Salem State University
School of Graduate Studies
Department of English

Keeping Yunes Alive:
The Vulnerable Witness in *Gate of the Sun*

A Thesis in English
by
Logan Austin

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Introduction

In 2001, Palestinian activist Hanan Ashrawi spoke at the *Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances*[1]. She told attendees that Palestine is "a nation in captivity held hostage to an ongoing Nakba" (98). Ashrawi goes on to say that the Zionist occupation continues the Nakba "by usurping not only the land and rights of the Palestinians, but also by confiscating their utterance and distorting their historical narrative" (98). Through violence, the Israeli occupation revokes Palestinians' right to bear witness to their own experiences. What does it mean to be denied your own witnessing, and how might witnessing still be performed in the face of institutional silencing? Is witnessing only an expression of empathy and recognition in the face of traumatic events or can it also be an expression of hope for a future without trauma?

The Nakba (1948–present), Arabic for "catastrophe," commonly refers to the period in 1948 in which Zionist military forces displaced thousands of Palestinians with the intent to ethnically cleanse the area in preparation for the establishment of the state of Israel. According to a 2019-2021 report published by BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, between 750,000 and 900,000 people, an estimated 85 percent of the Palestinian population, were displaced or murdered ("Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 2019-2021" 8). Above, Ashrawi argues that this definition of the Nakba is incomplete. Instead, she advocates for a different understanding of the Nakba, one which

[1] Part of the World Conference Against Racism series hosted by UNESCO, the 2001 conference took place in Durban, South Africa, and brought together world leaders for the purpose of combating racism (United Nations).

understands the Nakba as “ongoing” (98). The Palestinian people continue to be displaced and ethnically cleansed, and until the Palestinian refugees can exercise their right to return, the Nakba does not end.

Current Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, perpetuates this ongoing Nakba by laying siege to the Palestinian population of Gaza with support from the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other Western countries, killing over 64,000 people as of 2023 according to a count done in 2025 (PBS). Through mainstream media, personal videos and social media posts made by thousands of individual Palestinian civilians, the world has the opportunity to act as witness to this very public documentation of their horrifying circumstances as Israel continues to do everything it can to deny the Gazans a legitimate voice.

In the novel *Gate of the Sun* (1998, English translation published 2006), Lebanese author Elias Khoury (1948–2024) grapples with the challenge of witnessing Palestinian trauma so that others might begin to understand, even empathize, with that voice. Khoury’s novel responds to the crisis of witnessing that Palestinian people face today, one made even more challenging by silencing, trauma, and a present defined by ethnic cleansing. In this work, he advocates for the Palestinian people, both bearing testimony to their struggle and confronting the intimidating challenge of maintaining second-hand or second-generational traumatic memories.

In this thesis, I analyze the ways in which Khoury’s novel, *Gate of the Sun*, attempts to depict the trauma of witnessing and remembering the Nakba. I examine how Khoury depicts Palestinian displacement and collective memory through an exploration of silencing, second-generational witnessing, and the titular gate of the sun as a symbol of hope. *Gate of the Sun* is an expression of love toward the Palestinian people and demonstrates Khoury’s sincere belief in their future liberation.

PART I: GATE OF THE SUN

Gate of the Sun takes place in the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon in the 1990s, years after the events of the initial expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine in 1948. In particular, Khoury's novel makes specific reference to the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Beirut, Lebanon in 1982 in which a Lebanese Christian militia and IDF soldiers murdered anywhere between 2000-3500 Palestinian refugees and Shia Muslim Lebanese civilians in refugee camps Sabra and Shatila (Al Jazeera). The Sabra and Shatila massacres are an example of the continued violence of the Nakba and were devastating to the Palestinian and Shia Muslim communities in Lebanon.

Thus, Khoury sets his novel in the wake of these atrocities, and his characters describe personal experiences of the Nakba and the Sabra and Shatila massacres and the ripple effect ethnic cleansing has had on the world they inhabit. As the book opens, the reader is introduced to Palestinian protagonist and nurse Khalil Ayyoub who keeps watch over what readers come to understand as his father figure, the comatose Palestinian freedom fighter Yunes al-Asadi. Khoury's book is a winding epic of Palestinian history in the 20th century, guided by Khalil, who struggles with the burden of the memory of his people. The story is told in Khalil's first-person narration as he speaks aloud to the comatose freedom fighter Yunes in his hospital room, telling him he "decided to try to treat you [Yunes] by talking to you," trying to keep Yunes alive through story (30). Khalil tends to Yunes in the hospital as a nurse, but he too is confined to the hospital for his own reasons: When his lover, Shams, is killed, her family assumes he was involved in her death and are searching for him to take revenge (32). Khalil tells his stories

nonlinearly, starting over repeatedly in an effort to tell Yunes' life story, including the dying man's love story with his wife and the stories of members of the Palestinian community. As the narrator, Khalil starts over, jumps to different storylines, misremembers, and retells. Khalil laments his struggle to remember and repeat these stories while Yunes can't correct or corroborate him, telling Yunes, "Now you know the whole story, but I don't. . . I've told you a story I don't know. I understand nothing . . ." (242). Khalil's desperation is obvious in his frequent assertions that he is "drowning" in the memory of the stories he doesn't trust himself to recount (242). Khoury explores the way the Nakba has devastated Khalil and his community as Khalil struggles to articulate unspeakable violence.

Gate of the Sun's nonlinear and winding nature introduces the reader to how trauma, witnessing, and memory-keeping are also anything but a straight narrative line. Individual memory is fallible and represents only a single perspective, which makes the search for a so-called truth in memory particularly challenging, if not impossible. Specifically traumatic memories are often even more of a challenge when stress and overwhelm dominate the experience of remembering. In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Dori Laub writes that "the trauma survivor who is bearing witness has no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened . . . he or she proudly fears such knowledge, shrinks away from it and is apt to close off at any moment, when facing it" (58). In witnessing, Laub argues, the trauma survivor *creates* a narrative of the experience, a narrative which, until the point of speaking, had not existed in such a form. The nature of traumatic memories means that expressing them is challenging both emotionally and logically, and in bearing witness, a survivor attempts to create a linear record of memories which are not linear and not simple to express.

This struggle with memory is represented by periods where Khalil admits to forgetting or misremembering specific stories. The nonlinearity also mimics for the reader themself the experience of witnessing and remembering, in which the person remembering does not always access or recount memories in a strictly linear fashion. In fact, second-hand witness is often made up of a broad collection of memories and stories heard in no particular order by a variety of people sharing their experiences, similarly to how Khalil pulls memories from across his entire community to recount. Khalil comments to Yunes that "It fell to me to collect your asides and mutterings and work them into a story to tell you" (32). As a second-hand witness to the beginning of the Nakba through Yunes' life story, Khalil must do his best to make sense of the stories he receives and order them correctly, an experience the reader joins him in. In applying a nonlinear structure to Khalil's storytelling and including Khalil's own lapses of memory, Khoury invites the reader to participate in the struggle to witness.

Throughout his meandering stories, Khalil establishes a throughline in Yunes' personal history. Khalil recounts how, following the displacement in 1948, Yunes and his wife, Nahilah, were separated by the newly formed Israeli border. As a freedom fighter[2], Yunes was a wanted man in the new state of Israel: Crossing the border was extremely dangerous for him. Meanwhile, Nahilah lived with his family on the Israeli side of the new border. Yunes snuck frequently over the border to meet Nahilah and bring her to a remote cave they named Bab al-Shams, or the gate of the sun, so that they might continue their love story and so Yunes might occasionally see his young children. The Israeli government is suspicious, and Nahilah is frequently interrogated while they search for Yunes' location (71). Khalil develops this

[2] Also referred to by the Arabic translation "fedayeen" in the novel, Yunes is among many who opposed the Israeli occupation and organized to take action against its establishment.

throughline as it was told to him by Yunes before the coma, and Khalil attempts to fill in the gaps where he can.

Khalil recounts that the Israeli government stops looking for Yunes once he manages to fake his death. In 1960, Yunes is part of an unsuccessful operation in Galilee which gives him the opportunity to disappear, leaving the Israeli government to assume he must have been killed (137). He hides at Bal al-Shams for five months until Nahilah can sneak away to see him. Together, Nahilah and Yunes experience the births of ten children and the tragic death of their first son. Yunes frequently refers to the fact that he "fought for the sake of a woman I loved," though the distance sometimes strained their relationship (22). The gate of the sun is "the only liberated plot of Palestinian land" and "the country I [Yunes] created for my wife" (522, 523). Yunes tells Khalil he stopped seeing Nahilah in 1978 and began instead to make telephone calls, in his 50's and too old to make the dangerous hike across the border. When Nahilah eventually dies of old age and ill health sometime between 1978 and 1998, she tells her children to find Bab al-Shams to take away her and Yunes' belongings and to close the cave with stones so that it might remain private (522).

At the same time, Khalil also tells Yunes his *own* love story with a woman named Shams, whom he met in 1975 while they both worked with Fatah to protect Shatila. Shams was trapped in an unhappy marriage when she and Khalil met, telling him that her husband assaulted and controlled her (43). Khalil describes loving her more than she loved him. "She dominated me completely, and she knew it," he tells Yunes (44). However, Khalil discovers that Shams had had another lover, Sameh Abu Diab, who she killed because he wouldn't agree to marry her. Sameh's family take their revenge on Shams and murder her, luring her to another refugee camp and surprising her with machine guns (45). Now in 1998, heartbroken and lost in the aftermath of

so much loss, Khalil hides in the hospital with Yunes, “awaiting death at the hands of Shams’ family,” who believe he was involved in her death (32).

Thus, Khoury sets up a situation where two Palestinian men experience their own individual kinds of limbo—one physical and the other metaphorical. Khalil and Yunes seem unable to do anything but lie in wait next to each other. As Yunes’ health deteriorates, Khalil becomes increasingly desperate to keep him alive. Should Yunes die, Khalil knows the comatose man’s first-hand knowledge of Palestine and 1948 will die with him, and Khalil feels incapable of carrying the memory, the weight of this history, on his own. The other hospital workers Khalil encounters feel less strongly and tell Khalil to let Yunes go. He’s a hero, Khalil insists when told to let Yunes pass on, and “this isn’t how stories end” (242). Yunes is larger than life to Khalil as eh struggles to accept that someone so “mythic” could die (16). Thus, to convince himself against all odds that Yunes will wake up, he configures Yunes’ slow death as a sort of rebirth. He convinces himself that Yunes is instead being rebirthed to start life over again as a child. Khalil tells Yunes, “You don’t have to agree, Father, because you’re my son now. Let me call you ‘son,’ please” (455). Khalil hopes that Yunes can defeat death—both Yunes’ literal, physical death and the death of the greater memories of the Palestinian people.

However, Yunes is not more than human and cannot defeat death. Tragically, during one of the rare times Khalil is away from the bedside, Yunes passes away. The novel ends as Khalil stands in front of Yunes’ grave, bereft. In the last sentence of the novel, Khalil tells Yunes’ grave, “I stretch out my hand, I grasp the ropes of rain, and I walk and walk and walk” (540). The last sentence ends unpunctuated, a poignant reference to a pain that still has not ended despite the finality of physical death.

Gate of the Sun explores the impact of the ongoing Nakba on the Palestinian community. Not only is the violence continuous and repetitious, but it has disrupted the lives of displaced Palestinian refugees in ways they struggle to communicate. Even the challenge of witness bearing and memory keeping becomes increasingly more impossible in the face of endless violence. Through *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury preforms his own act of witness bearing as he illuminates the challenges facing the Palestinian community and the violence of the Nakba that has created those challenges.

PART II: KHOURY AS A WITNESS TO PALESTINE

In *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury seeks to explore the experience of memory keeping for the Palestinian people through the 20th century. He bears his own second-hand witness to the Nakba and asks keys questions about Palestinian memory keeping such as: What does it mean to bear witness—not only to remember the stories of others and listen with an empathetic ear but to *testify* to them, corroborate them, and speak out about them? How do we articulate the suffering of others in a meaningful way? And in what ways has occupation and an unending Nakba silenced the Palestinians as the first-hand witnesses to their own traumatic generational experience? Using his own personal experiences with empathetic witnessing to the Palestinian people, Khoury both explores witnessing as a theme and simultaneously bears that witness through the writing of *Gate of the Sun*.

Of the Palestinian people's displacement, author Khoury writes that the Nakba continues and that the trauma has not yet come to a close ("Rethinking the Nakba," 259). "This is why," Khoury writes, "my feeling is that Gate of the Sun is an unfinished novel, and it will remain open until the moment when this wound is healed" (266). Like Khalil, the Palestinian people cannot

mourn a pain that has not yet ended even as first-hand knowledge of the past passes beyond our understanding. They are forced into a limbo space: the Nakba happened in 1948, and yet it is still happening today in 2026; many live as refugees, neither a citizen of the land they live in nor able to return to a homeland that can claim them. An estimated 9.17 million Palestinians, 65.5 percent of the Palestinian population worldwide, are refugees ("Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 2019-2021" 39). While the Nakba continues, Palestinians will continue to be displaced and subjected to community-wide trauma.

There has been a concerted effort by certain nations to erase the Palestinian past, and yet despite this effort to deny the violence of the past ever happened, that violence never seems to end. In 2025, the Palestinian people seem to exist in a seemingly endless in-between space that displacement and oppression have exiled them to, much like Khalil and Yunes trapped in the hospital. *Gate of the Sun* expresses Khoury's interest in the sort of in-between space that a traumatic past makes of the present. Like Yunes, Palestinian history and the truth and experience of the Nakba are neither dead nor alive, neither present nor past. It's not over because the ethnic cleansing perpetrated against Palestinians continues in extreme ways. However, first-hand memory of the first expulsion in 1948 is almost entirely gone now almost seventy-seven years later as these first-hand witnesses pass away. Many Palestinians live as refugees, their ethnic and national identity denied them, unable to return home.

