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# The role of national status in refugee narratives: A case study on Palestinian and Sudanese productions

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# Abstract

The 1951 Refugee Convention recognizes two groups of refugees: one outside the country of his/her nationality and another group without nationality outside of the place of their habitual residence. However, because stateless displaced groups do not fall into the global nation-state paradigm, they are often overlooked within studies on refugees. As such, this thesis takes up the question of refugee memory as connected to place and the identities constructed through shared narratives, particularly those circulated through refugee-authored cultural productions such as literature and film. The tension between the status of the refugee within international law and the self-perception of separation from home are explored through two refugee archives: Palestinian (1960s to present) and Sudanese (2000s to present).

In this thesis, I analyze the role of national status in shaping refugee narratives and collective identities, taking into account how passing time alters a group's understanding of its collective history and shared present. In particular, I explore how national status impacts each group's displacement experience and the process whereby they became refugees—examining how these factors play a role in shaping each group's refugee narratives. These narratives are further explored through an analysis of the role of class, education and historical landscape in shaping refugee memory, identity and cultural production.

Stateless, diasporic Palestinians, suffering displacement by Israeli occupation, employ land narratives to both validate their connection with the land and preserve its memory among those in exile. Their productions also work to create a strong sense of national community, uniting Palestinians around a collective national cause across space and time. This thesis explores how national belonging depicted in literature is often so strong that it even transcends familial and personal obligations. In contrast, the Sudanese refugee identity is not so much claimed as designated by international agencies. Thus, Sudanese narratives are highly structured and construct an “innocent” refugee identity— “depoliticizing” the refugee subject—thus proving themselves as hapless victims “worthy” of assistance. This thesis seeks to show how national status intersects with memory, kinship, conflicting notions of belonging, state forces, and violence, producing very different narrative forms, which in turn shape the contours of refugee identity.

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# Introduction

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I believe that future historians will call the twentieth century not only the century of the great wars, but also the century of the refugee. It has been an extraordinary period of movement and upheavals. There are so many scars that need mending and healing and it seems to me that it is imperative that we proclaim that asylum issues are an index of our spiritual and moral civilization. –Rabbi Hugo Gryn, Holocaust survivor

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As a Vietnamese immigrant, I remember growing up to stories of Vietnamese refugees who fled the country after the Vietnam War. I especially recall the narratives of the Vietnamese boat people (*người vượt biển*), a group of refugees who fled the country by sea as a result of the conflict. My mother and I are not a part of this group, but many others in my Vietnamese community were. Growing up, I listened to narratives of families selling their possessions to give younger members the opportunity to be smuggled out of the country on overcrowded boats. I heard stories of shipwrecks, starvation and thirst.

One particular story of a woman, Liên Châu, who used to teach with my mother in Vietnam particularly stands out in my memory. During the early years their career, the two had taught together at the same high school. After several years, however, my mother asked to be transferred back to her hometown, Gò Công, in order to care for her aging parents. They lost touch at this point, which was in the 1970s. Four decades later after both Liên Châu and my mother had resettled in the United States, the two by chance reunited at a conference in Austin, TX, in a women's bathroom. That year, we drove to San Antonio to spend the holidays with the woman's family, and there, we found out that she fled Vietnam several years after my

mother transferred to Gò Công. After fleeing Vietnam by boat, the Liên Châu had applied for refugee status and was resettled in San Antonio, TX, where she lives with her family to this day.

In contrast to Liên Châu, mother and my journey to the U.S. as immigrants was quite different from the stories of Vietnamese refugees. Liên Châu traveled by herself whereas my mother came with me as a three-year-old. We were not fleeing political persecution but rather came in search of greater opportunity. We did not leave the country by boat but instead, flew directly to the United States. My mother and I arrived with much more than the clothes on our backs—we came with several suitcases full of possessions. One similarity, however, between my mother's and her friend's respective journeys is that they virtually had to start over upon arrival to the U.S. Though I had an aunt already living in the country, my aunt was hesitant to take on the burden of supporting our small family, so we were financially independent from the start. Looking back, my aunt's family in many ways played the role of resettlement agencies for refugees—while unable to give us financial support, she provided assistance during my mother's initial phase of transition and resources for her to successfully integrate into American society.

I remember the transition being very difficult on my mother. Upon arrival to the U.S., my mother and I immediately moved to Oklahoma where she worked as a nanny for a family friend. After about a year, through the recommendation of my aunt, my mother was able to find a permanent job in Waco, TX, where we settled until I graduated from high school. I remember my mother struggling the most in this transition when she became completely independent. Within the period of a month, she had to find our first apartment and learn to drive—all in the midst of trying to learn English and navigating the basics of American society.

Both my mother and Liên Châu were fortunate, though, because the Vietnamese community in their respective cities greatly supported them in this process by providing assistance through English classes and driving lessons. Similar to many other Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S., my mother worked as a manicurist for most of our time in Waco and later, similar Liên Châu, owned her own salon as well.

Liên Châu's and my mother's stories are ones of successful transitions. Having come to the United States with hardly any belongings, Liên Châu initially worked as a hair stylist, later becoming an entrepreneur. Until recently, she has owned several hair salons in the city—she sold these salons several years ago to consolidate her investments into a small shopping center that continues to thrive to this day. My mother also eventually sold her share of the salon but has continued her career even after our family's move to North Carolina.

Oftentimes, refugees and immigrants are perceived by the host population as a financial burden. While this may be true in the short-term, we also see that in the long-term, they contribute back to the host country's economy many times over their host's initial investment. Ideally, I believe that all countries as members of the global society should play some role in addressing the issue of refugees regardless of profitability. However, as questions about cost (and after the Paris attacks in November 2015, danger) of refugees permeate our conversations, the need arises for a reconstruction of the refugee identity. Within American dialogue, refugees are depicted as freeloaders, costly to society. It's time we change how we portray them. They are people fleeing their war-torn homes in search of peace and a secure future. They have hopes and dreams, and given the opportunity, they can become entrepreneurs, teachers and scientists.

Many years later during my time at Duke, I would again hear stories of flight and resettlement from my Arab refugee community partners in Durham. In the beginning, I became interested in the issue of Arab refugees because of its intersection with my two interests: global health and the Arab world. However, as I continued to learn more about these refugees' stories, I began to connect their stories to my own history. I realized that their stories were so compelling to me because through them, I heard both the collective Vietnamese narrative and my own being retold. Being involved in the present refugee crisis is no longer for me just an act of humanitarian service but rather, a journey of self-discovery through which I am able to learn about my own people within the context of these refugees' stories.

### Statelessness within refugee narratives

The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as “a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” Often when this definition is referenced, only the first half is cited—the segment on refugees fleeing from the country of his/her nationality as a result of persecution. This is the identity that predominates within 21<sup>st</sup> century dialogue on refugees. However, the 1951 Refugee Convention also recognizes another group whose stories differ drastically from the prototypical 21<sup>st</sup> century refugee but nonetheless still falls under the established definition—stateless refugees who have no

autonomous homeland to which they can return. Within the modern in which nationality plays a critical role in shaping people's identities, these stateless groups have often been overlooked likely because they are uncategorizable within the nation-state paradigm.

Most work on refugee narratives has focused on groups who, though displaced from their homes, nonetheless have a state to which they can return. Within this void of research on stateless narratives, the goal of this thesis is to examine the role of national status—whether refugees belong to a recognized state—in shaping refugee narratives, focusing on Sudanese and Palestinian refugee literature and film. Throughout my discussion, I examine these refugees as narrative imaginaries, constructed by refugee productions that have arisen out of each movement. What aspects of the refugee identity do these cultural productions mobilize, and to what end? How these productions depict collective identity, and what purpose does this collective serve for each group?

## Background

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, people were displaced from multiple regions globally—European Jews during World Wars I and II, the Indo-Chinese during the Vietnam War and Afghans during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan to name a few. In contrast, within the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the demographics of those refugees have shifted to become more centralized within one region—the Arab world. According to the UNHCR report forced displacement, three of the top four source countries of refugees—Syria, Somalia and Sudan—are in the Arab world with the exception of Afghanistan” (UNHCR Global Trends 2014). Though the causes of displacement vary by country, the increasing prominence of Arab refugees has shaped the image of the archetypal 21<sup>st</sup> century refugee. Not only have Arab refugees grown in visibility as a result of

their numbers, but they have also recently gained a more prominent place within public discourse as a result of security concerns surrounding ISIL, particularly after the Paris attacks in November 2015. These factors have again brought discussion on Arab, specifically Arab *Muslim*, refugees to Western headlines without, however, taking into account refugees' perspectives.

In this thesis I explore Arab refugees' agency through an analysis of their cultural productions, specifically literature and film. As Richard Delgado, credited for pioneering storytelling within legal scholarship, argues, "The stories of outgroups aim to subvert that ingroup reality. [...] it is the prevailing *mindset* by means of which members of the dominant group justify the world as it is [...] Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means for destroying mindset – the bundle of presuppositions, receiving wisdoms, and shared understandings against a background of which legal and political discourse takes place" (Delgado 2413). To use Delgado's terms, refugees are the outgroup. Their stories are overshadowed by narratives of both the displacing force and the host countries. After the November 2015 Paris attacks, the American public debated resettlement of Syrian refugees given the risks of doing so. Unfortunately, this dialogue remained within the American public, failing to take into account the perspectives of Syrian refugees—the population most affected by these decisions. Such omitted voices are the subject of my thesis that focuses on Palestinian and Sudanese refugees.

### Sudanese and Palestinian narratives

I have chosen to narrow the scope of my project to examine Sudanese and Palestinian refugees for several reasons. First, these groups serve as case studies of refugee narratives from those with national status and those without, respectively. While Sudanese refugees only lost their

homes, Palestinian refugees parted with both their homes and homeland. National status was never at stake for the Sudanese, and in fact, in 2011 the South Sudanese acquired independence and the right to autonomy from ethnically distinct North Sudan. Palestinians, on the other hand, have lived in a condition of statelessness with what remains of the nation currently under Israeli occupation. Secondly, these are Palestinians and Sudanese are some of the largest groups from the Arab world to be displaced in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. As such, their collections of cultural productions are far more established than those of any other group of “Arab” refugees in recent history. Important to note, however, is that while both Northern and Southern Sudanese have been displaced, Sudanese refugee productions by and large depict the South Sudanese’s experience who in fact do not consider themselves ethnically Arab. Nonetheless, because they come from Sudan, they are regarded as so by the outside world.

These differences in Palestinian and Sudanese refugee experiences have contributed to the variation between these two groups’ refugee productions. While Sudanese cultural productions by and large revolve around fictionalized memoirs, Palestinian diasporic literature has been marked by poetry and prose. Moreover, the majority of Sudanese memoirs, though based on interviews with Sudanese refugees, were generally written by or in conjunction with foreigners. Palestinian works, on the other hand, are primarily written by Palestinian refugees themselves or descendants of the displaced generation. Moreover, class also divides the writers of these productions. Palestinian works are generally produced by intellectuals who are known for their political involvement in the movement to liberate Palestine. On the contrary, the Sudanese civil war disproportionately affected villages. As a result, Sudanese diasporic writers tend to be less educated, thus often relying on foreigners to communicate their stories.

Further, not only do these foreigners play a prominent role in the writing process, they also are typically the ones to initiate the process with Sudanese refugees, encouraging them to retell their stories. Throughout this thesis, I highlight the role of national status in driving these differences that emerge. However, one distinction is difficult to account for in this discussion is time and generational differences between the two sets of productions

Palestinian and Sudanese works range across a wide period of time, beginning with Ghassan Kanafani's short stories soon after al-Nakba to Susan Abulhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin* published in 2010. Further, they are produced by writers across different generations with Kanafani having experienced al-Nakba himself and Abulhawa only inheriting the memories as a result of her Palestinian descent. In contrast, Sudanese productions began to emerge in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, spanning about fifteen years total, and reflect only the narratives of the displaced generation. For Palestinians, time and generational differences affect how narratives depict the boundary between exile and the homeland, which becomes less permeable as the hope for return slowly diminishes. This distinction is particularly apparent among literature before and after the Six-Day War in 1967 when the Arab forces were decidedly crushed by the Israeli military. In contrast, because Sudanese productions were created within a mere decade and a half, the effect of time on these works are much less apparent. As such, my discussion on Sudanese narratives will take on a greater depth as I elucidate the role of time and generational differences within these narratives as opposed to Sudanese productions, which more so represent a snapshot in time. Due to these differences, the goal of this thesis is not to compare Palestinian and Sudanese refugee narratives but rather, to analyze the role of national status

within the narratives that emerge, taking into account how refugee productions evolve over time.

In chapter one, I examine storylines within Palestinian and Sudanese productions, identifying the narratives that emerge from these two groups. Among Palestinian refugees, I also trace how their narratives have shifted throughout time as a result of the political environment regarding Palestine. I then analyze the role of national status in shaping these narratives and analyze how each group mobilizes these narratives within their respective movements. Chapter two explores how national status affects narrative forms and devices within Palestinian and Sudanese productions. In particular, I highlight how UNHCR expectations shape Sudanese refugee narratives, resulting in highly structured productions that cast the refugees as innocent victims. On the other hand, as a result of the Palestinians' continued and uncertain struggle for national recognition, the Palestinian narrative that emerges in many ways transcends time by building on previous works by both Palestinians and other stateless groups. In chapter three, I examine how Palestinian and Sudanese refugee narratives illustrate each group's diasporic communities. I then identify factors that drive these different manifestations of collectiveness and explore the role of these communities within each refugee movement.

## Literature review

### "Hostipitality"

One of the most influential people to have shaped present-day refugee theory is French philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose work has greatly impacted contemporary research on diasporic movements. Among his contributions, one of the most well-known is his concept of

“hostipitality,” which he discusses in a series of lectures documented in *Of Hospitality*. He derives his discussion of hospitality from Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant, who coined the concept of universal hospitality, based on the notion that individuals should have the right to travel without fear of hostility. Derrida further claims that unlimited hospitality requires the host open up his/her home to the guest with no pre-conditions and no expectation that the action be reciprocated (Derrida 77). Yet, in reality, this law also coexists with the laws (plural), “those rights and duties that are always conditioned and conditional, as they are defined by the Greco-Roman tradition and even the Judeo-Christian one [...] across the family, civil society, and the State” (77). One particular law that creates an unequal power dynamic between the host and guest is the law of private property. Should the guest begin intruding on the host’s sovereignty, this “pact” of hospitality is rendered void: “Anyone who encroaches on my ‘at home,’ on my ipseity, on my power of hospitality, on my sovereignty as host, I start to regard as an undesirable foreigner, and virtually as an enemy” (Derrida 53-55). This simultaneous hospitality and hostility is what Derrida terms “hostipitality”—the tension between hosting a guest while still maintaining sovereignty over one’s space.

