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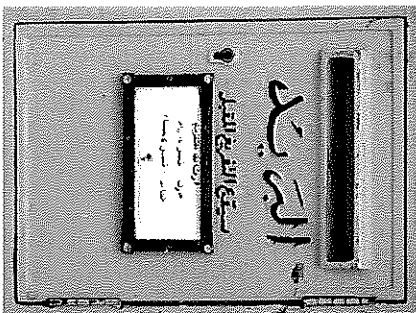
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New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature Roger Allen, Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, Francisco M. Rodríguez Sierra y Tetz Rooke

New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature
Roger Allen, Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, Francisco M. Rodríguez Sierra y Tetz Rooke (eds.)



New Geographies: Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature explora las regiones y géneros literarios que no suelen recibir demasiada atención por parte de crítica y academia en el ámbito de la Literatura Árabe Moderna. La mayoría de los estudios que se publican en este volumen fueron presentados en el XI congreso de EUBALVA (European Association for Modern Arabic Literature), celebrado en la Universidad Autónoma de Madrid entre los días 7 y 10 de mayo de 2014, aunque otros fueron añadidos posteriormente para dar forma a este libro.

Los estudios que aquí se ofrecen guardan relación con los temas propuestos para el congreso. En primer lugar, las transformaciones representadas por los nuevos géneros (génera ficción, novela gráfica, etc.), escritores árabes emergentes y los cambios acontecidos en la configuración del canon literario así como dentro de las formas formales y temáticas que vienen ocurriendo en el panorama literario árabe. En segundo lugar, la revisión de temas ya consagrados, como la relación entre literatura árabe y literatura mundial (*Global Literatures*), el elemento religioso en la escritura creativa contemporánea o la validación de la literatura contemporánea (*Al-Zaman*). Dado que muchas de estas transformaciones se han dado en los últimos años, esta obra se centra principalmente en las últimas dos décadas, aunque algunos temas requieren necesariamente perspectivas históricas o diacrónicas según el caso.

Este volumen se divide en dos partes. La primera, *Contexts*, está dedicada a temas esenciales relacionados con el campo, incluyendo aproximaciones comparativas y diacrónicas, así como movimientos literarios y tendencias tales como el surrealismo o la crítica ficción. La segunda parte, *Texts*, incluye análisis de textos concretos (particularmente narrativos, aunque también poéticos), generalmente situados dentro de las nuevas geografías y géneros que hasta tiempos muy recientes se han visto infrarepresentados.





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Texts and Contexts in Modern Arabic Literature



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Contents

9	1. Introduction
15	— “Transforming the Arabic Literary Canon”, Roger Allen
	— “New Media’ and the Transformation of the Public Sphere in the <i>nahḍa</i> Period and Today: How the Advent of the Periodical Press and the Internet Have Affected the Arabic Literary Field – Analogies and Differences”, Barbara Winkler.....
27	— “Programs of Renewal. Towards an <i>’adab al-bawḥ wa’l-siḍq wa’l-karāmah?</i> An analytical and comparative glance at the forewords of some recent (literary?) publications”, Stephan Guth
65	— “Médias, religion et écriture romanesque dans le nouveau champ littéraire arabe”, Sobhi Bustani
81	— “The Planet of Stupidity. Environmental Themes in Arabic Speculative Fiction”, Tetz Rooke
99	— “Syria and the Reception of Surrealism: <i>Shayal</i> 1947 vs. Radio SūrīaLi (SūrīaLi) 2012”, Arturo Monaco
115	— “À propos du <i>zāḡal marocain</i> ”, Mercedes Aragón Huerta
135	3. Texts
	— “Encounters of a Different Kind: Two Emerging Novelists from the Gulf”, Rashed El-Enany.....
145	— “Paysages et narration: du reportage à la fiction dans l’œuvre de Yūsuf Rakha”, Monica Ruocco.....
151	— “Poétique de l’ <i>autofiction</i> dans <i>al-’ajnadhiyya (l’Étrangère)</i> de Alia Mam-douh”, Dounia Abourachid Badini
165	
7	

- “Between Fantasy and Science Fiction: Saudi Society through the Eyes of a Jinn”, Ada Barbaro..... 181
- “*Khalf al-shams* by Bushra al-Maqari, when Commitment is Female in a Macho Society”, Francesco De Angelis..... 203
- “Transtextual Postmodernity: Hassan Najmi’s Novel: *Girwid*, Gertrude Stein’s *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and Anais Nin’s *The Dary of Anais Nin*”, Joshua Abdallah Sabih..... 217
- “Narrating the Unnarratable: The Role of Literary Memory in Moroccan Testimonial Writing. *Hadith al-‘amnah* by Fatmah al-Bih”, Tina Dransfeldt Christensen..... 237
- “Traces of Postmemory in Salman Natūr’s *Dhakira*”, Simone Sibilio..... 251
- “The poetic voice. Muzaffar an-Nawwab: A singular case of literary circulation and reception”, Fatima Sai..... 271
- “Re-defining identity in exile: an analysis of the Saudi novel *al-Uryūha* by Badriyya Bashir”, Mercedes S. Melchor Velayos..... 279
- “مسألة الحب الأجنبي المحاصر”, Peter Komerding..... 293

Traces of Postmemory in Salīmān Nāṭūr's *Dhākira*

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In memory of Salīmān Nāṭūr

The notion of postmemory, much debated in Holocaust Studies, has been less investigated in the scholarly fields of Middle Eastern Studies and Arabic literary criticism. Nevertheless, there is a growing number of works by Palestinian scholars and writers on the memory of the Nakba, the 1948 Palestinian catastrophe, that accounts for the effects of the transgenerational transfer of that trauma. In light of increasing interest in this 'received memory' in contemporary Palestinian cultural production, this essay will explore the challenging way in which memory and postmemory of the Nakba interact in the work *Dhākira* by the Israeli Palestinian writer Salīmān Nāṭūr. Particular attention will be also paid to the use of the different modes and media of trans-generational transmission of trauma.

1. PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Scholarly debate on postmemory and transgenerational transfer of traumatic memory, which has been fueled by and large through the extreme case of the Shoah, has in recent times widened the spectrum of analysis to embrace other historical human catastrophes of our time. Several critical essays focusing on postmemory, within the larger frame-work of cultural memory studies, have appeared in recent decades, from different areas: in post-conflict contexts and countries marked by genocides, apartheid, violent elimination or expulsion of minorities, massacres of civilians or any kind of cataclysmic event that has had a devastating impact on their societies, such as South America, Caribbean Countries, South Africa, East Africa, Vietnam, and Soviet and East European Countries. Albert Timidly and cautiously, this notion has more recently started to enter the discursive field of Palestine Studies, inherently related to the memory of the Nakba, the 1948 catastrophe, which represents a watershed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the loss of their land and the beginning of their exodus and displacement. After providing a brief assessment of the 'Nakba postmemory issue' in Palestine studies, this essay will propose a reading of the prose work, *Dhākira* (Memory), by the

Israeli/Palestinian writer Salma Nahir (1949-2016), viewing it through the lens of the paradigmatic interplay between memory and postmemory. Yet, before I begin the analysis itself, I will first clarify conceptually the meaning of postmemory and the transgenerational transmission of trauma.

Postmemory is a kind of collective and cultural memory that connects the witnesses from generations of those who have witnessed traumatic events to the next generation—or what has come to be known as “the generation after”—those who have grown up with overwhelming inherited memories. The term was first introduced by the Romanian Jewish scholar, Marianne Hirsch, in her essay, “Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning and Post-Memory” (1993). She developed this concept further in her seminal study, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997), a work that mostly focuses on the effects of Holocaust photographs on the second generation. She has returned to the discussion in more recent essays, such as *The Generation of Postmemory* (2008) and *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012).² Her critical inputs have led to the extension of its use in Holocaust studies, as demonstrated by an increasing number of interdisciplinary contributions by several scholars, including Ernst van Alphen and Leslie Morris.³

In coining the term, Hirsch drew inspiration from Henri Raczykowski’s notion of *mémoire trouée*, that is a “memory shot through with holes”. The notion of *mémoire trouée* also defines “the indirect and fragmentary nature of second-generation memory”.⁴ Hirsch considers postmemory as “not a movement, method, or idea”, but rather as a cognitive structure of “inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience”⁶ by taking the Holocaust as a historical frame of reference. In fact, she applies it to understand the works of Jewish diaspora writers and visual artists who are sons of Holocaust survivors. Yet for her the concept can be relevant and extendable to the analyses of other contexts of traumatic transfer where the generation-after’s memory is at stake.

Transgenerational transmission of trauma is a concept that scholars in Holocaust studies have drawn from psychiatric literature and particularly within the field of traumatic

1 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today*, 29:1 (Spring 2008): 105-106. For complete reference see related bibliography.

2 We should remember that the term postmemory as elaborated within this theoretical field is to be placed alongside other expressions coined to study and describe the generational interconnection through the transmission of memory and the resounding after-effects of trauma. Just to mention the most relevant among these: ‘belated memory’ or ‘vicarious witness’ (Zeitlin, 1998), ‘received history’ (Young, 1997), and ‘received memory’ (Holtman, 2004). For further insight, see Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” op. cit., 105.

3 Born to a Jewish family in Paris in 1948, Henri Raczykowski is considered one of the most brilliant writers of the so-called Post-Holocaust generation. “Memory shot through with holes” is the title of his essay published in 1986. See “La mémoire trouée,” *Partes* 3 (1986): 177-182.

4 Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* ed. 2, illustrated (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23.

6 Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” 106.

stress. It refers to the transfer of trauma from the first generation of trauma survivors to the second, and further generations of descendants of the survivors.

The transgenerational process is viewed through a social-work, family-systems perspective that suggests what happens in one generation will affect the next. Transgenerational trauma transmission suggests contagion, repeated and observable patterns within the family.⁷

The intergenerational transmission of trauma is a concept more commonly used in reference to the third generation affected directly or indirectly by their parents' post-traumatic symptoms.

The relationship between the eyewitness generation and the generation of postmemory⁸—what Eva Hoffmann has called the “hinge generation” between experience and traumatic memory and its inter- and transgenerational transmission through the lens of cultural and media productions in the most diverse contexts.

2. POSTMEMORY AND NAKBA: A QUESTIONABLE RELATIONSHIP?

How can we understand the Palestinian postmemory related to the traumatic experience of the Nakba, and the reception of this concept within the Arab and Palestinian scholarly community? Before we apply this term to the Palestinian experience, it is necessary to elucidate some preliminary distinctions. A theoretical debate on the ‘postmemory of the Nakba’ is still in its incipient phase, though there are plenty of studies, research projects, stories, works, films and testimonies that inform the deep interconnections between the generation who directly experienced the 1948 catastrophe and the following one which has come to terms with the legacy of that trauma.

