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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Unveiling (Hi)stories:
Colonial Dispossession in Emile Habiby's
The Pessoptimist
and
Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River***

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of English and Comparative Literature

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

By

Mushira Salah El-Deen Sabry

Under the supervision of **Dr. Ferial Ghazoul**

May/2013

The American University in Cairo

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Has been approved by

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I dedicate this thesis to my late father Dr. Salah El-Deen Sabry (1939-2012), who lovingly dedicated his life to his family's welfare and his children's academic success. He may not be physically present to witness the completion of this humble work, but in his heart of hearts, he left us knowing I would complete this degree for him.

Dad, thank you.

I am indebted to my mother Abla Salah El-Deen, my sister Sherifa, and my brothers Sameh and Mohammed. Their love, faith in me and consistent encouragement propels me to succeed in life.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the dynamics of dispossession in two (post) colonial novels: *Al-waqai' al-ghariba fi ikhtifa' Sa'id abu al-nahs al-mutasha'il* (1974) by the Palestinian novelist Emile Habiby (translated as *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* [1985] by Salma Khadra Jayussi and Trevor Le Gassick) and *Crossing the River* (1995) by West Indian novelist Caryl Phillips. Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the "chronotope," "carnavalesque," and "polyphony" are used to show how the two texts avoid using "a rhetoric of blame" (Edward Said's expression) as their objective. Rather, both novels provide the Other's version of an event to supplement the mainstream narrative; ultimately creating a multifaceted text that is inclusive. As a result, they creatively expose the ideological hierarchy that perpetuates dispossession, and how it affects both the oppressor and the oppressed. This study also observes parallels shared between them such as the use of racialized discourse to perpetuate the marginalization and dispossession of one group of society. The texts refer to events that the colonizer and the colonized share to expose (hi)stories that were silenced or misrepresented in the mainstream version of events to prompt the reader to explore, uncover and suspect the history written by the victors. Bakhtin's critical theory illuminates the narrative strategies used by the works to achieve subversion of the hegemonic discourse, introduction of multiple viewpoints, and the weaving of history with imaginative episodes.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Carnivalizing Dispossession in Emile Habiby’s <i>The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist</i>	10
Chapter Two: A Trajectory of Familial Dispossession and Survival in Caryl Phillips’ <i>Crossing the River</i> :	32
Conclusion.....	50
Endnotes.....	57
Works Cited.....	61

Introduction

The totalitarian regimes in the Arab world are toppling due to the dissemination of multiple and diverse narrative versions of events. These variants of (hi)story,¹ with the emphasis on “story,” aim to highlight the value of alternative accounts that are subsumed by the larger “master” narratives. These articulations are relayed by the masses that have been silenced and indoctrinated with the belief that their voice could never overpower their masters. By having their story told, the oppressed show that they have all become agents of their own history and that it is impossible to turn a blind eye to the plethora of stories that are unfolding through image, video and text. The proponents of this history range from the underdog to the privileged, and from the victor to the defeated. Their stories are assembled to present a panorama of overlapping, conflicting, and juxtaposed variants. In turn, they affirm, question, problematize, or deny specific episodes in their shared (hi)story.

Previously, the stories of the conquered, defeated or subaltern were ignored if not forcibly censored by their superiors. In colonialism this erasure was essential to provide the conquerors with a threshold of power that allows them to exploit others. Attributed to Winston Churchill, the often repeated saying that history is written by the victors, assumes that only one version of events is disseminated and recognized. Within it, the colonialists and conquerors incorporate ideologies such as racism, which legitimate dispossession and exploitation. Consequently, the Other is silenced, and the conqueror speaks for them, freely ravaging their property and history.

More recently, there has been a rediscovery and re-articulation that brought these alternative (hi)stories to the limelight, placing them alongside the history of colonial discourse for comparison and in an effort to challenge it. These versions expose the ideological framework that made the two accounts of an experience appear dissonant, and

sheds light on events that make the reader reach a more comprehensive understanding of history.

This thesis intends to research how two novels *Al-waqai' al-ghariba fi ikhtifa' Sa'id abu al-nahs al-mutasha'il* (1974), translated as *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* (1985) by the Palestinian novelist Emile Habiby (1921-1996)², and *Crossing the River* (1995) by the West Indian novelist Caryl Phillips (1958-)³ were able to situate the (hi)story of both the colonizer and the colonized in one text in order to expose dispossession under a colonial system and the impact it makes on both the oppressed and their oppressors.

One of the common motifs that the novels share is the struggle to survive with a problematic history of marginalization, even when the marginalized form a large division of society. Another common feature is the dichotomous racist discourse employed: Jewish as superior to Arab and white as superior to black, which are used in both novels. These difficulties illustrate the obstacles that the protagonists try to overcome, and the pathos that marks their failures.

I will engage the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's study of the instances of the "chronotope," "carnavalesque," and "polyphony" in texts, which will guide my research into the various narrative strategies used to represent the power dynamics in the novelists' poetics. In his critical works, Bakhtin emphasized the relationship between power and enunciation. His interest was in the role of textual and cultural phenomena that undermine authority.

Briefly, the chronotope is a term given to a precise segment of a text as a unit of time and space, whereby ideas, discourse, and aesthetics are studied. The carnivalesque is a narrative strategy that uses humor and other techniques to deconstruct hierarchies to contest a truth that is unapproachable in reality. Lastly, polyphony is also a method of narration that

uses multiple voices or stories that are interdependent of each other to question truths or events in time.

Habiby, the author of *Al-waqai' al-ghariba fi ikhtifa' Sa'id abu al-nahs al-mutasha'il*, uses a variety of narrative approaches, including humor and irony to satirize the plight of the Palestinians inside Israel and in the diaspora. Habiby shows how the tyrannized minority experiences harassment, destruction of homes, separation from family members, and a struggle within a state that denies equal rights to all its citizens and discriminates against its Arab population. The novelist demystifies the figure of the Palestinian hero through the protagonist Saeed, and likewise exposes the oppressor through the Israeli characters in the novel. Carnivalizing the “only democracy in the Middle East”—as Israel is widely known—is a mode of articulating suppressed facts and desires.

In *Crossing the River* Phillips presents the voices of the dispossessed Africans alongside those of the “whites.” They convey how these juxtapositions show the intensity of racial indoctrination and the white race claims of superiority. This contrived claim provides the whites with the conviction that the African is “inferior.” Phillips overcomes this racialized view through polyphony by bringing “white” and “black” together in dialogue. The several voices heard through the novel, with their specificities, function as points and counterpoints representing the African diaspora in diverse chronotopes.

The Pessoptimist

Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* is an epistolary novel that was set in Israel between 1948 and the early 1970s and goes back through flashbacks to earlier dates. Saeed, the protagonist, recounts his story of dispossession as a Palestinian, and the oppression of living as a second-class citizen under the Israeli regime. These events are illustrated through his letters from “outer space,” and later from Acre to an unnamed narrator.

Habiby divides the novel into three chronotopes, which are then divided into shorter titled letters. The first is in the protagonist's name "Saeed" (literally Happy), and the following two in the names of the women that he loves and loses: "Baqiyya" (literally Staying) and "The Second Yuaad" (literally Returned). The first chronotope takes place between 1948 and the early 1950s in Haifa. Saeed relays the "pessoptimistic" legacy of his family that has led him to return to Palestine on the eve of the declaration of the State of Israel. He returns to fulfil his father's wish and to follow in his footsteps by working as an informer for the Israeli regime. As this unusual protagonist begins his activities, he uncovers the tragedy of living as the conquered within a racist establishment. He describes how his first girlfriend Yuaad returned to Haifa from Nazareth under the authority's noses, and how she was eager to discover the cause of her father's detention and disappearance, and whether Saeed had anything to do with it. However, she was accused of being an infiltrator, and the authorities arrested her while Saeed was helplessly watching. To win her back, he relentlessly serves the State as a leader of the Union of Palestinian Workers, a position which he uses to spy on the Communists for the sake of the regime. Moreover, during the events in the first chronotope, Saeed meets his friend from "outer space" who guides him when he is distraught and confused about his miserable condition in Israel.

The second chronotope "Baqiyya," is in honour of the woman that Saeed marries. This section is set in the village of Jisr al-Zarqa and later in Haifa, between the early 1950s and 1966. Baqiyya is an orphan from the village of Tanturah, which the Israelis had razed to the ground. After receiving the State of Israel's blessings, she and Saeed marry. On their wedding night, Baqiyya reveals to Saeed that her family has a treasure that is secretly buried in the shores of Tanturah, and she hopes that one day they can extract it to enable them to live freely and without fear of the authorities. In time, the Israeli establishment discovers that the couple's son, Walaa (literally Loyal) has become a guerrilla fighter by selling the Tanturian

treasure to buy weapons, and using the cave, where it was hidden, as shelter. When Saeed and Baqiyya fail to convince their son to surrender, Walaa decides to swim out to sea to escape the Israeli forces. His mother joins him as a display of her unwillingness to live submissively in the colonial state. All this takes place while Saeed idly observes them as they disappear.

The third and final chronotope entitled “The Second Yuaad” relates the events that led to Saeed’s encounter with his first girlfriend’s daughter. In this section, Saeed accidentally commits an offense against the State, despite his unfailing loyalty to it. During the Naksa (setback), or Six-Day War of 1967, the local radio announced that all defeated Arabs should hoist a white flag as a show of their surrender to Israel. To convey his unconditional devotion to his conquerors, Saeed raises a white flag above his home in Haifa (already a part of Israel since 1948). While the authorities arrest him, they explain that the message was directed to the defeated Arabs in the occupied West Bank only. Consequently, Saeed’s gesture is interpreted as an outright act of resistance because it implies that Haifa is an occupied city and thus, not a legitimate part of Israel. During his incarceration, Saeed for the first time experiences the terrorism of the Israeli regime, and realizes that his work for them was not a good idea. In prison, he has a chance encounter with his foil, a severely injured guerrilla fighter, ironically called Saeed, who believes that his fellow cellmate is a “brother” in the resistance against the establishment. When Saeed the Pessoptimist leaves prison, he meets the “second” Yuaad, who coincidentally has entered Israel to look for her imprisoned brother Saeed, who our anti-hero had met during his detention. Nonetheless, like her mother, Yuaad is forcefully removed from Israel and her permit is forfeited while the protagonist passively stands by. These overwhelming events fantastically transport our anti-hero Saeed onto a stake, *khazuq*, where he is stuck, stoically, and emblematically as the Arabs are in the State of Israel. Saeed conveys his reflections to the unnamed narrator where he describes his struggle that has caused him to harbor many secrets and to lose many valuable friends, until his

‘friends’ from outer space save him. The novel concludes with a postscript by the unnamed narrator who chose to investigate the existence of Saeed the Pessoptimist. His trail ended in a mental hospital in Acre, where the closest bearing to the letters’ author is a deceased mental patient called Saadi El-Nahhas.

Crossing the River

Phillips’ *Crossing the River* is a polyphonic text that recounts the lives of three young African children sold to slavery in 1753. Phillips divides the narrative into four contrasting chronotopes that relate how the three African children fared in the diaspora. The novel opens with a prologue of a remorseful African father who sold his three children Nash, Martha, and Travis because he was suffering from a meager harvest.

The first chronotope is titled “The Pagan Coast,” and is set in Liberia and in Virginia in the United States between 1834 and 1842. This section interweaves both the letters of a former North American slave, Nash Williams, alongside the narrative of his owner in America, Edward Williams. The latter is a wealthy tobacco plantation owner, who decides that his most enlightened slave, Nash, should be repatriated to Liberia in Africa as part of the activities of the American Colonization Society. The objective was for the former slaves to educate the native Africans to recant their savage beliefs and to convert to Christianity. Instead, Nash’s letters reveal that he and his family could not assimilate to life in Africa, and that they began to perish due to malaria. However, Edward discovers Nash’s debilitating conditions far too late, as the former’s wife jealously hid the letters from him because she suspected a homosexual relationship between the slave and her husband. As Nash’s letters became more desperate and alarming, Edward decides to make the trip to discover what happened to Nash. He assigns one of his former slaves Madison, who was also in Liberia, to locate Nash until Edward himself arrives to investigate the latter’s whereabouts. He painfully

discovers that Nash decided to forgo the Christian life that he was brought up on in the United States because he felt forsaken by his “father” Edward who did not respond to his pleas. This section ends as Edward discovers in disbelief that Nash, whom he loved, died as a “savage” African, and that Christianity was not enough to guide him through his adverse struggle in Liberia.

The following chronotope “West” is about Martha and is set in pre- and post-Emancipation America, where she is trying to escape the oppression of slavery. The disjointed narrative shifts through flashbacks to three different stages in her life. The first is with her husband Lucas and her daughter Eliza Mae, whom she loses at the auction block when their owner chose to sell them. Martha later settles in Dodge City, Kansas, and is able to forge a new family and start a lucrative business for ten years. However, when Chester, her lover in Dodge City, is killed because of racial discrimination, she decides that it is time for her to move further westward to California. The final narrative is her journey with the “colored pioneers,” where she imagines she will find her daughter Eliza Mae living a respectable and prosperous life. But Martha’s age hinders the more able travellers, and they leave her in the streets of Denver where her health quickly deteriorates. Martha is found by a white woman who shelters her from the cold; however, she dies too quickly for the latter to discover her name in order to arrange for a proper funeral.