Yet, though the notion of hospitality in regards to immigrants/refugees is widely-accepted, it is an analogy that is not without flaw. In *Postcolonial Hospitality*, Mireille Rosello explores the fluid nature of hospitality, what she calls a “kaleidoscopic radiance of a forever-changing mosaic” (Rosello 7). In her book, she problematizes the comparison between hospitality and immigration. In particular, she argues that comparing immigrants to guests suppresses many issues within the immigrant experience. First, while guests are invited, immigrants arrive with different motivations. Refugees in particular immigrate out of necessity,

so to compare them to a guest would diminish the urgency of their situation. Secondly, depicting immigrants as guests implies that they are inherently equal and able to perhaps reciprocate the hospitality should the situation arise. Thirdly, this analogy creates a “generosity” narrative, in which the host is commended for his/her hospitality, obscuring the right of the immigrant/refugee to have access to asylum (8-9). Ultimately, both Rosello and Derrida agree that the notion of hospitality as a one-way street should be dismantled: “if the roles of guests and hosts are set in stone, if immigrants are treated as if they always have to behave as guests, if hosts are always generous to their poor relations, [...] the continuum between guest and host disappears” (167).

Given the shortcomings of the hospitality analogy, the anthology *Mobilizing Hospitality* works to dismantle the concept, taking into account the limitations acknowledged by Derrida, Rosello and other scholars of the topic. Through observations of both immigrants and tourists, this work deconstructs the host/guest and give/take dichotomies and challenges the spaces in which hospitality can exist. Particularly of interest is its acknowledgement of the impact of colonization on deepening the immigrant/diasporic divide—one of the first instances in which colonization is referenced within this body of literature: “Descendants of postcolonial migrants still carry the image of the ex-colonial ‘immigrant’ with its violent colonial residue that relegates them to the margins of society on the basis of their ‘cultural’, ‘ethnic’, ‘religious’ and social affiliations that are sometimes deemed incompatible with European values” (Molz et al. 189).

Despite these tensions in the concept of hospitality, Derrida’s “hostipitality” is nonetheless helpful in shedding light on the simultaneous hospitality and hostility within the refugee-host relationship. “Hostipitality” manifests in several ways throughout the refugee

resettlement. The first is through the selection process in which the host exercises power over his/her home by “choosing, electing, filtering, selecting their invitees, visitors, or guests, those to whom they decide to grant asylum, the right of visiting, or hospitality” (Derrida 55). In America, refugee quotas and screening processes are examples of this tension—the conflict between the international expectation that America play a role in the present Syrian refugee crisis and its commitment to the safety of its citizens. The second form of “hostipitality” is appears in language: guests are expected to speak the host’s language, whether literally, legally or in terms of cultural norms. According to Derrida, the foreigner “is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated [...] He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State” (15). Within this language power dynamic emerges refugee cultural productions. Some take the host’s language—that is, reflect the host’s expectations—and others are a means by which refugees regain agency over their language. Nonetheless, regardless of whose “language” they use, through these productions refugees are able to take some ownership of their stories in a space dominated by their hosts.

### Refugee cultural productions

One of the most widely studied aspects of refugee narratives is the way in which they have been mobilized to construct identities. In her article “Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research,” social anthropologist Marita Eastmond argues that because the refugee experience involves ruptures in identity and environment, refugees often employ narratives to “create a sense of continuity in who they are, linking selves in different ways to

time and place” (Eastmond 254). In particular, the verisimilitude quality is what allows refugees to negotiate their identities within narratives. As psychologist Jerome Bruner in his book *The Narrative Construction of Reality* describes, verisimilitude quality is “a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and ‘narrative necessity’ rather than empirical verification and logical requiredness” (Bruner 4). Existing in a demi-reality, narratives are not held to a standard of absolute truthfulness, and as such they simultaneously allow refugees to illustrate their plight while also giving them space to modify their stories to truly capture the lived reality of their experience.

Among analyses on refugee cultural productions emerges two dominant themes: explorations of how refugees remember the past and how they reconstruct their identities in exile. Vijay Mishra explores the concept of melancholic loss of the homeland in *Literature of the Indian Diaspora* in which he claims that the diasporic imaginary is itself a condition of mourning that later becomes melancholia. He argues that melancholia is defined as absence, and moreover, it persists in the melancholic individual because he/she is unable to obtain another object of equal affection (Mishra 8-9). Roger Bromley in *Narratives for a New Belonging* observes a similar mourning as well. In his research of Chinese diasporic literature, he found that home was “a place of nostalgia and childhood memory, part of [an] ‘imaginary’, and a locus of change, conflict, and splitting” (Bromley 127). He also encounters this nostalgia in his work with Haitian and Indian works as well—referring to them as “Haiti of the mind” and “India of the mind.” In particular, he describes “India of the mind” as the “mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination” and the “place of no return” (73, 143). These idealistic conceptions of the homeland, though emotionally satisfying because they allow the refugees to “return”

home, ultimately gives rise to Mishra's definition of melancholia. Bromley includes a quote from the story "Homecoming" that illustrates the juxtaposition of the idealistic homeland and the present reality—a tension that often results in a sense of emptiness within the refugee: "It's like two sides of me coming together and they don't fit" (127). I return to this tension in my discussion of Palestine of the mind in chapter three.

Another topic widely explored is that which Bromley refers to as the "borderlines"—not only nation-state borders but also gender, ethnicity and class—of refugee identities. For refugees whose identities become destabilized as a result of their displacement, he argues that cultural fictions are especially effective at reterritorializing spaces: "Diasporic cultural fictions produce an endless series of flexible translations, arcs or bridges of new possibility, brought about by a creative fracturing of surface cultural representations" (Bromley 97). He further argues that as a result of displacement, refugee identities unavoidably become globalized—that it is impossible to maintain culturally and ethnically closed identities in exile. Yet, research on Palestinian cultural productions contest Bromley's claim. In Susan Slyomovics' *Object of Memory*, for example, she argues, "Place, gesture, and words conjoin the double Palestinian traumas of 1948 and 1967, fusing in al-Mudawwar's consciousness, thereby obligating him to preserve the memory of what was. In his case, this obligation had given rise to an as yet unpublished account about his native village of Dayr Ghusun and an oral history of the 1936-39 Arab Revolt" (Slyomovics 12). Palestinian productions revolve precisely around creating a strong national community as they continue to struggle for a state of their own. As such, though many Palestinians have resettled around the world, their diasporic productions nonetheless have remained faithful to the Palestinian cause and identity. In *Purity and Exile*,

Liisa Malkki suggests that both Slyomovics' and Bromley's observations are valid, arguing the modern-day displacement can result in two outcomes for the groups displaced. The first is that the displaced group will attempt to conform to the notion of nationality by creating a "nation" amongst themselves, and the second is that the group will become globalized, refusing to be classified by only one nationality or any other identity (Malkki 4).

Throughout this thesis, I will draw on Malkki's assertion regarding the two types of refugees—Palestinians conforming to the notion of nationality while the Sudanese becoming more globalized—to analyze how the identity of these groups change with the shifting of boundaries. I will also use the case of Palestinian refugees to challenge the hospitality analogy, which fails to account for stateless groups who do not want to acquire another nationality but yet are unable to return home.

# Chapter One: Diasporic Storylines

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Do not look upon yourself in the way they write about you. Do not investigate the Canaanite in you in order to establish that you exist. Rather, seize this reality, this name of yours, and learn how to write your proof. For you are you, not your ghost, the one who was driven away that night.

–Mahmoud Darwish, *Absent Presence*

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Though the UNHCR was originally commissioned to provide assistance to refugees, its mission was expanded to include stateless peoples after the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Later, in 2014 the UNHCR launched a “campaign to eradicate statelessness by 2024, which will seek greater political commitment to resolve protracted situations of statelessness and to prevent new situations of mass statelessness due to state succession or arbitrary deprivation of nationality” (“The Campaign to End Statelessness”). The case of Palestinians refugees is distinct because unlike other stateless groups, they have a separate UN organization devoted to their protection—UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). As evidenced by the need to create an entirely new organization to address the needs of Palestinians, statelessness plays a large role in impacting a group’s refugee experience and their needs. These refugees share the same basic components of the refugee journey—homeland, violence, displacement, exile. However, the way in which they experience each of these events differs. For outsiders, by identifying which aspect(s) of the refugee journey most characterizes each group, we begin to better understand how refugees depict their own identities.

This chapter examines the various segments of the refugee journey that are emphasized within Sudanese and Palestinian refugee narratives, analyzing the role of national status in driving the storylines that emerge within Sudanese and Palestinian refugee narratives. I begin by discussing the conditions surrounding each group's displacement and identifying the narratives within which each group's stories are situated. I then explore the storylines that emerge within Sudanese and Palestinian refugee cultural productions, particularly examining how these works employ plot to participate in public discourse on issues specific to each group. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how nationality or lack thereof influences the refugee narratives that emerge.

## Sudan: The archetypal refugee narrative

### Historical overview

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the failed movement for independence led by Muhammad Ahmad ibn al-Sayyid, also known as the Mahdi, Sudan once again fell under the jurisdiction of a British-Egyptian government. In many ways, British-Egyptian rule over Sudan laid the groundwork for the present-day conflicts in Sudan. First of all, while culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse northern and southern Sudan were governed as separate provinces, they were nonetheless ruled as one entity. The levels of mistrust between these regions were heightened with Britain's tendency to focus its development "to the vicinity of the capital, the agricultural region to its south, and the towns along the colonial railway that connected these to the Red Sea. Darfur, as indeed much of the rest of the country, was neglected" (Daly 2). Britain, in particular, disregarded "Southern Sudan's remote and undeveloped provinces—

Equatoria, Bahr al-Ghazal, and Upper Nile [...] except for efforts to suppress tribal warfare and the slave trade,” claiming that South Sudan was not yet prepared for “exposure to the modern world” (Berry 26). Furthermore, in the 1920s, Britain passed the Closed Districts Ordinances, which forbade travel between the North and South without a passport or permit, further reinforcing the disparities between the two regions. Ultimately, aside from the influence of Christian missionaries, the South was essentially isolated from the outside world until World War I.

The Sudanese nationalistic movement began after World War I, arising predominantly from the north. In the early 1940s, Britain agreed to gradually transition their government to a system of self-government. Several years later in 1946, the Sudan Administrative Conference decided to unite North and South Sudan under one government, abolishing previous restrictions between the two regions. A conference was held in 1947 to address the Southerners’ concerns regarding the formation of a united government over both regions. However, this conference did little to alleviate tensions. In fact, during this period suspicion grew among the South as the new government adopted Arabic as the language of administration excluding English-speaking southerners from governmental positions.

The first major post-colonial conflict between the North and South erupted in August 1955 when some Southern soldiers protested being placed under Northern officers, killing several hundred Northerners during the rebellion and initiating the first of Sudan’s civil wars. The first civil war lasted until the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, which gave the South a level of autonomy. As a result of the first civil war, over five hundred thousand people were killed and hundreds of thousands more were displaced.

In 1983 the second civil war erupted as a result of conflicts over natural resources and the Nimeiry regime's policy of Islamization. In 1979 oil reserves were found on the border between North and South Sudan, so the North's attempts to redraw their boundaries to include the reserves served as an initial source of tension between the two regions. Moreover, though the Addis Ababa Agreement was originally signed under Nimeiry in 1972, in the 1980s his policies began to shift toward an Islamist government. In 1983, he enacted Sharia law over all of Sudan, resulting in massive protest among Southerners, many of whom were Christian or animists. Furthermore, this declaration eliminated South Sudan's autonomy, violating and thus terminating the Addis Ababa Agreement.

The second civil war lasted from 1983 to 2005, making it one of the longest civil wars in history. The war was between Sudan People's Liberation Army, a group of rebel forces led by John Garang and the Sudanese government. The war eventually ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Ethiopia in 2005 and took an enormous toll on Sudan, killing two million people and displacing another four million. Another consequence of the war was the outbreak of slave trade, which enslaved approximately two hundred thousand South Sudanese women and children.

Though the civil war has officially ended, Sudan is still far from peace. Ongoing conflict since 2003 the war in Darfur, a region in Western Sudan, between the Sudanese government and primarily non-Arab rebel forces has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths. According to the UNHCR, between January and August 2014 alone, four hundred thousand internally displaced people were registered in the country. Some who have the resources or connections go to Cairo to apply for asylum and then refugee status. Others travel, often by foot, to refugee

camps in countries surrounding Sudan such as Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Central African Republic and apply for refugee status there. Many of these refugees come from rural areas and leave their homes with very little, if any, resources. The stories that dominate Sudanese narratives are from a small group of these refugees—named the Lost Boys. These orphaned children traveled by foot from their homes to refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya. Years later, after these boys have resettled and acquired an education, they would retell their narratives of their refugee journeys, which have been documented in the novels, memoirs and films.

### Sudanese diasporic narratives

The Sudanese diasporic experience follows the archetypal refugee storyline that dominates within 21<sup>st</sup> century dialogue—a group of people displaced as a result of war and violence beyond their control—a story reminiscent of many other groups such as the Afghans, Iraqis and Congolese. Upon my initial dive into Sudanese diasporic cultural productions, I was immediately struck by the repetition of storylines within literature and film. These works are not entirely homogenous, but in this chapter, I focus on the similarities in order to highlight the emerging storyline within these works. In future chapters, I will expand my discussion to include the particularities of these works.

Sudanese diasporic narratives typically begin with a village under attack during which children are separated from their parents and are forced to seek safety on their own. Eventually, these orphaned children group together and under the leadership of an older child or young adult, make the trek to the nearest refugee camp, which was often thousands of miles away. Along the way, they face starvation, attacks by wild animals, disease, and assaults/forced recruitment by rebel forces. Over half of these children die during their journey. Those who

survive this arduous trek find asylum in a refugee camp where they can apply for refugee status and await resettlement.

In particular, the vast majority of these productions highlight the refugees' journey from their homes to the refugee camps. As Valentino Achak Deng states in his novel, "Everyone's account includes attacks by lions, hyenas, crocodiles. All have born witness to the attacks by the murahaleen—government-sponsored militias on horseback—to Antonov bombings, to slave-raidings [...] But now, sponsors and newspaper reporters and the like expect the stories to have certain elements, and the Lost Boys have been consistent in their willingness to oblige" (Eggers 21). According to Deng, this narrative, which depicts the challenges refugees must overcome in their journey searching for safety, is not only a shared experience for Sudanese refugees, but further, this storyline is an essential component of the Sudanese diasporic narrative, particularly when the outside world is the audience.