The experience of the Palestinian “generation of postmemory”—the one born after 1948 and yet one whose life has been decisively determined by this familiar and cultural memory—as well as the transgenerational transfer of the memory of the Nakba within exile or any other displaced Palestinian community are increasingly likely to become the focus of great concern for scholars. A large body of work, in both literature and cultural and artistic fields, shows how the familial or communal transmission of the memory of 1948 has not only shaped the identity of following generations of Palestinians, but also continues to have a profound impact on the lives of exiles and refugees.⁹

⁷ Charles R. Figley (edit. by), *Encyclopedia of Trauma: An Interdisciplinary Guide* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2012), 671.
⁸ Eva Hoffmann, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
⁹ Many Palestinian literary works focus on the identity of the second generation, shaped by familial memory of 1948. Such a crucial topic has attracted most Palestinian writers from the post-Nakba

A broader space for critical debate is indeed offered by visual culture and cinema, given the blossoming in the Palestinian cultural world during recent decades of not only memorial works on the events of the uprooting and exodus, but also artistic representations of that traumatic recollection in the collective memory. Conceptually, postmemory seems to be particularly pertinent, if applied critically, to some of those Palestinian films which take on the Nakba as a privileged object of representation. The haunting presence of the past, the role of oral stories, the dynamics of remembrance, and the second generation narratives are all common motifs in the cinema of Michel Khleifi and Rashid Masharawi. Visual reconstruction of a lost landscape and the representation of the wounds on the victims' bodies requires an imaginative investment prompted by received memories. According to Khleifi and Geerts, Hirsch's ideas on postmemory are appropriate in discussions of exilic directors from the second and third generations of the Palestinian Nakba, who have inherited from their ancestors memories of their troubled past and now feel the need to transmute that mediated memory into a creative act.¹⁰

A seminal contribution in the field of Palestinian postmemory has come from Lila Abu Lughod, daughter of the prominent Palestinian historian, Ibrahim Abu Lughod.¹¹ Her essay, "Return to Haifa-Ruins. Memory, Postmemory and Living History in Palestine," is a meditation on the changing perception of a catastrophic event when confronted with living history. In this article, she focuses on her own experience as a daughter who has inherited a traumatic past. The primary object of her research is her father's return to Palestine after forty years of exile in the United States. Interweaving her father's private memories of Palestine and Jaffa with her own experiences, she shows how the postmemory of the 'generation after' functions when the founding trauma of the Nakba is not over and still marks the everyday life of Palestinians.¹² This latter assumption opens the way to an important distinction. Mariamne Hirsch explores family memories of traumatic events belonging to the past, universally acknowledged and condemned, even if their effects continue in the present. Contrary to this, Nakba survivors and subsequent generations in the Palestinian case, those who have inherited that traumatic memory, give to postmemory a deep and complex significance because "the past has not yet passed", and the atrocities of the Nak-

generation, including Ghassan Zaqqān, Ibrahim Nasrallah, Elias Sanbar, and Fawaz Turki. For further details, see Isabella Camera d'Affitto, *Centro anni di cultura palestinese* (Roma: Carocci, 2007), 67-126; Simone Sibillo, *Nakba. La memoria letteraria della catastrofe palestinese* (Roma: Edizioni Q, 2013), 91-119; Ihab Salou, *Catastrofe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and Elias Khoury, "Rethinking the Nakba," in *Critical Inquiry* 38:2 (2012): 250-266.

¹⁰ Nurith Gertz, George Khleifi, *Palestinian Cinema. Landscape, Trauma and Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 111.

¹¹ See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Return to Haifa-Ruins. Memory, Postmemory and Living History in Palestine," in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 77-104.

¹² As she puts it, "My father's insertion of memory into the historical present made possible a different knowledge and identification for his children as well". See Lila Abu-Lughod, "Return to Haifa-Ruins," op. cit., 79.

ba have not yet been politically recognized nor fully acknowledged by the international community.¹³

Going deeper into this issue, the Palestinian researcher Ihab Saloul uses his cultural essay, *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*, to problematize the very notion of postmemory when referred to the founding trauma of the Nakba. He maintains that this notion only acquires a meaning if it is used as a " shorthand for the 'presentness' of a temporal, ongoing Nakba".¹⁴ For Saloul, the Palestinian past and present are more closely bound up together than other cases in our history. For him the term "post", is problematic because it

is by no means constitutive of the experience of catastrophe of subsequent generations of Palestinians; they do not have just post-memories of *al-Nakba*. Whereas the first generations of post-*Nakba* Palestinians have memories and experiences of the originating event of *al-Nakba*, second and third generations of post-*Nakba* Palestinians, although they have not experienced this originating moment in 1948, are still "inside" the event itself, living the catastrophe every day.¹⁵

If according to Hirsch, the prefix "post" in postmemory "signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in the aftermath", and like the other "posts" of our time (e.g. postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism), "reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture",¹⁶ then, in the Palestinian case, neither a rupture nor a temporal and emotional distance from that traumatic past is collectively perceived. The 'post-ness' of that experience is questioned and challenged by the persistence, the 'on-goingness', of the state of things which govern the lives of all Palestinians, wherever they may be: be it those living in exile, or those who live either under occupation or in Israel as members of an oppressed minority group. The second and third generations of post-Nakba Palestinians feel as though they 'belong' to this ongoing traumatic process as victims of ceaseless displacement and fragmentation. They are *mankhubun*, 'catastrophed subjects',¹⁷ whose lands are being relentlessly violated as much as their lives, hopes and aspirations are being inexorably frustrated, regardless of their status or conditions.¹⁸

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Ihab Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile*, op. cit., 12.

¹⁵ *Idem*, 207.

¹⁶ Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory", 106.

¹⁷ Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile*, 13.