The third chronotope, “Crossing the River,” exhibits a logbook belonging to John Hamilton, the captain of the slave ship the “Duke of York” that set sail between August 1752 and May 1753, which was bound for the “Windward Coast of Africa.” The narrative in this section places the captain’s dehumanizing and insensitive listing of the conditions of the staff and slaves, as a counterpoint to the love letters that he writes to his wife in England. Phillips reveals that Hamilton had his doubts that slavery was an unchristian activity, and that it was a trade that he was eager to leave. More importantly, Hamilton’s logbook records the day that

the three protagonists were sold to him; thus, connecting the captain's narrative to that of the African father.

A white Yorkshire woman, Joyce, narrates the final chronotope, "Somewhere in England," in the form of semi-diary entries that do not follow a specific chronological order. The events are set between 1936 and 1963, and illustrate the life and relationship between Joyce and Travis, the third child sold into slavery in the prologue. Joyce's narrative uncovers her difficult life with her mother, and her uneasy marriage to Len until she meets Travis when he was a GI stationed in England during World War II. Her entries reveal her affection towards Travis, she does not make any racist references, only slight hints that imply he is black. Their relationship is faced by the disapproval of interracial marriages in England. Additionally, they were not permitted to constitute a conjugal relationship in the United States, and could not live there together, either. When Travis dies in battle, and Joyce gives birth to their child Greer, she is faced with the difficult decision to give him up for adoption since she could not face societal pressure of raising a multiracial child in England. This in turn points to how the descendants of Africans continue to face discrimination in the diaspora.

The African father, who sold his children, concludes the novel with a multifaceted epilogue where he addresses his three "children." They are not the same ones he sold in the prologue, given their different historical periods. Rather they are representative of all descendants of Africans who experienced the same journey, each arriving to the New World to endure different kinds of suffering. The father extends his voice further to communicate with the other white protagonists Joyce, Captain Hamilton, and eventually to all his African offspring who are wrestling with efforts to root themselves in an unwelcome soil where slavery has planted them.

My research will observe how Phillips presents the voices of the dispossessed Africans alongside those of the “whites.” These juxtapositions show the intensity of racial indoctrination where the white race claims superiority, and the Africans struggle to resist this racial oppression. Phillips intends to overcome this racial barrier by bringing “white” and “black” together in dialogue, constituting what can be seen as a polyphonic work. My research will also analyze the dispossessed Palestinians in various stages of their history and in their different locations (historical Palestine and in the diaspora) as referred to in the narrative of the *Pessoptimist*. Presenting how Habiby juxtaposes Palestinian viewpoints with Israeli claims underlines the problem of national exclusivity.

The *Pessoptimist* and *Crossing the River* deal with different geo-political situations, but the underlying socio-political dynamics of oppression, marginalization, and silencing are equally present. Furthermore, such dehumanization is equally resisted and undermined by both authors. This thesis will elaborate on contextualizing the novels and analysing the fictional strategies of “writing back” to the empire by placing the conquerors shoulder to shoulder with their conquered.

Chapter One

Carnivalizing Dispossession in Emile Habiby's

The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist

The experiences of Palestinians and Israelis are rendered in discourses that are imbued with the diatribes of two peoples in contest to validate their own story against the other. On the one hand, the Palestinians are determined to keep their (hi)story alive by resisting the mainstream version provided by the Zionists. Whereas the Jews who relocated to Palestine go to extensive measures to justify their settlement on what they assert to be “a land without a people, for a people without a land.”⁴ In an interview in 1981, Habiby notes that he was haunted by a lecture delivered by an Israeli minister who stated that the land that was chosen was uninhabited because there were no authors or historians writing from a place called “Palestine” (Interview 191). Habiby's recollection demonstrates the urgency with which he, and others like him, need to produce texts that consolidate their existence, and by extension their possession of the land. However, the novelist notes that these texts have become monotonous because Palestinian authors dedicate their literary oeuvre to writing “slogan literature” or “paper wisdom,” as the man from outer space mentions in the novel (*The Pessoptimist* 77/ *Al-waqai'* 81). These literary productions are rushed, ineffectual, and privilege the political message over art. In other words, they are predictable and thus boring. To simultaneously resist this tedium found in Palestinian literature and to guarantee that the bona fide experience is not overwritten, Habiby explains that a new kind of novel is necessary (Interview 190).

Following the Naksa of 1967, Habiby began publishing a satirical text in three parts “Yuaad” published in 1972, “Baqiyya” towards the end of 1972, and “The Second Yuaad” published in 1974, and by the end of the year the three texts were combined in the current title of the novel (Mihjiz 196), which can be considered as the three main chronotopes of the

text. In his study “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” Bakhtin explains that the chronotope is “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature,” and is significant because it is “the organizing center for the fundamental narrative events of the novel” (250). The term emerges from the synthesis of the Greek “chrono” and “topos” indicating time and space respectively. When incorporated into literary analysis, the chronotope aims to chronologically and spatially frame content within a text because within it “each motif, each separate aspect of artistic work bears value” (*Dialogical* 243).

Within each chronotope, large or small, Habiby is foregrounding historical events into his narrative. The effect of this inclusion gives dimension to this particular segment of the text, and “time as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise space becomes changed and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history” (*Dialogical* 85). Habiby practices this strategy by making Saeed, his protagonist, deviate from the main line of events by adding anecdotes and incidents that appear as unrelated, but link to the larger objective of the novel. Therefore, within the chronotope the features that are analyzed include the representations of the characters, the discourse used, and the unique historical event that it is mapping. Thus, using the chronotope as a frame to situate the events provides a method to contrapuntally read representations of (hi)story. After all, one specific event and place can mean something to one group of people, and it can mean something completely different to another. For instance, a chronotopic reading of 1948 can mean the Nakba (catastrophe) to a native Palestinian, but to an Israeli it can mean their independence day.

Habiby selects Saeed, an anti-hero, who in his perspective, represents the quintessential Palestinian man. More importantly, Saeed is experiencing a carnivalesque situation, to use Bakhtin’s term, in his day to day life inside Israel. The concept of the carnival and the carnivalesque emerges from the riotous Medieval carnivals such as the

Italian Saturnalia (*Problems* 124). During the carnival its participants underwent activities that aimed to suspend “hierarchal structure[s]...that is everything resulting from socio-hierarchal inequality or any other form of inequality among people” (*Problems* 123), and eventually come into “free and familiar contact” in the carnival space (*Problems* 123). Within these spaces and texts, such as Habiby’s novel, various perspectives are juxtaposed and problematized through “extraordinary situations for the provoking and testing of a philosophical idea, a discourse, a *truth*” (*Problems* 114; italics in the original), which would be the experience of living as a second class citizen in your own country, and the practices that enable the dispossession of your land, culture and identity. However, the representations of these truths are illustrated with “carnivalistic laughter” (*Problems* 126), which aims to question the (hi)story under study by “put[ting] it to shame and ridicul[ing] it,” through strategies such as satire and parody (*Problems* 126). In an interview, Habiby explains that choosing satire and parody stems from the psychological burden of revisiting the experience of dispossession; as a result, he uses a cathartic narrative method to deliver the trauma by supplementing it with humor (Interview 190). These narrative approaches are mixed with the tragic which constitutes an interplay of “serious and comic” (*Problems* 108).

Additionally, the protagonists of the novel are “presented without any epic or tragic distance” (*Problems* 108), rather, they “are laughed at by others and *themselves* as well” (*Dialogical* 159; italics in the original). Habiby’s protagonist Saeed intimates other characters such as Juha⁵, the fictional Arab literary protagonist who plays a fool to survive, and Voltaire’s *Candide*⁶. In the novel, Saeed’s objectives are simple: having a family and a home, even if it means collaborating with the enemy.

The objective of such unusual interactions is for realizing “*a new mode of interrelationships between individuals*” (*Problems* 123; italics in the original) which permits two disparate groups to come into a temporary fusion. This synthesis would prompt each

group to uncover the hierarchies and modes of subordination that separate individuals. Ideally, with this knowledge, the reader would be able to critique and deconstruct this order, conceptualizing a more egalitarian structure (*Problems* 153). The “carnavalesque arena” that Habiby uses in the novel incorporates folk culture, legends, songs and idioms to create a popular Palestinian scene, which is threatened by the dominant Zionist mainstream narratives (Khalil 154).

The author illustrates that Saeed’s character is the result of the conditions that Palestinians are forced to endure. The protagonist never mentions going to university or any opportunity to get an average job to keep him out of poverty. Saeed accepts what he is given by the establishment so that he can survive. In his article, As‘ad Ghanem notes that among the many injustices committed against the Palestinians in Israel is the underfunded education for Arabs, which denies them the qualifications for proper jobs -- reserved for Jews only (236). Additionally, the state ensures that the Arabs remain a minority in any region they reside in. For instance, by 2008, Haifa, which is one of the cities where the events of the novel takes place, the Arabs have been reduced and account for approximately only ten percent of the local population⁷. These measures are taken to intimidate the Arab population, preventing them from organizing, and to give cities a Jewish character (Ghanem 241).

In his first extended letter or the novel’s first chronotope, Saeed relays how his father was killed during the skirmishes of 1948, but how his own life was saved due to a stray donkey that was fated to cross the path of the bullet aimed at him (*The Pessoptimist 6/Al-waqai‘* 18). On the surface, this coincidence appears humorous; however, it is pregnant with pathos. Avi Shliam indicates in his article that many Palestinians, like Saeed and his family, have been forced to evacuate their homes in fear of the fighting taking place between the Zionist forces and the regular and irregular Arab armies in the late 1940s (148). Moreover, the fact that an Israeli bullet killed Saeed’s father undermines the notion of *tohar haneshak* or

“purity of arms” (Shliam 141). This concept connects to the idea that the war practiced in Israel is a moral one, and thus, the weapons used in battle should be for self-defense only, and not against helpless and innocent civilians (Shliam 141). Ilan Pappé indicates in his article that the Jewish *Haganah*⁸ had been given specific commands to “occupy” lands that were allocated for the Jews by the 1947 Partition Plan⁹, alongside any other neighboring Palestinian areas which the *Haganah* brigades received in the form of lists (118). Consequently, by 1948, out of the 58 villages that were planned to be destroyed, only six had remained intact (Pappé 118).

To make the tragic experiences of the novel approachable, Habiby intertwines humor and pathos to permit the reader to become a witness to several incidents and nuances that the master narratives choose not to present. For instance, Saeed continues to stress how his life was spared by an undistinguished animal, however, the author’s choice is not without its purpose. Donkeys are popular domesticated farm animals used in Palestine, therefore, the beast that happened to cross Saeed’s way must have strayed from its village because its owners had evacuated or had been killed. Here, the donkey functions as a metonym for the ravished villages and the Palestinians dispossessed of their property at the hands of the Israeli-Arab war. Vice argues that this “double-voiced discourse” is a “method of establishing truth and conviction which are inseparable from fear, violence, morose, and narrow-minded seriousness and intolerance,” (121) and it veils the critique that Habiby spews at the Israeli authority. Bakhtin illuminates this point as he explains that such duality makes it difficult for authority to notice discord, especially if this discourse is practiced by an inferior who “will never be accused of heresy, no matter what he might say, provided that he maintain[s] his clownery” (*Rabelais* 64), which Saeed, and Habiby’s other protagonists sustain in the novel. More importantly, it creates a plane for dialogue between the Palestinians and their other, the Israeli Jews. Therefore, this is a “carnavalesque” position that keeps Habiby’s critique

uncaught, because he uses Saeed as the interlocutor of his criticism of the Israeli state. Since using Saeed is a position of temporary release and reversal, inviting the readers to unveil the underlying message of such satire as they recognize the interplay of tragedy and comedy within the novel (Baderneh 306).

After being waylaid and losing his father, Saeed and his family flee from Haifa to Acre, and later they become refugees by escaping to Lebanon. Saeed notes that they had made that trip when they realized that “everyone was busy saving their skins” as their villages were being attacked, and when they had arrived in Lebanon they sold their “skin to live” until they had “nothing left to sell” (*The Pessoptimist* 9/ *Al-waqai* ‘ 21). It is imperative to highlight that Saeed does not tell us that a specific leadership or group ordered the Palestinians to evacuate their homes. The Israeli revisionist historians and Habiby agree that contrary to the Israeli mainstream narrative, Palestinians were told not to leave their homes by their own leaders and Arab forces (Shliam 149; Interview 188). Therefore, as Benny Morris indicates in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* the Palestinians evacuated their homes because of the threat of warfare (quoted in Shliam 149). In fact, Shliam highlights that the main reason for accusing one side of encouraging the Palestinians to leave is the need to simply hold someone responsible for the refugee crisis other than the Israelis (Shliam 149). However, Pappé contests with relevant evidence that in compliance with *Plan Dalet*, the *Haganah* brigades were given specific instructions to expel Palestinian civilians from villages “falling under [*Haganah*] control” to maintain the security of the newly established Jewish state (118).