In many respects, this narrative is highly reminiscent of the ancient Greek epic poem *Odyssey*, a work known for its role in establishing the Western canon. The poem begins after the Trojan War and follows Odysseus's journey home after being released from captivity. During his voyage, he encounters various obstacles that he must overcome in order to reach his final destination—the Lotus-eaters who drugged his men, the enchantress Circe turning all his men into pigs and the temptation of the Sirens, to name a few. Along the way, all of his crew perishes in a shipwreck as a result of eating sacred cows belonging to Hyperion. Odysseus is the lone survivor and is washed ashore to the island of Ogygia. There, he is at the mercy of King Alcinöus and Queen Arete who, fortunately, are sympathetic to his story and provide a ship that finally brings him home.

Though for the Sudanese, their narratives depict their journey away from home, there nonetheless are many similarities between these two storylines. First, similar to *Odyssey* the Sudanese narrative is marked with a variety of challenges as well. These refugees often had to trek thousands of miles on foot to reach the nearest refugee camps in bordering countries. Among the various terrains the refugees passed, the desert was by far the most brutal segment of their journey: “There was no water and there was no food. [...] Within a few days, our pace became sluggish, and boys began to go mad” (Eggers 214). “I have watched too many young boys die in the desert, some as if sitting down to sleep, some after days of madness” (25). During their flight, they were also vulnerable to attacks by wild animals: “One night [a] lion, *nyanjuan*, came while we were sleeping. It picked up a boy sleeping near me” (Ajak et al. 115). “I have seen boys taken by lions, eaten haphazardly. I watched them lifted from their feet, carried off in the animal’s jaws and devoured [...] close enough that I could hear the snapping sounds of the tearing of flesh” (Eggers 25). Moreover, though the refugees encountered people throughout their journey who were willing to temporarily feed and shelter them, they were also constantly at risk of being attacked: “Always we were ready to run; every boy had a plan if the militias came” (Eggers 163). “There are bad tribes on the way who like to attack the walking people. They kill them and take away their belongings” (Ajak et al. 77). For the refugees, these obstacles serve to purify their identities. In the midst of a civil war in which virtually everyone is in some way connected to the government-sponsored militia or SPLA rebel forces, these challenges serve to “depoliticize” the refugees’ identity. After enduring the injustices of their journey, the refugees’ victim identities are solidified. They are no longer fighting against

government forces but for their own survival. As such, they acquire an identity of “innocence,” thus making them more “deserving” of aid.

A second similarity between Sudanese diasporic productions and *Odyssey* is the individualistic nature of the flight. In *Odyssey*, though Odysseus starts his voyage with a crew, he eventually loses all of them as a result of a shipwreck. The story thus becomes one of individual survival and suggests that this quest for home is a personal experience. This individuality is also apparent within Sudanese productions—though the refugees begin their journey in groups, these groups quickly dwindle as people fall victim to the harsh conditions of the flight: “Deng was the first to die but soon boys died frequently and there was no time to bury the dead. Boys died of malaria, they starved, they died of infections. Each time a boy died, Dut and Kur did their best to honor the dead, but we had to keep walking” (Eggers 174). In *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky*, a similar storyline emerges during Benson’s journey to the Kenyan refugee camp Kakuma. He initially began this journey with a small group of older boys, but along the way, the group grew weary and opted to rest. Knowing that resting in the shade often leads to death, Benson decided to continue walking. “I hoped others would follow, but regardless I was determined to take my chances going alone rather than lying under a tree and never opening my eyes again” (Ajak et al. 248). For the Sudanese, the journey is a collective experience for these refugees and indeed, there is a level of emotional and physical support among the refugees. Nonetheless, in the end, a successful journey requires that the refugees themselves must, on an individual level, overcome the challenges.

A third similarity—though seemingly contradictory to my discussion on individuality above—is that within both Sudanese diasporic narratives and *Odyssey*, though the protagonist

overcomes the obstacles set against him, he in the end relies on the help of one with greater power. In *Odyssey*, King Alcinoüs and Queen Arete provide him with the means to complete his journey and ultimately return home. For Sudanese refugees, this “higher power” is the UNHCR. While at the Pinyudo refugee camp, Benson encounters these “white people [...] coming from Addis Ababa to look at our situation” for the first time. A translator nearby explained to him, “They are UNHCR [...] The women are crying because they feel sorry for your suffering. [...] They will bring some more blankets, food and medicine for they have seen enough suffering out of you. They will help you” (Ajak et al. 91). Beyond providing for their physical needs, the UNHCR is also the party responsible for resettling refugees to a third country. Within both *Odyssey* and the Sudanese narratives, we see the coexistence of individuality and dependence. Up to a certain point, the protagonist must overcome a series of challenges individually. Once that point is reached, though, it is the higher power who ultimately decides whether to allow the protagonist to complete his voyage. Interestingly, both Odysseus and the Sudanese refugees rely on storytelling in order to enlist the higher power’s assistance for them complete their journey.

This comparison of Sudanese diasporic narratives with *Odyssey* raises the issue of home. For Odysseus, the ultimate goal of his voyage is to return home to his wife, but Sudanese refugees are *fleeing* their homes. Yet, interestingly, within Sudanese narratives, the longing for home rarely appears. In fact, in one of the few works that depicts a Sudanese refugee’s return home, *The Lost Boy* in fact depicts refugee Aher Arop Bol reuniting with his parents but soon thereafter returning to South Africa to pursue his education. Though he maintains a connection with his home in Sudan, he nonetheless chooses to remain in South Africa, an illustration of the

instability of home for these refugees. Throughout my research on Sudanese productions and through my own interaction with Sudanese refugees, they unfailingly identify education as their ultimate goal. Could it be that for this group, home is not necessarily confined to where one was born but rather, where one can pursue his/her fullest potential in safety?

## Palestine: The stateless narrative

### Historical overview

Though Jews had been gradually immigrating to Palestine many years before, in the 1880s Jewish immigration dramatically increased as a result of economic problems and persecution in Eastern Europe. The increasing number of Jewish immigrants and the fall of the Ottoman Empire intensified the Jewish community's effort to create an Israeli state.

One of the first documents to pave the way in the creation of an Israeli State was the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 in which the United Kingdom, France and Russia preemptively divided the Middle East among themselves in preparation for the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The year after, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 was written, which was one of the first times the intention of creating a Jewish state in Palestine was publically expressed.

Interestingly, however, the Balfour Declaration was preceded by another agreement that is often overlooked in literature—that is, the Husain-McMahon Correspondence of 1915-1916. Within these exchanges between British High Commissioner in Egypt Sir Henry McMahon and Sharif of Mecca Husayn bin Ali, the British agreed to provide “assistance in attaining Arab independence in exchange for Arab rebellion against the sultan” of the Ottoman empire (Krämer 144).

Despite these agreements and declarations, the fate of Palestine remained uncertain after its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1918 when the British-led Egyptian Expeditionary Force captured Syria, Lebanon and Palestine and the Ottoman Empire signed the Armistice of Mudros, surrendering the Levant. Between 1918-1920, a British military government was set up in Palestine with the purpose of providing relief, security and administration. In 1920, the British transitioned the military government to a civilian government with Zionist Sir Herbert Samuel in its charge. Three years later, the British mandate over Palestine was established.

The provisions of the British mandate of Palestine were distinct from its mandates over other Arab territories. Unlike Syria and Iraq, the Mandate Treaty for Palestine did not include a clause allowing Palestinians to seek autonomous governance after a level of stability had been reached. Furthermore, the treaty contained no provisions to create a representative government in Palestine. Instead, the mandatory government, under the leadership of the high commissioner, retained control of virtually all power. Noteworthy about this treaty is its inclusion of the Balfour Declaration, promising to create a Jewish home within Mandatory Palestine. This again reaffirms that the United Kingdom's intentions from the beginning of the mandate period to establish an Israeli state in Palestine.

Palestine's first few years under the British mandate were relatively peaceful with just a few scattered riots. The tension began to escalate in 1928, however, when riots broke at the Wailing Wall followed by several more the year after. Moreover, with Jewish immigrants continuing to arrive and purchasing Palestinian lands, shifting population demographics

became a serious cause of concern for the Palestinians who feared they would be outnumbered by their Jewish neighbors.

The tensions continued to intensify resulting in the Arab uprising of 1936-1939. The revolts began in the summer of 1936 with armed resistance, mainly in the central and northern regions of Palestine. British and Arab leaders intervened later in the year, resulting in a temporary halt to the uprisings. In 1937, the Peel Commission proposed the Partition Plan, which recommended limiting Jewish immigration to 12,000 a year for five years and the creation of a plan to divide Palestine into an Arab and Israeli state that is to be facilitated with population transfers. However, neither the Arabs nor British received this plan with enthusiasm, and the uprisings broke out again in 1938. The revolts finally ended when the British increased their military presence in Palestine in 1939.

With the arrival of World War II came a new set of questions. As a result of the escalating persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe, increasing numbers of Jews were emigrating from their homes. Unable to sustain the rapid influx of Jewish refugees, Palestine became the ideal solution to help alleviate pressure on other countries. Thus, during the course of World War II, the international community increased its efforts to create a Jewish state in Palestine.

In 1947 the United Kingdom realized it could no longer maintain its mandate over Palestine, so they handed over control of the region to the United Nations. The United Nations Special Commission on Palestine, which was sent to review the situation, proposed to partition the land into Arab and Jewish states. However, the plan was rejected by the Arabs on the grounds that "injustice in one case [...] could not be remedied by injustice in another" (Krämer 307). Nonetheless, the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the partition plan, but before it

could be implemented, civil war broke out Palestine. As a result of the “food shortages and the sense of military vulnerability and isolation caused by the presence of Jewish settlements on the city’s access roads” and “the concomitant breakdown of law and order,” many Arabs fled during this period (Morris 44). By March 1948, over 75,000 Arabs were either internally displaced or had fled the country altogether.

Between April and May of 1948, the *Haganah*, or the Jewish paramilitary in Palestine, launched Plan “D,” changing their strategy from a defensive position to offense. With this shift in strategy, their plan was to take over lands given to them by the partition. Consequently, many of the villages and towns bordering Jewish lands were destroyed and its inhabitants driven out during this period. In May 1948, the date of the establishment of the state of Israeli war broke out between the two groups which lasted until spring of 1949. The number of refugees between June 1946 to May 1948 alone amounted to approximately 711,000 people.

#### [Pre-1967 Palestinian diasporic narratives: Al-Nakba](#)

Similar to the Sudanese, many of the early Palestinian diasporic productions emphasize on the refugees’ flight experience. In Ghassan Kanafani’s short story “The Land of the Sad Orange,” for example, a family is forced to flee from their homes in the aftermath of an Israeli attack on their city, Acre. The family departed from Acre by car, and as such, their journey was not as physically strenuous as the Sudanese. Nonetheless, the story depicts the emotionally excruciating experience of leaving one’s homeland. In particular, this is apparent when the family arrives at the border—when the reality of their situation finally dawns on them, “I started weeping in a loud sharp way. Your mother was still looking in silence to the oranges. In your father’s eyes were the reflection of all the orange trees he had left behind for the Israelis,

all the clean orange trees he had planted one by one glittered in his face. He failed to stop the tears that filled up his eyes, when facing the police head officer” (“The Land of the Sad Oranges”). Beyond the despair of leaving the homeland, Kanafani also depicts a spiritual depletion associated with the journey—that when the family drives across the border, they somehow lost parts of themselves in the process: “The road absorbed us among many other things. Your father suddenly became older than before, he looked as if he didn’t sleep for a long time” (“The Land of the Sad Oranges”).

Aside from the emotional trauma of leaving one’s homeland, Kanafani’s novellas also depict the violence and chaos surrounding the Palestinians’ departure. In “The Land of the Sad Orange,” as the family was driving away from Acre, “from a distance, we heard the sound of gun shots as if greeting us farewell” (“The Land of the Sad Orange”). In “Return to Haifa,” Kanafani illustrates a similar, though less romanticized, scene of a mob of Palestinians attempting to flee at once: “The sky was on fire, crackling with shots, bombs and explosions, near and far. It was as though the very sounds themselves were pushing everyone toward the port” (*Palestine’s children* 155). While these al-Nakba narratives permeate throughout early literature, after the Six-Day War, these stories begin to give way to land narrative which serves two purposes: 1) to validate the Palestinians’ claim to the land and 2) to preserve the memory of home among those in exile. I discuss the former purpose in this next section and the latter in chapter three.

#### [Post-1967 Palestinian diasporic narratives: The land](#)

The Palestinian situation is distinct from many other refugee groups in history because their story is situated in a well-known biblical narrative. Referring to Palestine as Canaan, the story

portrays Canaanites as barbaric idolaters and refer to the land as the Jews' "Promised Land."

Canaan first appears in the Bible in Genesis when God calls Abram to "go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (*Holy Bible: New International Version*, Genesis 12:1). Later, in Leviticus, God justifies the expulsion by citing their immorality: "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:24-25).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Zionists employ a similar "Promised Land" narrative to promote their agenda in Palestine, arguing that because of their ancestors' ties with the region, the land is rightfully theirs. Furthermore, in regards to the mass Palestinian exodus in 1948, Israelis claim that "the Arabs fled voluntarily (not under Jewish compulsion) and/or that they were asked/ordered to do so by their Palestinian and Arab states' leaders" (Morris 1). They contend that the ease with which the Arabs left their homes suggests their lack of connection with the land in the first place. In response, Palestinian diasporic cultural productions offer a counter-narrative that legitimizes the Palestinians' connection and ownership of the land.

A first argument that Palestinian productions use to validate their connection with the land is the claim that they and their families have historically been caring for the land. In *Born a Refugee*, Dixiane Hallaj depicts a story of two women who, because of their old age, are no longer able to care for their olive groves any longer. As the main character and community activist, Ali exclaims, "If they can't get their olive groves tended and the crop harvested, their land will be declared abandoned property and the Israelis will take it and build another settlement. It isn't fair!" (Hallaj 33). This storyline directly contrasts the Biblical narrative in

which God promises to the Israelite, “When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Deuteronomy 6:10-12). In this passage, there is no reference to the builders and farmers—it simply states in the passive voice that the houses were already built and the lands already farmed. To counter this narrative, *Born a Refugee* reemphasizes the Palestinians’ investment of sweat and tears to develop the agricultural industry in Palestine and that any “abandonment” was likely a result of Israeli’s policy on land ownership. By telling this story, Hallaj gives the passive Biblical narrative a subject, thereby humanizing their presence within the Biblical storyline.