¹⁸ We should not forget that the current relevance of the Nakba as a spatio-temporal *continuum*, a paradigmatic persistent sign of dislocation and dispossession, has been claimed over the years by the most influential Palestinian thinkers and historians, from Edward Said (Sa'id) and Ibrahim Abu Lughud to Nur Masalha (Nūr al-Dīn Masāliḥa), and Elias Sanbar, along with other Arab scholars like Elias Khoury (Ilyās Khūrī) and Joseph Massad (Mas'ad), and Israeli scholars

The seeming hesitancy in the use of the term postmemory in Palestinian studies could also be explained by other factors which entail a combination of theoretical, cultural and political dimensions. Some Nakba scholars seem to refrain from adopting critical concepts or paradigms that have arisen within the field of Holocaust Studies and are still in vogue in the Israeli Studies. It is not always appropriate nor scientifically plausible for some Palestinian scholars to draw on theoretical frameworks that are perceived as relating to the other's emotional, historical and cultural experiences. We should also not forget that the postmemory issue is to be located within the broader debate on memory and in the case of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, to be based on the political use of memory. In a political arena strongly marked by the polarization of memorial discourses and their matrices of power, Palestinians are still struggling against a "state of denial" of the Nakba as historical fact and, consequently, its memoricide.¹⁹ In self-representing as 'the victims of the victims', in Said's words, they have shown an ambivalent posture with regard to Holocaust memory. Most Palestinian scholars, along with a large number of Israel's new historians, have claimed that there is a cause-effect relationship between the two human catastrophes and that Holocaust memory is often used in the public discourse for the sake of political manipulation, i.e. as a justification for the measures taken by Israel in the framework of the conflict.²⁰

Furthermore, the claim of the uniqueness and incomparability of the Holocaust, as well as its primacy in the fields of trauma and memory studies, may serve to discourage comparative research or methodologies on the Palestinian side, aimed at an inclusive and shared framework.²¹ Besides, language-usage offers yet another consideration to illustrate how inconvenient it may be to grapple with the other's cultural experiences and theoretical assumptions. We find the term postmemory in Arabic sources translated both as *mā ba'ad al-dhākirā* and as *al-dhākirā al-muwallada*. The former is a literal translation that recurs in most of the neologisms introduced by the prefix 'post-'; this suggests the spatio-temporal distance from the object. The latter, in my opinion,

like Avi Shlaim, Ian Pappé, and Uri Ram--just to cite the most prominent figures. All of them have played an active role in the debate on the Palestinian collective memory of the Nakba, its transmission and current claims.

¹⁹ The reference here is to two terms used by Ian Pappé. For the 'memoricide' of the Nakba see *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2006). For the 'state of denial,' see his essay 'State of Denial: The Nakbah in Israeli History and Today' in Noam Chomsky and Ian Pappé, *Gaza in Crisis: Reflections on Israel's War Against the Palestinians*. Edited by Frank Barat. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2010).

²⁰ I have developed this point in my previous essay: Simone Sibilo, Nakba. *La memoria letteraria*, op. cit. See also Nur Masalha, *The Palesine Nakba: Decolonising History*, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

²¹ In this regard Bashir and Amos Goldberg are convinced that a joint Arab-Jewish public deliberation on the traumatic memories of these two events is "fundamental for producing an egalitarian and inclusive ethics of binationalism in Israel/Palestine". See Bashir and Amos Goldberg, "Deliberating the Holocaust and the Nakba: disruptive empathy and binationalism in Israel/Palestine" *Journal of Genocide Research* Vol. 16 n. 1 (2014): 77.

is closer to the concept of 'inherited memory,' relying on the second pattern of the augmented verb from the root W-L-D, with the more nuanced meaning of 'generated' or 'engendered' memory, in its attempt to translate the process of transgenerational transmission.²²

Even though, both in Palestine studies and in Arab literary criticism, this notion has not been widely received and borrowed so far, be it due to its primary 'field of affiliation', or because of its problematic prefix 'post', it is worthwhile to note that the focus on 'the generation of postmemory', can be found in a growing number of Palestinian literary works. Literature, like other media, can serve as a useful lens in understanding the ground of these existential dilemmas and the crises of memory that affects the Palestinians' relationship to their own past.

In what follows I will demonstrate how this complex and paradigmatic structure of inter- and transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience takes place in the prose work *Dhākira* (Memory)²³ by the Israeli Palestinian writer Salmān Nāṭūr.²⁴ He is one of the most prolific intellectuals addressing the issue of Palestinian collective memory, and is at the same time most sensitive to the preservation of the oral heritage.

²² The most widely employed translation of postmemory in Arabic sources is *ma ba'ad al-dhākira*. See also its use in the Arabic translation of Salou's essay *The Afterlives of 1948: Photographic Remembrances in a Time of Catastrophe* included in a bilingual volume on Israeli and Palestinian memories of 1948. For further insight see Adwan et al., *Zoom in. Palestinian refugees of 1948. Remembrances* (Dordrecht and Boston: Republic of Letters, 2011), 48-52. For the use of the expression *al-dhākira al-muwallada* see the translation into Arabic of Lila Abu Lughod's above-mentioned article in Lila Abu Lughod, "'Awda liha baqāya al-ajāl: Al-dhākira wa al-dhaki-ra al-muwallada wa' tārīkh al-ḥayy fi Filasṭīn", transl. by Husam Nayil, in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 30, Trauma and Memory (2010), 217-249.

²³ Salmān Nāṭūr, *Dhākira* (Hayfa: Dar Abu Salmā, 1983; Ramallah: Mu'assasat Tamir, 1998; Bayt Lahm: Markaz Badil, 2006).