Confronted with the challenge of memory-keeping for Palestinian refugees, Khoury seeks to explore and add to the witnessing effort through *Gate of the Sun*. The novel, Khoury says, ". . .is a book to send the Palestinians a message of love as a people" (C-SPAN). Khoury describes the conditions in which Palestinian refugees live in countries such as Lebanon, where he became personally familiar with them. To the Arab world at large, Khoury says, "Palestine is sacred,"

but that the Palestinians themselves are not and are in fact broadly mistreated. “Palestine is only sacred,” he continued, “if the Palestinians are our brothers and sisters, if the tragedy of the Palestinians is our tragedy. . .” (C-SPAN). In writing *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury was explicitly interested in making the Palestinians his “brothers and sisters” through his empathetic witness of their suffering (C-SPAN). To Khoury, making “the tragedy of the Palestinians [his] tragedy” meant writing about them and validating the things they were experiencing through his witness.

A Lebanese Christian, Khoury’s degrees of separation from Muslim Palestinians are often cited when he’s asked about his obviously personal and passionate commitment to Palestinian liberation. Lebanon in fact has several political stakes in Palestinian liberation. Many Palestinian refugees reside in camps in Lebanon, and UNRWA estimated 222,000 were living there actively as of February 2025 (UNRWA). Lebanon has also been subject to Israeli invasions, attacks, and war crimes such as the Sabra and Shatila massacre or the 1978 invasion. Considering this history, Khoury’s dedication to Palestinian liberation as a Lebanese citizen is not entirely remote.

Even more relevant than geographical proximity, however, is Khoury’s interest in pan-Arabism and his novel is his expression of this belief as part of Palestinian liberation. In 1990, Khoury was interviewed about the Lebanese civil war[3] by Barbara Harlow and is quoted saying, “If Lebanon collapses, we will not have Palestine. And if we have Palestine, we will have Lebanon” (38). Khoury’s belief in the interdependent fates of Palestine and Lebanon are based in pan-Arabism, a leftist anti-colonial political ideology which argues for a collective Arab identity that supersedes national boundaries. The popularity of pan-Arabism peaked in the 1960s and

[3] The Lebanese civil war took place between 1975 and 1990 as a result of the dissolution of the central government of Lebanon and the rise of various militia groups in its place (Kingston).

’70s but largely lost that popularity with both the decline of Fatah (a faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization) and the loss of belief in the ideology’s effectiveness (Britannica Editors). This political movement was deeply engaged in Palestinian liberation, and it asserted that the Palestinian’s subjugation was that of all Arab people.

As a proponent for Palestinian liberation, the influence of pan-Arab nationalism’s belief in a border-less Arab identity is visible in Khoury’s work. Khoury’s work with Fatah is also evidence of his dedication to Palestinian liberation and pan-Arabism. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) supported pan-Arab political ideology during the late ’60s when Khoury became a member of a PLO faction called the Palestine National Liberation Movement, i.e. Fatah (Archipelago). The PLO, formed in 1964 to unite the displaced Palestinian population, is a political organization which seeks to return land to Palestinians and replace the state of Israel with a secular state. Over the years, it engaged in attacks on Israel and eventually worked with Israel to sign the controversial Oslo Accords in 1993, which was meant to establish a two-state solution. Fatah (“victory” in English) is a faction of the PLO which, similarly, sought to wrestle control of the land back from the Israeli occupation through military action.

During his time as a member of Fatah, Khoury moved to Jordan in 1967, where it was headquartered, to participate in the liberation effort. There, he lived with Palestinians in refugee camps, listening to their stories and getting to know them personally. Like Khalil witnessing Yunes’ life story, Khoury became acquainted with the Palestinian people and had to contend with what it means to maintain their memories and stories. As he received these stories, he developed an idea to write a novel centered around the events of the Nakba and the people who were impacted by it (CSPAN). He returned to Lebanon in 1970 after several years in Jordan

following the Jordanian civil war, having come to understand the Palestinian people more intimately and grappling with the experiences he bore witness to (Archipelago).

Khoury came to understand that witnessing was key to memory and history during his time living with Palestinian refugees in Jordan (1967-1970). In Jordan he conducted research, recorded stories, and got to know the Palestinian people in a deeper way. He became a collector of memories of the Nakba (CSPAN). Khoury writes, "I felt that my job was to collect memories and write stories never written before. In this huge personal journey, I discovered Palestine, a land I had never visited" ("Rethinking the Nakba" 266). Khoury's experience witnessing the plight of the Palestinian refugees he got to know is reflected in the stories which comprise *Gate of the Sun.*

Khoury's love of and dedication to the Palestinian people is evidenced by his political engagement and the literary works he produced. He believed that Palestinian liberation is possible and he dedicated himself to this effort not only through his work with Fatah but in his novels and his academic writing. Khoury writes about the silencing the Palestinian people experience in the wake of the Nakba: "Nobody was ready to hear the story of their pain" (261) and "[the Palestinians] lost . . . the ability to tell their story" ("Rethinking the Nakba" 260). Witnessing, Khoury argues here, is vitally important to Palestinian liberation because it directly addresses the Palestinian silencing, which they have experienced and continue to experience as a result of the Nakba. Khoury's witnessing efforts in the refugee camp in Jordan[4] and his later writing of *Gate of the Sun* are representative of his belief in and effort toward the eventual Palestinian liberation.

[4] Khoury does not appear to have ever named the exact camp he lived in.

Khoury published *Gate of the Sun* based on his second-hand witnessing of the Palestinian refugees' stories and his first-hand witnessing of the Nakba. In "Rethinking the Nakba," Khoury argues, like Ashrawi, that the Nakba has not yet ended and he describes an ongoing Nakba (or "continuous" in Khoury's words). Palestinians are, to this day, still experiencing ethnic cleansing and displacement at the hands of the state of Israel. Khoury refers to Ashrawi's theory when he writes, "I am questioning the approach of dealing with the *nakba* as a historical event that happened in the past . . . what happened hasn't stopped happening for sixty-two years. It is still happening now, in this moment" (original emphasis, 259). A continuous Nakba is a consistent theme in Khoury's novel and essays and though Ashrawi had not yet coined the term by the time *Gate of the Sun* was written, the concept informed the writing. Khoury has been historically invested in the Palestinian refugee community and personally bore witness to the things they were experiencing, enabling him to write about the ongoing Nakba and the challenge of memory-keeping.

PART III: MEMORY AND WITNESSING—FROM EUROPE TO THE LEVANT

We might better understand Khoury's witnessing and memory-keeping as he expresses it in *Gate of the Sun* through an exploration of the field of memory studies. This field seeks to understand how we memorialize and attempt to address that past. Khoury uses *Gate of the Sun* to explore similar themes, memorializing the experiences of the Palestinian people while also explicitly detailing protagonist Khalil's challenges with witnessing. Khalil laments to the comatose Yunes about this challenge, saying, "It fell to me to collect your asides and mutterings and work them into a story to tell you" (32). Khalil must not only struggle to maintain Yunes' memories but also to contextualize and to build a history out of them. Over the past century,

memory studies have developed throughout both the Western world and the Arab world to answer that challenge, and the development continues today in increasingly experimental ways.

Sigmund Freud pioneered the earliest work of memory studies in 1899 with his essay, "Screen Memories," in which he describes ambiguous and potentially repressed childhood memory (Gay 117). Later, in his essay "A Note on the 'Mystic Writing Pad," in 1925, Freud posits that memory is similar to a "mystic writing pad," a sort of wax transfer paper technology. The brain, Freud asserts, writes new memories on top of old ones and with time, the older memories fade, but their imprint is still visible, if imperfectly, on the wax underneath the transfer paper (Freud 227). Here, Freud establishes the basic theories on how memory works, building a base for the theorists that follow him.

Twenty-five years later, the now-foundational text *The Collective Memory* (1950) was published posthumously by family members of the French sociologist and Holocaust victim Maurice Halbwachs. In it, Halbwachs argues that social groups build and share memories collectively, and that these memories are defined by the unique perspective of the social group (18). As the field of memory studies picked up speed after the Holocaust, both Freud and Halbwachs' works became important springboards for future keystone memory theory.

Moving forward, in the 1990s Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub built off Halbwachs' ideas about collective and social memory when they wrote about the unique failures and successes of witnessing the Holocaust in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. They present "a theory of a yet uncharted . . . relationship between art and culture . . . and the . . . witnessing of historical events," arguing for art as a space for witness bearing (xx). Felman and Laub use examples in art to develop ideas about the concept of

witnessing. Their work was followed by the seminal writing of Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, published in 1995, in which he argues that location can become a sort of container for collective memory, identifying, like Felman and Laub, another space which bears witness (5).

Since the 1990s, theory about witnessing has expanded further from a space where groups memorialize collective experiences and more explicitly into witnessing as a space for progress and social justice. Kelly Oliver, American professor of philosophy and author of *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (2001), argues for an adapted theory of witnessing which she names "witness-response" to apply witnessing to ethics. Oliver asserts that mutual recognition "can become a symptom of oppression rather than its cure" and that "it may require us to go beyond recognition to consider our proximity to those whom we do not recognize" (474). This new kind of witness argues for a broader application of collective memory in that those outside of the directly affected group may bear witness to those memories as well. *Prosthetic Memory* (2004) by Alison Landsberg responds to this call for a broader "collective" and argues that societies, and specifically American society, uses art to apply collective memory belonging to other groups to themselves almost like a prosthetic (3).

Similarly accepting the call for a broader "collective" is Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory," published in 2008 in "The Generation of Postmemory." Hirsch defines her theory about ". . . experiences . . . transmitted to [the 'generation after'] so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (emphasis original, 5). She describes the process of second generations receiving and maintaining the memory of previous generations, particularly family members, as if the event the memory details happened to them directly. *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) by Michael Rothberg argues that the work of decolonization

and the memory studies work into the Holocaust have inspired and developed each other, proving the interdependent nature the way we develop memory as a collective (6).

Forays into the act of witnessing and memory-keeping are increasingly experimental. Graphic novels, for instance, are a rising art form and include such works as *Maus* (1980) by Art Spiegelman, which depicts the author's father's experience with the Holocaust and the author's own experience chronicling it, and *Persepolis* (2000-2003) by Marjane Satrapi, which depicts the author's childhood in Iran during the Islamic Revolution and her eventual return to Iran as an adult. Modern and performance art is another experimental form through which artists record their witness. Minouk Lim's *Monument 300—Chasing Watermarks* (2014-15) is a postmodern expedition into witness, memorializing the experience had by the daughters of a victim of a political mass murder in North Korea while searching for their father's body. Participants enter a dark field with only a lantern, seeking 300 hidden and transparent "monuments" which represent not only the daughters' father but also the other 299 victims murdered with him (ASJC). Witnessing efforts keep up with the times as artists look for more appropriate and expressive ways to maintain memory.

In the Arab world, memory-keeping and witnessing efforts evolved as well. The Nakba had already begun as of 1948, and Palestinian writers began publishing their memories and witnesses. Ghassan Kanafani published one of the most famous Palestinian novels of all time in 1963, *Men in the Sun*, following three Palestinian refugees in Iraq who arrange to be smuggled to Kuwait to find work but tragically die just outside Kuwait while hiding in an empty water tank at a border checkpoint (Kanafani). Kanafani's novel describes the suffering and silencing Palestinian refugees had been experiencing since 1948. Later, Christan Palestinian Edward Said published *Orientalism* (1978) and *The Question of Palestine* (1979), which both challenge

popular Western narratives about the East and Palestine. Through these works, Said seeks to correct the narrative about the East and Palestine, bearing witness to the West of the truth about the Arab world. *Orientalism* is one of the seminal texts on postcolonialism, and it argues that the West's racist and incorrect assumptions about the East are driven by imperialism (5) *The Question of Palestine* describes the history of Palestine and the Nakba and argues for the Palestinians right to return (48). In the West Bank, iconic Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish publishes *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?* (1999), an epic poem describing not only his own experience with the Nakba but also those of the greater Palestinian community (Darwish). Palestinian authors wrote about their experiences and bore witness to the false narrative and silencing they were subject to.

Current Palestinian memory is explored and maintained in similarly experimental and postmodern ways as those in other cultures. Impactful examples include contemporary Palestinian artists Hazem Harb and Dima Srouji. Harb's exhibit titled *Temporary Museum. For Palestine* (sic) was shown in in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, in 2021, which featured Palestinian antiques in glass cases against large projections of photos of Palestine on the walls (Maraya Art Centre). His exhibition challenged participants to consider the ancient-now-temporary nature of Palestinian culture as it is threatened today by oppression. In 2023, Palestinian artist and architect Dima Srouji memorialized the destruction of 30 *qamariyyas*, or stained-glass windows, which had been displayed in historic mosques before Israeli soldiers destroyed them a year earlier in 2022. Srouji's art installation, *Maintaining the Sacred*, is a *qamariyya,* disembodied and standing on wooden support planks, perhaps indicating the resilience of Palestinian culture (Srouji). Palestinian artists experiment with memory-keeping in

similarly experimental ways as other cultures, producing artwork that witnesses and memorializes.

In sum, memory studies have developed rapidly over the course of the last century until now as theorists, artists, and novelists struggle to contextualize and memorialize the past. The study is credited as having begun with Freud's screen memory and Halbwachs' collective memory and grew from there into more expansive ways to think about memory and witness, such as Hirsch's postmemory, among other theories. Meanwhile in the Levant, Palestinian artists and theorists memorialized their experiences, with notable examples including novelist Ghassan Kanafani and theorist Edward Said. In more recent years, attempts at memory keeping and witnessing continue to expand into the realms of graphic novels and modern art. *Gate of the Sun* explores similar themes, fitting into the growing collection of art that bears witness. As theory develops and witnesses reach for increasingly postmodern expressions for their memory-keeping, they grapple with key questions: What do we owe to others in their suffering? How do we express the memories of our own suffering? And what is the cost of forgetting? In theory and art, witnesses continue to seek answers to these questions.

PART IV: OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Khoury uses *Gate of the Sun* to explore the complicated experience of witnessing the Nakba. He not only bears his own witness through the writing of the book, but he also uses his protagonist, Khalil, to further engage the challenges of witnessing as Khalil attempts to memorialize the life of his comatose father figure, Yunes. Through *Gate of the Sun*, witnessing is defined in a number of ways: It's an articulation of the silencing the Palestinian people have

experienced, a traumatic postmemorial mirror to the experiences they struggle to memorialize, and a vehicle for resistance and hope for the future of Palestine. *Gate of the Sun* speaks to the challenge and the trauma of witnessing the Nakba, calling attention to the suffering of oppressed Palestinians.