Secondly, Palestinian productions claim that they know the land better than the Israelis, who are depicted as too reliant on technology. This is apparent in the film *Wedding in Galilee* when after having lost a prized purebred racehorse in a minefield, Palestinian villagers and Israeli soldiers worked together to direct the horse back to safety. The soldiers initially attempted to lead the horse out of the field by firing shots at it, prompting it to run in a certain direction. However, being distressed by the shots, the Palestinian owner instead asked the soldiers to give him the directions, and he would navigate the horse himself. Instead of using bullets, the owner began whistling to direct the horse out of the field. The Israeli soldiers reacted with stunned silence when the horse obeyed his owner’s calls and safely exited the minefield (*Wedding in Galilee*). One of the reasons Palestinians fared so poorly is because the

Jews had brought from Europe more advanced technology and weaponry. In this story, Palestinians continue playing on the technologically-advanced versus organic image. However, instead of depicting themselves as inferior in light of the Jews' superior technology, they argue that the Jews' reliance on technology is itself a testament of their aloofness from the land.

Lastly, a third claim Palestinian productions rely on is their deep love for the land, oftentimes even personifying the land to be an extension of their family. In Susan Abulhawa's novel *Mornings in Jenin*, when Yehya, the patriarch of a family living in exile for five years, realized that the hopes of returning home were slim, he decided to make the dangerous journey back by himself. Upon his arrival home, he "roamed his fields, greeting his carob and fig trees with the excitement of a man reuniting with his family" (Abulhawa 43-44). In contrast to Yehya's affection for the land, the Jews were depicted as clueless and incompetent: "Those people don't know a damn thing about olives. They're lily-skinned foreigners with no attachment to the land. If they had a sense of the land then the land would compel in them a love for the olives," (Abulhawa 46). Not only are Palestinians depicted as being more knowledgeable in terms of agriculture, this familiarity gives way to a deep love for the land as well. The Palestinians' affection stands in contrast to the Jews who are depicted as foreigners because they have only recently begun settling in Palestine. Moreover, this narrative highlights the outdated-ness of the Jews' claim to the land—though the land at one point belonged to the Jews, they have failed to maintain their relationship with it throughout their millennia in exile.

The examples given above are only a few instances in which we see the motif of agriculture permeating Palestinian diasporic literature. However, while many Palestinian refugees come from rural areas, particularly as a result of the Jewish implementation of Plan

“D” during April and May of 1948, many others fled from urban centers such as Haifa as well. Why, then, does agriculture emerge so frequently within literature? Why is the Palestine of the mind typically portrayed as rural and agriculturally-dependent when a large segment of the displaced population also fled from urban areas? I suggest two possible explanations: First, the relationship farmers have with their land is much more intimate than city dwellers. Thus, by depicting the Palestinians’ strong agricultural relationship with the land and, in contrast, the Jews’ incompetency in maintaining it, the cultural productions draw a sharp distinction between Palestinians as the rightful inhabitants and Jews as merely foreigners. Secondly, the theme of agriculture emerged within Palestinian diasporic cultural productions at the same time that Jews began urbanizing parts of Palestine. This urbanization came at a cost for Palestinians as villages were often destroyed to make room for Jewish expansion. By emphasizing the Palestinians’ strong rural identity, these cultural productions highlight that not only was Jewish urbanization taking over their lands, but the Jewish destruction of Palestinian agriculture was an attempt to wipe out Palestinian heritage as well.

## Conclusion

Current discussion about refugees focus on groups such as the Sudanese and Syrians who are fleeing their homes as a result of civil war but have not lost their nationality. Unfortunately, stateless refugee groups like the Kurds and Palestinians are overlooked because of the unique—and often highly “politicized”—nature of their situation. Assistance for the first group takes the form of humanitarian assistance and political pressure to end the violence within their countries. For the second group, aid becomes much more complex because they are

seeking the creation of a nation-state that will give them a sense of—an outcome they desire perhaps more than immediate humanitarian assistance.

As such, the narratives these two groups convey are quite distinct. The Sudanese narrative depicts an *Odyssey*-like journey experience through which they must overcome challenges against nature and humans, ultimately proving that they are, indeed, worthy of assistance. The Palestinian storyline, on the other hand, though initially depicts the events surrounding al-Nakba, ultimately evolves to become a land narrative. These later narratives validate and celebrate their ties with the land and emphasize the labor they have invested, their knowledge of agriculture and their affection for the land. Ultimately, this narrative speaks not just to the connection modern-day Palestinians have with the region but also their ancestral history of cultivating the land, making it the agriculturally thriving region it is today. Unlike the Sudanese narrative in which the ultimate goal—home—is vague, Palestinians reiterate that home will always be the land of their ancestors. They advocate not only for the return *to* but also the restoration *of* their homeland.

These storylines within diasporic productions from the two groups are not surprising, given their refugee experiences. For the Sudanese, the most difficult aspect of their experience was the flight—they had to travel thousands of miles, enduring the extreme conditions of their journey for several months before finally reaching the refugee camps. Because those displaced were typically from villages, they were forced to endure the journey with very little, of any, resources—some with hardly any clothes on their backs—having to make due with the resources given to them along the way. On the contrary, Palestinians generally did not have as difficult an experience fleeing from their homes. Most of those who fled had the means to fund

their own journeys, and oftentimes, for major urban centers, transportation was arranged to assist with evacuation in anticipation of Jewish attacks. The most challenging aspect of the Palestinian experience was, once they reached refugee camps in the surrounding countries, the realization that they might never be able to return. Palestinian refugee camps and UNRWA were supposed to be temporary solutions to the Palestinian problem. However, almost seventy years later, both the refugee camps and UNRWA still exist, and the Palestinian issue remains unresolved.

While Sudanese refugees, who have a homeland to return to, have the liberty to adapt their definition of home depending on their circumstances, Palestinians do not have this freedom. Acquiring a new nationality for the Palestinians is equivalent of giving up on their struggle for an autonomous homeland. This is why, even after nearly seventy years of exile, Palestinians continue writing about their homeland whereas Sudanese productions tend to conclude with a note of optimism—a hopefulness for the future and desire to make the most of their new home.

Sudan and Palestine are only two case studies within the larger groups of refugees with nationality and those without. Their narratives by no means are representative of these larger groups of refugees. In fact, Sudanese refugees are among the groups with the least resources in comparison to other refugee groups. The Palestinian case is unique because more so than others, their story is shaped by the narrative contours that have shifted over millennia as a result of their historic struggle with Jews/biblical Israelites. Nonetheless, through these case studies, we can begin to identify trends that emerge among these two distinct subcategories of refugees. To further solidify this analysis on diasporic plots, more case studies should be

examined, in particular exploring the role of class, religion and race in shaping the storylines that emerge.

Throughout this chapter, I have focused on how national status—whether refugees belong to a recognized state—affect the storylines that emerge. However, national status influences more within Palestinian and Sudanese diasporic productions than plot alone. In the next chapter, I expand on this discussion by examining how national status influences the narrative forms and devices employed by Sudanese and Palestinian diasporic cultural productions, thereby impacting not just the types of stories that refugees tell but *how* they relay these stories as well.

## Chapter Two: Diasporic Narratives

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Stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived, but should be seen as creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present. –Marita Eastmond, “Stories as Lived Experience”

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As much as refugees employ their narratives to as a form of agency—giving themselves voice in the midst of a dominant storyline that does not include their perspective, refugee stories also do not exist in isolation away from the public eye. As such, their stories are greatly shaped by audience and the purpose which they serve in the collective movement. As Marita Eastmond argues, “Recounting the same experience for a different purpose, as in an asylum hearing with a more skeptical audience assessing the story with a different set of criteria, would necessarily affect the narration, requiring a more strategic presentation of self” (Eastmond 250). Stemming from their difference in national status, the process whereby Palestinians and the Sudanese became recognized as refugees also diverges. For Palestinians, refugee status is automatically given to those outside of the slowly declining (and presently, completely disappeared) autonomous Palestinian lands. The Sudanese, on the other hand, have to apply for refugee status. As such, they are essentially tasked with convincing the UNHCR through their personal stories that they were indeed fleeing from persecution and thus meriting refugee status. Years after the organization commissioned refugee status to these groups, these expectations continue to shape the narratives that emerge today.

Another difference between Palestinian and Sudanese diasporic experiences is the continuity of their struggles. The Sudanese struggle for individual survival was primarily confined to their flight from Sudan. After arriving at the refugee camps and later resettlement,

they more or less experience some sort of security, and the major challenges they face—education, finances, etc.—no longer revolve around the issue of survival. On the contrary, the Palestinian struggle to return to the homeland is an ongoing battle that will continue to persist until such a Palestinian space is created. Consequently, Palestinian writers and producers are under the demand by the Palestinian community to create works that represent the continued battle for national recognition.

In this chapter, I address how both these differences—narrative expectations and continuity of struggle—impact how refugees mobilize narrative forms and devices within their productions. In the first half of this chapter, I discuss how UNHCR expectations have shaped Sudanese narratives even after resettlement in contrast to Palestinian narratives which generally are not expected to conform to an established structural framework. In the second half, I explore how the prolonged Palestinian struggle has impacted Palestinian narratives, comparing them to Sudanese works which depict a struggle confined within a period of time. I conclude with a discussion of how national status drives the types of narratives and narrative devices that appear within diasporic productions.

### Narrative expectations

Unlike Palestinians who are automatically considered refugees upon departure from their homes and fall under the protection of UNRWA, Sudanese asylum seekers need to apply to acquire refugee status. In accordance with the definition set out by the 1951 Refugee Convention, in order for refugee status to be granted, the asylum seekers' stories must provide convincing evidence that 1) they are fleeing from fear of persecution as a result of race,

religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and as a result, 2) are unwilling or unable to return to their country as a result this fear.

The documentary *The Art of Flight* on Sudanese asylum seekers in Cairo describes the refugee application process as convoluted and the outcomes arbitrary. In the documentary, Barbara Harrel-Bond, the co-funder of Refugee Legal Aid in Cairo, comments, “Refugees don’t know how to make their own arguments for refugee status, so they need to be represented, they need to have someone write up their testimony. [...] They need to have legal arguments for their case.” Unfortunately, because many refugees do not have access to such legal advice, their applications are denied—not because their experiences were invalid but rather, because their stories were not communicated effectively. In an interview with Kike Bayin, an asylum seeker who was denied refugee status, when asked why he believed his application was rejected, he responded, “I don’t think UNHCR believed me. They must have thought my case was weak” (*The Art of Flight*). Beyond the challenges of effectively communicating their stories, during the application process refugees also encounter the arbitrariness of bureaucracy. Alitair Boulton, a UNHCR resettlement officer himself admits this unpredictability, “I acknowledge that to some extent whether or not you were recognized as a refugee was a function of timing” (*The Art of Flight*). Refugees, then, are not only tasked with retelling their narratives, but they also must convey their stories in a convincing manner to UNHCR resettlement officers. The simultaneous ambiguity of the application process yet the preciseness of the refugee criteria has likely played a large role in shaping the Sudanese narratives that emerged, not only in standardizing the stories as I have examined in the previous chapter but also impacting the narrative forms and devices employed.

## Narrative forms

In contrast to Palestinian works which take a variety of forms ranging from poetry/prose to short stories, Sudanese productions generally appear as novels or memoirs. One factor that contributes to this divergence in narrative forms is level of education. Whereas early Palestinian diasporic writers were largely intellectuals and trained in literature and culture, Sudanese writers did not receive the same level of education. Though Sudanese refugee camps provided some some form of schooling, many of the refugees did not have the opportunity to seriously pursue their education until resettlement. As such, Sudanese diasporic productions—particularly those written by the refugees themselves—are fairly simple, plainly communicating the various phases of their refugee journey. Creative expression within these works are minimally used simply because it requires a deeper knowledge of English language that the refugees had not yet acquired. The one work in which we see a greater level of creativity is *What is the What*, which employs flashbacks to illustrate Achak's refugee experience, was entirely written by American author Dave Eggers, confirming this point.

Though education may appear to be disconnected to national status, in actuality it too has roots in the nature of the refugees' experience. In the case of Palestine, the collective loss of nationality resulted in an entire population becoming refugees of some sort—either outside of Palestine/Israel or within Occupied Palestine which is not recognized as a state. As a result, the people who carried this movement were those who were already politically involved—the intellectuals, those from well-known families who had access to higher education even in exile. In contrast, the situation in Sudan only affected certain segments of the population with the lower class experiencing the greatest burden and the elite minimally affected. As such, it is

apparent that nationality status—and more specifically, whether the entire population was displaced or only a segment—affects education level among refugees, in particular creating a distinction between the voices of each diasporic movement. These differences can, in turn, impact the forms of narratives forms that emerge.

Beyond disparities in education level, expectations of the UNHCR and humanitarian organizations are another driving force behind these different narrative forms. Unlike Palestinians, in order for Sudanese stories to be considered diasporic narratives, they are expected to depict the atrocities the refugees have experienced in order to convince outsiders of their “refugee-ness.” Further, virtually all Sudanese writers are resettled refugees advocating not only for increased aid but also the resettlement of other refugees. As such, Sudanese diasporic writers must depict a resolution, or at least the beginnings of one in their story in order to illustrate that resettlement is a viable solution and give reason to why other Sudanese asylum seekers should be given the same opportunity. These motivations give rise to what I have discussed before as the journey narrative—a series of challenges followed by a resolution. Given this plot structure, novels and memoirs are often employed because they generally follow a similar storyline progression. Though poetry at times narrates an extended plot (epic poetry, for example), more commonly poems depict emotion as opposed to recounting a story. As such, Sudanese productions tend to employ narratives and memoirs because those are the means most conventionally used to illustrate *Odyssey*-like narratives such as theirs. On the other hand, because Palestinian narratives are not expected to conform to a specific storyline so long as they contribute to the national struggle, Palestinian writers and producers have more

space for creativity in their works. Thus emerges the wider range of diasporic productions among Palestinian refugees.

### Victim narratives

In terms of narrative devices, one of the most widely-used within both Sudanese and Palestinian productions is the victim narrative. Francesca Polletta in her book *It Was Like A Fever* on storytelling in activism considers the concept of victim narratives and the widely-held belief that “representing oneself as a victim [...] cannot but diminish one’s sense of agency.” Contrary this popular assumption, Polletta argues that “to claim oneself a victim is not necessarily to trade agency for passivity” (Polletta 111). Furthermore, “with the right narrative tools, disadvantaged groups today may be able to style victims as guides to the social bases of inequality” (140). As such, victim narratives need not remain powerless stories of oppression but rather, they can be mobilized to combat the social injustices that created victims of these individuals in the first place.