To record the (hi)stories of the expulsion of the Palestinians from their villages, the author uses an incident where Saeed is sent to the Al-Jazzar mosque in Acre when he returns to Palestine to work for the Israeli establishment (*The Pessoptimist* 9/ *Al-waqai* ‘ 21). There he finds displaced Palestinian refugees who have been apprehended because they tried to

return to their villages after they evacuated them. They are kept there in limbo by the Israeli authority until they are moved elsewhere outside the newly founded state. It is vital to indicate that the Israelis do not provide an actual destination for these native Palestinians who will become refugees upon their transfer out of Israel.

When the residents of the mosque discover that Saeed had returned from Lebanon, they eagerly ask him whether he had met anyone from their villages there. Here Habiby masterfully uses the carnivalesque to express both humor and heightened tragedy in parallel to each other. As the residents of the mosque begin to list their villages, Saeed in his naiveté begins to poke fun at the manner a simple Palestinian pronounces the name of his village of “Kuwaykaat” (*The Pessoptimist* 21/ *Al-waqai* ‘ 31).¹⁰ Rather than continue in this humorous thread, Habiby interrupts it with a moment of tragedy, whereby a woman loses her infant: “the girl isn’t sleeping Shukriyya; she’s dead” (*The Pessoptimist* 21/ *Al-waqai* ‘ 31). The death of this child is symbolic of the kind of misfortunes that Palestinians had to endure due to the rushed conditions of evacuating their homes and facing an uncertain future. Furthermore, the infant can figuratively represent a generation of Palestinians that are lost by the Nakba and continue to be destroyed by Zionist aggression. Even the infant’s mother has to stifle her scream and does not have the opportunity to vocalize mourning her child as the inhabitants begin their questioning once more. Thus, the episode where the inhabitants set aside the loss of the child and continue asking about survivors from villages shows how the Nakba makes every Palestinian more concerned with their personal tragedy than with another’s.

The sobriety of the situation arrests Saeed’s sarcasm and he complies by listening to the rest of the inhabitants as they ask about their villages; in fact, out of the 18 villages, six have become *moshavs* (privately owned Jewish villages), another six have been entirely destroyed, and the last six remain Arab.¹¹ Equally important in this episode is showing that

the Israeli establishment systematically destroyed Palestinian villages. By listing these villages one by one in this chronotope, Habiby uses it as a method to present episodes in the novel “while at the same time other ‘binding’ events” (*Dialogical* 247), such as the implications of the 1948 war, which “appear as mere dry information and communicated facts” (*Dialogical* 150) similar to the listing of the obliterated Palestinian villages. Moreover, the (hi)stories presented have been omitted from the official version provided by the conquerors. Consequently, through this incident of satirical and tragic interchange, Habiby is able to illuminate the degradations and the losses that Palestinians underwent during the Nakba.

As the novel progresses we see the measures that Saeed takes to fulfill his objective, which is to be equal to the Jews. In the second main chronotope, which is in the form of another extended letter, we discover that equality between Arabs and Jews in Israel is impossible. Even though several Israeli political figures point out that anyone living in Israel “deserves equal rights,” they quickly add that it is a “Jewish home, the home keys are given to the Jews through the Law of Return” (Ghanem 233).¹² Thus, this preferential ideology formulates a state policy towards its minority population, robbing the Palestinians of any opportunity of becoming equal to their Jewish counterparts. What is more, Habiby uses the text as an opportunity to illustrate why it is easier for some Palestinians under occupation to collaborate than to resist (Ashour 152).

Habiby dedicates a section in the novel to the endeavors that some Palestinians under occupation have taken in order to be able to survive in Israel. Entitled “An Odd Piece of Research on the Many Virtues of the Oriental Imagination,” Saeed refers to episodes from *Alf Layla wa Layla* to elucidate the Judas mask that Palestinians wear inside Israel; where on the surface they may appear aligned to the establishment, but what the conquerors do not see is that they are indeed against the regime. This doubling connects to Bakhtin’s motif of the

“carnival square”, where behind the complacency of the inferior’s “naturalistic manner, there glimmers more or less the carnival square with its specific carnivalistic logic of familiar contacts, mésalliances, disguises and mystifications” (*Problems* 133).

Even though Saeed opens this section by foreshadowing the tragic loss of his son Walaa, he interlaces this poignant reference with a warning, which foretells the power of the “Oriental Imagination” that can fabricate such stories (*The Pessoptimist* 100/*Al-waqai* ‘ 100). Saeed believes that if the Arabs could freely relay their tales they “would reach the very stars” and be able to escape or change their fate, because such tales are “penetrating and that [they] can see with it what [the Israelis] can’t” (*The Pessoptimist* 100-101/*Al-waqai* ‘ 100-101). This statement implies that having their story disseminated functions as a medium of resistance, as it can influence future generations; just as Walaa was affected by the stories of Saeed and Baqiyya about “the golden fish,” which is a metaphor for the treasure on the shores of the village of Tanturah.

In fact, the reference to Tanturah in the novel is to unveil the massacre that happened over two days in the village, and Pappé states in his study that it was occupied by the *Haganah* Alexandroni Brigade on 22 May 1948 (120). Tanturah was one of the largest villages on the coastal plain between Haifa and Tel Aviv, and the commands given by the government to the *Haganah* was to Judaize all the villages in their path (Pappé 119). The Tanturah massacre is one of the worst that had occurred since Dayr Yassin, and one of the 40 massacres least researched, which proves that the *Haganah* had systematically followed the policy of killing Arabs, rather than just intimidating them so that they would desert their villages (Pappé 117). Moreover, Pappé indicates that this massacre is omitted from the Israeli historians’ version of events, and only indicated in a suggestive rather than conclusive manner by Palestinian historians (117). As done in previous assaults, the Alexandroni Brigade were given instructions to occupy the seaside village of Tanturah (Pappé 131). The

objective of the Brigade's instructions was ethnic cleansing to guarantee the security of the Israeli state.¹³

The military strategy that the *Haganah* used was to cover three flanks of the village and to leave one open for the terrorized Arabs to escape (Pappé 118). However, the Brigade closed all the flanks and killed twenty residents during the battle (Pappé 118). Approximately 250 Arabs were killed on the shores, which included all the able bodied men (aged between 13 and 30) while the remaining residents were ordered to bury them in mass graves where they were massacred (Pappé 124-126). One of the eyewitnesses, Eli Shimoni elucidates that Brigade soldiers would walk to the Commander-in-Chief and inform him that he had lost a brother or a relative at war (Pappé 123). In response, the Commander “ordered the troops to take a group of five to seven people aside and execute them” in what can be described as a “justified massacre” (Pappé 123). Thus, by focusing on Baqiyya in the novel, Habiby presses the reader to discover the purpose behind valorizing her, as she was dispossessed of her home and her family in one of the worst massacres in the Arab-Israeli conflict of 1948. Moreover, the focus on the treasure at the “shores of Tanturah” alludes to the massacre of young men, and thus to the genocidal strategies of colonial Zionism (*The Pessoptimist* 88/ *Al-waqai'* 90).

Among Habiby's literary influences was the *Maqamat* of Al-Hamadani and stories from *Alf Layla wa Layla*, alongside other intrinsically Middle Eastern and Arabic texts (Interview 183).¹⁴ In turn, he incorporates them into his novel rather than rely entirely on Western influences. As an illustration, Habiby uses the fable of the peasant who carried his wife inside a box on his back to insure that she does not cuckold him (*The Pessoptimist* 100/*Al-waqai'* 100). When Prince Badr al-Zaman hears this story from the peasant himself, he asks him to open the chest, and when he does, both find the latter's wife in a compromising position “with that rascal Aladdin! Right there, in a box on her husband's back, mind you!” (*The Pessoptimist* 100/*Al-waqai'* 100).

In the same vein, Habiby illustrates that this story was extracted from *Alf Layla wa Layla*, where a giant from the sea brings out his nymph, untouched by man, from a set of seven boxes, to also prevent himself from being cuckolded (Interview 191). In fact, the giant was satisfied to simply lay his head on her lap once every year. However, when a Prince watches this scene, the nymph notices him and threatens him, stating that if he does not sleep with her, she will awaken the giant to kill him. And after they copulate, she tells the Prince to give her his ring, which he provides, also in fear of awakening the beast. To his shock he discovers that she has a chest of seventy rings, all from the men she has slept with (Interview 191). These several boxes are a metaphor for the several measures that the Israeli authorities use to control the Palestinians, such as checkpoints, prisons and infringements on basic liberties. Habiby's reference to this fabliau illustrates that the superiors cannot control the subaltern indefinitely. In fact, the nymph's collection of rings exemplifies how the oppressed will be able not only to escape, but to continuously resist. Furthermore, the oppressed will continue to unveil that they are as eager to get rid of the colonizer as the outspoken activists are such as Walaa, Baqiyya and the second Saeed. Additionally, through Habiby's extensive knowledge of Arabic heritage, he is able to weave (hi)storiical Arab accounts and Palestinian folktales into the novel not only to reveal the irony of the condition of Palestinians in Israel, but to show the expanse of Arab literary heritage that can be used to shape and bolster Arab identity, rather than to rely on Western mainstream narratives (Khalil 54). Thus, the reader would better understand their ordeal rather than accuse them of being feeble or traitors.

In the novel, Saeed describes the ironic moment where Palestinians celebrate Israel's Independence Day more fervently than the Israelis. He adds that the Arab homes are decorated with flags, whereas the "[t]he Jewish home finds it enough to be Jewish" (*The Pessoptimist* 101/*Al-waqai'* 101). This statement conveys that the Arabs are determined to assimilate and show their loyalty to the regime, so that they will not be threatened by it. On

the other hand, the Jewish citizens are not required to make any effort, as they are continuously in a privileged position in the state, and are not suspect.

Other sardonic examples of the Arabs' ironic behavior in Israel are when they fashion their names to sound more Hebraic in order to be accepted:

And don't forget Shlomo in one of Tel Aviv's very best hotels. Isn't he really Sulaiman, son of Munirah, from our own quarter? And 'Dudi,' isn't he really Mahmud? 'Moshe,' too, isn't his proper name Musa, son of Abdel Massih? How could they earn a living in a hotel, restaurant, or filling station without help from their Oriental Imagination ... (*The Pessoptimist* 101/*Al-waqai*'101)

Accordingly, Habiby postulates that it would be unfair for others to expect the Palestinians to act as heroes and martyrs on a continuous basis, because they are not living within a democratic state. In fact, there are no regulations or policies that prevent any infringements on the Arab minority's rights, rather there is a monitoring and control policy that guarantees the Jewish majority is in control and the minority is marginalized (Ghanem 234).

Ashour argues that the female characters are empowered, and stand as a metaphor for the homeland and its split status: Yuaad a representative of the Palestinians in the Diaspora; along with Baqiyya, a representative of the Palestinians in occupation (152). As a child, Yuaad initiates the love relationship when she calls Saeed over to sit with her on their train trip to school (*The Pessoptimist* 17/*Al-waqai*' 29). Soon their relationship is uncovered and Yuaad disappears. Instead of Saeed taking an assertive action to find her and defend her, he is assaulted by one of her relatives (*The Pessoptimist* 18/*Al-waqai*' 30). What is more, when he tries to attack the student who exposed their relationship, ironically their battle leads to a friendship, and he never searches for Yuaad again, indicating the failure of Palestinians in bringing back their exiles (*The Pessoptimist* 18/*Al-waqai*' 30). Saeed does not gain anything from his relationship with Yuaad except to love her more, as he states (*The Pessoptimist* 18/*Al-waqai*' 30).

When they are older, Yuaad clandestinely moves from Nazareth to Haifa, an act that is punishable under the Israeli regime,¹⁵ to find out whether Saeed, as a collaborator, had been involved in her father's arrest (*The Pessoptimist* 57/ *Al-waqai'* 63). Even when Yuaad is caught, she puts up a staunch battle, "she kept resisting, shouting, and kicking," and Habiby quickly adds, "[w]hen Yuaad bit one soldier on the shoulder, he screamed in pain and retreated," thus Habiby mixes the patriotic allegory with humorous realism (*The Pessoptimist* 61/ *Al-waqai'* 66). While Yuaad was taken away "on her own two feet, her body straight and her head held high," (*The Pessoptimist* 62/ *Al-waqai'* 66) Saeed lay prostrated on the pavement. She further declares that Saeed is her husband, another assertive decision that is unusual for a woman to make in a patriarchal society (*The Pessoptimist* 62/ *Al-waqai'* 66). Lastly, she promises that she will return to Saeed, and keeps her promise as her daughter finds him in the last part of the novel (*The Pessoptimist* 137/ *Al-waqai'* 136). As Palestinian women are doubly disenfranchised under the Israeli regime (as victims of patriarchy as well as colonialism), assertions are both astonishing, on the one hand, and on the other made possible by their doubly underprivileged position which allows them a position of harmless intervention.