"Chapter One: Witnessing Silence" is about how Khoury explores witnessing as the articulation of silence. The Palestinian people have been silenced (murdered, traumatized, invalidated), and *Gate of the Sun* calls attention to this through Khalil's narration. At the center of the book, Khalil briefly stops speaking to Yunes and summarizes his frustration, angry that Yunes can't respond and specifically that he can't cry. This speaks to a very literal, physical silencing to which *Gate of the Sun* bears witness: that Yunes is dying. Later, Khalil is unable to tell the French actors the details about his experience with the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The rest of the people in the camp are similarly quiet. Trauma silences the people who have experienced it. They have no words to make others understand what they experienced. Furthermore, Khalil describes Yunes as a symbol and says that the Palestinians are a people without a memory. In having lost their country and having had their national identity challenged and erased, the Palestinian people have been invalidated (Khoury 173). Their very national identity has been silenced. In part because of this, the Palestinian people struggle to name their experiences. The book itself and Khoury's authorship is another example of this: *Gate of the Sun*, as it was written by a non-Palestinian man, speaks around Palestinian silence and makes that silence visible.

In "Chapter Two: Witnessing the Nakba as Ongoing," I explore how the reversal of time through Khalil's relationship to Yunes speaks to Khalil's experience with memory and witness bearing. At the very beginning of the book, Khalil considers Yunes a father figure and addresses

him directly as "Father." As Yunes' health begins to deteriorate throughout his coma, however, Khalil begins to insist instead that Yunes is his son, hoping for Yunes' miraculous rebirth (456). In this way, time seems to move nonlinearly, perhaps representing the continuous Nakba and the undying past of the Palestinian peoples' struggle. Not only does the memory of the Nakba live to torment those who remember, but its impact and current manifestations are alive today. In this way, the past is reborn repeatedly with each new generation of Palestinians who grow up to remember it and face its modern iterations. It cannot die or be mourned because it resurrects. In a continuous Nakba, time becomes unreliable. The key to this interpretation lies, however, in the fact that Yunes *does* die. He is also neither literal father nor son to Khalil. Yunes' "transformation" to son refers to both the horror of a continuous Nakba and the hope for a future without it, but this transformation only exists in Khalil's own insistence. Khalil's experience with witness bearing warps his experience with time and makes him desperate to resurrect the past, to fix what he's bearing witness to in the hope that he might one day be able to bear witness to something better.

"Chapter Three: Witnessing as Hope for the Future of Palestine" examines the titular "gate of the sun," the cave in which Yunes and Nahilah meet just inside the Israeli border near Galilee, a space neither perfectly outdoors in the elements nor inside a home, neither fully inside the populated areas of Israel nor outside of its borders. Not only is the imagery in the name inviting and almost evocative of a potential new day, the gate of the sun is the place in which the lovers in Khalil's stories meet to *continue* their love story and to move forward with their lives together despite opposition. In this transitional space, Yunes and Nahilah find a gate that they can *open*, a door that is not impossibly open and closed at the same time. In Khoury's own words, the driving idea behind *Gate of the Sun* is a story about "overcome[ing] occupation

through love" (CSPAN). Similar to this act of hope and love in a transitional space is Khalil's witness bearing as an act of love toward Yunes. In the transitional space of memory, Khalil bears witness as an act of love to his father figure and his people. The gate of the sun as an expression of love under the conditions of oppression represents progress and the promise of hope and a future is an ideal Khalil reaches for. It transcends the past to exist in Khalil's stories as a representation of the possibilities for happiness and a space and time beyond a never-ending Nakba, a possibility Khalil keeps alive through virtue of his effort to love through memory.

CONCLUSION: WITNESSING FOR THE FUTURE OF PALESTINE

Israel broke the Oslo Accords in 2023, a peace agreement between Israel and the PLO signed in 1995, by invading the Gaza Strip (Britannica Editors). The Israeli military has been murdering civilians and blocking humanitarian aid with the purported intent to destroy Hamas, the Islamist resistance organization that eventually replaced the secular Fatah. The siege on Gaza has been brutal and almost constant for over two years (PBS). Gate of the Sun's description of a continuous Nakba and its themes about witnessing the Palestinian plight become increasingly relevant as the world at large reckons with Israel's ethnic cleansing.

Yet Khoury believed that there would be a future in which Palestinians would be liberated. He wrote: "the moment *will* come when the peoples of the Mashreq will wake from this nightmare to discover that life is possible without wars and massacres and madness" (266, emphasis added). He expressed this sincere belief in the careful attention he paid to the process of witnessing throughout *Gate of the Sun*, through the depiction of Khalil's narration, his

traumatic postmemory, and the appropriation of the titular gate of the sun as a space where love can persist in the face of occupation and oppression.

Thus, this thesis moves forward with the following questions in mind: In what ways does Khoury explore witnessing as liberatory? How might witnessing also be traumatic? What challenges do witnesses to the Nakba face and how might they confront them? *Gate of the Sun* is thematically concerned with the responsibility and meaning of witnessing but more important is that its very existence is an exercise in the same, a letter of love and compassionate attention to a painfully oppressed people and the conviction, communicated by that witness, that they will one day be recognized.

Chapter One: Silencing

Witnessing silence and the effect of silencing, though apparently paradoxical, are integral to the experience of witnessing. It calls attention to experiences which had been previous silenced, but it will never be able to *undo* silencing. Instead of filling that gap of silence, witnessing draws attention to injustice and makes the effects of the silencing apparent.

Because witnessing doesn't fill that gap, silence is an inherent feature of the witnessing process. In "Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History," author Dori Laub writes a witness "must *listen to and hear the silence*, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech . . . [They] must recognize, acknowledge and address that silence" (original emphasis, 58). Laub refers here to the experience of listening to a victim recount a traumatic experience. The witness must learn to both allow the speaker to speak *and* to hear in the speaker's account the emotional experience they do not or cannot express, including the silencing effect trauma has undoubtedly had on the speaker. Silence, Laub says, is an integral part of the witnessing process. "Speaking mutely" sounds paradoxical, but it may in fact constitute the very act of witnessing (58). In this apparently paradoxical act, the witness must hear what can't be heard and articulate what can't be spoken, that is the trauma they are bearing witness to. These traumatic experiences can never truly be shared, and so the witness must look for these feelings in the silences where they go unexpressed.

This chapter focuses on how Elias Khoury explores witnessing as an articulation of silence in *Gate of the Sun*. It considers how Palestinians in the novel are historically silenced in multiple ways: through the denial of a coherent national narrative, through the difficulty of expressing traumatic experience, and through death and murder. In each of these instances, the

act of witnessing makes that silencing visible. Part I discusses the silencing of the Palestinian national identity and grapples with the absence of this sense of identity. Part II addresses the ways in which trauma inherently silences victims and the impossibility of articulating intense traumatic experiences. Part III is about how death silences Palestinians through the loss of first-hand witnesses.

PART I: SILENCE AS THE DENIAL OF A NATIONAL IDENTITY

In *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury's characters reckon with the silencing of their national identity by witnessing that identity. This is evident in moments in which the characters elaborate on their unique perspectives on Palestine such as Yunes' nebulous "feeling" of Palestine, Khalil's inherited pillow, and the frequent use of videotapes in the camp. Even Khoury's own authorship also bears witness to this silenced identity position, making the lack of Palestinian authorship obvious.

In "Permission to Narrate," Said writes about the Palestinian national story and identity, describing the conditions under which this story and associated identity are created. He states: "Facts . . . require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain, and circulate them. Such a narrative must have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian case, homeland for the resolution of its exiles since 1948" (252). He continues "national identity . . . is interested in its origins, its history of suffering, its need to survive" (266). For Said, a national narrative must string together historical, collective experiences into a cohesive and broadly accepted story, and it must have both a beginning and an end (252). Through the building and acceptance of a national narrative, a shared national identity is formed. From the vantage point of this identity position, members of the community can bear witness to their own experiences, contextualized and empowered by the broadly accepted national narrative.

Because the Palestinian national narrative has been silenced, Palestinian identity has also been challenged. Palestinian activist Hanan Ashrawi says that "the Palestinians as a people were slated for national obliteration, cast outside the course of history, their identity denied, and their very human cultural and historical reality suppressed" (98). The Palestinian people have had their national identity invalidated by the ethnic cleansing and displacement of the Nakba. In having lost their country and having had their identity challenged and erased, their very national narrative has been silenced. In part because of this, the Palestinian people struggle to name their experiences and receive recognition. As a people "slated for national obliteration," the Palestinians are denied validation when speaking about their experiences *as* Palestinians.

In addition, Palestinian national identity has been challenged not just by violence but by Israel's competing narrative. Said references Israeli Prime Minister from 1969-1974, Golda Meir, who, in 1969, is famously quoted as having said that, "There was no such thing as Palestinians" (Giles). Later in the same interview, she says, "It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country from them. They did not exist" (Giles). Meir literally denies the Palestinian people their name and their history. This example, though recognized as extreme, is representative of a broader narrative which seeks to erase Palestinian identity.

Meir's comments are famous, but the institutional denial of a Palestinian identity and nation is older than her. The popular Zionist slogan, "A land without a people for a people without a land," was first published by Christian Zionist Alexander Keith in 1843, and the idea that Palestinians did not exist or that they held no claim over Palestine has been repeated consistently through assertions that the Palestinians were nomadic, did not then consider themselves Palestinian, that they abandoned Palestine virtually without provocation, or that they

were incapable of cultivating the land ("A Land without a People for a People without a Land"). Said writes that ". . . Zionism always undertakes to speak for Palestine and the Palestinians; this has always meant a blocking operation, by which the Palestinian cannot be heard from (or represent himself) directly on the world stage" (*The Question of Palestine* 30). This invalidation of Palestine's national narrative and the effort Zionists make to speak over Palestinians and impose their own national narrative means that Palestinian voices spoken over and decontextualized by the lack of a cohesive national story.

In fact, because of this invalidation, the definition of identity as a Palestinian is blurry. Their name and history are institutionally denied by the leaders of Israel and other world superpowers. Khoury underscores this crisis when he writes that "Suddenly a whole people became nameless and had no right to use their name and refer to their national identity . . . This was one of the most painful elements of the 1948 war" ("Rethinking the Nakba" 259). To be denied the language to name yourself and your experiences is as good as claiming those experiences don't exist. In sum, institutional silencing has challenged all the ways in which someone might claim Palestinian identity.

Having a national identity invalidated is a form of silencing because it insists that Palestine as a country and Palestinians as citizens don't definitionally exist and therefore can't speak for themselves: they are denied autonomy. Someone always speaks for them—Israel, the US, the Lebanese, and so many others. It also situates their national story as one where Palestinians are cast into roles which better suit the dominant narrative. Said responds to this when he writes that Israeli history refers to Palestinians only as "non-Jews" ("Permission to Narrate" 251). Without a name, the Palestinian peoples' collective experiences are more easily

denied and invalidated. They are spoken over and renamed by others without the authority of their own self-determination.

Khoury's very authorship as a non-Palestinian author calls attention to and articulates the silencing they have experienced. An uncertain identity position is silencing in and of itself, leaving victims without a contextualized narrative or sense of communal self. It also results in an absence made particularly obvious by the presence of Khoury's authorship of *Gate of the Sun* as a non-Palestinian author. Khoury's citizenship is commonly remarked upon by critics' alert to the irony of a non-Palestinian author writing a narrative so deeply concerned with the experience of being Palestinian. Writer Amir Khadem writes that "the fact that it takes a neighbouring outsider to compile the reminiscent fragments of these memories into a condensed narrative reveals how damaging the conflict of remembrance has been for Palestinians" (sic, "The Permanence of an Ephemeral Pain" 284). Khoury's non-Palestinian authorship calls attention to the silencing of the Palestinian identity.

Khoury writes that "The muteness of literature is part of the muteness of history or, in other words, part of the inability of the victim to write the story" (*Rethinking the Nakba* 254). Here, he refers not only to the victims' death but the silencing they experience. Due to their victimization, they are unable to regain narrative and definitional ground. They can't define what happened to them because the aggressor controls the narrative. With reference to Khoury's quote, Youssef Yacoubi writes that "Literary muteness captures the silence, artificialized and discursive silence of history" ("Suspended Crisis in Arab-American and Arabic Literatures" 370). This "literary muteness" is represented through Khoury's authorship: In the face of the "inability of the victim to write the story," Khoury's empathetic second-hand witness makes the absence of Palestinian authorship a clear presence.

In *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury explores the experience of bearing witness to this silenced national identity through the characters' different relationships to their identities as Palestinian and through his own positionality as author of the novel. The characters relate to their identities differently due to the variety of experiences they've had or not had with pre-1948 Palestine and with the refugee camps they live in now.

Yunes, the comatose freedom fighter, is one of the main characters who has experience with pre-1948 Palestine. Yunes' experience with Palestinian identity is defined, paradoxically, by loss and absence, a persistent generational trauma. The narrator and protagonist keeping watch over Yunes, Khalil, recounts Yunes declaring that, "A country is falling into the abyss, feeling that you are part of the whole, and dying because it has died . . . Palestine was the cities . . . In them we could feel something called Palestine" (193). Here, Yunes struggles to identify Palestine but "feels" Palestine in the cities, occupied by people, and by being "part of the whole," identifying a community that experiences things together, reminiscent of Said's definition of a national narrative as communal and broadly accepted. He also, importantly, defines Palestine and his identity as a Palestinian by communal *death* and by "falling into the abyss" (193). As a first-hand witness to the beginning of the Nakba and the loss of his homeland, Yunes experiences loss as part and parcel to his identity as Palestinian because of the way that identity has been silenced.