Both Palestinian and Sudanese diasporic cultural productions depict refugees as victims of an unjust force, whether it is as a result of Israeli aggression or two civil wars. Though both sets of productions mobilize victim narratives, they differ in how they construct the diasporic victim identity. Palestinian works tend to depict Palestinian refugees as highly politicized and aggressive whereas Sudanese productions illustrate an innocent and docile Sudanese refugee identity.

One way in which this distinction emerges is through how each group’s productions depict children. Stereotypically, children are a symbol of purity, often depicted as apolitical. Indeed, Sudanese narratives follow this innocent identity construction: “We were, in many

cases, too young to know what these [tribal] distinctions meant, but even if we were aware, we had been taught and had agreed to set aside our supposed differences” (Eggers 49). Within Palestinian productions, however, even young children become invested in the Palestinian national movement. In the documentary *Jenin Jenin*, for example, a young girl who had grown up at the Jenin refugee camp swears to take up the Palestinian cause even if it costs her life: “Proud as eagles we will live. Erect as lions we will die” (*Jenin, Jenin*). Similarly, the novel *Born a Refugee* illustrates young boys in the Kalandia refugee camp throwing rocks at soldiers and tanks. Though they know that they are no match against Israeli soldiers, throwing rocks nonetheless becomes a way for the children to engage in the Palestinian struggle a different way: “In a straight bullets versus stones battle, bullets win every time, but there’s another war that we’ve ignored for decades. This is the war for attention [...] We just got observer status in the United Nations. We didn’t get that by sitting and waiting; we got it because we made noise, and people are noticing” (Hallaj 3). On the contrary, Sudanese productions not only depoliticize victim narratives but also, by primarily documenting the experiences of refugee children, these productions preserve the sense of innocence throughout their narratives.

Simultaneous to the victim identities within Sudanese and Palestinian narratives, a sense of agency also emerges through both productions in which despite the atrocities they have endured, the refugees nonetheless continue to use their stories to advocate for their respective causes. However, distinctive between these two sets of productions is the way in which agency manifests itself within and through the refugee narratives.

For Palestinians, diasporic productions are a means by which Palestinians empower themselves. Within the political battle to preserve the Palestinian identity, their stories have, in

a sense, become weapons through which they hope to overcome Israel's military dominance. In *Absent Presence*, Darwish admonishes both himself and the Palestinian people to continue wielding their words in order to continue fighting for the place of Palestine:

The place, then, is pulled with the leash of expression; bear it, as you bear your name, not your shadow, in your imagination, not in a suitcase. Only words are qualified in this sunset to repair the breakages of Time and place, to name gods who have ignored you and plunged into their wars with primitive weapons.

Words are the raw materials for building a house. Words are a country. (*Absent Presence* 61)

Within the context of Palestine today, which is occupied and limited to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, cultural productions have been a means through which both those living under Israeli occupation and those who have resettled elsewhere can maintain their struggle for the Palestinian cause.

Sudanese diasporic productions, on the other hand, depict a different form of empowerment. For Palestinians, their works were internally initiated in the midst of a collective struggle to reclaim their histories. In contrast, Sudanese productions emerged within collaborations between outsiders and refugees, and specifically, they are often initiated by the outsider. In *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky*, for example, Judy Bernstein reveals that the idea to publically share the refugees' stories was initially hers: "Touched by their accounts and outraged by the situation, I want the world to hear of their tragic and remarkable experiences and to know what is happening in Sudan" (Deng et al. xxiii). Similarly, in *What is the What*, a social activist and founder of the Lost Boys Foundation Mary Williams was "the person who first

spoke to [producer Bobby Newmyer] about the idea of a feature film on our lives” (Eggers 165). In *The Lost Boy*, Bol was inspired by retired South African teacher Sannie Meiring to write his autobiography: “My story took many hours to tell, but when I had finished [Meiring] said, ‘So, Santino, why don’t you write a book?’ [...] Ma Sannie offered me the use of her computer. And that’s how I began writing my book” (Bol 157). In contrast to Palestinians who created cultural productions in order to forge for themselves an international voice, these Sudanese refugees’ stories are not only readily heard but also advocated by a sympathetic and privileged outsider. Depicting Sudanese refugees as being given agency as opposed to taking it themselves contributes to, as I discussed above, the innocent and docile image of these refugees, which stands in stark contrast to Palestinian refugees who are depicted as highly politicalized and confrontational.

## Continuity of struggle

### Interaction of refugee productions across time

As opposed to the Sudanese refugees who encountered the most challenging aspects of their refugee experiences during their flight from Sudan, Palestinians have continued living the most difficult aspect of their refugee experience—the hopelessness of the impossibility of return—since their original displacement. As such, Sudanese diasporic productions work to advocate for Sudanese communities under threat of attack in Sudan or living in refugee camps. However, the personal struggle for these writers and producers in many ways has come to a close as they adjust to life in their new home. As a result, Sudanese diasporic narratives have since calcified—reflective of a diasporic identity not of the present, but rather, of the past. Palestinian diasporic

narratives, on the other hand, represent a continued struggle within the community. They reveal a diasporic identity that, contrary to the Sudanese identity, is constantly subject to the test of time. Because the Palestinian struggle remains alive even after seven decades, the Palestinian diasporic identity is constantly being negotiated by those within the community. As such, in contrast to Sudanese stories, Palestinian diasporic narratives are fluid, subject to change as a result of time or change in circumstances.

Within this analysis, I employ the narrative device of canonicity and breach. In the words of Polletta, “The best fictional narratives [...] recall familiar plot lines but depart from them” (Polletta 126). Bruner discusses this concept in further detail, claiming “the function of inventive narrative is not so much to ‘fabulate’ new plots as to render previously familiar ones uncertain or problematical, challenging a reader into fresh interpretive activity” (Bruner 13). In some sense, canonicity and breach demonstrate a level of aliveness in the text and within the community in which it is situated. It suggests that not only are stories being preserved but people are still engaging with the texts as well.

Within Sudanese diasporic canon, an area of discontentment is character and voice. *What is the What* illustrates this with a scene in which Sudanese refugees were gathered at a conference to discuss a feature film on their refugee journeys:

Everyone [...] was looking to protect their interests. The representative originally from the Nuba region of Sudan wanted to make sure Nuba was properly represented. Those from Bor wanted to make sure there were provisions for the needs of those from Bor. [...] There was a Lost Girl present [...] and she wanted to

know what would be done for the female refugees of Sudan. Lost Boys! she said.

Always Lost Boys! What about the Lost Girls? (Eggers 166)

One of the most contentious points in this dispute is in regard to gender. Virtually all Sudanese diasporic productions depict the flight of the Lost Boys. As a result of this gender dialogue, some writers have begun to include women into their narratives—an example is the film *The Good Lie* which depicts the journeys of four refugees to America, one of them being a woman, Tabitha. Ironically, even within this film, most of the screen time is given to document the men's lives because Tabitha gets resettled in a different city than the rest of the group. Productions dedicated solely to document the Lost Girls are nonexistent, a controversial void within this set of productions. Within the Sudanese community, though we see some level of engagement among the refugees regarding how their collective diasporic narrative is conveyed, these dialogues have been minimally incorporated into the Sudanese diasporic canon, which remains fairly stagnant.

In contrast to Sudanese works which tend to be unchanging and freestanding—that is, independent from other Sudanese diasporic productions—Palestinian works can often be seen in dialogue, building off of each other. Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa* and Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin* provide a particularly compelling example of canonicity and breach, both works depicting the story of a lost Palestinian son. In *Return to Haifa*, Said S. and Safiyya lose their son, Khaldun, in the midst of the chaos an Israeli attack. Safiyya, who was staying at home with Khaldun, had left in search of her husband who was out during the attack. “How much time passed before she remembered that the infant Khaldun was still in his crib” (*Palestine's children* 156)? When she returned, she found the crib was empty—that someone

had taken her son. She later discovered that in the midst of the commotion, “the divorced [Jewish] woman who lived with her small son on the third floor, right above Said S., heard a sound coming from the second floor of a baby weakling crying” (170). She took the baby to care for him. However, after several days when she realized she could no longer continue taking custody of him, she passed him the office of the Jewish Agency in Haifa. The organization offered the child to Iphrat and Miram Koshen when they realized the couple did not have children of their own. In exchange for adopting the child, they also offered them a house—Said S. and Safiyya’s home.

Though *Mornings in Jenin* and *Return to Haifa* illustrate a similar storyline, one point of distinction between the two works involves the circumstances surrounding Khaldun’s disappearance. *Return to Haifa* depicts a level of ambiguity concerning Khaldun’s disappearance—could it be considered as abandonment if Safiyya was planning to return or was it theft because the Israeli woman took the child without any attempt to find his parents? *Mornings in Jenin*, in contrast, portrays the child—Ismael/David—as willfully stolen from his mother by Moshe, an Israeli soldier:

How could God deny [his wife] the elemental gift of motherhood while granting so many healthy children to Arabs, who were already so numerous? The injustice of it all solidified in him a resolve to take—by force if necessary—whatever was needed.

After the bombing the following day, in the crowd of fleeing villagers, he saw that Arab woman, her baby held tightly to her chest, her defiant ankle bracelet as pretty as she.

Moshe made his way toward the crowd, coming up behind the Arab woman. Before he reached her, the throbbing crowd jostled the baby from her arms, into that fateful instant. In a flash, Moshe snatched the child, tucked it in his army sack, and kept moving without looking back. (Abulhawa 37)

In contrast to Kanafani's version which gave the audience space to interpret the situation on Palestine, Abulhawa's novel directly establishes a theft narrative. As such, by building on Kanafani's widely-known narrative, Abulhawa not only makes the story more relevant to the Palestinian reader, but she also participates in a dialogue regarding al-Nakba through her work.

While the level of interaction between Palestinian and Sudanese refugee productions cannot be compared because Sudanese works have not had substantial time to develop, this nonetheless raises the question of how Sudanese productions will evolve in the future. Will Sudanese works continue to expand or is the present wave of works simply that, a wave? Moreover, as the culture surrounding Sudanese diasporic productions solidifies, will future works attempt to engage with previous productions or will they remain standing in isolation, depicting a few refugees' stories without engaging with Sudanese diasporic culture as a whole?

#### [Incorporation of narratives from previous movements](#)

Not only do Palestinian diasporic productions reveal the vibrant community among Palestinian refugees and the continuity of their struggle for the homeland, these works also root the Palestinian movement within a historical narrative of statelessness by building on existing narratives. Bruner refers to this as narrative accrual, stating, "What creates a culture, surely must be a 'local' capacity for accruing stories of happenings of the past into some sort of diachronic structure that permits a continuity into the present" (Bruner 19-20). Reviving the

stories of past stateless groups demonstrates the timelessness of Palestinian diasporic narratives, simultaneously resilient against the test of time and established within a tragic history of injustice.

As I claimed in the previous chapter, many Palestinian productions are structured as counter-narratives to biblical Israeli/Canaanite narratives, legitimizing the Palestinians' claim to the land. However, another narrative strategy that Palestinian productions employ is using the Canaanite narrative to give voice to their experiences. In Darwish's poem *On a Canaanite stone at the Dead Sea*, he questions why the ancient Israelites were unable to live peacefully with the Canaanites but had to drive them out of their homes:

Take the Canaanite woman's prayers  
at the feast of her grapes. Take our customs  
of irrigation. Take our architecture.  
Lay a single brick and build up  
a tower for doves, to be one of us,  
if that's what you desire. Be a neighbor  
to our wheat. Take the stars  
of our alphabet from us, stranger. [...]  
Have you come... then murdered... then inherited  
in order to increase the salt of this sea? (*The Adam of Two Edens* 75-76).

Darwish portrays the Canaanites as willing to coexist and willing to compromise in order to do so. Yet, the Israelites were dissatisfied and despite the offers of goodwill, murdered the Canaanites and inherited the land.



on the face of the lake, corpse by corpse.

Keep marching, so the Gospels may thrive!

We want God all to ourselves

because the best Indians are dead Indians

in the eyes of our Lord.”

The Lord is white and the day is white. (*The Adam of Two Edens* 136)

Beyond comparing the Native American and Palestinian expulsion experiences, in this poem Darwish addresses the issues of religion and race. Similar to Manifest Destiny which was interwoven with Christian rhetoric, Zionism too is strongly marked with Judeo-Christian ideology. Here, he criticizes the way both movements have used Christian theology to support their acts of violence. Moreover, Darwish takes it further by arguing that Zionists and Americans employ in their campaigns not just Christianity but *white* Christianity, making it also an issue of racial oppression.

By drawing on the narratives of the ancient Canaanites, the Moors and Native Americans, Darwish both mobilizes their voices to tell the Palestinian story while also situating the plight of Palestinian refugees within this greater history of statelessness and oppression. It illustrates the timelessness of the Palestinian struggle—extending as far back as Biblical era and continuing even to this day.

## Conclusion

As Sudanese refugee literature continues to emerge, there appears to be a trend towards more independence in how they narrate their stories. While *What is the What* was completely

written by an American, later works such as *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky* and *The Lost Boy* show more collaboration and autonomy in the writing process. As refugees appear to own their stories more and have the opportunity to pursue education, productions may continue to emerge depicting their individual experiences. However, while they may continue telling their stories, the extent to which they will be able to acquire and maintain an audience is uncertain. In Bruner's discussion of canonicity and breach, he argues that in order "to be worth telling, a tale must be about how an implicit canonical script has been breached, violated, or deviated from in a manner to do violence to [...] the 'legitimacy' to the canonical script" (Bruner 12). As such, unless future Sudanese narratives are able to present a different aspect of their experience or otherwise build on the already-established canon, I project that the momentum created by these early works will subside in the following years.

While conflicts are still prevalent in Sudan, the independence of South Sudan has, in many ways, ended the Sudanese struggle. The Sudanese story thus concludes with an encouragement for the remaining Sudanese to return home. In the words of South Sudan's Minister of Interior, Brigadier Aleu Ayieny Aleu, "We should call our brothers to return to Sudan. [...] There is water to make your land a green land and you will be able to feed yourself" ("Return Home Now Possible for South Sudan's Refugees in Uganda"). While the independence of South Sudan could mark the end of Sudanese refugee productions, perhaps instead of a complete discontinuation of these works, this will give rise to a new canon emerging from the previous works on the Sudanese refugee experience. In *The Lost Boy*, Bol concludes his narrative with a return home, though at that time South Sudan had not yet gained its independence. Future works on the Sudanese may continue to build on this "return" storyline,

potentially depicting how independence has (or has not) affected their perception of their old homes. For those who have resettled, perhaps their productions will follow the narrative of *The Good Lie*, depicting a story of the Lost Boys overcoming the odds to attain what was most precious to them—an education.