The ironic oscillation between Yuaad's strength and Saeed's feebleness carnivalizes the roles of Palestinian men and women, whereby the Palestinian female is the heroic and assertive figure, and the male is not. Furthermore, since Yuaad represents the Palestinians in the diaspora, her resistance conveys their persistence to return to their land. This desire is further shown through the character of the second Yuaad, who is the former's daughter who re-enters the borders to look for her brother, a freedom fighter or feda'i, who is also named Saeed. Like Walaa, this other Saeed represents the second generation of Palestinians who persist in their struggle and do not surrender to the establishment as their fathers have done.

Another female figure that Habiby valorizes in the novel is Baqiyya, the fifteen year old girl who is the sole survivor of the razed village of Tanturah (*The Pessoptimist* 83/*Al-waqai* ' 86). Again, she is assertive, as she returns Saeed's gaze, and like her predecessor, she takes the initiative in their relationship by writing Saeed's name on a rock (*The Pessoptimist* 86/ *Al-waqai* ' 89). He realizes that "this young Tanturiyya was braver than the young man I was," and without any further ado "I knew she loved me; and I therefore loved her," (*The Pessoptimist* 85/ *Al-waqai* ' 88) as he is responsive to any woman who has feelings for him.

When Baqiyya mysteriously disappears, Saeed's behavior is passive, and he does not make an effort to find her, until Jacob, his Sephardic master, who has been monitoring him, notes that they will be married only because it serves the desires of the "Big man (of small stature)" (*The Pessoptimist* 87/ *Al-waqai* ' 89). Again, Habiby uses the metaphor of marriage as the appropriation of the land when the Israeli officials propose to Baqiyya's remaining family on Saeed's behalf. Unlike folk girls her age, she openly expresses her dislike for this gesture. Additionally, when Baqiyya explains that there is a treasure buried in the shores of the ruins of her village, she insists that they recover it to "relieve us of the poverty you suffer [...] I am used to living in freedom, husband!" (*The Pessoptimist* 89/ *Al-waqai* ' 90). This discourse shocks Saeed, as he was not used to this kind of fervor, especially when it is coming from a young girl who is going to share his life with him (*The Pessoptimist* 89/*Al-waqai* ' 90). Nonetheless, her passion persuades him to her side, and he came to acquire from her what he believed he could never have, the symbolic treasure:

Then I realized your secret: every one of you must have an iron chest in your own Tanturah, where your father hid his treasure of gold! When I realized that through this treasure I had become one of you, without you knowing a thing about it, a great burden was lifted from my mind. (*The Pessoptimist* 89/*Al-waqai* ' 91)

This treasure can be interpreted as Saeed's hidden desires, which are toppling the colonialists, and repossessing one's land, and living productively on it.

Returning to parody, Habiby focuses on deconsecrating the Israeli figures of authority in the novel. Firstly, he makes references to their height, where he describes all figures of authority to be shorter than Saeed. After the protagonist returns to Palestine during the Nakba in what the Israelis consider “infiltration,” he presents himself to the Israeli military governor of Kufr Yasif. Saeed “sat, at ease, thanking God for making [him] taller than the military governor without the help of the donkey’s legs” (*The Pessoptimist* 12/*Al-waqai’* 24). This satirizing implies that on the one hand, the Palestinians should not be intimidated by the Israelis, because the former are taller than them, a fact that should give them more confidence; and on the other hand, it is humorous, constituting a desperate example of the powerless finding gratification in insignificant signs of grandeur. This ridiculing is in line with Bakhtin’s “crowning/decrowning” ritual in the carnival, where the uncrowned figures are “put to shame and ridiculed” to see themselves with a “special clarity” (*Problems* 125). This ritual reveals ideologies that make them superior to another (*Problems* 125-126), thus, the revelations force them to “*renew themselves*” and abandon the truths that perpetuate hierarchies that separate people from each other (*Problems* 127; italics in the original).

During the same episode, the military governor discovers a woman from Berwa (the birthplace of the poet of Palestinian Resistance, Mahmoud Darwish) and her son who are on the run to return to her village after evacuating due to the warfare (*The Pessoptimist* 15/*Al-waqai’* 27). When the military governor threatens her, and forces them to travel east, both he and Saeed observe that their shadow continues to grow as they walk away, and the governor groans “Will they never disappear?” (*The Pessoptimist* 16/*Al-waqai’* 27). This is another significant representation of the Israelis as much smaller, and indeed, threatened by the presence of Palestinians within their recently created state. This scene demonstrates a reversal of power relations. Despite the women’s dispossession, and departure, she remains present as a shadow, indicating that the Palestinian question cannot go away despite all suppression.¹⁶

In his text *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question* Joseph Massad highlights that the Ashkenazi Jews are “ ‘the leading candidates for citizenship in the State of Israel’ ” (59). However, Habiby in the *Pessoptimist* deconsecrates and ridicules them. For instance, the author cunningly embodies them in the figure of the “Big Man” who also does not escape parody, as Saeed notes when he “jumped to his feet, his height scarcely increased by a hand’s breadth” (*The Pessoptimist* 51/ *Al-waqai’* 57). In the same way, Habiby presents Jacob, a Sephardic Jew who is Saeed’s overseer, as a figure that has disputed authority. The author uses him to illustrate that apart from discriminating against its non-Jewish population, Israel also has an innate caste hierarchy, whereby as Massad argues, the Ashkenazi Jews are in fact privileged over the Sephardic Jews (59). This consistent reference to their lack in size undermines the culture that Israel generates, where the Jew in Israel should be one that is “deep-chested, sturdy” (Massad 26), a *Sabra* Jew who is a “settler-soldier” (Massad 32). The purpose behind this “tough Jew” image is to transform the body of the Jew from the feeble and weak image imposed on them in Europe to one of power and masculinity as they colonize Palestine (Massad 27).

The philosophies of “pessoptimism” and “the carnivalesque” that figure prominently in the novel appear dissimilar but share the same objective. Habiby’s “pessoptimism” is a portmanteau word coined from “pessimism” and “optimism.” It describes the outlook that Palestinians have acquired in light of the catastrophe that they experienced: although conditions are of tragic proportions, they could be worse (*The Pessoptimist* 12/ *Al-waqai’* 24), and thus there is room for optimism. It is a self-soothing mechanism that makes the present tragedy bearable (Interview 189), similar to the carnivalesque of placing the dismal in parallel with the comic. Besides, it prevents the readers from becoming too immersed in the distressing aspects of the novel; and instead, it invites them to reflect on the satirical digressions that are incorporated in these incidents, which are often much more revealing

(Ashour 160). This dialectic engagement is precisely Habiby's goal, to create a narrative voice that is approachable and can deliver a message effectively without seeking to become a didactic text (Interview 190). The novelist explains that when it comes to writing *effective* literature, there must be an awareness of the audience and enough contextual background of the subject (Interview 192). Additionally, Habiby was after writing an *enduring* dialectic literature that would have the capacity to influence the generation of readers to come (Interview 184). This kind of narrative is "indirectly focused on the terror and dictated by it" as Rylkin notes in his article "Bodies of Terror" (quoted in Vice 153).

By the same token, it is important for Habiby to write a novel of genuine experiences, creating a chronological epic of the Palestinians' struggle since 1948 (Ashour 152). He conveys the torture, suffering, mass deportations, ransacking of homes and the sneaking back into Palestine, as essential parts of the Palestinian mass experience (Ashour 152). His intention is to reveal other events that occurred during the struggle, which are not known to the Arab world or to other readers (Interview 189). Habiby relays from his own experience how Palestinians left Jerusalem during battles:

I remember the day when the Arabs evacuated from Jerusalem, I was there. It was April, the dust storms were whipping, people were moving on their feet and packed into trucks like cattle heading towards Jordan. The "Al-Hawn" bombs were dropping on them and on their homes that they left behind. All you could hear was the wailing of the women and the crying of the children. This scene is forever imprinted on my consciousness. (Interview 187-188)¹⁷

Additionally, Habiby uses this text as an instrument to provide the Palestinians and others with stimulants that would reiterate their (hi)story; one that challenges the version forced by the Zionist colonial project. This version would strengthen their connection to their identity as Palestinians. In the novel, Habiby indicates that Israel, as a colonizer, has the authority over displaced native Palestinians, settling on their land, and paradoxically still claiming their state to be democratic. When Saeed, for example, is on a truck back to Haifa

with Israeli soldiers, he notes that he is unable to relax, or “search out the anemones that once filled that plain because, [he] realized, there was no room for the memories of childhood cramped in that narrow seat scarcely large enough for the three of [them]” (*The Pessoptimist* 42/*Al-waqai* ‘ 50). This “tight squeeze” between the two soldiers is symbolic of how Palestinians are being pressured by the Israelis. In order to relieve himself of this discomfort, Saeed tries to “expand a little” in his seat, however the driver complains, and eventually stops the vehicle, and instructs him to move to the open back of the truck adding emphatically “each of us sits in his own place” (*The Pessoptimist* 42/*Al-waqai* ‘ 50), which places the Palestinian on the fringes, rather than side by side with the colonizer. Even at the open back of the truck, Saeed is more uncomfortable, as he is forced to stand because he cannot find room to sit (*The Pessoptimist* 42/*Al-waqai* ‘ 50). This scene is illustrative of the pressure and irrevocable conditions that the native Palestinians experience. Besides, this transfer to the anxiety of the periphery represents how the Zionists are dispossessing the Palestinians of their space.

Pursuing this further, Saeed discovers that he is dispossessed of his ancestral home when he finds that it has become occupied by an Ashkenazi Jewish family (*The Pessoptimist* 47/*Al-waqai* ‘ 54). He spends an evening pacing the house, and “each time [he] almost knock[s] on the door [his] courage left [him]” (*The Pessoptimist* 47/*Al-waqai* ‘ 54). This inability to re-enter his home alludes to the Palestinian refugee crisis, and their disputed right of return. In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said notes that international declarations and covenants assert that the Palestinians, like any other people, have the right to leave the borders of their respective state and to return to it (48). The UN Resolution stating that the Palestinians have the right to return to their land has been re-passed 88 times in an effort to alleviate the Palestinian refugee crisis, starting from the UN General Assembly Resolution of 11 December 1948 (*Question* 48). Ironically, Israel uses the “Law of Return” in particular to

entitle any Jewish person to citizenship and property in Israel as a strategy to persuade Jews to move there (*Question 49*). Moreover, Israel has incorporated policies making Palestinians' return impossible by guaranteeing that Arab lands are seized and then appropriated by Jewish authorities such as the Jewish National Fund (*Question 48*). Therefore, it is no surprise that many Palestinians in Israel and in the diaspora, like Saeed, will experience dispossession directly as they, and their heirs, will systematically be prevented from claiming their property or exercising the right of return.

Another one of the strategies that Israel uses to encourage Palestinians to be dispossessed from their land and identity is “mythologizing” racialization (Rego n. pag.). This is a form of racism used by the Israeli colonizer to indoctrinate the Arabs. This ideology makes them believe that they are of a different race and as a consequence, they have no choice but to accept being unequal to the Jews living in the same state they inhabit. Israel does so by associating the Arabs with negative character traits through media and law, which in turn affects how their Jewish counterparts view them, and more so, how the Arabs perceive themselves. Thus, Palestinians internalize the negative traits: they are feeble, helpless and have no political agency. Moreover, they have a “permeating crisis of identity” because they are not permitted to honor or rejoice in their own culture, or be a part of Israeli culture (Ghanem 239). Habiby illustrates this racist misconception when the Israeli military governor of Nazareth had misunderstood a poetic verse used by the Communists (*The Pessoptimist 56/Al-waqai' 62*). To elaborate, the verse was employed to describe the bravery and resilience of Arab men towards the enemy and it reads “Like desert camels of thirst dying/While on their backs water bearing” (*The Pessoptimist 56/Al-waqai' 62*):

This made [the military governor] extremely angry and he defended with spirit and dignity of man, insisting that he should never be compared with a beast of burden, not even if an Arab, an enemy. He said, “You have become citizens, precisely like us.” (*The Pessoptimist 56/Al-waqai' 62*)

Even though the military governor indicates that humans should not be compared to animals, even if these humans are from the Arab subaltern race, the governor still uses a racialized discourse when he refers to dismissing them by having “them herded out [taradhum] of his sight” (*The Pessoptimist* 56/*Al-waqai* ‘ 62). The association with the camel comes across as a symbol of strength for the Palestinians; whereas the Israeli connects the Other with a creature that is inferior to humans. This shows not only misinterpretation but also the contradiction between what is claimed and what is experienced and practiced.