Loss is also a big part of Khalil's definition of Palestine. Khalil seeks identity and narrative cohesion as a Palestinian, but the effort is complicated for him. He appears to define his Palestinian identity as something inherited and decaying. Khalil was born after 1948, so his experience with pre-Nakba Palestine is limited: he has the stories he's inherited from Yunes and other community members, he has videotapes, and he has a seemingly random object: his

grandmother's pillow, which she had stuffed with flowers. He describes the pillow to Yunes, telling Yunes that his grandmother "used to stuff her pillow with flowers, saying that when she rested her head on it she felt as though she'd returned to her village . . . I would lay my head on her pillow and smell nothing but decay. . . I . . . ended up connecting the smell of Palestine with the smell of that pillow" (38). Here, Khalil describes his second-hand relationship to Palestine as a nation and compares his perception of it to the smell of decay, like something old and already gone. It's something he has inherited, like he inherits the pillow—something he knows his community and family place great stock in but that he can only relate to second-hand. Like Yunes defining his relationship to Palestine as "dying because it has died," Khalil makes a comparison between Palestine and something already dead (193). Because of the way Palestinian identity has been silenced, Khalil, who never knew pre-1948 Palestine, believes that the current Palestine he has inherited is decaying.

To the rest of Khalil's community, Palestine's silencing manifests not as decay but rather as something frozen in the past and insubstantial, accessed only through video. Their connection to video indicates that the identity they communally build is intangible and unstable. Defining Palestine is a challenge throughout the entire course of the novel. A visitor to Yunes, Abu Kamal, tells Khalil his frustration with people in the camp who are obsessed with videotapes they have from before the Nakba. "This isn't Palestine," Abu Kamal says. ". . . they sit in their houses and stare at those films they say are Palestine. We're a video nation and our country's become a video country" (461). Abu Kamal is afraid that Palestine might be in the past, that his country might now only exist in a video. He's incensed by the video-watchers in the camp whose activities only seem to confirm his fear. If the people in the camp can only access Palestine through video, the identity they communally build off the existence of Palestine becomes

intangible and unstable, a picture instead of a place. The insubstantial nature of the Palestine in the videotapes is a shaky ground on which to build a national identity. As quoted earlier, Khalil says that "Everything [in the refugee camp] isn't itself but a simulacrum of itself" (119). The tapes are not what they memorialize—they are only a record of it. The displacement has rocked the narrative and national identity of the Palestinians, silencing their very perception of themselves.

Thus, *Gate of the Sun* bears witness to the silencing of Palestinian refugees' sense of identity due to displacement and ethnic cleansing. Khoury explores how Palestinians bear witness to their silenced identity through such as Yunes' nebulous "feeling" of Palestine, Khalil's inherited pillow, and the frequent use of videotapes in the camp. Even Khoury's own authorship also bears witness to this silence, making the lack of Palestinian authorship obvious. The silencing of Palestinians' sense of identity stems from and is itself a trauma which erases sense of self and keeps its victims unable to define themselves.

PART II: TRAUMA AS SILENCE

Trauma itself is inherently silencing. The failure of language to communicate, or represent, traumatic experiences discourages victims' attempts to speak. Many feel if they attempt to articulate their trauma through language will necessarily be misunderstood by the listener. Essentially, Trauma Studies in the 20th century has grappled with the fact that victims of traumatic experiences have no words to make others understand what they experienced, and their listeners can only access the victim's trauma through the subjectivity of language. In other words, communication always fails, yet it is all we have. Amid this, the act of speaking itself can

also be retraumatizing and painful for a victim, something not all victims will want to endure. Thus, the question here is: In what ways might the experience of trauma lead to the silencing of those who suffered from it, and how might the act of witnessing make that silence apparent?

Laub writes that speakers of trauma and those witnessing, when brought together create a new kind of knowledge. This is a knowledge which has heretofore been unspoken and silent. He writes that until the speaker attempts to witness to their experience, "the trauma survivor . . . has no prior knowledge, no comprehension and no memory of what happened. That [they] profoundly fear such knowledge, shrink away from it" (58). Until the speaker attempts to witness, the trauma is only an experience and not an understanding. However, Laub adds that these speakers "prefer silence so as to protect themselves" from the creation of this new knowledge. To put a traumatic experience into words is to create a record of it which has never existed before, and to make that record is also an attempt to understand emotions that perhaps can't be understood through words.

Khoury writes about this preference for silence through Khalil's experience speaking to a group of foreign visitors. Khalil is approached at the hospital by a small group of French play actors who intend to do research in the refugee camp on the Sabra and Shatila massacre so they can write and perform a play about the massacre later. The French actors want to speak to people who witnessed the Sabra and Shatila massacre, like Khalil, and their families. Khalil is at first reluctant to chaperone them around the camp but agrees once he realizes that "it would be an opportunity to get out of this godforsaken hospital" (252). Throughout this section, Khalil attempts to introduce the French actors to other members of the camp and to describe his own memories but he is silenced by the failure of language to truly communicate his trauma.

Khalil begins with an attempt to articulate his own traumatic experience when he first takes the French actors outside of the hospital and begins to describe his own memories of Sabra and Shatila. Yet thensomething stops him. "'In this street, the bodies were piled up,'" he tells them as they walk past. But "I didn't tell them about the flies; I couldn't bring myself to" (254). Khalil censors himself, unable to share what he had planned. He says that "I'd been determined to tell them the story. . . I told myself that the story of the flies would be the high point" (254). Khalil doesn't admit it in so many words, but once he had agreed to the opportunity to share his memories of the massacre, it seems as though he had committed fully. He prepared what he might say, described himself as "determined" to get the words out. But something stops him from doing so. It might be a stretch to insinuate that Khalil became anxious for the opportunity to bear his own first-hand witness, but he was certainly no longer entirely reluctant as he had been earlier. Despite his attempt to describe what he experienced, he says, "I couldn't bring myself to" (254). It seems that something in the translation from memory to story fails and words fall short.

Khalil's failure to share the true extent of his experience perhaps indicates the inherent impossibility of the act—language, being necessarily representational, can't capture the depth of his feeling, the way this experience changed himself and his community, the actual *impact* of being there. The description is not the experience. Khoury comments on the incomplete nature of language, writing, "Things can only be described in their own terms, and when we compare them, we forget them. . . When we say that a girl's face is like the moon, we forget the girl. We make the description so that we can forget . . ." (68). Here, he makes the argument that language and description in fact distances the speaker and listener from the material experience, even enables them to forget by replacing that experience with imprecise and representational

language. No words are adequate to truly communicate what Khalil went through during the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

What's more is that within the refugee camp and within the Palestinians' broken national identity, language must always be imprecise, a result of a state of being that writer Amir Khadem describes as "permanent temporariness" ("The Permanence of an Ephemeral Pain" 290). Here, Khadem refers to "the lack of any material foundation to stabilize a social identity for Palestinians," or in other words, the transitional state of their lives as refugees has destroyed their national identity, leaving them in a transitional state which paradoxically seems to have no end (290). Because of this paradoxical state of being, the words Palestinians may reach for to describe their experience are uniquely inadequate because their very sense of identity has no stable foundation. Language is ordinarily subjective because words themselves are representational, like Khoury demonstrates with the girl and the moon, but under a state of "permanent temporariness," even the material objects the words signify cannot be static. Representation becomes fluid all the way down.

Khalil speaks to this phenomenon, lamenting not just the failure of language but that failure in the refugee camp specifically because of that "permanent ephemerality" (Khadem 290). Khalil tells Yunes that "We say *house* but we don't live in houses, we live in places that resemble houses. We say *Beirut* but we aren't really in Beirut, we're in a semblance of Beirut" (Khoury 119). Earlier in this speech, Khalil sums up the problem well when he says that "Everything here isn't itself but a simulacrum of itself" (119). A refugee camp is by definition impermanent, transitional, even though it resists its transitional nature by continuing indefinitely. It represents a sort of home between homes—not a destination but a road on the way there. In this way, the camp is only a representation of the permanent homes the people there want to

return to. Similarly, though the camp is in Beirut, Khalil defines it differently. It's not inherently Beirut in the way the rest of the city is—it's an impermanent camp, a makeshift Palestine in lieu of the nation itself. Here, Khalil demonstrates how "permanent temporariness" invades even his language, silencing his attempt to communicate before he can even really begin.

Perhaps the nature of the French play actors' appearance in the camp also contributes to Khalil's inability to express himself. Before he agrees, he's dismissive and suspicious. He says, "These foreigners think that just visiting us is such a big sacrifice that we'll agree to anything they ask," irritated by their entitlement. His conversation with them while they ask him to chaperone them is also tense and loaded. The actors name-drop a prestigious playwright that Khalil doesn't recognize, which alienates him, and then they tell him the writer "wrote a stunningly beautiful text about the Shatila massacre" (251). Khalil is made aware immediately of the differences between him and the actors in front of him, and their attitudes alienate him.

Khalil takes in the actors' words uncomfortably. Especially juxtaposed to the descriptions Khalil later gives of his own experience with the Sabra and Shatila massacre, it's hard to imagine he could consider anything related to it as "stunningly beautiful" as they had described (251). The actors are blithely ignorant to the nature of the experience Khalil had with the massacre—their lives and concerns are obviously starkly different from his, and the way they speak about the massacre delineates the gulf of experience between them. Later, one of the actors, Catherine, puts her head on Khalil's shoulder to cry as he describes his memories. "I tried to move away a little," Khalil comments, "for that sort of thing is frowned upon in the camp, but she didn't move" (253). The actors don't understand the culture in the camp. They do not embody the role Laub writes of listeners, that they must "listen to and hear the silence . . . so as to be a companion in a journey onto an uncharted land, a journey the [speaker] cannot traverse or return from alone"

(59). Instead, the actors come off as pretentious voyeurs with lives and experiences so dramatically different from Khalil's that they appear incapable of understanding what Khalil might have to tell them even if he could. Their behavior makes it clear that they have no true frame of reference. They refuse to listen to the silence, as Laub instructs, and so are incapable of sharing the burden of witness with Khalil.

Later in this section, Khalil attempts to introduce the French actors to other people in the camp who might be able to communicate something about the massacre to them. However, the people are reticent and made uncomfortable by the questions. They refuse to speak. Before the French actors give up completely, one woman shares something with Khalil, but only in Arabic so the French actors won't understand. Of her children, who were murdered during the massacre, she tells him, "Every time I talk about them, or say something to them, they come to me at night. I hear their voices speaking like the wind. . . I know they don't want me to talk about them. The dead remember, and their memories hurt like knives" (258). She's haunted by the memories once they're dredged back up and even worries that the process of remembering could actively hurt her late children. To speak the trauma is, to this woman, like making it real or reliving it again. This is a retraumatization she can't stand.

Further exploring the concept of retraumatization that Palestinians experience when asked to speak, leading to their silence, Khalil describes the story of a character named Dunya. To support fundraising efforts Dunya spoke about her experience with the massacre to journalists and crowds repeatedly until eventually, she couldn't go on. Khalil says that "Dunya became a story telling its own story" (262). He describes her collapsing and eventually being hospitalized, virtually catatonic. To relive a traumatic experience through the telling of it is retraumatizing. The victim of a traumatic experience must revisit the experience every time they relate it. A

study about the retraumatization of Rwandan citizens testifying in tribunals about the 1994 Rwandan genocide argues that "witnessing may have this worsening effect on depression and PTSD because of the nature of witnessing in truth-telling procedures; it involves a type of short and intensive trauma exposure that has been found to be retraumatizing in previous psychological research" (Brounéus 429). The Palestinian refugees in Khalil's community are hesitant to retraumatize themselves, especially in front of strangers, and their silence persists.

Hence, it is important to emphasize that what we see here in *Gate of the Sun* is that attempting to bear witness to a traumatic event is uniquely challenging—and sometimes even impossible. The trauma silences its victims; When Khalil says "I couldn't bring myself to" share his experiences with the French actors, he alludes to silencing as the very nature of trauma itself. Khalil's attempts to witness and the French actors' clumsy attempts listen makes clear the way trauma culminates in a failure to truly communicate. He experiences not only the fear of speaking that Laub describes but also the fear of that new knowledge the speaking would manifest: the reductive recontextualization of his traumatic experience into something language can attempt to capture (Laub 58). The attempt to bear witness to a traumatic experience is so emotionally fraught that it requires a listener who can hear and interpret the silences in the telling.

PART III: SILENCE IN DEATH

Witnessing as explored in *Gate of the Sun* articulates silence both in that it illuminates the silenced Palestinian national identity *and* that it illuminates the silencing nature of trauma which keeps victims from putting their experiences into words. How, then, might witnessing articulate

the most obvious silence—death? In what ways does Khoury explore how witnessing illuminates the silence in death?

Yunes' inability to respond to Khalil and the fact that he is dying speaks to a very literal, physical silencing of the Palestinian people that *Gate of the Sun* bears witness to. Palestinians are silenced through death and murder, and the act of witnessing draws attention to that silencing. In *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury explores this theme through Yunes' silence in his coma and eventual death and in the one-sided conversation Khalil holds with him. Khoury writes that "Death will cover the stories of the Nakba with silence" ("Rethinking the Nakba" 261). Here, Khoury refers to the loss of first-hand witness by death, a loss represented by Yunes' silence. If the first-hand witnesses to the Nakba (both to the events of 1948 and to the ongoing ethnic cleansing that followed) are murdered or pass away, their memory goes with them and leaves silence behind. Yunes' coma and eventual death represent not just the death of a symbol of objectivity in witnessing but also the loss of Yunes' and his contemporaries' first-hand knowledge of the past. Yunes' coma also creates the circumstances for Khalil's one-sided conversation, an explicit reference to a Palestinian people who go unheard by the world.

Khalil sits at Yunes' bedside, burdened with the knowledge that should Yunes die, Khalil will be left to maintain Yunes' first-hand memories alone. Khalil laments that Yunes is "incapable of correcting my errors" in memory-keeping, that Yunes cannot "rescue me from the pool of storytelling in whose waters I'm drowning" (242). Yunes cannot respond to the stories, and he cannot corroborate or correct them either. Because Khalil is alone in his memory-keeping, he struggles with the validity of his witness. "I've told you a story I don't know," Khalil laments. He continues: "I understand nothing . . . but I have to know so I can tell" (242). Khalil feels distinctly incapable of this duty. His memory-keeping is not as a first-hand witness, and "things

are collapsing inside my head. I've almost forgotten all of your names" (242). When Yunes' dies, he is silenced forever. He can no longer give a first-hand account of his own experiences, and his memory is lost with him. Khalil understands the urgency of this loss and the silence that Yunes would leave behind.