With the Sudanese and other refugee groups who have national status, the displacing event—be it war or natural disaster—tends to be more or less temporary. Sudanese refugees are an anomaly in that their civil wars lasted for five decades. Yet, their situation nonetheless came to an end, which will likely result in either a complete termination of or a shift in their refugee productions. Palestinian productions also display similar transitions in their narratives. However, because they face a much more indefinite struggle, these shifts more so reflect the political environment surrounding their homeland—like the transition from the al-Nakba narrative to a land narrative in the aftermath of the Six-Day War. Interestingly, despite these shifts in narrative storylines, Palestinian productions also, as I have argued, have a timeless quality. Perhaps it is the simultaneous enduring nature and yet plasticity of these narratives that allow them to persist across generations, throughout the shifting environments in Palestine.

In the past two chapters, I have examined the narrative aspects of Sudanese and Palestinian diasporic productions, exploring how national status impacts the storyline, narrative forms and narrative devices within these works. However, the goal of this thesis is not only to investigate how refugees mobilize their stories but also to study what these productions reveal about these refugee communities. In this chapter, I explored the community that appears amongst these refugee productions by analyzing how various works interact with each other. In

the following chapter, I shift to focus on the collective identities that emerge among the refugees, identifying the different types of communities that appear and analyzing the driving forces behind these differences.

## Chapter Three: Diasporic Communities

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“I don’t know why I’m so widely read, but I find that there are generations of Palestinians who become acquainted with their homeland and their past by embodying the scenes of my poems. My poems do not deliver mere images and metaphors, but deliver landscapes, villages, and fields, deliver a place. It makes that which is absent from geography present in its form. That is, one is able to reside in the poetic text, as if residing on his land.” – Mahmoud Darwish, *Mahmoud Darwish* (1997)

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In my comparison of Sudanese narratives with *Odyssey* in chapter one, I discussed the individuality of the Sudanese refugee experience—though they flee from their homes in groups, theirs is a story of individual survival. On the other hand, Palestinian productions, which work to legitimize their claim to the land, represent a struggle for national survival. Already, it appears that the group striving for national recognition—the Palestinians—are more likely to rely on a greater sense of collectiveness within their narratives. However, in this chapter I complicate this dichotomy that emerges, arguing that though refugee experiences can range from being an individual’s struggle for survival to a national campaign for recognition, these stories are nonetheless situated within a collective framework. Despite how individualized the refugees’ experiences are, they nonetheless are being displaced as a collective—as a result of similar causes and subject to similar fates.

Internally, these communities can serve as sources of physical/emotional support whereby members can share the burden of loss. Externally, communities can also act as a form of political leverage through which refugees can mobilize their collective voice to accomplish a certain agenda—a political power derived from their numbers. This chapter is devoted to the exploration of where collectiveness emerges within Palestinian and Sudanese productions.

Throughout it, I draw on both the internal and external aspects of diasporic communities in my discussion of the collective that emerges within Palestinian and Sudanese diasporic productions. I end by discussing potential driving forces for the different communities that appear within each group's set of productions.

In this chapter, I rely heavily on historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities." In his influential book *Imagined Communities*, he uses this term to describe the modern nation-state. He depicts the nation as imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" and a community because "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 6-7). He argues that this nationalistic sentiment arose as a result of print capitalism which standardized languages within certain regions, creating imaginary borders which ultimately became the nation-state. Refugees do not fall into Anderson's nation-state paradigm because they have fled their homeland but have yet to fully integrate into their host countries. However, they also similarly create communities (and for the Palestinians, nationality) through diasporic cultural productions. As such, I mobilize this concept to discuss how narratives are employed to create and renegotiate borders among groups who fall outside of this nation-state paradigm.

### Palestine: A national collective

The Palestinian national identity is a relatively recent phenomenon that, as Palestinian American historian Rashid Khalidi argues, has both local and Arab roots (Khalidi 19-21). Prior to

the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and as a result of Ottoman rule between the years 1516 to 1918, community within Palestine was locally-centered. Under the Ottoman empire, local communities operated with a high level of independence: “The Ottoman administrative units were mostly relevant for the purposes of tax collection [...] Most village and urban communities appeared to their members and to outsiders as autonomous, and the defense of this autonomy greatly mattered to them” (Krämer 41, 43). Simultaneously, the borders of the Palestinian collective also extended to include the larger Arabic community as well: “most Palestinian Arabs had no sense of separate national or cultural identity to distinguish them from, say, the Arabs of Syria, Lebanon or Egypt” (Morris 18). As such, upon the arrival of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Palestinian collective—while existent—was not yet well-defined. Nonetheless, during this period under the Ottoman empire, nationalist dialogue began developing among Palestinian communities, marking the beginnings of an emerging Palestinian identity.

The years leading up to al-Nakba and al-Nakba itself ultimately solidified the Palestinian national identity. Similar to how the experiences of the Holocaust reinforced the Jewish collective, the catastrophe of 1948 too strengthened the Palestinian community. Ironically, this national identity, that which was supposed to hold together a people within a geopolitical border, emerged strongest as Palestinians were leaving their homeland. For the remainder of this discussion on the Palestinian collective, I will rely on Palestinian diasporic cultural productions to explore the imagined community that arises within this group.

### [Palestine of the mind](#)

Picking up from my discussion in chapter one of the land narratives within post-1967 Palestine, another manifestation of the land narrative that emerges during this time is the creation of the

imagined homeland—Palestine of the mind, which is constructed through the use of memories by those in exile. After the Six-Day War when the hope of return began to fade and Palestinians were more strictly prohibited from returning to their homes, this imagined homeland developed within literature as a way to preserve the memories of Palestine. Among other diasporic writers and producers, Mahmoud Darwish—also known as the Palestinian national poet—arguably develops this imagined Palestine most thoroughly within his works. As he states in an interview, his poems have become renown because they “do not deliver mere images and metaphors, but [they] deliver landscapes, villages, and fields, deliver a place [...] It makes that which is absent from geography present in its form, that is, able to reside in the poetic text, as if residing on his land. I don’t think that a poet is entitled to a greater happiness than that some people seek refuge in his lines of poetry, as if they were real houses” (*Mahmoud Darwish*). For a people who have not only lost their homes but also their homelands, Darwish’s poetry recreates for them a home in exile, paving the way for his audience to return to Palestine through their memories.

One of the analogies he greatly relies on throughout his work is the comparison between Palestine and Eden. Oftentimes, within his poetry Darwish projects this Eden within his poetry through the romanticization of the homeland:

Good evening to you! Say hello to our well!

Say hello to our fig trees! Step gingerly

on our shadows in the barley fields

Greet our pines on high [...]

Greet our house for us, stranger.

The coffee cups are the same.

Can his you smell our fingers still on them? (*The Adam of Two Edens* 51-53)

In this passage, one aspect of this romanticization arises from the idealistic belief that Palestine, even after decades of exile, would be the same as before. This theme is not limited to Darwish's poetry—another work that illustrate a similar motif is Ghassan Kanafani's *Return to Haifa*. In Kanafani's short story, when Said S and Safiyya return to visit their old home after being in exile for twenty years, they find that minor details had changed—the bell was different, three of the chairs had been exchanged and two peacock feathers had been removed (*Palestine's children* 162-163). As much as the couple attempted to overlook these differences, they nonetheless were thrown off balance by these changes in the home that used to be theirs, evidence that they had carried with them an idealistic and stagnant image of their home throughout their time in exile.

A second aspect of this romanticization of the homeland emerges when those in exile depict the homeland as perfection. As Darwish writes, in exile “the lost grows within you, grows in this sunset and bestows on distance the qualities of Paradise, cleansing it of all evil” (*Absent Presence* 61). For Darwish, memory is the tool used to reconstruct the idealized homeland and re-establish place within the distant object of memory: “and there are in the memory enough cosmetic tools to establish the place in its place, to arrange the trees on the pulsation of desire, not because it is inside us, even if we are not inside it, but because hope is the power of the weak who rebel against trade” (*Absent Presence* 10). Interestingly, though Darwish depicts a flawless and unchanging Palestine in his poetry, he is also critical of this image, warning his audience of the limitations of his poetry: “On the other hand, one born in exile and having

heard of all the good qualities of the other place is disappointed by a paradise constructed for him alone out of words he has imbibed and made into motionless pictures, to be his guide in diversity" (*Absent Presence* 95).

While the romanticized homeland plays a crucial role in Darwish's construction of the Palestine of the mind, he also employs this analogy between Palestine and Eden to describe the Palestinian people's expulsion from Eden: "I'm the Adam of two Edens lost to me twice. / Expel me slowly. Kill me slowly" (*Adam of Two Edens* 154). Palestinians are subject to the loss of two Edens: the first by way of Adam and Eve's sin and the second as a result of Israeli aggression. As much as Darwish's poetry relies on an idealistic construction of the Palestinian homeland, his works are also faithful to depict the Hell of living outside Paradise. If Palestine is illustrated vibrant and abundant in life, life in exile is described as the exact opposite—hopeless and without meaning:

Since the day you were expelled from Paradise a second time  
 our whole world changed,  
 our voices changed,  
 even the greeting between us fell  
 echoless, like a button falling on sand. (*Adam of Two Edens* 87)

He questions whether life outside of Paradise can truly be life if it is rooted in a notion that no longer exists—a physical autonomous homeland: "We live, so far as we can live, in an infant past which is planted in fields which were ours for hundreds of years" (*Absent Presence* 31). Another way he which he portrays this Hell is by comparing life outside of Palestine to being confined in prison:

Every winter you grieve for the joy of what is absent; you walk under the rain, one in two persons: yourself and the man you were in another winter, and you speak to yourself in words you do not understand, because memory is unable to recall past emotion, because longing can lavish what is not on what was, so that tree becomes forest, the stone, a canopy, and it is as if you were happy in a cell, which you now see as more spacious than a public park. (*Absent Presence* 82)

Within his poetry, Darwish mobilizes Hell to convey the emptiness of life in exile. Without the lifeblood found in the homeland, Palestinians exist in a state of living death. Beyond this, as depicted in the prison analogy, Hell also represents the state of desire Palestinians live in—the longing to return home but the impossibility of doing so. Yet, in spite of this, nostalgia and memory allow him to return to Palestine of the mind, finding refuge in the Eden he constructs through his poetry.

### Landscape and borders of the post-Oslo imagined Palestine

Palestine of the mind exists in the absence of spatiotemporal boundaries. As a diasporic community, imagined Palestine extends across borders and spatial divides, and through collective memory, it transcends time. Anyone who has Palestinian roots has access to this imagined community. Keeping with the inclusiveness of the Palestinian imagined community, these diasporic productions also tend to flatten out the Palestinian identity—blurring out class and religious differences. Aside from the occasional class indicators such as type of house (typically, apartment) and mode of transportation (usually, personal cars), socioeconomic status is rarely referenced and class struggles are virtually non-existent. Likewise, religion is also largely disregarded within these productions, with its occasional reference typically being used

to diminish religious divides: "What difference was it to them whether / it was Isaac or Ishmael who was / God's sacrificial lamb?" (*Adam of Two Edens* 177).

Similar to the imagined communities of nation-states which are not only defined by what is within the borders but also the borders themselves, the Palestinian imagined community too is solidified by its boundaries. One particular border that reappears within literature is the boundary between the imagination and reality. In order for Palestine of the mind to maintain its coherency, it must exist in the imaginary. Once it becomes superimposed on reality, this imagined community falls apart. This clash becomes apparent in productions created after the Oslo Accords of 1993 which allowed many Palestinians return to their homeland.

In 1995, Darwish experienced this discrepancy first-hand when he was permitted to resettle in Ramallah. Yet, despite being back in his homeland, he still felt a sense of emptiness: "This is the land of my poem. But me, both in my poem and on this land, I feel somewhat like a stranger. One may feel a stranger even in the mirror. There is something missing, that is what pains me most. I feel that I am like a tourist but without the right of a tourist. This feeling of being a visitor is devastating. The most difficult thing is to be a visitor to oneself" (*Mahmoud Darwish*). Mourid Barghouti experiences the same sensation when he returned to Ramallah in 1996 after thirty years in exile:

The Occupation has created generations without a place whose colors, smells, and sounds they can remember; a first place that belongs to them, that they can return to in their memories in their cobbled-together exiles [...] The Occupation has created generations of us that have to adore an unknown

beloved: distant, difficult, surrounded by guards, by walls, by nuclear missiles, by sheer terror.

The long Occupation has succeeded in changing us from children of Palestine to children of the idea of Palestine. (Barghouti 62)

For both Darwish and Barghouti, Palestine of the mind becomes so vivid while they are in exile that when they return, they find that, somehow, their imagined Palestine engages their senses even more so than the actual homeland itself.

Even within fictional works such as Sahar Khalifeh's *The Inheritance*, a similar tension emerges between memories and reality, except in this novel, the memories are not Zayna's own but inherited from her father's stories about the homeland. In the novel, Zayna grows up to her father's idealistic illustrations of Palestine: "If you need help, you find a thousand hands stretched out to help you. If you need money you can take it from a friend, no banks, no checks, and no headaches. At the end of the day you can sit in the cafe for hours on end, then go the mosque or to the diwan. There, people are genuine Muslims, even the Christians are good-hearted and know God exactly as we do" (Khalifeh Kindle Locations 125-128). Years later, the grown Zayna has become the chair of her anthropology department, yet she nonetheless feels within herself a void—an emptiness likely deposited by her father's stories. After hearing news of her father's impending death, she travels to the West Bank. However, when she arrives, she discovers that the Palestine in front of her eyes was completely different compared the homeland painted by her father through his stories: "My eyes wandered in all directions in the street that was jammed with buildings lined up without harmony. I was searching in vain for the charm of this country I had long dreamed of seeing, but I found only emptiness, silence, and

clutter” (Kindle Locations 463-464). While Palestine of the mind is effective in preserving the struggle for Palestinian nationality outside of the homeland prior to the Oslo Accords, this idealistic construction of Palestine begins to disintegrate with the reopening of Palestine, giving rise to a set of narratives that juxtapose Palestine of the mind to the land’s flawed reality.

### Collective memory: 21<sup>st</sup> century Palestinian narratives

Throughout the predominant majority of Palestinian works, Palestinian writers rely immensely on memory to reconstruct Palestine of the mind. Palestinian diasporic productions and Palestinian collective memory play an interdependent role in preserving Palestinian collective identities. Not only do writers and producers draw from collective memories to produce their works, but these works—which often exemplify some combination of the writer’s own experiences interwoven into the collective storyline—also redefine the collective memory.