Bakhtin argues that chronotopes in the carnivalesque novels expose the fallacies and ideologies that are “reinforced by tradition and sanctioned by religious and official ideology” (*Dialogical* 169), which in this case is racism that keeps the Palestinians and Jews apart. Nasser Rego elaborates that a “historico-social schema” is created to force the Arabs to see themselves as inferior to Jews (n.pag.), and to “internaliz[e] the view that Arabs (unlike Jews, who in their dealings with each other are exemplary), are violent and dangerous—including their own [...] a process whereby the colonized native sees himself, instead of the colonial order, as the biggest problem,” (n.pag.) which is further encouraged by Israeli law and media. Rego illustrates the nature of the prejudice that Palestinians encounter through his study of the Arabs who live in the Naqab region (n.pag.). The Israeli authorities, for example, refer to them and to other Arab Bedouins, as violent, and irresponsible, and permit them to exist as the “living dead” on the most basic human rights (Rego n.pag.). Even though these Bedouins are Israeli citizens, they are treated as land squatters with no legal ownership of the land they have been farming.

Habiby conveys this inner racism in the novel, where Saeed, for the sake of his own survival, does not hesitate “giv[ing] in and degrad[ing]” himself to use Sartre’s words (*Preface* xlix) by betraying the Palestinian resistance. This confirms Sartre’s assertion that colonization dislocates the personality of the colonized (xlix-1). When Saeed is caught after

visiting his relative Isam Al-Bathanjani, for example, he blames himself and uses Israeli discourse when he exclaims, “I am an ass! I am an ass!” (*The Pessoptimist* 52/*Al-waqai‘* 58) to appease the Big Man (of small stature). The author demonstrates the injury caused by this racialization through one of Saeed’s letters:

I lived in the outside world—outside the tunnels, that is—for twenty years, unable to breath no matter how I tried, like a man who is drowning. But I did not die. I wanted to be free but could not; I was a prisoner unable to escape. But I did remain unchained. How often I yelled at those about me, “Please, everyone! I groan at the burden of the great secret I bear on my shoulders! Please help me!” But all that came from beneath my moustache was a meowing sound, like that of a cat. (*The Pessoptimist* 76/*Al-waqai‘* 80)

His appeal to be saved is due to his heavy secret, which is the dichotomy in his life between his actions in serving the Israeli establishment and the belief he conceals, which is his support for the Palestinian resistance that he is unable to disclose. As a result, he reaches out to a character from outer space to try and disentangle him from the miserable situation that he is placed in. Ashour emphasizes that these are moments of great satire and also of great pain in the novel (158).

In the same vein, when Saeed wants to love, he falls in love with Yuaad, who is a Palestinian rebel, and when he wants to marry he chooses Baqiyya, the quintessential Palestinian folk girl. Following this further, when they have a child, they name their son Walaa, which instead of the intended loyalty to Israel, he grows up to be loyal to the Palestinian resistance (*The Pessoptimist* 122/*Al-waqai‘* 122). When Walaa finds his mother’s Tanturian treasure, he uses it for the resistance, and dies defending his cause, unlike Saeed in his youth who finds it easier to collaborate with the enemy (*The Pessoptimist* 113/*Al-waqai‘* 113).

The narrator observes that such contradicting conditions led Saeed to a mental hospital and eventually to death (*The Pessoptimist* 161/*Al-waqai‘* 199). Consequently, this

conveys to the reader that it is impossible to coexist in this unparalleled discrepant situation, where the Palestinian living inside Israel sits cross-legged as Saeed does on his imaginary *khazuq*, damned if he does collaborate with the Israeli regime, and damned if he does not (*The Pessoptimist* 157/ *Al-waqai* '152).

Chapter Two

A Trajectory of Familial Dispossession and Survival in Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*

But then I ask the following question: has colonization really *placed civilizations in contact*? Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of *establishing contact*, was it the best?

I answer no. (Aimé Césaire 33)

Exploring the connection between slavery and its role in the African diaspora is not a novel idea. Slave narratives, historical records, musicians, artists, and authors have creatively presented the acts that dispossessed nearly twenty million humans over the course of 250 years, and its repercussions which echo until today. To invigorate this subject, and determine its contemporaneity, authors have begun to avoid developing animosity through a “rhetoric of blame” (*Culture and Imperialism* 19) to use Edward Said’s term. In other words, their discourse does not blame the West for the throes of slavery and the consequences that they suffer from. Instead, these texts aim to *understand* how racism was used as an ideology to encourage slavery and the dispossession of the Africans in diaspora. In turn, authors decided to take a “glance back” at this enterprise, and to look forward for planes that would help the scattered Africans to grow productively in territories where they have been forcibly propelled to (Ilona 3). Moreover, the new rhetoric aims to revert “the relationship of identity to roots and rootedness” that the diasporic population lacks (Gilroy 19), which has essentialist undertones that would continue the ideology that perpetuated the African diaspora. Instead, it involves “seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation” that would elicit both parties to dispossession to reinvent themselves from the identities that society has indoctrinated them with (Gilroy 19).

Crossing the River intends to reveal to the descendents of slave masters and slaves the “shameful intercourse” of the slave trade (1), and the consequences that are borne onto the parties from centuries old industry (Gilroy 218). Research reveals that millions of African lives were irrevocably destroyed when they were removed from Africa to the West and the

colonies, but only a sliver of their (hi)stories are extant (Gilroy 53). The paucity of narratives is due to the fact that so many slaves who were transported from Africa died at sea, while those that arrived at unfamiliar shores in the West did not find a reliable listener, or an opportunity to document their ordeal. Therefore, Phillips “excavates” the past of protagonists who are unable to render their stories in full (Pulitano 375). For one reason or another, their interlocutors could not save nor provide any evidence of the protagonist’s past. Consequently, Phillips decides to create a product of “polyphonic [...] cultural expression” (Gilroy 32), by employing the remnants of extant slave narratives for the re-memory of the trauma, alongside the narratives of their white counterparts and to rewrite a marginalized (hi)story that challenges the master narrative.¹⁸

This polyphony generates a tapestry of narratives that unveils how the West used racism to practice slavery and its implications today. Additionally, these works present how in certain chronotopes the roles of superior and inferior are reversed. As Paul Gilroy explains in his study *The Black Atlantic*, the transatlantic slave trade does not belong to the victims alone; indeed, it is a space of “movement, restlessness, and displacement” that involves both black and white (19).

In his study *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin defines polyphony as a “plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” (*Problems* 6) of characters in a text. They have “fully weighted ideological conception[s] of [their] own” (*Problems* 5) that are not limited to the author’s consciousness. Bakhtin adds that the protagonists “develop their views into finished systems” as they encounter opposing ideologies during their journey in the text, which challenges their outlook on their immediate world (*Problems* 5).

Bakhtin explains that the protagonist in a polyphonic work is one that is marginalized from “cultural tradition, from the soil and the earth, a representative of an ‘accidental tribe’ ”

(*Problems 22*), similar to the condition of Africans once they are a part of the diaspora. Therefore, by using polyphony, the characters are given the opportunity to be “fully valid autonomous carriers of [their] own individual word” (*Problems 5*), in other words, to convey their own story. This is essential to produce an alternative (hi)story to that of the dominating discourse of the controlling, superior authority. As a consequence, the narratives are permitted to intertwine with their Other to produce an “unmediated response” from the reader (*Problems 5*).

The unremitting survival strategies of Africans in the diaspora inspired Phillips to conceive this novel. He goes further to locate himself within the subjects he writes about:

Know[ing] my Atlantic ‘home’ to be triangular in shape with Britain at one apex, the west coast of Africa at another, and the new world of North America (including the Caribbean) forming the third point of the triangle. (Pulitano 371)

With this said, Phillips opens his novel to the poignant prologue of a father in Africa who professes his guilt after selling his children Nash, Martha and Travis into slavery (1). Basing his calamity on a poor harvest he explains that he has “condemned” them (1); “fracturing” their lives as children connected to a family without the opportunity of return (1). Further “jettisoning” them on a journey that would transport them to an unknown land (1), and a transmutation from free human beings to slaves. Phillips uses this prologue as a framing device to introduce the reader to the main trope of the novel, which is the dispossession of family ties caused by slavery. This form of trade is based on racist ideology that benefits the whites at the expense of those of darker skin. Phillips extends the consequences of this fracture to both the propagators of slavery and the victims of it. In fact, all the characters in the novel are actually orphans or become so as the novel unfolds. To amend this cleavage, both white and black try to re-create substitute/surrogate families, but lose them once more to the processes and aftermath of slavery (Lendent 60).

In “The Pagan Coast” Phillips continues to chronicle this fracture, where geography and voice intermingle through a polyphonous exposition of loss. Edward Williams, a childless, elderly American, and slave owner of great means, discovers that Nash Williams, his most prized African slave, had “disappeared from the known world” years after being selected to go to Liberia¹⁹ as a part of the American Colonization Society’s mission to civilize Africa (9). The narrative exhibits Nash’s letters as he renders his experience of what should have been a return to his home where “a colored person can enjoy his liberty in this place, for there exists no prejudice of color and everyman is free and equal” (18), as opposed to enslavement and discrimination in America. His experience in Liberia unveils what he was missing as a slave in America, as he explains to Edward:

We, the colored man, have been oppressed long enough. We need to contend for our rights, stand our ground, and feel the love of liberty that can never be found in *your* America. Far from corrupting my soul, this Commonwealth of Liberia has provided me with the opportunity to open up my eyes and cast off the garb of ignorance which has encompassed me all too securely in the whole course of my life. (61-62; emphasis mine)

As the narrative develops, Edward reveals that he had homosexual and pedophilic affairs with the slaves in his possession (68), and Nash is the one he loved the most (55). These correspondences began in 1834, but they were made apparent to Edward in 1842 because of his wife Amelia who concealed them out of her jealousy and shame of her husband’s love for his former slave:

Nash Williams, the boy he had brought from the fields to the house, the boy who won his love, freely given, who would force on to him all the pain and confusion which finally proved too much for Amelia to bear. (58)

Indeed what is pertinent in Nash’s letters is his unusually strong desire to once more be united with Edward, he perceives him as his paternal figure “who [has] done more for me than my natural father” (20). This reference to an original father connects to the African

parent in the prologue and to the act of loss that he experiences therein. In the same vein, referring to Edward as his parent confirms that he is a substitute for his original father as a way to make up for the experience of his loss of family when he was taken away from Africa. The need to create a “non-biological kinship is a ‘conspicuous power’ ” (Gilroy 28), which is essential for “black survival,” and it has become a constituent of black Atlantic culture (Gilroy 139). As Edward continues to uncover the letters, Nash’s pleas become more painful: “Why, my dear Father, do you choose to ignore my previous letters?” (29), which develops to an apprehensive “Why have you forsaken me?” (42) as Nash begins to internalize this abandonment as an act of “betrayal of trust and kinship” (Low 135).

His letters also convey that although he spoke highly of Liberia, he found that he, and other former slaves, are unable to fully immerse themselves in the country. This is a result of being once more removed from familiar surroundings to an alien one, and echoes the first stage of the transatlantic slave trade (25). Nash explains in his letters “I have been in Africa a long time and I wish to come *home* as soon as possible” (35; emphasis mine), which presents his inability to coexist, regardless of whether Africa is his ‘biological’ fatherland or not. Moreover, his inability to assimilate in Africa indicates that Nash, and many like him actually have no place to call their own home. Additionally, his continuous requests for commercial goods such as “bacon, nails, borax, shoes, stockings” (25), imply that he has been cut off from all that he once considered familiar and is obligated to remain in a terrain that is hostile to his constitution and culture.

Abandoned by Edward, Nash renounces his missionary work and becomes a farmer (38). To complete his transformation, he takes three wives, which is the result of the injury of familial disruption “by his enslavement and repatriation to Liberia” (Ilona 7). Thus, he humanizes himself through having a “*family*, above whom [he] reign[s] as head” (38; emphasis in the original). He continues to describe the advantages and luxury of genuine

companionship, which he was prevented from having under the yoke of slavery (60).

Eventually, Nash meets his end as an African “and he is burned according to local custom” (58), which emboldens the reality that “civilization kills” (Pichler 473), and that “there is no return” to Africa (2).

Edward Williams discovers that Nash’s death illustrates the impossibility of return to Africa, and provides the oppressors’ perspective on the dynamics of this familial dispossession. He is alarmed by the content of the letters that he discovered too late, and senses the shame and guilt of losing Nash to African custom, which connects to the African father’s remorseful prologue (Ilona 7). He embarks on the sea journey to find Nash, and like the African slaves, he falls ill, and is confined to his room for the majority of his trip. This reversal of roles obligates Edward to experience the transatlantic journey through the eyes of his Other, which is the slave. Additionally, when Edward takes the trip to Liberia, he is relinquished of his authority and remains at the mercy of Madison (another freed slave of Edward’s, and also a victim of his sexual exploitations) and “enters into completely new relations with the real world” as his principles are challenged when his role as slave master no longer exists (*Dialogical* 165). This reversal of roles and loss of power connects with change in identity through the transfer from one space to another. To demonstrate, when he is in Liberia, he attempts to look for the company of other white masters. He discovers that there is a colonial club, and when an African man opens the door, Edward realizes:

Never before had he had to explain or ask anything of a colored man, and to have to do so now and in order to gain access to the company of other white men, he found extremely difficult [...] He [the black doorman] closed in the door and left Edward standing in the street like a beggar. (54)

When his illicit relationship with his slaves is uncovered to the club members later on, he is prevented from ever returning to the colonial club (75). This is a moment of irony as Edward Williams experiences estrangement, which he caused the Africans in America as a

slave owner on his plantations. This ignites his guilt again, both as father and lover, as he reflects:

Perhaps the fever, the sleepless nights, the complex welter of emotions that he had been subjected to since his arrival in Africa, were nothing more complex than the manifestations of profound guilt. (52)

When Madison informs his previous master that Nash is dead, he is dumbfounded and decides to visit the village where Nash met his demise (65). At Madison's mercy, Edward exposes to the readers his homosexual desires as he tries once more to entice him to make love to him. Ironically, his former slave utters a clear cut "No," and it puts an end to Edward's exploitation (68), because he is in Africa, where racist hierarchy has been suspended. Consequently, he cannot force any of the Africans to obey him as he does with the slaves on his estate.