In the first part of the novel, we are faced with the idea that to Khalil, Yunes, as that first-hand witness, represents the possibility of a truth of the past. Khalil is grieved to lose Yunes' first-hand witness not only because Yunes loses the ability to further witness for himself but also because Khalil has made of him a symbol of objectivity in witnessing. When Khalil's superior at the hospital, Dr. Amjad, pulls Khalil aside and says he plans to transfer Yunes to "a home," one Khalil knows to be inhumane to patients, Khalil explodes at Dr. Amjad (172). Khalil insists that Yunes is "a symbol . . . that you [Yunes] were the first, that you were Adam, that nobody was going to touch you. . ." (172). Later, Khalil says, "Everyone knows [Yunes'] story. Doesn't it mean anything to [Dr. Amjad] or what? Has he lost his memory?" (173). To Khalil, Yunes isn't just a father figure and former freedom fighter: he's larger than life. Yunes is more symbol and story than anything else, further consecrated perhaps by his comatose state, which transforms him from complex human and into the realm of the interpretable story.

Yunes' death represents silencing even in the abstract as Khalil grapples with the death of this symbol of "correct" witness. Even if Yunes should eventually sit up and speak for himself, he would not "know the answer" (175). Khalil wishes Yunes could be an objective vehicle for Khalil to understand the past, but he isn't—because he is comatose and simply because he is human. His perspective would always only be that: perspective. And if even Yunes can't articulate a "correct" witness, how could Khalil ever do so?

Khalil cannot abide what Yunes' death means for the symbolic figure he has created. By the novel's end, his grief is directed not only toward the man himself but toward the collapse of the myth that sustained him. Standing before Yunes' grave, Khalil refuses the reality of death: ". . . No, this isn't how stories end. No" (540). Earlier he had imagined a more fitting conclusion—one in which Yunes would "get up . . . return to your country . . . go to Bab al-Shams, enter your village of caves, and disappear," the "only dignified ending" to his story (32). After all, if Yunes has died of a stroke in the hospital instead of either returning to life or acting out the romantic, noble hero's death Khalil imagined, then will anything he stood for—a new future, the end of the Nakba, the discovery of the correct way to remember—come to pass? To Khalil, Yunes' human death, one not defined by the hallmarks of a story hero's mysterious disappearance, is the death of hope. He can't defy nature to come back to life and save Khalil from losing the truth about the past. The symbol is dead.

Yunes' death not only challenges the symbols of hope Khalil ascribed to him but also the meaning of Khalil's storytelling in general. Yunes can't be the epic symbol of Palestine if he's passed away. And despite Khalil's intentions, storytelling is not strong enough to maintain his life. If "this isn't how stories end," then perhaps Yunes was not a story of Palestine or symbol of it at all (540). Certainly the storytelling didn't bring Yunes back to life, as Khalil hoped it would. Khalil's comment about endings begs the question: how *do* stories end, if at all? Why must they have prescribed endings?

Khalil uses storytelling for a number of reasons, not the least of which is to understand the past and the world he's inherited from Yunes' generation. If Yunes is not a symbol or a story, but instead a human man capable of dying an anticlimactic death, then what can Khalil do with the fact that story and symbol is all he has of Yunes? Khalil wants to use story to maintain

Yunes' life, an act which necessarily positions Yunes as a story himself. In the end, the stories *do* maintain that life, but by transmuting Yunes into story himself. That's all that's left of him to have.

Story and symbol are perhaps all Khalil has to cling to. Trapped as he is in the hospital, faced with a man whose life has all but ended and so has nowhere to go but backward, dealing with a broken national story that gives his identity no footing to stand on, it makes sense that Khalil would be obsessed with the past and with story, which trying to make it all come to a clean and understandable conclusion. His witnessing belies his desire to understand the past and to understand Yunes, an understanding which might lend him a sense of stability. But death silences Yunes forever, leaving Khalil with nothing but story in his place.

Yunes' coma and eventual death also create the circumstances for *Gate of the Sun*'s framing device: Khalil narrates the entire book as a one-sided conversation at Yunes' hospital bed, and this is also a silencing device because only half of the story is being told. It's one sided. Khalil laments the one-sidedness often, begging Yunes to reply, telling him to "Weep a little, Father. Just one sob and everything will be over" (241). He asks Yunes questions, to verify information or help him understand something. "So where is the truth?" Khalil asks and receives no answer. "Did Ibrahim die in 1951, meaning he was born in 1948? What was going on between 1943 . . . and 1948 . . ." (94). Khalil's questions and demands directly to Yunes only serve to further emphasize the response that doesn't come.

Khalil briefly stops speaking to Yunes, overwhelmed with speaking nonstop to a man who doesn't respond. He expresses frustration specifically that Yunes can't cry and grieve

actively with Khalil. "Abd al-Mu'ti[5] dies, and you don't weep. You're dying, and you don't weep" (241). The weeping is a *response*. It is the kind of response Khalil wants to receive; the only reasonable response a living human being could offer to the things Khalil is recounting. To receive silence back from Yunes instead of tears is intolerable to Khalil not only because the traumatic experiences he's recounting deserve an empathetic response but because the lack of response leaves him alone as if he hadn't spoken at all. Similarly, the Palestinian people and their story have been silenced. Khoury writes that "the difficulties facing the unfolding of the story of Palestine [are] not because the story is not there but because there is nobody to hear it . . . Nobody was ready to hear the story of their pain" (261). Khalil doesn't speak into a void: he speaks *to* Yunes. But like the Palestinian people at large, he is only unheard and unrecognized.

One might say that, in the end, Yunes' coma and death articulate the silencing experienced by the Palestinian people through death and the loss of the possibility of understanding a traumatic history from a first-hand witness. Not only is second-hand memory-keeping now the only option, but Yunes' death also represents to Khalil the death of a symbol of hope for truth—no matter how unrealistic this is. Khoury uses this framing device to make Yunes' absence clear, challenging his readers to consider the ways that Palestinians, their first-hand witnesses to the past, and any hope of a "truth" of their history have been silenced. Khalil, as witness to Yunes, now has the responsivity to somehow maintain his life and memory. Yet, his storytelling can't fill the gap of silence that Yunes' death leaves for future generations.

CONCLUSION

[5] A fellow community member and freedom fighter.

The very act of witnessing perhaps can be described as seeking out silences. Laub's requirement that those witnessing must be "speaking mutely both in silence and in speech, both from behind and from within the speech" describes the paradox of empathetic witness in hearing what is not said and seeing what has been hidden (58). The Palestinian people have experienced silencing through the denial of a coherent national narrative, through the difficulty of expressing traumatic experience, and through death and murder. Khoury uses the characters' relationships to their identities, Khalil's experience with the foreign actors, and Yunes' death to explore witness as the articulation of that silencing. This silencing is illuminated by and impacts any effort to bear witness, making it all the more important that witnesses make the effort despite opposition.

Chapter Two: Witnessing the Nakba as Ongoing

As discussed in Chapter One, the Palestinian national narrative has been coopted and broken, disappeared due to silencing and to the Nakba. Their perspective and experiences are not broadly heard or accepted by the world powers. What then is the Palestinian perspective and how do Palestinian refugees experience it in their witnessing efforts? How does the Palestinian perspective that the Nakba is ongoing, despite being broadly understood to have been a one-time event in 1948, affect their witnessing? Khoury explores how Palestinian witnessing is defined by not only the trauma of the Nakba but also by the fact that the Nakba is ongoing.

The Nakba continues, affecting the Palestinian perspective, and that continuation is understood through two primary criteria: Palestinian displacement from Palestine and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. Said argues that the Nakba will end once Palestinian refugees are given the right to return, writing that "[the national] narrative has to have a beginning and an end: in the Palestinian case, homeland for the resolution of its exiles since 1948" ("Permission to Narrate" 252). Here, Said defines a national narrative as needing a beginning and an ending. He indicates that until Palestinians have the right to return, the Nakba will not have ended and their national narrative will be disrupted. As long as the Palestinian community continues to be displaced and ethnically cleansed *and* until they are given that right to return, the Nakba is extant—what Ashrawi describes as "ongoing" and Khoury as "continuous" (Ashrawi 98, "Rethinking the Nakba" 265).

The fact that the Nakba is ongoing affects the Palestinian perspective, making that perspective repetitious and nonlinear because the Palestinians are bearing witness to something repetitious and still unended. Throughout this chapter, I'll explore how this nonlinear perspective

manifests in the experiences of those who bear witness to the Nakba. I also ask: how might postmemory aid in a better understanding of the nonlinear witnessing that seems to be an essential part of the how the Nakba is remembered and recounted?

Khoury represents the experience of witnessing nonlinearity through Khalil's story of Yunes being reborn, as well as through the role reversal Khalil imposes within their relationship in order to sustain that narrative Khoury explores how Khalil's witnessing of temporality during the Nakba is defined his postmemory, his desire to correct the past and to project authority over the past, and the eventual failure of his rebirth story. Khalil's witnessing tragically mirrors the nonlinearity of the Nakba, but Khoury uses the failure of Khalil's rebirth story to express his hope that the Palestinian community will one day bear witness to the end of the ongoing Nakba.

PART I: POSTMEMORY AND THE ONGOING NAKBA

How might witnesses to the Nakba relate to its past even as it continues into the present? Perhaps the answer is found in the retrospective condition of the postmodern era. In the foundational postcolonial text, *The Location of Culture*, scholar Homi K. Bhabha writes that "Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present,' for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post'. . ." (1). For Bhabha, the postcolonial (and postmodern) present is one which "renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (7). In other words, the present doesn't exactly leave the past behind and neither does it simply build off it—instead, it remakes the past. The past

exists alongside the present, recontextualizing it. I reach for the prefix "post" to describe the complicated relationship our present shared with our past.

Hirsch writes that "post" as a prefix "signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath . . . [Instead, it signals] a critical distance and a profound interrelation. . ." ("The Generation of Postmemory" 106). Hirsch chooses the prefix "post" carefully, specifically wanting to reference a similar kind of nuanced relationship to the past that Bhabha describes earlier. A time period that is "post" doesn't alienate the past. Rather, it reconfigures and recontextualizes it. The past needs to be understood and if we are to understand our experience of the present. Our modern era is defined by "post-ness," which indicates this complicated retrospectivity.

This retrospectivity is reflected in our understanding of the ongoing Nakba. Like the nuanced implications of the prefix "post," the fact that the Nakba is ongoing indicates not just that the Nakba has not yet reached an end but also that it *repeats* itself without apparent end. We can also understand a retrospective view of the Nakba to incorporate the "critical distance and profound interrelation" that Hirsch indicates of "post-ness" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 106). The Nakba's past affects and informs how it continues into the present, existing alongside the present to recontextualize it through its repetition. Because the displacement and ethnic cleansing that began in 1948 is reenacted repeatedly, the Palestinian people are left to struggle to understand the past so they may also understand the present violence imposed upon them.

That the Nakba is ongoing impacts the witnessing of it, and this impact may be understood through the framework of postmemory. Hirsch introduces the term "postmemory" in *The Generation of Postmemory* and writes: "'Postmemory' describes the relationship the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before

. . . these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right" (emphasis original, 5). These "postmemories" are inherited memories, the outcome of the second generation's memory-keeping efforts. However, the nature of these memories is unique and intense, causing the witness to inherit them in a more personal sense: The second-generation witness feels situated in the memory almost as if they had been there to experience it first-hand. The intense ownership the witness feels over both the memory itself and even the memory-keeping process causes a unique trauma experience. These second-generation witnesses find that their own experiences may be displaced in importance by the memories they inherit and that they inherit not just the knowledge of the events but the trauma associated with it.

Hirsch situates the concept of postmemory in context with other "posts" such as postmodernism or postcoloniality, writing that it is ". . . aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterize [other "posts,"] marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past . . ." ("The Generation of Postmemory" 160). Postmemory then reflects the witness' experience with the retrospective nature of the postmodern age by looking back into the past to understand the past's continuity into the present. Similarly, the repetitious events of the ongoing Nakba demand that its second-generation witnesses look backward through the lens of their postmemory.

Postmemory is a useful framework for understanding the experience of witnessing the concept of the Nakba as a situation that exists in a kind of "post-ness," or, more simply stated, its retrospective relationship with the past. Second-generation witnesses to the Nakba may experience the effects of postmemory as they struggle to witness the events of the Nakba which

happened before the beginning of their own memory. They may also struggle as the Nakba repeats into the present, creating the circumstances for first-hand memory. As these second-generation witnesses inherit memories of the Nakba *and* create their own, their postmemorial sense of guardianship over the past may begin to feel increasingly immediate. Hirsch writes that witnesses experiencing postmemory are "shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 107). For second-generation Palestinian refugees experiencing an ongoing Nakba, however, the effects *and* the events themselves continue into the present. Their second-hand memories will mirror the experiences they've had with the Nakba first-hand. The experience of postmemory not only reflects the complicated and ongoing temporality of the Nakba but also the experience second-generation witnesses have as they inherit collective memory and trauma.

PART II: "BACK TO THE BEGINNING"

Khoury uses Khalil as a second-hand witness to the Nakba to explore the way postmemory and the Nakba's continuation into the present complicates the witnessing process. Khalil's postmemorial witnessing to the ongoing Nakba is demonstrated in his rebirth story for Yunes. This story Khalil describes features a return to the beginning and no true ending, mirroring his experience with the Nakba. How does this story explore Khalil's postmemorial witnessing? In what ways does his story mirror what he has witnessed about the Nakba?