The concept of “collective memory” was originally developed by French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In his book *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs argues that collective frameworks are not merely a random compilation of individual recollections but rather, are “precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord [...] with the predominant thoughts of society” (Halbwachs 40). Moreover, this collective memory is neither established nor stagnant. It “needs continuous feeding from collective sources and is sustained by social and moral props” (Halbwachs 34). It relies on the telling and retelling of individual experiences.

Darwish employs both personal and collective memory to recreate the imagined homeland within his poetry. His poetry inspires in his audience again memory of the homeland, and as he argues, “Memory, your personal museum, admits you to the contents of what is lost”

(*Absent Presence* 61). Memory is the key by which Palestinians are able to access their collective community. Having only spent six of his childhood years in pre-1948 Palestine and the remainder of his life in either newly-established Israel or in exile, Darwish had to navigate between personal and collective memories within his poetry. However, beyond being only an expression of his memories, his poetry also serves as the grounds by which his audience negotiates their personal and collective histories as well. Darwish's works invite his readers to journey to the Palestine of the mind together, creating a form of community among his audience.

If memory plays such a crucial component of the Palestinian identity and in fact, is the key to entering into this imagined community, how then does this collectiveness endure decades after the displacement among those who never experienced the displacing event themselves? The fact that the Palestinian identity has continued to thrive even after many in the displaced generation have passed away suggests of a form of collective memory among the Palestinian community. A more recently published novel *Mornings in Jenin* by Palestinian American Susan Abulhawa illustrates this concept.

Susan Abulhawa's experience within Palestine is quite different from that of Darwish. Her parents were refugees of the 1967 war who had fled to Kuwait, where they gave birth to Abulhawa in 1970. As a result of her volatile family situation, Abulhawa was passed between the United States, Kuwait and Jordan between various family members before ending up at an orphanage in Jerusalem. At age thirteen, she resettled in the U.S., under the care of her new foster parents. She has remained in the U.S. since.

In contrast to the stories of Darwish and many other Palestinians, Abulhawa's personal displacement was more so a direct consequence of her family situation than Israeli aggression. Moreover, unlike many other Palestinian writers, much of Abulhawa's childhood was spent outside the Palestinian community. As such, her story is one of rediscovery—in which only during adulthood did she begin to explore her identity as a Palestinian: "Maybe it was having a child that made me really start thinking about my roots and what I wanted her to grow up with, what religion and what language" (Yacoob). This led to her trip back to Palestine in 2000 and 2002, which she says were crucial in her journey of rediscovering her identity. As she states in an interview: "I was transformed by that whole experience [...] You grow up as a Palestinian knowing about these massacres and the wars and the injustice but it was completely different to be there" (Yacoob). As a result of her visits to Palestine, she penned her debut novel *Mornings in Jenin* in which she draws from both the imagined Palestinian collective identity and her own memories to reconstruct a fictionalized history of a Palestinian family.

During an initial read, *Mornings in Jenin* appears to follow a generic Palestinian family. However, upon closer examination, we see that Abulhawa situates herself within the character of Amal. Both were born in exile, both spent a period of time in an orphanage as a result of their family's inability to care for them, both attended graduate school at the University of South Carolina and later resettled in Pennsylvania, and both revisited Palestine with their daughters in effort to preserve the Palestinian heritage among their posterior generations.

Complementing these distinct personal experiences she includes in her novel, Abulhawa also draws on several key motifs within Palestinian diasporic literature. One of the most prominent themes she includes is the separation of two brothers—one growing up in a

Palestinian family and the other in a Jewish family. Similar to Ghassan Kanafani's short story *Return to Haifa*, in *Mornings in Jenin* Amal's brother—Ismael, renamed to be David—was stolen from his parents as an infant, raised by an Israeli, and later becomes an Israeli soldier. Amal's other brother, Yousef, encounters Ismael/David for the first time after this separation at an Israeli checkpoint. Far from being a warm brotherly reunion, Ismael/David gets the impulse to beat up the man who reminds him so much of himself.

Abulhawa's story is distinct from other Palestinian writers because her move from Kuwait to the U.S. was not primarily a result of nationality. As such, hers is a story of coming to terms with her Palestinian identity later on in life—a journey of self-discovery. As she rediscovers her Palestinian roots, she begins to step into the Palestinian imagined community, inheriting the collective memories present within this community. In *Mornings in Jenin*, Abulhawa simultaneously situates herself as the protagonist of the story while also drawing on a prominent theme within Palestinian literature, negotiating between these two distinct storylines within her novel. Ultimately, *Mornings in Jenin* is an expression of how, through collective memory, the Palestinian imagined community is able to permeate the boundaries of time including posterior generations were never themselves victims of the displacement.

### Sudan: A tribal/familial collective

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, within the void of strong governance and general dissatisfaction of Egyptian rule, the Mahdi led a revolt that resulted in the fall of Khartoum and Egyptian rule. However, within a month after his Khartoum victory, the Mahdi died. His successor continued his expansion agenda until 1898 when the British reclaimed Sudan for the British-Egyptian

government. This Mahdist movement was one of Sudan's first attempts at nationalism. Though the campaign ultimately failed, it nonetheless reinvigorated among the Muslim Sudanese a sense of Sudanese national identity. Key to note here, though, is that because the Mahdi identified himself as an Islamic savior, the movement largely fell along racial and religious lines.

The failed nationalistic movement led to the reestablishment of the British-Egyptian government over Sudan. As I previously discussed, under British rule tensions between the North and South deepened as a result of Britain's focus to develop the Northern regions at the expense of the South. Later, when the nation began to transition from British-Egyptian government to self-rule, the culturally, racially and religiously distinct North and South regions of Sudan were united as one state under an Arab government. The lack of representation of the non-Arab community and the government's attempts to Arabize the nation laid the foundation for Sudan's two civil wars, ultimately leading to the creation of South Sudan in 2011.

### Tribal collective

As a result of the civil war, one would expect the emergence of a bifurcated Sudanese identity with Northern and Southern imagined communities appearing throughout Sudanese diasporic productions. However, a review of the Sudanese diasporic productions suggests that while these identities exist, they are weak compared to other collectives that emerge. In *What is the What*, Achak observed that in the refugee camps "in Ethiopia there were no Nuer, no Dinka, no Fur or Nubians" (Eggers 48-49). Yet, this unity among the tribes was fragile. After resettlement, "the Sudanese [in America] have regressed to tribalism, to the same ethnic divisions we gave up long ago" (Eggers 48). In *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky*, for Benson, a Dinka, inter-tribal tensions manifested even during his refugee experience in Ethiopia: "I don't know what made

me sit next to a Nuer man and his wife that day, but when the movement of the truck caused me to fall across her legs, the man grabbed me by my belly with his right hand. His fingers dug into my tummy and he shook me up and down, hitting me against his knee. I cried but nobody cared” (Ajak et al. 86).

Because of the shared purpose among the South Sudanese—the collective movement for independence Khartoum—we would anticipate a form of community emerging from this mutual cause. To some extent, this collective struggle did bridge across divides among various tribes of South Sudan. However, this forged community was prone to rupture depending on the surrounding environment. Even among South Sudan’s rebel forces, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), who more so than the refugees shared a collective vision, experienced divides among their ranks: “A few nights later a thunderous gun battle kept us awake and we knew those two [SPLA] commanders had started warring against each other. In the morning we heard that Honorable Chief had been ambushed by Merciless Crocodile. [...] John Garang, the leader of the SPLA army, came and he was angry because half of the troops fighting the government had to be withdrawn to stop the fighting between his commanders” (Ajak et al. 196-197). Though the SPLA were united in their vision to liberate South Sudan from the oppressive government of Khartoum, the tensions here again reflect the reemergence of their history of inter-tribal conflict. For refugees whose lived reality is centered around displacement and personal survival as opposed to the movement for independence, this collective vision is even less so a unifying force.

Among the refugees, perhaps we would expect a sense of community appearing as a result of their shared displacement experiences. However, this diasporic community is virtually

nonexistent within Sudanese productions, with the divided nature of the Sudanese refugee community highlighted as opposed to their collectiveness. For Achak, these divisions emerged in the form of a hierarchical system among the refugees. One example occurred during his flight to Ethiopia with a group of other children. They had arrived at a village after a long leg of the journey hoping to be assisted by the villagers. However, their arrival coincided with that of another much larger, more privileged group: “There were families and adults in fine clothing but there were among them many boys, small boys, looking very much like us. The only difference was that the new group was better fed. Their eyes were not shrunken, their bellies not bloated. They wore shirts and shoes” (Eggers 224). Not only did the larger group receive priority to the village’s resources, but they also refused to share with Achak’s much smaller cohort. Recalling his frustration, Achak states, “My anger was more intense than it had ever been toward the murahaleen [the pro-government militia]. It was born of the realization that there were castes within the displaced. And we [the orphaned refugees] occupied the lowest rung on the ladder. We were utterly dispensable to all—to the government, to the murahaleen, to the rebels, to the better-situated refugees” (Eggers 205). Later, this hierarchical system reappeared in refugee camps even among the orphaned boys. In the Pinyudo refugee camp, Achak observed “a class system, whereby the boys who had shirts and pants and shoes were considered the wealthiest, and the next were those who had two of the three. I was lucky to be considered upper-middle-class, with one shirt and two shoes and a pair of shorts” (Eggers 234).

Achak’s account of divisions among the Sudanese refugee community was largely a reflection of his struggle for survival. Within the refugees’ journey, hierarchical systems stood for more than simply social standing. They indicated of the refugees’ access to limited resources

such as food and clean water and consequently, refugees' ability to survive. A particularly vivid example of Achak's personal conflict between his struggle to survive and his desire to empathize with other refugees is portrayed in his description of the large influx of refugees to the Ethiopian refugee camp Pinyudo: "The people came without end, and each time they crossed the river, we knew it meant that the food we had would need to be further divided. I came to resent the sight of my own people, to loathe how many of them there were, how needful, how gangrenous, bug-eyed, and wailing" (Eggers 259). Though Achak to some extent identified with the incoming refugees ("my own people"), his own personal deprivation transcended this collective identity even to the point that he mentally wanted to harm the incoming refugees: "in my mind, I threw rocks [...] I threw rocks at the women and the children and wanted to throw rocks at the soldiers" (259). In Achak's story, the collective based on the South Sudanese's shared victim narrative is dominated by the individual refugees' struggle for survival.

In contrast to the fragile South Sudanese refugee community as a whole, tribal communities on the other hand play a prominent role within the Sudanese diasporic experience. Within Sudanese productions, many of the Lost Boys make their journey to refugee camps within their tribal communities. Benson's flight narrative, for example, began when he entrusted himself to the guidance of an older male in the Dinka tribe: "'Don't be afraid. Come with me. I will take care of you for your father. [...] You should call me uncle [...] I will look after you until we meet your parents'" (Ajak et al. 59). Likewise, after the attack on his village, when Achak finds himself alone in the wilderness of Sudan, he "heard a voice, a Dinka voice, singing a Dinka song. I ran to the singing" (Eggers 98). The man led Achak to a campsite where other

Dinka people were gathering: “They gave me water and I watched their Dinka faces red in the fire” (99). There, Achak met the young man with whom he would flee Sudan. Within both narratives, in the absence of blood kinship, tribal communities played for both Benson and Achak the role of family, offering them the leadership and protection they would need as they journey to the refugee camps.

Though within these productions we see the greatest expression of tribal community on a local level, this collective also extends to include other subgroups of the Dinka tribe in other regions as well. In *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky*, after Alepho crossed the Nile, he is received by the Aliab Dinka who offered them cows, providing the refugees with their first real meal after weeks of deprivation (Ajak et al. 117). Another—though less pleasant—instance in which the expectation of this tribal collective emerges is during Benson’s time in the Ethiopian refugee camp Panyido. Thinking that some girls by the river were Dinka, he asked them for some water. By the time he realized they were not Dinka, it was too late. “Putting a hand on each hip, they walked toward me throwing words I didn’t understand. I staggered backward and when they began to throw stones, I turned and ran” (Ajak et al. 88). Though the girls he met ultimately were not Dinkan, Benson’s request reveals an expectation of a tribal imagined community—that though he had never met the girls before, because they were from the same tribe, he was able to ask a favor of them.

### Familial collective

Alongside the prominent role of the tribal collective within Sudanese diasporic productions, a familial collective also emerges within these narratives. In fact, in many ways, these familial communities form the core of Sudanese identity—even more so than the tribal. Because many

of these productions revolve around the plight of the Lost Boys who are known for being orphaned, the familial collective is not always apparent. However, throughout their narratives, when a familial collective does appear, it carries much more significance for the refugees than any other community they identify themselves with.

In *They Poured Fire on Us From the Sky*, when Alepho is reunited with his older brother Yier, he immediately begins feeling at ease, knowing in his heart that as long as his Yier was around, he could rest in comfort and safety. Likewise, Benson feels the same relief upon his reunion with Yier: "He was an elder who cared about our family and could do something. That sense of loneliness finally left my heart" (Ajak et al. 153). When Yier was called away to fight, Alepho again experiences a void in his heart, "Family had become so precious to me. Without it I was like a tree alone in a desert" (Ajak et al. 111). Alepho and Benson had been under the leadership of older men throughout their journey, yet as much as the leaders tried to care for the boys' needs, there nonetheless was a void in the boys' hearts that only family could fill.

Even to a greater extent, the *The Good Lie* also illustrates the depth and selflessness of sibling relationships among the refugees. In the film, as the refugees were hiding in the grass during their flight, Mamere woke up one morning and was spotted by government soldiers. In order to prevent the soldiers from discovering the rest of the boys lying in the grass, Mamere's older brother Theo turned himself in. Years later, after Mamere is resettled in America, he returned to Kenya to search for his brother with the hopes of bringing him to the States as well. He found Theo but was unable to attain permission for him to leave the camp. In the end, Mamere decided to switch places with Theo, giving him his passport. Mamere remained in Kenya, working at a camp hospital.

Another memoir, Bol's *The Lost Boy* depicts a particularly poignant relationship between Bol and his parents. Unlike other narratives in which refugees had lost their parents, Bol's memoir is unique because not only are his parents still alive but he also has the opportunity to return home. In spite of Bol's many successes including his resettlement in South Africa and education, his novel concludes with a reunion with his parents in his home village: "Little did I know [...] my long-cherished dream would come true. [...] I had finally come to look for my parents who had been lost for so many years" (Bol 161). In the book's final scene, Bol depicts himself running into his mother's arms after years of separation: "And there [my mother] was, coming from the direction of my grandmother's village. [...] Then I started running. I ran to regain my lost world. I ran over the dry sorghum stalks towards my mother's love" (Bol 184). Bol concludes the narrative embracing his mother. For Bol, despite his personal accomplishments, he ultimately feels most fulfilled when he is reunited with his family.