In this chronotope, Phillips has explicitly shown the regressive effects that slavery has on both the victim and the victimizer through polyphony. Firstly, Edward Williams' narrative of his first-hand experience of the conditions of slavery in his time spent in Liberia, presents the dehumanization that Africans were exposed to both during their return to Africa, and in their initial experience in America. Furthermore, slavery is highlighted as the main cause for the dissolution of family ties, as Edward's family falls apart due to his exploitation of Africans. Forcing Nash to leave the plantation to live in Liberia is another act of cutting off his familial connection. On the other hand, Nash's narrative that is relayed through his letters records his experience and the continuous struggle with loss as he is dispossessed of family twice and of familiar surroundings. Nonetheless, he is eager to survive by creating a surrogate family in Liberia, but his civilizing mission before 'going native' has dwindled whatever vigor he had left.

The polyphony in "The Pagan Coast" exposes the readers to the contradiction in Edward Williams' character on the surface level, as he appears as a figure of authority that

befits his role as a slave master. However, in private the readers see his vulnerability as he realizes that he has grown too old and that he has failed because Nash abandoned his Christian faith and became a native African. Even though Nash Williams' letters reveal that he appeared to be an African who has been repatriated to his "homeland," his requests for American commodities and his desire to return to America conveys that being returned to Africa is not a remedy for slavery. Moreover, when Nash loses all hope to return to the United States his tone undergoes a change and he intimates to his master that he has abandoned his Christian faith, and had become a native. In turn, implying that even Christianity does not provide salvation for those who are enslaved or who have been previously enslaved.

Similarly, Martha Randolph in "West" is a figure of struggle and survival in the face of adverse loss as a result of slavery. In this chronotope, set in America during the 1860s, Phillips incorporates the voices of both a passionate young Martha who is escaping the slave trade in the United States prior to the Emancipation Proclamation,²⁰ and an older more helpless woman who goes back and forth between her memories of losing kinship ties after the American Civil War. The flashbacks that take over Martha make her narrative disjointed because "memory is the space where linear narrative is interrupted and dislocated" (Low 136), to demonstrate that the past and present are as equally important. As Martha journeys between her painful memories, a white woman takes pity on her and moves her to a shed rather than leave her in the snow. Even though this act of kindness would illustrate that there has been a change in attitude by the 'whites' in America, Martha notes that it has come "too late" to recover the loss that they have caused her (85).

By losing her family at the auction block, Martha has been conditioned to find strategies of survival to live a dignified life and be "part of this country without feeling like you wasn't really a part" (73-74). Even though her many escapes from slave owners had been

previously successful, on her last journey she is abandoned by a group of pioneers²¹ heading to California where they would live and “have[ing] to pay no heed to the white man and his ways” (73), which includes the degradation caused by slavery and racism. However, living in freedom was not her only objective; she invested herself in this arduous trip to reunite with her daughter who she believes was living in California after she was sold at the auction block years before. Also, her acceptance of her impending death does little to console her from the pioneers’ desertion; in fact, with them she had recreated another family by mothering them as they made the difficult journey West (93). Recalling her many losses, Martha is taken back and remembers:

Through some atavistic mist, Martha peered back east, beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man. Standing off, a ship. Her journey had been a long one. (73)

Even though Martha is probably not the same child who was sold by the African father in the prologue, she is able to connect to this memory of dispossession as she shares his experience of overwhelming parental guilt because she is unable to stop her daughter and husband from being sold (Low 136). When their master dies, Martha and her family are sold in an auction (76), and her suffering is heightened when she realizes that her husband does not have the volition to prevent his family from being separated, and that her daughter:

Eliza Mae looks from me to her father, then back to me. Poor child, she does not understand. ‘Lucas, we going to be sold?’ Lucas lowers his eyes. (76)

Martha further charges her agony when she recalls the last moment she held Eliza Mae:

Then the auctioneer slaps his gavel against a block of wood. I fall to my knees and take Eliza Mae in my arms. I did not suckle this child at the breast, nor did I cradle her in my arms and shower her with that love I have, to see her taken away from me. (76)

Since Martha is prevented from performing her traditional role as a mother, she is again dehumanized and “no longer possesses either a husband or a daughter, but her memory of their loss was clear” (78). However, in her relentless struggle to survive, Martha escapes the second ‘masters’ that buy her, and remakes a life for herself in Dodge City, Kansas. Apart from forging her own business, Martha meets Lucy and later Chester, where she is able to re-create a surrogate family for herself, in an effort to replace the one that she has lost.

Martha describes the younger Lucy as “a friend and sister to me,” who was also her partner in running a washing and cooking shop in Dodge City (83). Demonstrating her longing to have a family, she does not refuse Chester’s advances; in fact, she informs him that she “just needed some companionship, that’s all” (83). As the narrative progresses she realizes that the Emancipation Proclamation (which was passed in 1862, and took effect on January 1, 1863) did not make any difference for her, and that she was only:

more contented on account of my Chester [...] This man has made me happy. For ten long years, this man has made me forget—and that’s a gift from above. (84)

Indeed, Phillips uses this opportunity to expose once more how the West fails to amend the calamity that slavery creates; Martha contemplates whether “freedom was more important than love, and indeed if love was at all possible without somebody taking it from her” as she continuously loses every companion she makes due to slavery (86). This emphasis on companionship even appears when the white woman who takes her in asks “Shall I leave you now?” and Martha quickly refuses, which she subconsciously does to avoid being alone (81). As with her brother Nash, Martha’s story ends with her death, and where her last companion “wondered who or what this woman was,” and, “[t]hey would have to choose a name for her if she going to receive a Christian burial” (94). Ironically, Martha is still subject to a white person, and she is renamed as masters rename their slaves when they purchase them.

The polyphony in “West” is constituted through Martha’s several consciousnesses as she reveals that even as she has grown older and less mobile, she is determined to escape the threat of slavery and racism. By using flashbacks, Phillips reveals the consciousness of the younger Martha, which continuously pushes her to escape her slave masters, while her older consciousness reveals her determination to not fall victim or have her freedom curtailed as she chooses to join the pioneers as they make their way to California.

In “Crossing the River” Captain James Hamilton of the *Duke of York* is the slave trader who purchases the African father’s children in the prologue. Phillips utilizes this section for a dual purpose, one of which is to again present the severing of kinship ties for both the Africans and the slave traders. Secondly, by relying on Newton’s *Journal of a Slave Trader*, the text calls attention to the victimizer’s version of ‘History’ to demonstrate how the Africans were written into it by those who purchased them in comparison to the author’s rendition of their lives in the previous two sections (Low 136-7). Aimé Césaire states that the colonial enterprise “dehumanizes even the most civilized man; colonial activity [...] which is based on contempt for the native and justified by the corrupt” to guarantee its continuity will eventually undermine the integrity of anyone who is participating in it (41).

In this short section, Captain Hamilton embodies two selves, one who is a discipliner, correcting both his crew and slaves, and on the other hand, a loving man who dislikes his trade and yearns to return to his beloved wife in England. In his impassive log he notes: “corrected the Carpenter with a dozen stripes of the cat for making a commotion while fetching wood” (103). In another instance he “canes” his crew and the slaves for bad behavior (105). And when preventing a slave insurrection he:

put 2 [Africans] in irons and delicately in the thumbscrews to encourage them to a full confession of those principally concerned. In the evening put 5 more in neck yokes. (114)

Hamilton's records of the slave insurrections on nearby ships present the Africans' repetitious effort to resist being dispossessed and their continued struggle to survive (103). This shows the reader how the slaves persisted in resisting capture and enslavement. While Hamilton is taking families apart, he ironically reveals in his letters to his beloved how his involvement in the slave trade has taken him away from his own family. Thus, the reader can understand the effects of slavery on both masters and slaves. He explains to his wife that the lives that are "entrusted into his care," approximately 250 people on the slave ship, overwhelm him, but become "petty concerns" alongside his love for her (108). In another letter, we understand that Hamilton dislikes this separation from his wife and their capacity to have a family, as he looks for the opportunity to do "everything necessary to procure a future happy reconciliation, for beyond this trading community lies family life," which ironically the Africans do not have the opportunity to choose for themselves (120).

This enthusiasm to reunite with his wife stems from Hamilton's status as an orphan; like his slaves on the slaving ship he is stripped of parents and of partner (120). In a revealing confession that he makes to his wife, he underlines that his father had been a slave trader like him and he had hoped to reach some conclusions regarding his mysterious death while at sea. Mr. Ellis, a man of some slaving experience, and who also knew Hamilton's father refuses to divulge to him where his father is buried. Instead of providing him with any answers, Ellis:

responds to my entreaties with the curious suggestion that my father traded unwisely, and with too much vigor. He goes on, and hints that Father cultivated a passionate hatred, instead of a commercial detachment, towards the poor creatures in his care, and he urges me not to err in this direction. (119)

Consequently, this indicates that his involvement in the trade had dehumanized him, as "men are indeed captives in the 'prisonhouse of natural bias,' prisoners of the roles imposed upon them by the code of colonial behavior of corollary racism" (Lendent 119), to the extent that he continued to trade slaves even though he "held dear to the belief that the

teachings of the Lord were incompatible with his chosen occupation” and it was impossible for them to come together (119).

Contrary to the protestations of love in the Captain’s letters are the unfeeling factual logs of the events happening on board the *Duke of York*. The log provides an example of the kind of records that are made of Africans captured in the transatlantic slave trade. They are used as a comparison to the narratives of other chapters in the novel to illustrate how master narratives present the Other. Here the author shows the vital information that would interest the readers of such logs, which would be the trader who advised the captain on the purchase, the gender of the slaves, and any extraordinary features that distinguish them. In one entry Hamilton states: “This afternoon, bartered with a Frenchman for 2 anchors of brandy, 20 cwt of rice, and a man slave of quite unnatural proportions” (111). Thus, placing the event of procuring a slave alongside other purchasable goods dehumanizes him and presents them as a mere commodity. Moreover, Africans were distinguished only by a serial number, not by a name, unlike the ship’s crew who are noted down by their last names. Significantly, the logs portray that there are 210 slaves accounted for on the ship (124), which would amount to 210 untold stories of dispossession and loss that could be conveyed, if the victims were fortuitous enough to learn a written language, or tell their story to another who inscribes it. Since the available slave narratives account for only a fraction of the multitudes that were enslaved, their stories would remain unwritten, unless fiction is able to convey them creatively by padding these small entries into fully-fledged stories.

In “Crossing the River” the polyphony is contained in Captain James Hamilton’s logs of the slave ship in parallel to his romantic letters to his wife. These two voices are completely independent as his log reveals a dehumanized tone that lists the events and commodities on the ship, which include the slaves. On the other hand, his love letters to his wife reveal his personality and inner consciousness, that not only is he a young orphan, he

does not enjoy the slave trade and that he questions its principles as it contradicts his Christian upbringing.

The section entitled “Somewhere in England” revolves around the disjointed entries of Joyce, an Englishwoman who resides in a sleepy Yorkshire town. In this final chronotope, Phillips uses a fragmented narrative style to combine flashbacks where World War II becomes the main locomotive of events. This section relies mostly on Joyce’s narrative, and not that of the African protagonist Travis. In fact, he appears only briefly in this section. What comes across clearly is Joyce’s feelings of loneliness and her desire to create a family, which echoes the desires of her African counterparts. Again, Phillips creates empathy and a connection between the desires of both black and white.

Joyce’s father died in the Great War, and she explains that she has a tense relationship with her mother, who was pious and cold, forcing Joyce to withdraw from school at 16 (190). She tried to convince Joyce to revoke the distractions of life and follow a more religious one, to the extent that “she hit me because she said I read too much. Apparently, there was no need to read so much. It was willful disobedience on my part” (190). When Joyce was getting married she notes:

My mother, well, she found a way not to cry. She set her face like a mask and just stared straight ahead as if she couldn’t see what all the fuss was about. [...] Maybe she didn’t want me to see that she cared. (139)

What adds to Joyce’s loneliness was her lack of friendship, as she relays how during her summer holidays no one ever “asked [her] to go with them. They haven’t even asked me if I’m going somewhere else” (190). Clearly this marginalization makes her more susceptible to accepting others who are on the periphery of her community, such as the African American GIs who arrive in 1942. Phillips explains that as individuals who “have been forced to question our identity” (Pulitano 376), they will find an opportunity to connect to others who feel the same. To demonstrate, when Joyce and her fellow villagers see them for the first

time, she had wanted to approach them “to warn them,” that her parochial town would not be able to treat them as more than a phenomenon (130). On the other hand, Joyce cannot connect with the other villagers because they perceive her as “the uninvited outsider” (130), nor can she connect with the white soldier who enters her shop explaining that the African American GIs are not to be treated as equals. Joyce inquires: “What are they going to do? I thought, throw themselves on the floor before us if we smile?” (145).