Khalil begins his rebirth story for Yunes toward the end of the novel. As Yunes begins to wither and die, Khalil contradicts this scientific reality and insists instead that Yunes is coming

back to life. Though the doctor and nurses contradict him, Khalil won't be swayed. He insists: "[The doctor] said that what I see as positive signs are really signs of death. Good God, can't he see how like a little child you've become?" (454). To convince himself that he is the one in the right, Khalil makes observations on Yunes' condition, such as the strength of his unconscious reflexes as compared to the reflexes of newborns, to conclude that Yunes is in fact growing younger and starting life over. Starting over and repeating life again from the beginning is a driving theme in Khalil's story. He asks Yunes to "Start at the beginning, not at the end," expressing his hope not only that Yunes survive but that he find a new beginning, that he make a fresh start (456). He tells Yunes that he is effectively being rebirthed—that he is becoming a newborn again. Although Khalil had spent nearly the whole novel calling Yunes Father, he begs Yunes to "Let me call you 'son,' please," upon asserting this rebirth story. He goes on to name Yunes "son" until the novel's end as if Yunes was in fact a newborn again (455).

Khalil's rebirth story for Yunes is nonlinear in its structure, defined by repetition rather than progression, and it mirrors the cyclical violence of the Nakba. In a conventional linear narrative, life moves from birth to life to death; however, Khalil's account disrupts this sequence by moving from birth to life and back to birth again. In doing so, he imagines Yunes not as reaching an endpoint, but as returning to the beginning to relive and reinhabit Khalil's own memories of the Nakba. This logic of repetition echoes the ongoing nature of the Nakba itself, which persists not as a singular historical event but through repeated acts of displacement and dispossession that began in 1948 and continue in different forms. Like the Nakba, Khalil's story resists closure, substituting repetition for resolution.

The nonlinearity of rebirth in Khalil's story is reminiscent of his own postmemorial experience of the Nakba—in which he inherited the ownership of memories and even trauma that

he did not experience first-hand, relating to the past as if it were reborn or renewed through him—*and* his own first-hand memories of the same Nakba in the present. Through his witnessing, Khalil keeps Yunes' memories of the Nakba alive, so in a sense they may be renewed, but the fact is that Khalil has experienced the Nakba too. The past is alive through Khalil's postmemory, but it is also alive in the sense that it simply hasn't yet died. It interrupts the present. In addition, Khalil's preoccupation with Yunes' life repeating itself indicates an obsession with return in a postmemorial mirroring of the Nakba's repetitious continuation. This mirroring explores the impossibility of articulating the violent trauma of the Nakba and its never-ending hold on the Palestinian people.

Of the kind of mirroring Khalil demonstrates between his rebirth story and his own postmemory, Hirsch writes that "postmemory always risks sliding into rememory, traumatic reenactment, and repetition" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 83). She describes "rememory" as "mimetic repetition," an implant of memory which implies "not just the threat but the certainty of repetition: 'It will happen again'" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 91, 84). Hirsch identifies a range between post- and rememory in which postmemory is described as "'identification with' as opposed to the . . . 'identification as' that is closer to rememory" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 85). This is a fine line that Hirsch describes in which a witness experiencing rememory completely and fully appropriates the position of the first-hand witness in the inherited memory whereas a witness experiencing postmemory instead only identifies *with* the memory.

However, Hirsch does not completely differentiate the one from the other, writing that, like other theories of memory, "postmemorial witnesses are also subject to different, if always overlapping, modes of 'remembering'" of which rememory is one overlapping mode (*The*

Generation of Postmemory 82). Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe postmemory and rememory as occupying a shared space in which the latter is only one "mode" of experiencing postmemory. In this way, Khalil's witnessing might be described as a subset of postmemory, a rememory in which he struggles to differentiate himself from the subject of his postmemories.

Khalil's rebirth story imposes an obsession with repetition and origin on Yunes as an expression of his rememory of the ongoing Nakba, a rememory which indicates that he expects the repetition of the past. It's easy to see in Khalil's story the "certainty of repetition" that Hirsch notes as being characteristic specifically of rememory (*The Generation of Postmemory* 84). Khalil wants Yunes not just to live but to be born again, to repeat his life. He reinterprets signs of Yunes' death as not just Yunes' health improving or even just Yunes being born again but as signs of time reversing—of the Nakba starting again (454). Khalil tells Yunes to ". . . see how beautiful and new you are! . . . You're an ageless child again. The years that were behind you are now ahead of you" (484). These years that Khalil refers to include the years the Nakba began, something he wants Yunes to start over. He goes on to add, "You won't progress from sickness to death, as they'd hoped; instead you've become a baby and are starting your life over again" (458). Khalil's story halts the natural progression into death and turns the time back to the beginning again before it can progress too far. Khalil's rememory is founded in the idea that the beginning of the Nakba will come back to happen again.

Because the beginning will return according to Khalil's experience with the Nakba, his rebirth story for Yunes not only repeats but, in doing so, it also rejects the concept of endings. Even at the very beginning of the book, Khalil struggles to come to terms with Yunes' life one day ending. The "death" Khalil imagines for Yunes is not a death at all but the dramatic and mysterious vanishing of an epic hero in which Yunes would "get up, tall and broad shouldered. .

. You'll go to Bab al-Shams, enter your village of caves, and disappear" (32). Toward the ending of the book, as Yunes is beginning to deteriorate and die, Khalil changes his prescribed ending for Yunes from that of the epic disappearance and into a rebirth into childhood. As death nears, Khalil must realize that what he really wants from the story of Yunes is a "new and beautiful" beginning (456). He tells Yunes that once he wakes up, "[we will] compose our story from the beginning without leaving a single gap for death to enter through" (525). From the vantage point of a Nakba that never ends and a witnessing defined by "mimetic repetition," it makes sense that endings aren't something Khalil knows how to imagine (91).

Khalil expresses his post- and rememory through a nonlinear rebirth story because his witness is a projection onto the past and even a repetition of it—his witness mirrors what he has experienced of the Nakba. Hirsch writes that "Postmemory's connection to the past is . . . actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (*The Generation of Postmemory* 5). Postmemory is a position of retrospective projection. We see this projecting in the way that Khalil situates himself in relation to Yunes, defined by the storytelling that projection requires. Khalil makes this creative projection and then, because of the "traumatic reenactment" of rememory, imposes on it the repetitious, constantly restarting nature of the ongoing Nakba (83).

PART III: TURNING BACK TIME TO GAIN AUTHORITY

Khalil's postmemorial second-generation witness incentivizes him to take on what Hirsch refers to as "the 'guardianship' of a traumatic personal and generational past" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 104). However, he struggles to feel as though he can truly accept that authority

because he did not witness first-hand like Yunes. In what ways, then, does Khalil's rebirth story—and specifically how it swaps his and Yunes' roles as father and son—enable him to accept authority over the past? What do these roles mean to Khalil in connection to his witnessing?

Khalil's rebirth story for Yunes includes changing Yunes' position from a father to a son figure. As Khalil insists that Yunes is repeating his life and becoming a newborn again, he swaps their roles, making himself the father and Yunes the son. He even says to Yunes: "Let me call you 'son,' please" (455). Soon after, he names himself Yunes' father, telling him, "For six months I've been with you, paralyzed by fear. Your new infancy has just liberated me from it. Fathers aren't allowed to show fear in front of their sons. My fear is gone" (459). Here, he expresses what this role swap means to him and the pressure and fear that it has alleviated. From then until Yunes' eventual death, Khalil calls Yunes his son.

Part of the fear Khalil describes himself as having experienced is perhaps the fear of his own second-generational witnessing being invalid. At the same time, almost paradoxically, his postmemory leads him to an overidentification with Yunes' past. This combination of a strong sense of personal ownership *and* the invalidation of the lack of first-hand experience leads Khalil to seek out a sense of authority over the past. He tells the comatose Yunes, "I've told you a story I don't know. I understand nothing . . . but I have to know so I can tell" (242). Khalil wants to know the past well enough to feel that he can stand in as a witness to it. Because he wasn't there in person, however, he'll never feel fully authorized to "tell" (242). He will always experience the tension of attempting to bear witness to something he didn't see. Khalil's postmemorial experience contributes to the pressure of maintaining Yunes' memories because not only does he feel the pressure of being the only person keeping these memories alive, but Khalil identifies

with these memories almost as if they were his own. In a sense, Khalil takes over what Hirsch refers to as "the guardianship" of memory. She says that "what is at stake . . . is precisely the 'guardianship' of a traumatic personal and generational past" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 104). In other words, the function of postmemory is to unpack the complexities of filling in or taking on the role of a guardian of traumatic memory and history. This tension between the pressure to take on guardianship versus the lack of first-hand experience he feels he needs to take on that guardianship tortures Khalil.

Because of how strongly and intimately his postmemory leads him to experience his inherited memories of the past, Khalil perhaps also struggles with his authority to witness due to a sense that he *should* have the first-hand memory that would explain those strong feelings. According to the theory of postmemory, the memories Khalil spends the book retelling must feel to him almost like personal memories, affecting him so strongly as if they were in fact his own. This disconnect between Khalil's actual distance from the past versus the closeness that might more easily explain his postmemorial experience perhaps also contributes to Khalil's search for authority over the past.

Driven by his powerful postmemorial experiences, Khalil places himself in a position of specifically hierarchical authority over the past through establishing himself as the father figure in his rebirth story. Upon beginning this new rebirth story, Khalil tells Yunes that "You don't have to agree, Father, because you're my son now" (455). Yunes doesn't "have to agree," Khalil tells him, because if Khalil is the father figure, he'll know better (455). He'll have the hierarchical authority position of father over son that will enable him to define the past. Throughout the novel, Khalil, as the younger between them, struggles with the fact that he can't corroborate Yunes' memories from before Khalil was born. Ordinarily, Khalil is the one who

doesn't "have to agree" because Yunes' age and experience have imbued Yunes with the authority over the past (455). Yunes, the father figure, has the last word. However, should Yunes be reborn to start his life over and Khalil fulfill the role of father—wiser, more experienced, defaulted to on matters of truth—then perhaps Khalil can trust himself to witness "correctly." He will have the authority that usually only belongs to Yunes. Khalil creating a son out of Yunes transfers the authority of a father onto himself. In this way, he seeks to validate his own witnessing efforts.

But more than just the hierarchical authority of father over son, Khalil wants the authority of and as first-hand witness. Should Yunes start life over, Khalil, as his father, would be able to watch the story of his life from the beginning to this end, like a film reel. Khalil tells Yunes, "I can't imagine the world that's waiting for you" and "I want you, Son, to see life with your new eyes" (465). Khalil pictures the beginning happening again, but this time with himself there as the father figure, poised to watch it all. Khalil pictures Yunes as his son, imagining that Khalil might obtain the authority and experience to properly maintain the memories he's inheriting if he could only have watched it unfold himself.

The role swap is only possible however through Khalil's nonlinear and repetitive sense of time, a reflection of how the repetition of the ongoing Nakba is mirrored in Khalil's witness through postmemory. Khalil's sense of authority over the past is a fiction he creates, a fiction enabled through his obsession with returning to the beginning. Khalil mirrors the repetition of the Nakba in this expression of his witness by insisting that Yunes repeats his life from the beginning. A world in which Khalil can turn back time and gain this first-hand authority he seeks is only one he can imagine because of the retrospective, postmemorial relationship he has to a repetitive and ongoing Nakba.

Khalil wants to experience the authority and narrative control he imagines that becoming a father figure and first-hand witness would imbue him with. Because he needs this sense of authority over the past to reconcile the tension between his postmemory and his responsibility to guardian the past, he imposes a father-son role swap on his story for Yunes.

PART IV: TURNING BACK TIME TO CORRECT THE PAST

Khalil seeks to validate his own postmemorial witnessing by enabling a sense of authority over the past through his father-son role swap with Yunes, which authority would give him the "right" to bear witness but also perhaps the control to change what he is bearing witness to. Khalil's rebirth story for Yunes repeats the past because Khalil hopes that they might be able to rewrite it entirely. What would that correction look like to Khalil? Is witnessing an unconscious attempt to rewrite or correct the past, even if this attempt will ultimately fail?

Through insisting that Yunes is becoming reborn to start his life over from the beginning, Khalil expresses his desire to correct the past he's bearing witness to. Khalil's postmemorial witnessing of the ongoing Nakba is defined by his preoccupation with beginning again; The rebirth story assumes that the events of the past are (or can again become) extant and so subject to change. Yunes' rebirth as a newborn would represent for Khalil a fresh start for Palestine, a new beginning that has a chance to turn out better this time. Perhaps, Khalil muses, Yunes starting over could improve upon the memories Khalil has been challenged to maintain.

Khalil seeks to "go back to the beginning" because, in part, he wants to find a "more beautiful [image] than all the ones we've drawn" (456). He wants to bear witness to something better than the Nakba. He tells Yunes that ". . . you've become a baby and are starting your life

over again. And that means everything can change" (458). Khalil longs for change. He wants Yunes' fresh start to give him a new memory to witness, one where the Nakba can be defeated. He tells Yunes, "I've told you these stories so you can create a new story for yourself" (456). Should Yunes only begin again, Khalil believes that he could have the power to change the past. Khalil later references the prophet Elias (otherwise known as Elijah in English), who was translated by God, telling Yunes that "Death . . . is not a requirement" (523). His witnessing is characterized here as a desire to return to *correct* the past and define the Palestinian national story as "more beautiful" than the version he knows, a version which doesn't require death—not Yunes' death, not the deaths of the Palestinians murdered throughout the Nakba, and not the death of a cohesive Palestinian national story.

Khalil needs to correct specifically Yunes' past because of Yunes' status as a symbol of Palestine and of hope. Khalil refers to Yunes as a hero and builds Yunes up through his stories as the protagonist in an epic. Defending Yunes' room in the hospital, Khalil declares to his boss that Yunes is ". . . a symbol. . . he's a hero! A hero doesn't end up in a cemetery . . ." (172). To Khalil, Yunes' fate is representative of the fate of Palestine, and he cannot be allowed to die. Khalil's reference to the translated prophet Elias is a reference specifically to the epic and larger-than-life nature he insists Yunes must possess, telling Yunes that "You are Elias, Yunes . . ." (523). Yunes is a symbol of hope, an epic hero on par with "the only man to have ascended to Heaven without experiencing death" (523). Should Yunes' past be corrected, and should he be the one reborn, perhaps Palestine itself could be as well.