²⁴ Born in 1949 in a Druze family in the village of Daliyat al-Karmil, Salmān Nāṭūr completed his higher education in Jerusalem and Haifa, specializing in General Philosophy. He worked in journalism from 1968 to 1990, editing the cultural section of the "al-Itihād" newspaper and the "al-Jadid" magazine. Novelist, journalist, playwright, and translator, he has published twenty-eight books and six plays in Hebrew and Arabic. Among his books, *Khammarat al-balad* (The Tavern of the Country, 1987); *Min hunāka ḥatira ihawat al-na'na'* (From There to the Mint Revolution, 1995); *Kamshina 'ala al-rīḥ aw hiya 'awda liha Baysan* (Walking over the Wind or A Return to Beisan, 1991), *Dhākira* has been translated into Hebrew and Italian, and has also been adapted as a play, directed by Adib Jishan and performed on the Saraya stage in Jaffa in 2003, and in Lebanon by director Qasim Isānbuli. It later toured different theaters across Middle East. Nāṭūr has also translated several books from Hebrew into Arabic, by prominent Israeli writers including Amos Oz, David Grossman, Egar Keret and Abraham Yehoshua. He was the director of the Israeli-Palestinian Committee of Artists and Writers against the Occupation (1986-1992) and served on the board of directors of Adafah, the legal Center for Arab minority rights in Israel (2000-2006). He was the director of the Emil Tuna Institute for Israeli and Palestinian Studies in Haifa (since 2002). He died in 2016.

- ²⁵ Salimā Nāṭūr, "Adab al-dhakira wa dhakirat al-adab," *Dawn al-'Arab*, June 7, 2007, last accessed January 18, 2015, <http://www.diwanaarab.com/spip.php?article9340>.
- ²⁶ Meeting with the author, October 6, 2012, Feltrinelli Libri e Musica, Milan (Italy).

demolished houses, split families, events, situations and landscapes obliterated by history, been buried for decades, from surfacing. Indeed, razed villages, displaced communities, not in any way prevent human traces, geographical signs and historical truths that have real-life before, during and after 1948. Yet the aesthetic device of fictionalized tales does distance between facts so that they coalesce into one another to forge fragmented frames of stories and memories, organized in a seemingly random sequence that blurs the temporal *Dhakira* is a work constructed "within the memory itself"²⁶. It is based on a rich stream into texts/written records which will sustain the social memory of a silenced community.²⁵ *abdal* (heroes) of this literature"; their private stories, orally transmitted, need to be turned object of narration into an active subject who makes history. Since, "it is they who are the up the collective memory of the oppressed is it feasible to convert a passive and 'shadow' or -gaps. Only by paying homage to the multiplicity of stories and recollections that make those who remember"; recording their feelings, sensations and even their memory-lapses ambitious project of building a 'Memory Literature', *adab al-dhakira*, "by writing about In his public interventions, Nāṭūr vigorously advocates for the need to implement the communities or illiterate individuals.

important source of knowledge but also gives voice to the voiceless, i.e. to marginalized of whom have been interviewed by him personally over the years. This not only acts as terms of knowledge and experience. He relies on the accounts of Nakba survivors, many os. At the core of the author's literary research lie the existing and yet not fully explored This accomplishes the complex task of pulling readers into the various different scenarios, through the mingling of modern standard Arabic with the Palestinian dialect in dialogues, and verisimilitude in the depiction of his characters and environments are accomplished ollected in their various environments and scenarios. The dynamism of the narration reconstruction of the history of Palestine and its people since the events of 1948, re- of the Nakba. This work constitutes a powerful example of fragmented and fictionalized (Wait, 2009)—that aims to give literary shape to Palestinian storytelling and the memory the works that comprise the trilogy, *Sajf al-'ala Sajf al-'ala Sajf al-'ala* (Travel on Travel, 2008) and *Intizār* started with the *Wa mā nasima* (And we have not forgotten, 1983) and was followed by can be considered as his flagship-work, the core book of a long-range project—one that those of 1948, and the subsequent *Nakba* that befell the country and its people. *Dhakira* lies heavily on the use of oral histories that serve as a basis for large-scale events such as commemorative wave of the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba. In this text the author re- which revolves around the collective experience of Exodus and diaspora following the included in the trilogy, *Sittin 'aman: rihlat al-sahra'* (Sixty Years: Desert Journey, 2009), *Dhakira* was first published in 1983, then reprinted in 1998 and 2006, and later in-

3. MEMORY AND POSTMEMORY: AMBIVALENT TRAJECTORIES OF ARTICULATION IN DHAKIRA

are dug out from popular and family memories of the *manḵabīn*, and thus, re-enacted on the stage of life.

Dhākīra is founded on two major interrelated topics: obsession with memory loss, further prompted by the awareness of the gradual disappearance of the Nakba eyewitness-generation; and the consequent struggle against oblivion that makes use of every possible means. Hence, the enduring value of oral histories as a primary source for reopening the path to a scarcely accessible past. Equally pivotal is the role of the generation after the Nakba, they being the entrusted guardians of a memory passed down to them with all its complications and implications: they are now responsible for preserving it as well as ensuring its survival over time.

In this work there are two leading voices that lead us on the journey through the threads of memory. The central character is a shaykh described as *mushaqqaq al-wajh*²⁷, someone with 'a cracked and wrinkled face'. He is the aged eyewitness to the dramatic historical evolution of Palestine, from the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of the British Mandate, until the birth of the State of Israel and the disappearance of Palestine from the world's history and geography. The shaykh digs out episodes and stories from his people's memory to assert their existence and cultural identity. Each of his wrinkles, which symbolize not only the fatigue of life experience, but also the living sore of remembrance, bears witness to the key events in the recent history of Palestine.²⁸ In the second part of the work the leading voice is the young narrator, an embodiment of the author himself, who was born in 1949 and has lived and grown up constantly confronting an overwhelming inherited past, a haunting memory which permeates his whole life. The complex interaction between memory and postmemory, the latter intended here in a broader sense than simply being limited to the intimate embodied space of family, takes place within various layers and levels of analysis, and pursues different trajectories of articulation. All these trajectories will be explored here. In what follows I will illustrate three levels that emerge from the work, exploring the possibilities of the transgenerational transfer of knowledge and information and the resilient impact of a postmemorial space on the Palestinian struggle against memory loss.

4. COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND IDENTITY AT STAKE, THE BLACKOUT RISK IN TRANSGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION

A first trajectory of analysis can be traced by exploring the received memory in terms of alienation and otherness, through the filter of the *leit-motif* of "guilt". Inasmuch as the young narrator represents the generation of postmemory, his narration, oscillating between the first person singular and plural, and thus between private and collective

²⁷ This leading eye-witness figure had already appeared in his previous work, *Wa mā nasīd*, published in *Al-Jadīd* in the years 1980-1982.

²⁸ Salmān Nāṭūr, "Dhākīra," in Idem, *Sittin 'aman: rihlat al-shaykh* ('Ammān and Rāmāllāh: Dar al-Shurūq, 2009), 11.

experience, is characterized by shattered thoughts fraught with thorny existential questions that are left unanswered. His style is plain and lean; its tone is meditative and often fluctuates between dark irony and self-victimization. The landscape of solitude and immobility that is drawn is permeated by the young narrator's feeling of otherness and atonement for a guilt that has weighed him down ever since his birth: "We were born in guilt", so opens the first fragment of the second section, entitled *Fī-l-khāt'ā* (In guilt), invoking Biblical reference, in which the writer calls into question the very meaning of life and procreation.

Why was I born after a war that is still ongoing and endless? There is a winner and a loser, but why do they always want me to be the loser? Why was I born in a homeland which has been eroding day by day, consuming its people hour after hour?²⁹

The sense of alienation and helplessness grips the generation of postmemory forced to carry the burden of a past that is not fully understandable, since it is only experienced through the painful recollections of the previous generation. Even so, its repercussions that impact their daily lives are irrevocable. The second generation has inherited a terrifying and absurd life "far beyond the limits of folly and death". The people who experienced the trauma first-hand are often left with gaps or distortions in memory, in a state of belatedness. Here, the trans-generational transfer of experience manifests itself through discontinuity and gaps in knowledge that affect the second generation that feels overwhelmed by a sense of loss. In monologue form, it constitutes the representation of an identity crisis suffered by a whole generation at the mercy of guilt's dark shadow--the guilt resulting from the war certainly, but, above all, the guilt of those born in its aftermath:

(...) We belong to this place and this time like anyone else in the world; yet, to be born after the first war³⁰ has turned us into a living proof. We are a black-inked historical document, in draft form. Our predecessors claimed that they died as martyrs for us while we assert that we will die as martyrs for the ones that will come after us. We convince ourselves that this is the headspring of happiness. How terrifying and absurd is our life, far beyond the limits of folly and death. It is an empty circle with no rhyme or reason. We always occupy its center, both when we receive and when we give, because we were born after the first war, and that conflict has made us bear all the responsibility for it.³¹

This 'guilt-transfer', which the descendants have to cope with, may reproduce itself as an escape-strategy for future generations in the hope of finding relief from self-respon-

²⁹ Salmaan Natūr, "Dhākīra," op. cit., 156.
³⁰ In the text, *al-harb al-īlā*. Here the reference is to the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948.
³¹ Salmaan Natūr, "Dhākīra," op. cit., 158.

sibility. The trans-generational connection here appears to be marked by absence and lack, where the fatalist perspective on life, which permeates the young narrator's words, is the direct result of the passing down of an historical discourse that has been received and inherited, but not fully acknowledged and assimilated into present-day life.

Most of the material used in *Dhākira* is the product of the author's data collection from the interviews that he conducted in the early 1980's with groups of Palestinians who had become refugees on their own land. In the first instance these refugees had refused to recount their stories because of their fear of Israeli counter-measures. Nātur recalls how a guilt-feeling had long accompanied the silence of the war generation; they were reluctant to recount their stories, either because of a fear of accusations of treason or of their inability to defend their own land.³² Salmīn Tamār well describes the core of that intergenerational divide during the activities of 1998 commemorating the Nakba:

Testimonies commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba in the spring of 1998 confounded both narrators and listeners. The former were perplexed as to why they had kept silent for what seemed like an eternity before relating their untold stories. The listeners (most of them belonging to the younger, third generation) were also confounded by the silence of their elders. Was it because their catastrophe was an expression of divine retribution? Or was it because their elders demonstrated a collective inability to face a superior enemy.³³

An evident rupture between past and present takes place; the strict demands of everyday life and the collective search for future meaning may serve to reduce the space for memory, knowledge and critical understanding. Against the silence and the threatening bouts of collective amnesia, Nātur summons the generation-after for the re-appropriation of memory in order to escape the danger of 'falling' into oblivion. In the fragment, *Suqūn* (Fall) we read: "Are we a generation without memory? I always wonder about it. This burdening and merciless question issues an alert, blaming us for our obsessive attachment to our painful present".³⁴

Dhākira grapples with the political, social, physical, cultural and psychological impact of the past on the Palestinian community's present. But it is also the very same past that may be silenced through this enduring preoccupation with the present. This specific limit, contends Nātur, may constitute a misleading track for the Palestinian subject, thereby undermining his identity and altering his perception of continuity and rootedness in the territory.

Postmemory serves as a linkage between the direct witness to the traumatic event and the second-generation. Yet at the same time, it acts in the present as a constructed narrative,

³² Salmān Nātur, "Adab al-dhākira," op. cit.