Joyce’s unconventionality and marginalization connects her to Travis. Her desire for companionship emboldens her to defy social mores. What makes Joyce special is that rather than look for differences between them, as racist ideology implies, instead she looks for the similarities. She is marginalized because her husband is imprisoned because of his black market trade, whereas Travis and his fellow GIs are marginalized because they are a different race (198). By the same token, when she is invited to a dance organized by the GIs, only then does she hint that Travis is of African descent because his hair was “short, like thin black wool” (175). Joyce values the respect that Travis has for family, as he would make it a regular activity to tell her stories about his kinship ties in America (209). Unlike her husband Len, Travis does not shy away from visiting Joyce’s mother’s gravesite, paying his respects and saying a prayer (202). Len, on the other hand, refuses to go to the funeral adding that “she died because you left her down there on her own and went off with me,” which indicates his lack of sensitivity and respect for Joyce’s needs for family (187).

After Joyce divorces Len, she is still unable to marry Travis. Their bond would break “laws against miscegenation” and impositions such as the Jim Crow laws which prevent them from living in the United States together (224).²² Despite her earlier examples of resistance, eventually race relations affect Joyce, and she is pressured to let go of her son Greer to avoid being socially stigmatized for having an interracial child:

Let's be sensible. You're going to have to start a new life on your own. And so we were sensible, my son and I. My son who hadn't asked me to turn him over to the lady with the blue coat and maroon scarf. (228)

British society's disapproval of interracial marriage prevents her from performing her conventional role as a mother to Greer. Rather she relieves herself of this social pressure, and foment a new surrogate family while again Greer carries the legacy of slavery and is forced to accept living with another family aside from his biological one. When Greer searches for her in 1963, her hesitance at meeting him underlines her guilt of letting Greer go without his choice: "I stared at Greer and longed for him to stay as dearly as I longed for him to leave" (223). Joyce's painful reunion grows more agonizing as she explains to Greer that she did not have any evidence of Travis, that she had burned all his letters and pictures when she met her conventionally acceptable husband Alan (224). This observation again feeds into the perception that Travis's story would never have been told had it not been for Greer's return to Joyce in 1963.

The polyphony in "Somewhere in England" reveals Joyce's transformation from vulnerable teenager to a marginalized woman through several flashbacks in the form of diary entries. Phillips organizes the entries in this section without a particular order to reveal Joyce's quiet nature in public as opposed to her rebellious nature in private. Furthermore, when she meets Greer when he returns to find her, Joyce's inner monologue reveals how she longs to recognize Greer as her son and to acknowledge her love and marriage to Travis. Her disclosures illustrate the influence that race relations continue to have on both black and white and their role in dispossessing them from their families.

In the epilogue, the African father consolidates his kinship relationship to the "many-tongued chorus of common memory" (235) in the novel, across generations and color lines. He explains that he can hear this polyphonous fugue because they are all bound together through the original act of dispossession on the shores of Africa "their voices hurt but

determined, they will survive the hardships of the far bank” (235), indicating that their experience “looks at ways in which suffering, and survival can offer new routes to the future” (Low 139). Moreover, it highlights slavery as a “cross-cultural hybrid domain” whereby their “intertwined histories” need to be “seen from the perspective of a whole secular human history” (Said quoted by Lendent 55). Also, the epilogue indicates that the figures of the three children at the onset of the novel are not the same ones that the father sold; rather they are figures representing diverse descendents of the slaves that have been unlisted, but are nonetheless heard by the father. Apart from the voices in the novel, the African father elucidates that he can also connect to other members of the African diaspora on a global scale such as “the barefoot boy in Sao Paulo,” to their music, and to all products of Black Atlantic culture that act as a mnemonic tool to relate them to the experience of slavery and its ability to reinvent their identities in the face of the disambiguous standards that conventional society enforces (235).

The various sections in *Crossing the River* do not intend to replace one version of the truth with another. Rather, the novel shows that there are no absolute “ready made truths” (*Problems* 108) and prefers the discernment of an ideology through creative exchange (*Problems* 110), whereby the reader can create a rich dialogue through the several “truths” or (hi)stories presented. Bakhtin explains in his studies that “dialogue” refers to a method of discerning a truth through more than one consciousness or voice. Consequently, a polyphonic text witnesses voices that “interact with each other in unforeseeable ways” (Emerson n.pag.), and thus the reader can reach new insights to discover dispossession as a product of slavery and racism. Moreover, Phillips’ novel is divided into six chronotopes, which observe the experiences of three protagonists sold into slavery in 1753. The experiences of these characters are set over three difference time-spaces, thus, they “cannot be taken literally” because they are not the same three children as those sold at the onset of the novel, therefore,

“they are not what they seem” (*Dialogical* 159). Indeed, “their very appearance, everything they do and say, cannot be understood in a direct and unmediated way but must be grasped metaphorically” (*Dialogical* 159). To reach a dialogical understanding of a truth, the novel uses “utterly incompatible elements” (*Problems* 16) such as the voices of black slaves and their white masters, which are “distributed among several worlds” that do not comply with the laws of time and place, and several autonomous consciousnesses” that do not necessarily agree with the author’s views (*Problems* 16). These elements are used to challenge a consolidated idea such as racism that generates dispossession and prevents natural human relationships.

Moreover, each chronotope contains multiple voices and often a character’s multiple consciousnesses are revealed. Thus, Phillips’ use of polyphony in his several chronotopes “destroys the monological plane of the novel” (*Problems* 5), and his characters are represented as “free people” (*Problems* 6) with their own valid discourse that is based on their own experiences. Therefore, dispossession of kinship ties for both black and white is revealed through the (hi)stories recorded through the several voices of Phillips’ characters. These revelations create a dialogue that encourages looking at a truth from more than one perspective.

Conclusion

To make a contestable understanding of dispossession, perspectives of the dispossessed and the dispossessing have to be presented. The dialogue created by this interplay encourages undocumented (hi)stories to be recorded, and the stifled to break their fetters and speak. Bakhtin describes this interplay as “the dialogical means of seeking truth” (*Problems* 110), which depends on the exchange between individuals to reach an understanding of an event. This is imperative because one-sided perspectives create a “perverse cross-culturalism” (Lendent 55), which is counterproductive and repetitious of the oppressor’s acts. Thus, the novelists emphasize the value of writing a collective history of one significant event as a vessel to understand the current reality that the oppressed (or previously oppressed) occupy (Pichler 468). Through these chronotopes they are fusing “historical and socio-public events together with personal and even deeply private side of life” through their inner consciousnesses to link “historical sequences with the everyday” (*Dialogical* 247), in turn, showing the implications of history on the experiences of the conqueror and conquered until today. This maps a territory for the reader to explore, and expose the “authoritative maxims of Western imperialist [...] histories which captured and contained the Other” (Pichler 468).

More significantly, the novels show that what prevents the Palestinians and the Jews, and white and black, to come together in dialogue is racist ideology that perpetuates colonialism. This belief infiltrates into discourse, history and culture, to insure that one party is privileged while the other is subordinated, even to the extent that they are denied basic human rights. As a response, both Habiby and Phillips use their novels for “the laying bare of any sort of conventionality” in order to expose “all that is vulgar and falsely stereotyped in human relationships” (*Dialogical* 162), which creates a sense of empathy between the oppressor and the oppressed. Thus, they can see the ideologies in practice, and realize that

these racialized differences are in fact false. Overall, they would see the humanity of the Other, and avoid partaking into exclusive ideologies that keep them apart.

This is essential because both authors studied in this thesis are from marginalized and subaltern circles of their respective societies, and continue to be so today. Emile Habiby gives the Palestinians living within the state of Israel an opportunity to reveal their ordeal.

Similarly, Phillips discerns a voice for the unknown millions who have been removed from their homes in Africa and do not have the opportunity to engage in dialogue.

Conveying the tragedy of loss, Habiby uses humor in the form of satire to be able to psychologically wring the reality of dispossession from himself. Throughout the plot, Saeed is dispossessed of his home that is occupied by an Ashkenazi Jewish family, and dispossessed of his identity as a Palestinian because he has to pretend to be on the side of the Israeli establishment to safeguard his existence. Furthermore, Saeed is dispossessed of his family, as Yuaad is taken away from him when she infiltrates the Haifa borders, and later loses his wife Baqiyya and their son Walaa as a result of the latter becoming a freedom fighter.

Through the carnivalesque, Habiby presents situations where the conventional roles and perceptions of everyday reality are reversed— beginning by presenting Israel itself as an “alien, miraculous world” (*Dialogical* 165) which is anything but democratic through the degradations and humiliations that Palestinians are forced to withstand in Israel and in the diaspora. Also the Palestinian protagonist is more Juha, the fool and jester, than Salah al-Din, the leader and redeemer; his oppressors are in fact small, such as the “Big man of Small Stature,” and feeble like his overseer Jacob. In the same vein, Saeed’s narrative presents a collective history to show how there was a generation of Palestinian collaborators through the characters of Saeed and his father, and another generation who resisted through Yuaad, her daughter the second Yuaad, her son the second Saeed, and of course Baqiyya and her son Walaa. Additionally, by using flashbacks, anecdotes, fabliaux, and interruptions of the

regular flow of events the reader recognizes the complexity that racist discourse has created in Jewish-Arab relations inside Israel, and why this novel is essential to uncover these obstacles.

On the other hand, Phillips uses melancholy to develop his polyphonic narrative from allowing his characters to speak for themselves. He permits each one to render his/her tale, through letters (Nash and Captain James Hamilton), flashbacks (Martha) and through diary entries (Joyce and Travis). Thus the novelist undermines the centrality that Western historiography occupies, and challenges it with an additional history to mesh into the first to create an alternative reading of it. Bakhtin explains that “the mixing of high and low, serious and comic” genres, and the use of “letters, found manuscripts, retold dialogues” all serve to reach the dialogical interaction to culminate to an alternative truth that challenges “ready-made” ideologies that discriminate one from the other (*Dialogical* 108). By doing so, Phillips’ novel demonstrates that mainstream culture and history rely on essentialist, “immovable and unchanging hierarchies, in which the ‘higher and lower’ never merge” as Bakhtin states in his study *Rabelais and His World* (166).

Phillips’ protagonists’ experience of loss is felt from the onset of their journey, as when the “enslaved [African] reach[s] the [slave] ship, they reached the point of no return” (Rediker 75). Every opportunity they have to create a family is destroyed as a result of racism. Nash and Edward Williams cannot be together as a family because the latter is a master while the former is his slave. Moreover, he betrays his patriarchal role by abandoning Nash after he is sent to Liberia, in turn, dispossessing him of the home and family that he has grown accustomed to. As a result, he is coerced to create a new family and existence in an alien environment. Martha Randolph never outgrows the loss of her husband Lucas and daughter Eliza-Mae, even after she creates her surrogate family. What is more, she cannot find consolation in the Emancipation Proclamation as an attempt to rectify the pain that

slavery has inflicted. Nor can she find any remedy in faith, as she realized that “she could find no solace in religion, and was unable to sympathize with the sufferings of the son of God when set against her own private misery” (79). Although Captain James Hamilton may come across as the fortuitous protagonist in the novel, ironically slavery has caused him a great deal of loss. Hamilton had lost his mother when he was very young, and his father died at sea while trading slaves, leaving him an orphan. He explains in his letters to his beloved wife that he finds that slavery induces their separation and looks forward to them uniting again. Finally, Joyce and Travis’ relationship in “Somewhere in England” is cut short due to the social pressures of race relations that do not accept interracial romance. This social pressure extends to their son Greer, whom Joyce is forced to give away to be adopted by another family to prevent herself from being further ostracized by society.

Since Palestinian and Zionist history are inextricably linked, a fact that “the Zionist movement and the Israeli state have until today consistently refused to acknowledge” (Massad 130), Habiby’s novel is vital in underscoring this interlink. Conversely, Habiby intends to unveil the subaltern position which Arabs in Israel continue to endure, and which enforces them to use their “Oriental Imagination,” as he puts it, to coexist with the Israelis as a survival strategy in the face of their dispossession. As in Phillips’ novel, there are several events in Habiby’s novel that history does not document, particularly those that defy the official history as presented by the occupier (Interview 186). These events include the massacres of Tanturah, the destruction of several villages, and loss of lives that are not recorded in the Zionist master narratives. Habiby’s text is staged in historical turning points for both the Palestinians and the Israelis, to render how both parties dealt or experienced these events. For instance, the Nakba of 1948 that Saeed relays, is constantly paired with the agony of dispossession, displacement, and humiliation of living under an “ethnocratic regime” to use Ghanem’s term (232). Another vital date is the Naksa of 1967, which reveals

to Saeed that he, and all Arabs in Israel, can never be accepted as equal to the Jews. On the other hand, for the Israelis both the Nakba (for Israel it represents their Independence Day), and the Naksa are valorized, and are considered moments of victory.