Khalil's postmemory of an unending Nakba leads him to the insistence that beginning again might allow him to make the past subject to change. Hirsch writes that "These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present" ("The Generation of

Postmemory" 107). Khalil's postmemory is an effect "continu[ing] into the present" but the Nakba itself is an event that happened in the past and continues happening now, complicating that postmemorial experience. Khalil insists on his rebirth story for Yunes as an expression of his witness to the ongoing Nakba, hoping to correct a past that he experiences as tragically present.

PART V: THE FAILURE TO TURN BACK TIME

Khalil's rebirth story collapses when confronted by the reality of Yunes' death: he cannot truly turn back time and see Yunes reborn. Khalil must accept Yunes' passing and even returns to referring to Yunes as father. What does the collapse of Khalil's story imply about his witness? In what ways might this apparently tragic ending instead be an expression of hope for the future of Palestine?

At the very end of *Gate of the Sun*, Khalil leaves Yunes' bedside. He plans to go to Yunes' house to collect photos from Yunes' life so he might "hang all the photos here, and we'll live among them. . . That way we can compose our story from the beginning" (525). However, while Khalil is outside, Yunes passes away. Khalil's narration ends as he stands in front of Yunes' grave, telling him, "no, this isn't how stories end" (540). The very last line reads, "I stretch out my hand, I grasp the ropes of rain, and I walk and walk and walk" (540). The line ends without a period, giving the impression that Khalil's grief—and even the book itself—continues unendingly.

The first key to interpreting Khalil's failed rebirth story *is* that it is not literal and it does not, in actuality, come to pass. It's a story he creates, something Hirsch might describe as a "postmemorial text," or an expression of the author's own experience with postmemory (90).

Khalil is steeped in story, even "drowning" in it, stories he retells from others that he can't be sure are all true or all retold correctly (242). This story, however, is his own creation—it has more in common with artistic expression than memory keeping. In this, it reveals more about Khalil's experience than anything else. What's more is that Khoury makes the story's fictional nature strikingly obvious by the return to reality of Yunes' death. Drawing attention to the fictional nature of the story so bluntly encourages the reader to investigate the beliefs behind Khalil's story and perhaps to interpret it—and even the ending itself—more abstractly as compared to previous somewhat-fantastical stories that *Gate of the Sun* does not so blatantly disprove.

The second key to interpreting the failure of the rebirth story is that though the ending of *Gate of the Sun* is tragic and affecting, any analysis of it must take into consideration that Khoury, in his own words, did not write it as a nihilist. Instead, *Gate of the Sun* is a "message of love," an expression of Khoury's empathetic witness and his hope for the future of Palestine (C-SPAN). Of the grief that lingers open-endedly on the final page, Khoury writes that "[*Gate of the Sun*] will remain open until the moment when this wound [the Nakba] is healed" ("Rethinking the Nakba" 266). The ending, including the disillusionment of Khalil's unrealistic rebirth story, is a call to action on behalf of a people Khoury wishes to see liberated and the confidence that "the moment will come" that they will be (266).

Perhaps, then, if Khalil's rebirth story is a fiction that must be disproven, the true way Yunes' life is maintained is not through an impossible rebirth—a rememory of the Nakba—but through Khalil's witness to his life. After death, all that's left of Yunes is his memory, which, in Hirsch's phrasing, Khalil staunchly maintains "guardianship" over ("The Generation of Postmemory" 104). Khalil memorializes Yunes through story, recognizes Yunes through

witness. Khalil puts it into words himself when he tells Yunes that "The issue isn't what happened but how we report and remember it" (286). Here is one of the rare moments Khalil puts aside his anxieties about the veracity of his storytelling and admits that the remembering is valuable in and of itself, that it is necessarily a different thing from the original event and valuable despite that difference. Yunes *is* transformed not from father to son or adult to child but from living subject to figure of memory, a transformation he began at the very beginning of the book when Khalil began committing his life to story. Though not the miraculous translation of Elias that Khalil envisioned, the continuation of Yunes' life through Khalil's memory is a sort of defeat of death driven not by the reality-defying power of God but by Khalil's love and his empathetic witness.

Yunes' death is tragic but natural. Despite years as a freedom fighter and a wanted man who survived numerous violent attempts on his life, he dies of natural causes as an old man; being comatose, he likely does not even feel the heart attack that ends his life (526). His death is relatively gentle, reasserting Yunes as a real person rather than the symbolic figure Khalil tries to make of him. Khalil's imagined rebirth story for Yunes is fueled by his rememory of the ongoing Nakba, but it also exposes the limits of such narrative repetition. Although Yunes' death devastates Khalil, the return to linear time becomes a more poignant expression of hope for Palestine's future. In reasserting a natural ending, Khoury resists endless perpetuity as a fiction of trauma and asks readers to confront the ongoing Nakba as something to be witnessed in its real historical unfolding rather than endlessly repeated in narrative form.

CONCLUSION

Thus, it is imperative to understand that Khoury uses Khalil's rebirth story to explore how the ongoing repetition of the Nakba affects its witnesses. He writes that he began *Gate of the Sun* with the belief that ". . . once we write the pain we . . . make from it a past that we can transcend in order to build a future. . . [However, the Palestinian peoples'] stories were not the past but the present, and their pain was not the memory of pain but the experience of their daily lives" ("Rethinking the Nakba" 266). Not only is the Nakba ongoing, as Khoury describes here, but post- and rememory make witnessing the past immediate and repetitious. Khalil's rebirth story demonstrates not only the complicated experience of witnessing a repetitious Nakba but also allows Khoury to call his readers to action in witnessing and anticipating the Nakba's end.

Chapter Three: Witnessing as Hope for the Future of Palestine

At a book reading at UC Irvine in 2006, Elias Khoury commented that, in developing the idea for *Gate of the Sun*, he had set out to write a love story. He described Yunes crossing the Israeli border to meet his wife Nahilah in a cave, the titular gate of the sun, and explained that the only obstacle keeping them apart was the occupation. He then told his audience that he was interested in writing about "how people tried to overcome the occupation through love" (CSPAN). In crossing the border and meeting at the gate of the sun, compelled by their love for each other, Yunes and Nahilah resist the occupation keeping them apart, and the gate of the sun becomes a symbol of that love and resistance. The story of Yunes and Nahilah at the gate of the sun threads through the novel, creating a throughline out of Khalil's stories, a subplot that continues from the beginning of the novel to the end. This theme is so central to interpreting the novel that Khoury foregrounds it in the title, prompting readers to reconsider the narrative through the symbolism of the gate of the sun. What, then, does Khalil's witness as the framing device for the telling of this story imply about the theme of resistance through love? What might the gate of the sun as a symbol imply about the act of witnessing?

Chapters One and Two discussed witnessing as an articulation of silence and the trauma of witnessing the ongoing Nakba respectively. Witnessing resists the effects of silencing by calling attention to absences. It is a traumatic and complicated process to witness a Nakba still in process, but Khoury asserts through his exploration of this trauma that the Nakba will eventually come to an end. Both explorations of witnessing emphasize resistance and hope for Palestine, a theme that will be further expounded upon here.

Thus, this chapter examines how Khoury presents witnessing as a form of resistance to oppression and occupation, using the symbol of the gate of the sun to connect Yunes' and Khalil's distinct acts of resistance. Theory about witnessing clearly positions it as an act which validates subjectivity and defies oppression. In the novel, the gate of the sun appears as a symbol of hope and resistance in Khalil's stories about Yunes and Nahilah and it also functions as a metaphor for the act of witnessing itself. As seen through the perspective of Khalil, it emphasizes the humanizing nature of witnessing for a people for whom humanization is resistance.

PART I: WITNESSING AS HUMANIZATION

In what way is witness inherently humanizing, and how is that humanization resistance for Palestinians? In *The Question of Palestine*, Edward Said writes that "After 1948 every Palestinian disappeared nationally and legally" (111). He goes on to explain that some Palestinians were redefined only as "non-Jews" or "Arabs" in Israel whereas others were redefined as "refugees." "Zionism," he writes, "has drawn a sharp line between Jew and non-Jew" (107). In this explicit unrecognition of Palestinians, they have been unnamed, dehumanized, and silenced. Dehumanization is a feature of oppression against the Palestinian people, and efforts to bear witness defy that oppression.

That witness is a matter of ethics, of mutual recognition, and of resistance against oppression is evident in part through examination of its absence. Dori Laub writes in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) that "The absence of an empathetic listener . . . who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness, annihilates the story" (68). Laub analyzes the film *The Eighty-first Blow*

(1974) by Israeli filmmaker Chaim Guri, which features testimonies from Holocaust survivors on the impact of Holocaust denial. Laub argues that "this ultimate annihilation of a narrative that . . . cannot be heard and . . . cannot be witnessed" is in fact what ends the life of the film's principal witness and narrator (emphasis original, 68). Here, Laub emphasizes that witnessing—both the sharing of a first-hand experience and the receiving of that experience—is an imperative to the survival of that experience. Though the lack of witnessing might not constitute literal death outside the world of a film, it does constitute a kind of death: that of the experience, as Laub named, but perhaps also a metaphorical death of the Self unrecognized by the Other.

The failure of mutual recognition stems from an absence of witnessing and in *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver writes that "without an addressee, without a witness, I cannot exist. I am by virtue of response-ability" (91). Here, she defines mutual recognition and outlines the consequences of its failure. The self can only be constituted through witnessing the other; without that act of witness, neither can fully come into being. Oliver understands witnessing as emerging from mutual recognition and, like Laub, describes it as a process that sustains the existence of the self.

Oliver goes on to comment on the necessity of witness not only as we understand it as a feature of mutual recognition but also as an act of resistance against oppression. She asserts, "It is the paradoxical nature of witnessing oppression that makes it so powerful in restoring subjectivity . . . Witnessing enables the subject to reconstitute the experience of objectification in ways that allow her to reinsert subjectivity into a situation designed to destroy it" (98). Here, Oliver argues that bearing witness to oppression resists the objectivity of oppression, granting the survivor agency where it was otherwise denied. Oliver says further that "Through the process of bearing witness to oppression and subordination, those othered can begin to repair damaged

subjectivity" (7). Witnessing, then, is a form of resistance to oppression and the reclaiming of subjectivity, an act which speaks back to oppression and perhaps even begins to "repair" what it had damaged.

To witness is to humanize for both the speaker and the listener because both participants are recognized in the circuit of mutual recognition. When interpreted as the result of empathetic mutual recognition, or what Oliver refers to as "address-bility and response-ability," witnessing is a process which has the potential to validate both participants (7). Oliver argues for the development of subjectivity which is "beyond recognition" and which more thoroughly validates the subjectivity of the other by recognizing that they are capable of being addressed and responding back (7). Through this understanding of the development of subjectivity, speakers might be humanized through the very process of addressing and listeners through their response in hearing. Oliver writes that "To be empowered is to be visible; to be disempowered is to be rendered invisible" (11). She seeks to recognize that which can't be recognized through the address-response process of witness; this is a process which is empowering for both participants. Witnessing is the process of listening where silencing has been imposed and of humanizing, or recognizing, where that humanity has been denied, a process which enables the selfhood of both participants.

Laub and Oliver are joined by Khoury in connecting unrecognition and death. In an essay memorializing the famous Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani (1936-1972), Khoury references Kanafani's novel, *Men in the Sun* (1962), in which several Palestinian characters suffocate to death in silence. Khoury writes, "Who would dare to claim that 'the Palestinians are not "knocking"'? Wouldn't it be more accurate to ask, 'Why do you not hear?'" ("Remembering Ghassan Kanafani" 90). Here, Khoury draws attention to Palestinian silencing *and* to the

unrecognition they've faced. The reference to *Men in the Sun* draws a parallel, as Laub did, between unrecognition and death.

Khoury refers explicitly to witnessing in a later interview with *The Paris Review* in 2017 during which he contextualizes his beliefs about the liberatory nature of witnessing within the context of writing. He says, "I do not believe that writing is an act of despair. On the contrary, it lies beyond despair . . . where witnessing [defends] man's right to live and dream, to rip the veil off taboos and to resist military and religious tyranny" (Creswell). Here, Khoury argues that witnessing defends rights and resists oppression, and he contextualizes his writing as a form of witnessing which he believes "lies beyond despair" (Creswell). Khoury believes it's important to hear the Palestinians "knocking," as in his reference to *Men in the Sun*, and he believes that the act of hearing, of witnessing, is liberatory.

We may also come to better understand Khoury's reference to the gate of the sun and "overcom[ing] occupation through love" when considering witness—an empathetic act—as resistance, a form of empathy which resists if not overcomes oppression (CSPAN). Khoury chooses the word "love" here as reference to Yunes and Nahilah's romantic relationship, but I argue that the act of witness may also be interpreted as the love in his quote. Because witness is an empathetic, or "loving," act, it has the power to humanize and recognize and, through these means, resist oppression.

Oliver also reaches for the word "love" when she writes, "To love is to bear witness" to the subjectivity of the other (224). Palestine has suffered a lack of recognition because of occupation. Witnessing, which is the process of mutual recognition, validates and enables the selfhood, or subjectivity, of the self and the other. Without this validation, the self experiences a

kind of metaphorical death. Bearing witness then is resistance, an empathetic form of mutual recognition in which oppressed Palestinians may be both humanized and heard.

In sum, Laub argues that to deny a victim a proper witness is to sentence them and their stories to death. Oliver further connects the lack of witness to the lack of recognition and the death of the self, arguing that witnessing a resistance act against oppression, dehumanization and silence. Said establishes that the Palestinians have suffered this dehumanization and silence, and so to bear witness to them is to resist the oppression they suffer. Through these lenses, witnessing is a powerful rejection of oppression and violence, a sort of resistance that fights against the dehumanization that injustice is founded upon.

PART II: YUNES AND NAHILAH'S RESISTANCE

Not only does witnessing resist oppression through humanization, it also offers the hope for that humanization and resistance. Before exploring the gate of the sun's connection to witnessing, it is important to establish it as a symbol of resistance and hope illustrated in the story of Khoury's characters Yunes and Nahilah's love for each other. I ask here: How do Yunes and Nahilah use the literal gate of the sun to overcome oppression? What does it symbolize through the vantage point of their story?