³³ Salmīn Tamār, *Mountain Against the Sea. Essays on Palestinian Society and Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), 56.

³⁴ Salmān Nātur, "Dhākira," op. cit., 159.

³⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, op. cit., 22.

³⁶ Ibid, 396.

CEIICH – UNAM, 2007), 396.

³⁵ Gilda Waldman Mimick, "Postmemoria, una primera aproximación" in *Memorias (in)cognitas. Contendas en la Historia*, ed. Maya Aguiluz Ibarquien and Gilda Waldman M. (Mexico City:

Talking about memory-space in relation with the Palestinian collective experience in the present inevitably raises questions about the "liminality" of current Palestinian geographical space and border issues. This prompts us to meditate on the elusiveness of postmemorial dimension if we are to take into account the shifting relationship with history and geography, with the places of the past. Postmemory's connection to its object or source, as Hirsch explains it, is mediated "through an imaginative investment and creation", rather than through recollection.³⁷ Subsequent generations of Palestinians can only see those realms of memory--most of which are buried under the rubble of war--restored to life through an imaginative investment, prompted by indirect and mediated memory,

Another critical trajectory can be articulated around what I will call "the postmemory shock" caused by disruption in the recognition process of all those geographical places, environments or landscapes which have been subjected to physical transformation. The subsequent generations of Palestinians are destined to cope with the after-effects of the trauma of displacement and loss of all those sites, houses and villages that have been violently erased in 1948 and will only survive in the memories of their forebears. For them all those sites will remain out of reach.

5. POSTMEMORY SHOCK. PLACES OUT OF REACH AND PLACES STILL THERE

one that is based on fragmented and disjointed accounts or images about a past that seems both equivocal and unsolved. The Chilean sociologist, Waldman Mimick, recalling Hirsch, insists on the fluctuating essence of postmemory, defining it as an "other" memory, which presupposes a precarious relationship with the world. It has a location in otherness, and thus it locates itself in a 'risk' space, one that is fragmentary and fragile.³⁵ This feeling of otherness is not only due to the fear of forgetfulness and absence from history, but also due to the essence of postmemory itself; it brings about a break with the traumatic past, of which only its signs, both symbolic and material, are visible and experienced in the present. Therefore, if the postmemory of the Holocaust, or of other traumatic events belonging to the past, characterizes the experience of the generation which brings with itself the "scar but not the wound",³⁶ the generations of post-Nakba Palestinians are bound to bring with themselves an open wound that is yet to be healed. The process of stemming the risk of blackout in trans-generational transmission can help to heal the rupture between past and present. This step represents a precondition, the author seems to say, for the Palestinians' assertion of their continuity and, consequently, for the preservation of their memory and identity.

either through oral testimonies or through media such as memorial books, films, recordings, and photographs, all of which, according to Aleida Assmann, can perform the function of "mediators of memory".³⁸

Dhākira is filled with references to names and places belonging to the pre-Nakba Palestinian space that, following the establishment of the State of Israel, have been incorporated into the Jewish space. Many of these are villages that had been razed to the ground by the Zionist Forces in the war of 1948. These are rehabilitated by the accounts of the wrinkled-face shaykh. The task of reconstructing his people's history and the topographical enterprise of remapping the contested territory has thus been entrusted to the old man.

The first section of the work introduces *ṣirāʾ al-shaykh*, the 'biography' of the old man, through the voice of the young narrator. In the fragment *Rāʾ* (Shepherd) we read:

When we fail to cope with geography and our present, we go back to memory. When I wanted to know what happened that year, I entered the realm of memory thanks to the shaykh with the cracked and wrinkled face. He talked to me, and together we made a long journey. In the beginning, I was convinced that we would have left at the first station; instead we continued, and reached the next one, then another. We stopped at Jaffa beach where the shaykh breathed his last breath. That's how that story went, and now here's another, not yet finished. There remain al-Birwa, Mīʾar, Maʾūl, Umm al-Zaynāt, Ayn Ghazāl, Jaba, Ṣaṭfūrīya, Ikzēm, and dozens of other villages, erased but still visible, which ask to be told; dozens of villages that speak and shout in the wrinkles of his face scarred by much travel.³⁹

Among those sites there is 'Ayn Ḥawd, a small and ancient village located at the foot of Mount Carmel. 'Ayn Hawd is a paradigmatic case of transformation of a place and its culture that leads the postmemory discourse to a paradox. The paradox lies in the fact that, while the other villages that had been erased during and after 1948 survive merely in the memory of the living witnesses, 'Ayn Ḥawd is still there, now renamed with the Jewish name of Ein Hud and transformed into a Jewish artists' colony. The former Arab inhabitants, all belonging to the same clan, the Abū al-Ḥijā's,⁴⁰ were forced to leave in

³⁸ For further development of this concept, see her comprehensive and painstaking study on cultural memory, it's opportune to mention the english translation here: Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2011), from the original German text: Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsraum: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: Beck Verlag, 1999).

³⁹ Salmān Nāṭūr, "Dhākira," op. cit., 233.

⁴⁰ The al-Ḥijā' tradition is deeply embedded in the memory of the village. They are the descendants of the Emir Abū al-Ḥijā, an Iraqi-born commander of the Kurdish force that took part in Saladin's conquest (1187–93) of the Crusader Kingdom. In this regard, Meron Benvenisti recalls, as an

1950; their lands were confiscated, following the provisions of the Absentee Property Law. But a group of them took refuge in the nearby hills and within a few years rebuilt the 'new' village, 'Ayn Hawd al-Jadida, just about two kilometers up Mount Carmel. In the meanwhile, the Moshav's Movement attempts to repopulate the evacuated 'Ayn Hawd, recruiting Jewish North African immigrants for agricultural settlement, failed, and the site was left deserted until 1953. That year, Marcel Janco, a Romanian Jewish painter and architect, world renowned forerunner of the European Dada movement, obtained permission from the Israeli authorities to create a cooperative colony on the ruins of the old Palestinian village. It became an atelier for Jewish artists that, according to Janco's intentions and artistic beliefs, was meant to preserve the original Arab architecture.