Phillips believes that “history is a subjective narrative,” and through his fiction he writes against the grain of official history to include those that have been excluded (Pulitano 375). As Gilroy indicates, novels that discuss the diaspora are necessary “to direct the consciousness of the ‘racial’ group” (198) to the importance of not looking back for an essentialist identity, since as the father in the prologue indicates: “there are no sign posts in water” (2). Instead, there has to be an acceptance of the multiplicity of identity, to provide one with the threshold to recreate one’s self by “sinking hopeful roots in difficult soil” (2), and satisfying one’s self with a hybrid identity, which was created by an irreversible ordeal.

Although the chapters in this study are concerned with particular texts and with one particular Bakhtinian strategy for each for comparison: the *Pessoptimist* and the carnivalesque and *Crossing the River* with polyphony, there are instances where the authors use both the carnivalesque and polyphony interchangeably in their novels. To elucidate, Habiby uses polyphony through delivering Saeed’s story to the readers through an unnamed narrator, which makes him unreliable and motivates the readers to look at the text with skepticism. Furthermore, Saeed becomes an unreliable interlocutor too, as the narrator discovers that he was a lunatic who died in a mental asylum.

On the other hand, Phillips incorporates Bakhtin’s carnivalesque as he sets the narratives of both black and white alongside each other, and often merges them with one another. Additionally, Phillips permits the two disparate groups to come together in episodes that would not happen in reality, such as Madison Williams refusing his former master’s sexual advances when they are in Liberia. Other instances of irony are where Nash is considered a “white man” in Africa (*Crossing* 32), and when Edward loses his power as a

slave owner when he arrives in Liberia. Bakhtin explains that one of the carnivalesque objectives is to “sunder and separate” truths or ideas that are “united by false hierarchal relationships,” which further forces them “not to touch in their living corporeality” (*Dialogical* 169). In turn, Phillips uses the carnivalesque in his novel to reveal racism as the false ideology that permits the dehumanizing of both black and white by exposing the perspectives of the oppressor and the oppressed to allow the reader to reach an understanding of dispossession.

Interestingly, both novelists rely heavily on memory as the space or medium to return to events in the past that explain present conditions. Both authors reveal implicit events in time to indicate the importance of memory, as the dispossessed did not have the privilege of telling their own stories in their own words, as their oppressors did. Phillips focuses on the moments in history that should have made amends to the adversity of slavery, but failed to do so. “The Pagan Coast,” for example, is set before Liberia’s independence, Martha’s “West” is situated between pre-and post-Emancipation America, and “Somewhere in England” is set during and after the Second World War. Nonetheless, the events that unfold in these sections indicate that the racial lines between white and black remain clearly drawn. And even more interesting is Phillips’ heavy reliance on protagonists whose narratives are relayed to unreliable interlocutors, or their narratives are prone to being lost. As an illustration, Nash renders his experience through letters sent to Edward, but his wife Amelia conceals them from him. If Amelia had not committed suicide, the letters would have never been read. For Martha Randolph, we are only exposed to her moments of loss through her memories and flashbacks. The white woman who takes her in when she is abandoned in Denver never finds out her name, let alone her story. The Africans condemned to slavery on the *Duke of York* are only referred to by their serial numbers, and the ones who die at sea will never have their tale

of capture heard. Lastly, when Joyce gives away Greer and meets Alan, she destroys all of Travis' letters and pictures, vanquishing any evidence of his existence.

On the other hand, Saeed's narrative is recorded in letters sent to the narrator who relays their contents to us. Already the references that Saeed makes to the man from outer space indicates that there is an element of the unreliable. Eventually, after tracking the address that sent these letters, the narrator finds out that it leads to a mental hospital in Acre. Moreover, the name "Saeed Abu al-Nahs The Pessoptimist," does not exist; instead the narrator finds the name Saadi al-Nahhas who had met his demise in the same mental hospital (*The Pessoptimist* 162/*Al-waqai'* 156).

Reading and internalizing these texts, the reader becomes witness to the silenced and unheard (hi)stories of the Other, as they are listening to a voice that speaks of a collective (hi)story that has been stifled due to racist discourse and power dynamics. As a result, the reader will treat history with skepticism, and read it as a debatable text and not as a truth that is cast in stone. Rather, the reader will be able to look for other unsung versions to provide them with all sides of the story, reaching an individual understanding of an experience or event.

Endnotes:

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- ¹ The use of the term “(hi)stories” in this thesis intends to underline the importance of stories or individual narratives to be able to discern an event, as opposed to “History” which is considered a “master” narrative based on facts written by one party of a series of events. Although (hi)stories are more ambiguous, it allows the readers to empathize with another version of an event to help them reach a more authentic rendering of an experience. This term has been utilized by other scholars. For more examples on how it is used, see: Justine Talley’s *Paradise Reconsidered: Toni Morrison’s (Hi)stories and Truths*; Marc Dolan, “The (Hi)story of Their Lives: Mythic Autobiography and ‘The Lost Generation.’ ”; and Julia Kristeva’s “ ‘Nous Deux’ or a (Hi)story of Intertextuality.”
- ² Habiby’s family moved from their village of Shafa’amro, to Haifa, where he was born and where he set the events of his novel *The Pessoptimist*. Habiby underlines that unlike the usual perception of Palestinians, his family owned no land. His father, Shukri, was a teacher in a missionary school in Shafa’amro, but forfeited his profession to become a laborer. He raised his family of nine children in a Protestant Christian working class home, and he hoped that they could rise in the social ladder in Haifa. Eventually Habiby’s family relied on the income provided by Habiby’s elder brothers, as his father’s attempts to provide for his family failed. Habiby’s literary talent was recognized at school as he studied the writers who would later influence his style. Among them were Taha Hussein, Mustafa Sadiq Al-Rafi’i, and a pantheon of Russian authors who include Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev. More importantly, he found Karl Marx as a great influence as he admired his ability to criticize “the holiest of holies,” which Habiby incorporates in his novels. Moreover, Habiby reveals that it was literature that had led him to politics and not vice versa. Working as a coal stoker in Haifa, his supervisor, a member of the then underground communist party persuaded him that if he joined them he would have an opportunity to publish his work. Throughout his time in the party, he was elected to the Israeli Knesset three times during 1951 to 1972. For more on Habiby refer to his interview with Mahmoud Darwish and Elias Khoury, “Ana huwa al tiftl al-qatil.”
- ³ Phillips was born in St. Kitts, an island in the West Indies, which is a part of the British Commonwealth. The author’s family moved to Leeds in the United Kingdom four months after he was born. Unlike Habiby, Phillips is more mysterious, and shuns becoming a public figure. Phillips strongly identifies with the theme of immigration and does not identify himself as West Indian or as a Briton. Rather, he sees himself as a resident of the “Atlantic,” a space that is central to his people’s transfer from Africa to the West Indies, Great Britain, and eventually to the United States. After his graduation from Oxford University where he studied literature, he continued to travel teaching in universities in Ghana, Sweden, Barbados, and the United States. While growing up in the United Kingdom he suffered from racial discrimination. He indicates that his parents felt disillusioned as they were met with antagonism after they immigrated, even though they were British citizens. Phillips found his calling while in university, and cites Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin as key influences. At university he worked on theatrical productions, eventually

producing a play at the Edinburgh regional theatre after being unemployed for a whole year. In 1980 he visited St. Kitts for the first time, which provided inspiration for novels such as *The Final Passage* (1985). For more information on Caryl Phillips see Ivan Kreilkamp, “Caryl Phillips: The Trauma of ‘Broken History’ ” and Elvira Pulitano, “Migrant Journeys: A Conversation with Caryl Phillips.”

⁴ Israel Zangwill used this phrase as a part of Zionist discourse for the first time in his 1901 article in the *New Liberal Review*. See Hani A. Faris, “Israel Zangwill’s Challenge to Zionism.”

⁵ To read more on Juha, see: Salma Khadra Jayussi and Faisal Khadra. *Tales of Juha: Classic Arabic Folk Humor*.

⁶ To read more on a comparison between *Candide* and Saeed see: Ahmad Harb, “Invisibility, Impossibility: The Reuse of Voltaire’s *Candide* in Emile Habiby’s *Saeed: The Pessoptimist*.”

⁷ This figure was used from the following website: <http://www.haifa.muni.il/Haifa/en-us/Pages/ststisticsEng2.aspx>.

⁸ Literally means “The Defense”. It is the Jewish Military Organization in service prior to 1948, and later became known as the Israel Defence Force (IDF).

⁹ The 1947 UN Partition Plan aimed to divide Palestine into two separate states, one Arab and the other Jewish, but with equal economic aims. The Zionists welcomed this plan, but the Palestinians and the Arabs strongly opposed this division. The Partition Plan, though passed by the Security Council, was in fact abandoned.

¹⁰ Kuwaykaat, is a small village nine kilometers away from Acre. It was razed to the ground on 10 July 1948, as a part of Operation Dekel. A Kibbutzum called Bayt Hayaamik has been built on the site. This information was used from the following website: <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Kuwaykat/>.

¹¹ Noted in the “Translators’ Notes”, *The Pessoptimist*, p.165.

¹² Stated by Minister Tzipi Livny and quoted in As‘ad Ghanem “Palestinians in Israel Under the Israeli ‘Ethnocratic’ Regime.”

¹³ Drazen Patrovac is quoted stating that “[t]he political leadership delegates to the military level the implementation of the ethnic cleansing programme without providing systematic planning and explicit instructions, ensuring, however, that the overall objective is clear” (Pappé 130).

¹⁴ Abu al-Fadl al-Hamadhani, or better known as Badi‘ al-Zaman (“Wonder of the Age”), was a Medieval Arab literary figure. He started writing *Maqamat* (séance) when he was 24 (c. 992-3). *Al- Maqamat* are written in rhymed prose and consist of episodic chapters where an unnamed narrator informs us of the recollection of ‘Isa Ibn Hisham—an alterego of the author-- and his encounters with the picaresque Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari. He travels the

Arab/Islamic world as a disguised swindler who Ibn Hisham uncovers until they meet in the next séance/or “Maqamah”. See: Fedwa Malti-Douglas “Badi al-Zaman Hamadani.”

¹⁵ To maintain security, the Israeli military government (1948-1966) used laws to prevent Palestinians from re-entering areas that from 1948 become part of Israel. Such laws include Law 5714-1954: the “Prevention of Infiltration (Offences and Jurisdiction).” This law indicates that any person who enters Israel and “ ‘who at any time between 29 November 1947 and his entry, was a Palestinian citizen or a Palestinian resident without nationality or citizenship or whose nationality or citizenship was doubtful and who, during the said period, left his ordinary place of residence in an area which has become a part of Israel for a place outside Israel’ ” (Korn 217) as an “infiltrator” who has committed a Political Status Offence. See: Alina Korn, “Crime and Legal Control: The Israeli Arab Population during the Military Government Period.”

¹⁶ Habiby’s poetic counterpart, Mahmoud Darwish, asserts the notion that they have power in their numbers :

And my identity card number is fifty thousand
I have eight children
And the ninth will come after a summer
Will you be angry?

See: Mahmoud Darwish. “Identity Card.” 1964.

¹⁷ In his interview, Habiby explains that in times of war, this kind of evacuation is normal, that people temporarily leave until the warfare subsides (Interview 188).

¹⁸ The term is used by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*. It represents the cyclical return to an “earlier traumatic moment, which is remembered in the present, a moment she cannot attempt to forget”(qtd. Pichler 477).

¹⁹ In an effort to balm the fault of slavery, and under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, the U.S founded Liberia as a nation-state for its freed slaves in 1822. The American Colonization Society was established in 1816 by Robert Finley. The Society’s objective was to transport African American freed slaves back to Liberia, as an attempt to deal with the difficulty of accepting freed slaves in America as equals to their white counterparts. The African American slaves sent to Liberia were told that they would be civilizing the natives, bringing Christianity and progress to them.

²⁰ The Emancipation Proclamation was an edict released by President Abraham Lincoln on January 1, 1863 that freed the enslaved in the Confederate states, which were at battle with the Northern States during the American Civil War. More importantly, the Proclamation was a game changer as it enabled the Northern states to defeat the Confederate states because the African Americans were able to enlist in the army.

²¹ Black Pioneers were freed slaves who had decided to move to California to escape the discrimination in the Confederate states after the Emancipation Proclamation. Their activity indicates that racial discrimination had still not subsided. See: “Post-Civil War Reconstruction: A New National Era.”

²² The Jim Crow laws were a set of laws that promoted racial segregation in the American South between 1877 and the 1950s. Segregation was practiced in schools, transportation, parks, cemeteries, theatres and restaurants. These laws were enforced to stress the inequality between black and white. More significantly, they did not recognize the marriage of a white person to a black person. They were no longer enforced after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Right Acts of 1965.

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