The gate of the sun is a reoccurring figure in Khalil's storytelling as the place Yunes met surreptitiously with his wife, Nahilah. Yunes and Nahilah's story is described in the Introduction, but as it is particularly relevant here, I'll now go into further detail. After the initial expulsion of Palestinians from Palestine in 1948, Yunes must live on the Lebanese side of the new Israeli border as a wanted man while his wife lives in Yunes' family home on the other side. To see

Nahilah, Yunes frequently crosses the border and meets her at a cave they dub Bab al-Shams, or the gate of the sun. There, they try to experience life together as a couple. Yunes describes the gate of the sun as "the only liberated plot of Palestinian land" and "the country I [Yunes] created for my wife" (522, 523). The gate of the sun becomes a liberated space for Yunes and Nahilah, a kind of new Palestine they create together through a space in which they meet to witness and express love to each other.

As Yunes and Nahilah age, meeting at the gate of the sun becomes more physically taxing so that by their 50's, they only make phone calls to each other. Khalil describes their post-gate of the sun years briefly, clearly preferring to focus on the epic of their meeting at the cave. In time, their children grow up and start their own families and Yunes and Nahilah connect in more distant ways. Even though it's been years since they met at the gate of the sun once Nahilah passes away, she still instructs her children upon her deathbed to find the cave and close it up so it might remain sacred between her and her husband (522).

The gate of the sun, for Nahilah and Yunes, is "the only liberated plot of Palestinian land," liberated by the insistence of their love for each other and their need to continue seeing each other (522). There, Nahilah and Yunes find homeland and freedom in each other. Yunes is so convinced by this version of Palestine that he finds he wants his fellow Palestinians to move in with him to the vast, interlinked cave system he describes as larger than a suburb. He proposes to "bring back the refugees. A cave is better than a tent . . ." (389). The tent is transitive, representative of Yunes' status as a refugee, whereas the gate of the sun is a place Yunes feels that he can have national sovereignty. Instead of being transitive and temporary, a cave is a permanent part of the land itself. It's also a private and protected part of the land that Yunes can still claim without the knowledge of the Israeli government. The gate of the sun might not be

Palestine as it was, but it *is* Palestine for Yunes, and somewhere he and his fellow Palestinians might be able to return to. Thus, the gate of the sun represents, and even becomes, Palestine for Yunes and Nahilah both.

Nahilah demonstrates her own reverence for the gate of the sun through her choice to seal the cave up upon her death, ensuring that it not only remains extant as a symbol but also that it cannot be discovered and desecrated after she's gone. Her choice implies that although her and Yunes' presence gave it its meaning as a symbol of Palestine, that symbolism transcends them, no longer tied to only their specific situation. Nahilah's instructions to her son are sentimental and personal, revealing her reverence for the gate of the sun. She tells him to clean out and close the cave upon her death and asks him to not "let the sheets, towels, and blankets get moldy. . . [Your father's] home must be kept neat" (522). To clean and then close the cave implies that it keeps its sacredness, that it doesn't return to the state it had been before Yunes and Nahilah's experiences there consecrated it. It will always be the gate of the sun and never again just another cave, and so it must be closed—not just protected but treated as distinct from other caves. Nahilah's choice to close the gate of the sun implies that she believed that their absences or deaths would not diminish its sacred nature. She venerates it and the experiences she and Yunes had there by closing it, solidifying and making permanent its status as a symbol of Palestine.

Nahilah's decision to close the gate of the sun also allows it to signify hope for Palestine's future, since what is closed can be opened again. The imagery of its name reinforces this possibility: it is inviting, evoking the promise of a new day and a threshold that Palestinians might one day cross to witness the sun's return. When Nahilah closes the gate of the sun, she is only temporarily closing a door which might again be opened. Through the closing of the gate of the sun, Khoury communicates that Palestine is not gone forever.

The gate of the sun is not only the future of Palestine but also representational of the love between Nahilah and Yunes—a love which can transcend and resist occupation. The gate of the sun enables Nahilah and Yunes' to resist the occupation. As Yunes crossed the border repeatedly to see her and "fought [against the occupation] for the sake of a woman [he] loved," the gate of the sun becomes a symbol of his resistance inspired by love (22). Nahilah also consecrates the gate of the sun into a symbol not just through her treatment of it upon her death but in the variety of other sacrifices she makes to meet Yunes there, including protecting him through years of intense scrutiny from the Israeli government and struggling to raise their family alone. Khalil narrates her sacrifices for Yunes, saying that "She lived her life alone among the blind, the refugees, and the dead" (136). Both Nahilah and Yunes defy the occupation to meet each other at the gate of the sun for the sake of their relationship. The gate of the sun comes serve as a shorthand for the lengths Nahilah and Yunes go to defy the occupation in the name of their love.

The resistance Yunes and Nahilah perform against the occupation to express their love exemplifies one way that the gate of the sun represents a hopeful future for Palestine. They not only make the sacrifice to meet at the gate of the sun over the span of decades, but they create a new version of Palestine for each other. They further make a symbol of the gate of the sun in the way they venerate the cave in the cleaning and closing of it, ensuring that it survives them and may again be opened. In this way, the gate of the sun's symbolism implies that Palestine's return and the resistance that brings it to pass will be enabled by the expression of love. Witnessing then, as an empathetic act, may also be a kind of love that enables the future of Palestine.

PART III: KHALIL'S WITNESSING

The gate of the sun serves as a symbol of love, hope, and resistance for Palestine. Yet, it also serves as a metaphor for witnessing, and especially that witnessing as resistance. Another key to interpreting the *Gate of the Sun* lies in the fact that Yunes and Nahilah's story is embedded within Khalil's framing as an act of witnessing and narration. In this way, it functions as a metaphor for Khalil's own act of witness, linking his form of resistance with Yunes'. How might this framing device develop the symbolism of the gate of the sun and in what ways might the gate of the sun serve as a commentary on witnessing as resistance?

PART III.I: Khalil's Act of Resistance

In comparison to Yunes' border-crossing and his work as a freedom fighter, Khalil's act of resistance is his witnessing. As discussed above, witnessing is an act of resistance because it recognizes, humanizes, and hears. Witnessing is a form of mutual recognition, what Oliver describes as a mutual *response* to the other which goes "beyond recognition" to "listen for the unfamiliar that disrupts what we already know" (2). In witnessing, both speaker and listener can validate the others' humanity and therefore, subjectivity, and to articulate that which has been silenced, actions which defy Palestinian's dehumanization and silencing. In Khoury's novel then Khalil attempts to keep Yunes' memories alive, resisting the silencing experienced by his loss. He also validates and recognizes Yunes his life story. It's in fact difficult to find a single quote to evidence this argument because the entire novel is that evidence: Khalil's reverence for Yunes' life story and his dedication to maintaining that memory is his motivation from the first word to the last.

Khalil's witnessing as an act of resistance is perhaps best evidenced by his conversation with his boss, Dr. Amjad. Dr. Amjad's continued insistence that Yunes be sent to a nursing home

and that he uses hospital resource implies that Khalil is wasting his time with the comatose patient. He tells Khalil, "You think talking's a cure? If talking were a cure, we'd have liberated Palestine long ago. No, it's impossible" (167). Here, Dr. Amjad specifically challenges the idea that talking has any power to liberate or resist against oppression. If it had that power, he argues, they would have done enough talking to end the occupation already. Dr. Amjad specifically challenges "talking" and not the act of bearing witness (167). To Dr. Amjad, Khalil is not witnessing or maintaining memory: he's only talking. Regardless of why he might make that distinction, Khalil's talking *is* the form his witness bearing takes. Because of that, although Dr. Amjad doesn't explicitly challenge the concept of witnessing, he does so inadvertently. Though he doesn't know exactly what that effort is, he believes Khalil's effort on Yunes' behalf is worthless. He tells Khalil his plans to transfer Yunes to the nursing home: "His condition's hopeless, and clinically he's dead" (167). Dr. Amjad has no hope—or at least no patience—for Khalil's interest in Yunes.

Khalil rails violently against the idea of transferring Yunes to a nursing home. Before he does so, however, he narrates his reasoning in detail using the story of Adnan, another freedom fighter hero Khalil had visited in the nursing home prior and found to be alone and suffering. "Do you know what moving you there would mean?" he explains to Yunes, "You would rot alive—yes, you'd rot and the worms and the ulcers would devour you. . . I'm the only one who visited [Adnan there]" (168). Khalil knows the circumstances in the home to be inhumane, which certainly motivates his response in a practical sense—he loves Yunes and doesn't want to see him suffer. His resistance here keeps Yunes from Adnan's fate.

Even more central to my argument that Khalil's witnessing constitutes a form of resistance is his emphasis on Adnan's abandonment and isolation in the home. He comments that

he is the only person to have visited Adnan, that his family didn't know he was there, and that Adnan was restrained and delirious. The doctor there tells Khalil that "the doctor on duty didn't read Adnan's medical file" and so chained him to his bed, but even after reading the file, the current doctor continued to keep him restrained (170). Adnan is abused in the hospital *because* he is alone and misunderstood. Khalil's story demonstrates not only that the home would be materially abusive to Yunes but that it would be due to the lack of recognition he would receive there. Through this story, Khalil reveals the impact of his talking-as-witnessing: it may not be immediately liberating Palestine as Dr. Amjad argued, but it resists dehumanization and abuse Yunes would experience if he were not recognized. Khalil's witness refuses to allow Yunes—a symbol of Palestine in his own right—to go unrecognized in the face of dehumanization.

PART III.II: The Gate of the Sun Story as a Metaphor for Witness

Khalil's witnessing recognizes Yunes and resists the oppression that might leave him unrecognized, and the gate of the sun in his stories becomes a metaphor for the power of that witnessing. As previously discussed, the gate of the sun functions as a symbol for love and for Palestine through the embedded story—an embedded story that only exists filtered through the framing device of Khalil's witnessing. It's a symbol of hope for Palestine and for Khalil himself. The gate of the sun exists only in story to Khalil, who has never been there. It's a part of Yunes' epic mythos, a part Khalil ascribes significant meaning to.

Khalil describes his wish for Yunes' death at the beginning of the novel, hoping that he might return to the gate of the sun, transcending death to instead join the gate of the sun in the realm of epic. He says, "You'll go to Bab al-Shams, enter your village of caves, and disappear," which he describes to Yunes as "the only dignified ending to your story" (32). The gate of the sun belongs to Yunes' story rather than Khalil's lived reality, and this distance lends Yunes an

epic dimension. As a figure within that epic, both Yunes and the gate of the sun seem capable of anything—even the liberation of Palestine and the evasion of death. Khalil also focuses most of his stories about Yunes and Nahilah to their gate of the sun days. Of the years when their health became too frail to continue making the trip, Khalil says very little, wrapping up Yunes' story in front of his grave site with only a few pages of reference. The gate of the sun frames the epic of Yunes' story, a symbol of the hope Yunes and Nahilah found in resistance, and a symbol Khalil clings to.

Through the framework of Khalil's witnessing, the gate of the sun is also a metaphor for witnessing itself. In the most literal sense, the gate of the sun is a space in which two people work to meet and see each other in resistance to opposition. Similarly, witnessing operates as a nonliteral space in which speaker and listener move beyond the experience of othering to recognize, respond to, and truly see one another. Oliver describes witness as a kind of seeing "what cannot be seen," which is the inherent subjectivity of the other (17). She further writes that "Rather than seeing others with the objectifying gaze of a self-sufficient subject . . . struggling with the other, we can see others with loving eyes that invite loving response" (19). By this, Oliver argues for witness as *response* over traditional recognition, a response she describes as "seeing others" (19). In this way, the gate of the sun is a functional metaphor for the space of witnessing; a place where two subjects work to recognize the other.

The gate of the sun also functions as a metaphor for witnessing, as it can be reopened through the medium of story and memory. Previously, I discussed the implications of the fact that the gate of the sun is extant due to Nahilah's choice to clean and close it. Not only does it persist, allowing the hope it symbolizes to be accessed again, but it is Khalil's act of witnessing that mediates and makes that access possible. Like he maintains Yunes' life even past his

physical death through his memory-keeping, Khalil can reopen the gate of the sun through the same methods. This makes the gate of the sun a metaphor for witnessing because it is closed—like memory, it belongs to the past. But also like memory, it may again be opened through the method of witnessing.

The gate of the sun as a metaphor for Khalil's witnessing aligns the gate of the sun with the humanization and resistance implicit in that witnessing. It implies that witnessing, like the gate of the sun as a symbol, is key to hope for the future of Palestine. When Khoury says he sought to write about "overcom[ing] occupation through love" when creating the gate of the sun story between Yunes and Nahilah, he also accomplished this goal in writing about Khalil's witness (CSPAN). In all these ways, the gate of the sun is a metaphor for the experience of witness and memory-keeping. In the articulation of this metaphor, the gate of the sun combines its hope for the future of Palestine enabled through love to the experience of witnessing, linking the empathetic and humanizing nature of witness to the future of Palestine.

CONCLUSION

Throughout *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury explores the ways witnessing liberates and how trauma challenges those attempting to bear witness. Witnessing is an ethical imperative which defies oppressive circumstances by articulating silencing and validating subjectivity. In writing *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury not only emphasizes the value of witnessing but bears witness himself. The process of witnessing is challenged by silencing, trauma, and oppression but seeks to overcome these things as an expression of hope and recognition. Khoury communicates this ethical imperative using the gate of the sun through Khalil's witnessing.

Because the gate of the sun is a symbol of the future of Palestine through the embedded story of Yunes and Nahilah, it serves a more nuanced role as it appears contextualized through Khalil's witnessing. When juxtaposed with the framework story, Yunes and Nahilah's story about acts of resistance which leads them to meet at the gate of the sun serves as a metaphor for Khalil's witnessing. Through both of these acts of resistance, the characters establish hope for the future of Palestine and Khoury expresses his own hope for empathetic witnessing to liberate the oppressed and to enable the future of Palestine.

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