This emphasis on the familial collective stands in stark contrast to the collective within Palestinian productions. Whereas Sudanese diasporic narratives depict families as the quintessential form of community, Palestinian narratives amplify the national identity oftentimes at the expense of kinship relations. A classic counterexample to Sudan's familial collective is Kanafani's *Return to Haifa*. Upon meeting their son again for the first time in twenty years, Said S and Safiyya discovered that their son, originally Khaldoun but renamed to Doff by his Israeli parents, had become an Israeli soldier. Unable to reconcile with their son's betrayal, the family disowned him and foretold of an imminent battle between him and their other son who was at the time training to join the Palestinian resistance movement.

### Landscape and borders of the Sudanese collective

The Sudanese identity that appears within these diasporic productions have roots within centuries-old regional, tribal and colonial dynamics within the region. The recent civil wars attempt to unify the North and South around a specific cause, but this regional collective is unstable, likely because the long history of tribal conflicts within the region that colonial powers often exploited. In the midst of the distrust between tribes, a strong tribal and familial community emerges. Ultimately, within these Sudanese narratives, trust and care are two indicators of these communities.

Similar to the Palestinian national collective which flattens out the Palestinian identity particularly in regards to class and religion, Sudanese diasporic productions also level out the Sudanese identity. However, unlike the Palestinian collective in which religious and class differences are minimally referenced creating a sense of inclusivity for all Palestinians, Sudanese productions repeatedly emphasize these identities, in a sense alienating others who do not belong to this collective. Virtually all the main characters within Sudanese diasporic productions identify as Christian and come from a lower class background. While these works do not necessarily attempt to speak on behalf of all Sudanese refugees, their personal stories nonetheless depict an archetypal Sudanese diasporic narrative that in many ways misrepresents of the Sudanese refugee experience. Indeed, the Sudanese lower class does tend to be disproportionately affected by the civil war. However, the exclusive emphasis on Christian refugees' stories discounts the large Muslim Sudanese refugee population resettled in America and beyond.

A limitation to this study is that while tribes and families form robust communities, the productions above do not depict instances in which, similar to *Return to Haifa*, tribal and familial loyalties are called into question. Tribes and families are illustrated as supportive and nurturing within these narratives, so the refugees naturally trust these communities. In *The Good Lie* for example, Theo selflessly surrenders his own future for his younger brother and the other children in his village without demanding in return. However, this selflessness is less apparent in other works. In *They Poured Fire on us From the Sky*, for instance, when Alepho and Benson find Yier, they have a subconscious expectation that Yier would be able to change their situation. However, if Yier were incapable of providing them this security, would Benson and Alepho have been just as enthusiastic to see him? In order to more precisely understand to what extent these narratives depict kinship relations among diasporic communities, future studies should also take into account works that illustrate places of tension within Sudanese diasporic tribal and familial communities.

## Conclusion

Diasporic communities within Palestinian and Sudanese productions ultimately serve both internal and external purposes. For those belonging to these imagined communities, collective narratives create a sense of solidarity among the refugees, an affirmation that they are not alone in their experiences. Especially for Palestinians who continue to live in the reality of the loss of their homeland, these narratives serve as a reminder that all Palestinians share the same state of exile. These productions act as cultural systems preserving the Palestinians' collective memories and ensuring that their experiences will be remembered well beyond their lifetimes.

These communities also serve as networks for advocacy and support for the marginalized within these imagined communities. Both Palestinian and Sudanese productions employ voices of the more privileged within society—whether as a result of their class, education or personal connections—in support of the collective cause. Sudanese productions are predominantly written by refugees who have successfully resettled and acquired an education while Palestinian works are generally produced by the upper class who already have a political voice. Lastly, these collectives act as leverage to mobilize international support in ways that the individual voice cannot. While in many cases both Palestinian and Sudanese works illustrate the stories of individual refugees, because of the collective nature of each group’s displacement, these individual stories have come to represent the collective’s plight.

Yet, though these are individual narratives, each group’s stories are situated within a distinct collective. The Palestinian imagined community is formed on nationality whereas the Sudanese collective is centered around tribes and families. These differences could be attributed to the writers and producers themselves. Palestinian productions were created by intellectuals like Darwish, Kanafani and Barghouti who were deeply involved in the Palestinian national movement, often risking their lives for the cause (Kanafani was, in fact, assassinated for his involvement). As such, these writers were more likely to prioritize the national narrative over their own experiences. In contrast, Sudanese works were generally produced by refugees who had defied the odds, earning the right to resettle abroad. In particular, these narratives focus on the story of the Lost Boys, who at the time of their displacement were considered too young to join the SPLA. Oftentimes too naïve to understand the politics of their situation, the

boys lived in the daily reality of the battle for survival. As such, tribes and families, who were able to provide some sort of protection, became the primary community for these refugees.

A second potential explanation for this difference lies within Sudan and Palestine's past. Perhaps the reason tribal tensions emerge so conspicuously within Sudanese productions is a result of the country's deep history of tribal conflicts. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, communities within both Sudan and Palestine were highly localized. However, in Sudan, tribal identities prevailed while in Palestine these communities took the form of village and urban communities. Unlike Palestine in which separate communities shared ethnic bonds, tribes within Sudan were diverse—mostly Arab but many other indigenous groups were represented as well. As a result of the absence of a shared sense of community among these tribes, conflicts often erupted, in particular over land. The British-Egyptian government exacerbated these tensions when they attempted to rule Sudan as one entity but yet treated various regions unfairly. This history of mistrust among tribes likely also contributed to the lack of inter-tribal unity within the Sudanese productions.

Finally, a third possible driving force for the distinction between Palestinian and Sudanese diasporic communities revolves around the refugee identities that each group attempts to project. As I discussed in the previous chapter, because the Sudanese are expected to prove their "refugee-ness" through their narratives, an apolitical and "innocent victim" narrative often emerges within cultural productions from this group. Due to the civil wars in Sudan, regional identities (North versus South) have become highly politicized. Perhaps in an attempt to characterize Sudanese refugees as the prototypical innocent victims of an unjust force, Sudanese productions focus on familial and tribal communities which are more

disconnected from the country's political struggle. Palestinian productions, on the other hand, work to rally international support for the return of Palestinians to their homeland. As such, it is imperative that Palestinian productions illustrate a strong national community, giving a sense of unity and solidarity. Further, the Palestinians' desire to be recognized as a nation state in many ways limits its ability to depict conflicts within their national community because such divisions could compromise their battle for recognition.

# Conclusion

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Why should our story, our particular story, deserve to be listened to by the world? [...] The capitals of the world refuse to receive us as corpses as they refuse to receive us alive. And if the dead by displacement and the dead by weapons and the dead by longing and the dead by simple death are martyrs, and if poems are true and each martyr is a rose, we can claim to have made a garden of the world.

—Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*

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National status immensely shapes a group's lived experience as a refugee—their flight, the process whereby they became a refugee and their collective identities. Ultimately, these factors contribute to the divergence in refugee narratives among Palestinians and the Sudanese. Yet, despite their vastly distinct experiences, these groups are often clustered together under a generalized refugee identity within studies on diasporic literature. As such, the purpose of this study was to accentuate the particularities of stateless diasporic narratives, exploring the role of national status in driving these differences.

Sudanese and early Palestinian refugee stories both emphasize the role of the journey in constructing their refugee identity. They echo the 1951 refugee definition highlighting two components to attaining refugee status: the first being fear of persecution and the second, that the refugee is outside the country of his/her nationality. While these productions acknowledge both aspects of the refugees' experience, there appears to be more of an emphasis on flight, a space of transition and change. Perhaps, as Liisa Malkki found among the Tutu, “refugeeness entail[s] a process of *becoming*. It [is] a gradual transformation, not an automatic result of the crossing of a national border” (Malkki 113). For the Sudanese, this process of “becoming” included overcoming challenges against humans and nature. For Palestinians, “becoming”

meant enduring the emotional agony of leaving home and later, the anguish of the impossibility of return and adapting desire for return with prolonged sojourns elsewhere. However, while Sudanese productions continue to follow this narrative formula, Palestinian texts have since evolved towards a land narrative, reflective of the Palestinian national struggle for the homeland.

After the Six-Day War in 1967, when the borders of Occupied Palestine became much more demarcated and the hope for an autonomous homeland began to dissipate, Palestinian refugee productions began to shift towards a homeland narrative that served to both validate the Palestinians' connection with the land while also creating an idealized Palestine, allowing those in exile to return with their imaginations. As discussed in the introduction, the Palestinians' melancholic loss and the creation of a homeland of the mind is not a unique phenomenon—other groups such as Haitian Americans and South Asian British have also developed similar imaginaries. Interestingly, though neither group lost their homeland, Bromley describes them as nonetheless unable to return, suggesting that it is in the realization of the impossibility of return that this imagined homeland arises. As I argue in chapter three, for the Palestinians in particular, this imagined homeland is much more vivid and far-reaching within the Palestinian consciousness because not only are they unable to return but this imagined homeland also serves to sustain the Palestinian national identity and struggle. For Sudanese refugees, this return was much more feasible because they did not lose their national status. As such, this sense of nostalgia is virtually nonexistent within Sudanese productions.

National status is central to the collective identities, which emerge within Palestinian and Sudanese productions. The Palestinians' struggle is dependent on a strong sense of

national identity throughout space and time. In effort to create a unified community, the Palestinian collective blurs out individual and subgroup differences such as class and religion, highlighting instead their common national identities. Palestinian refugee narratives also typically depict experiences with which all Palestinians can identify either through their experience or exposure to the collective narrative—whether it is al-Nakba or memories of the homeland. In contrast, the Sudanese refugee experience primarily revolves around the struggle for survival. As such, their journeys are highly individualistic, with collectiveness visible at a family and tribal level. Even among the refugees who share the same experiences, tensions and hierarchies emerge, often as a result of limited resources in refugee camps. Individual relationships can break through the refugees' class boundaries, but these ruptures are few and far between.

The absence of cultural artifacts mediating between individual and collective memory is a contributing factor to the lack of unity among Sudanese refugees. Because the Palestinian expulsion affected those from all segments of society, influential voices like Ghassan Kanafani began mobilizing support for the national movement soon after the exodus. Palestinian productions have since been continuously produced, both emerging out of and perpetuating the collective struggle. Through these works, the Palestinian collective memory is constantly being negotiated and revitalized. On the other hand, among the Sudanese, the lower-class was disproportionately affected. Some began their education in refugee camps, but most did not acquire a stable education and literacy until after resettlement. As such, Sudanese productions began to appear decades after the initial displacement, by which point the Sudanese collective had already been solidified.

Refugee narratives do not only have a history, but they have a trajectory as well. The Palestinian struggle is unlikely to end anytime soon, and as such, I expect cultural narratives to continue exerting a powerful influence on the memories and identities of those within the diaspora. For Sudanese refugees, on the other hand, it is less clear, particularly with the recent independence of South Sudan and the gradual return of refugee to their homes. In this next section, I briefly discuss where I believe Sudanese and Palestinian refugee narratives are going, and I close with remarks on the concept of hospitality in the context of statelessness.

## Projections

### Sudan: Return narratives

On a thematic level, Sudanese refugee productions follow a similar trajectory as Palestinian works. Palestinian productions follow a “journey” to “homeland” to “return” narrative progression. Excluding the homeland narrative, Sudanese works similarly emphasize the refugees’ journey with a recent memoir—*The Lost Boy*—depicting a return home. The work depicts Bol’s return less so to renew his connection to the homeland but rather, to reunite with his family. Further, the return is depicted as both celebratory and restorative—though he had become educated and accomplished outside of his country, he was not fulfilled until he was able to return home.

With the recent independence of South Sudan in 2011, it is quite likely that more Sudanese return narratives will emerge in the future. In contrast to Palestinian return narratives which depict a disappointing physical Palestine in comparison to the idealized Palestine of the mind, I suggest that Sudanese return narratives will continue to illustrate this

sense of celebration—especially because Sudanese narratives never created an Eden-like homeland, and as such, there is less of an expectation that Sudan conform to an idealized standard. Future Sudanese return narratives may also, similar to *The Lost Boy*, depict a celebratory reunion between family members as opposed to the land itself (in contrast to *Mornings in Jenin* when Yehya risks his life to return to Palestine just to revisit his olive groves). In this way, kinship through blood is prioritized over connection to land as valued in Palestinian depictions of belonging to a homeland.

### Palestine: Postmemory works and the fluidity of belonging

Within Palestinian diasporic productions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, comes the emergence of American novels by those who were not themselves Palestinian refugees, authors such as Susan Abulhawa and Dixiane Hallaj. The passage of memory that both Abulhawa and Hallaj rely on is what Mirianne Hirsch terms “postmemory”—traumatic memories that were “transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch 103). With the original diasporic community passing away while the issue of the Palestinian homeland still unresolved, the continuation of the Palestinian struggle through literature will be reliant on authors such as these.

While it is unclear how postmemory will influence the themes in this new era of Palestinian diasporic productions, what is interesting is that most of these more recent productions tend to take the form of novels—similar to Sudanese refugee productions. Perhaps this shift from poetry/prose to novels reflects the generational shifts within the Palestinian community. Previously, poetry and prose were used to capture the emotions of those in exile. While novels engage emotion, their primary purpose is to tell a story. This transition from

poetry and prose to novels suggests of a change in Palestinian diasporic productions from an emotional plea using melancholic loss to storytelling as a form of political activism. In terms of postmemory, this shift suggests that while memories are inherited within families, the emotions associated with these memories are not transmitted with the same depth.

## Closing thoughts

The case of Palestinian refugees challenges the concept of hospitality, which has laid the groundwork for refugee theory. First of all, in a society which revolves around the notion of nation-state, the theory of hospitality only allows for two roles: the guest and the host. However, for Palestinians, claiming residence in a host's space also means permanently surrendering their right of return—one of the reasons why Palestinian refugee camps still exist almost seventy years after al-Nakba. As such, they are in a position where they are neither guests nor hosts. Secondly, the notion of hospitality implies that being a guest is a privileged and highly desirable position. While refugees from other groups must apply for refugee status, Palestinians are ironically automatically granted a status they do not want. They are not seeking refuge but rather, desire to exercise their right of return.

As such, the term “refugee” implies a desire to be taken in as a guest. This is why Palestinians are often hesitant to be called refugees though by the 1951 definition, they technically are. The Palestinian case gives us the opportunity to rethink refugee theory once more. Does one need to be seeking refuge in order to be considered a refugee? In what spaces can refugees exist? Do people either need to be host or guest—can people also forge for themselves spaces in between as well?

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