The story of 'Ayn Hawd/Bin Hud is very well-known; its particular case has been the topic of several books and research by both Arab and Jew scholars. Now Jewish Ein Hod, as Silymovics remembers, "is an internationally known tourist site with Palestinian Arab architecture, European-style landscaping, and the normal amenities of an established municipality,"⁴¹ while the 'Arab' 'Ayn Hawd al-Jadida won full citizenship recognition by the State of Israel only in 2005, after a long struggle by its inhabitants against the denial of their rights as citizens of the country.

Natur, who had already dealt with the case of 'Ayn Hawd, namely on the memory of the old village, in *Wa ma nasina: 'Ayn Hawd* (1980),⁴² takes us once again into the depths of the village's story through the voice of the old man's son, the inheritor of that memory. His account, punctuated by pungent realism, takes place during a conversation with the young narrator:

In 'Ayn Hawd, that they turned into Ein Hud, there was a large mosque with a minaret many meters above both sea- and ground-level. Now in the artists' village the mosque has been converted into a restaurant with a beautiful girl who caters to the artists' needs and those of their guests. In the moments of relaxation and calm, she puts on soft music in the background, then disappears in an entrance-hall and God's light fades.⁴³

Silymovics clarifies Janco's intimate link between the rhetorics of place, memory and political action, well-grounded in the Zionist discourse, underlining the neo-colonial

indication of their pride in family tradition and their feeling of rootedness in that territory, still marked by unequivocal signs, how rooted in the family is the memory of Saladin's entrustment of the land to the Emir: "When Salah Al-Din requested that Abu al-Hija designate the boundaries of the village, the Emir took his walking stick and threw it. The stick landed on the rocks near the coast at 'Atlit and left a clearly visible mark on one of them. That mark exists to this day." See Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape. The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 193.

⁴¹ Susan Silymovics, *The Object of Memory. Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), XVI-XVII.

⁴² Salman Natur, "Wa ma nasina: 'Ayn Hawd," in *al-Jadid* 6 (June 1980): 14-16.

⁴³ Salman Natur, "Dhakira," op. cit., 40.

approach that ruthlessly suppresses the physical and cultural existence of native inhabitants and their rights, yet exploits their natural and architectural space and landscape:

Janco's theoretical innovation was to appropriate an entire self-contained, agrarian Arab village in which traditional modes of architecture survived, and to give a new meaning to the spatial configurations which had given structure to the life of the village - mosque and plaza, communal guest-houses and oil-presses.⁴⁴

The case of 'Ayn Hāwā' village is a paradigmatic example in which the interaction between memory and postmemory results in a jarring relationship with the current reality, whereas the blend of past and present make the 'post' embed into the 'pre', and the 'after' into the 'before'. It can be considered an unprecedented case of forced dislocation, both physical and imaginative. 'Ayn Hāwā', although transformed into something else, is still there, and stands as a living museum of traces of a prior existence, not totally erased, but covered up through the overwriting of a dominant narrative. It is the site of a buried memory which nevertheless serves as a challenge to Israeli spatial and cultural hegemony, by means of the permanence of old signs, both architectural and cultural, physical and symbolic. The ancient 'Ayn Hāwā', has not only been eternalized through oral accounts and memorial books, which serve like Hirsch's family frames, but also continues to resist physical change through traces and signs marking the land.

6. TROPES AND MEDIA OF TRANS-GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF MEMORY

Finally and by the way of conclusion, a last relevant level of articulation, in which the relationship between memory and postmemory unfolds, is most closely related to the recurring use of symbols and media of trans-generational transmission of memory. Postmemory is activated through mediated images and stories, objects and tools, and also behaviors and affects passed down within the family, the exile community or the societal culture at large. In *Dhākira* we can find many tropes that forcefully mobilize the work of postmemory. These are key identity symbols that strengthen the connection with the land of remembrance and nourish the hope of return. Among the most powerful "anchors of remembrance"⁴⁵ are keys, a highly pervasive symbol of both the custody of the homes that the Palestinians were forced to flee following the Nakba, and of their right of return. Many refugees, whether in

⁴⁴ Susan Slyomovics, "Discourses on the Pre-1948 Palestinian Village: The Case of Ein Hod/Ein Houd," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* 4 (2), (1993): 30.
⁴⁵ Juliane Hammer, "Homeland Palestine. Lost in the Catastrophe of 1948 and Recreated in Memories and Art," in *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies. Proceedings of the Third Summer Academy of the Working Group Modernity and Islam Held at the Orient Institute of the German Oriental Society in Beirut*, ed. Angelica Neuwirth and Andreas Pfittsch. (Beirut: Ergon Verlag in Kommission, 2001), 454.

the camps or in exile, have for long preserved their house-keys in the belief that they would be returning home in a short time.⁴⁶ Memory is the very key that can unlock the gates of history and give sense to the present and to life itself. Salimān Nāṭir refers to this multi-layered trope stressing its "staying power", seeing it as a medium of permanence and continuity over time. He repeatedly insists on the affective and emotional dimensions to which it is bound, thereby enabling it to function as a multiple signifier deeply rooted in the framing of *sumūd* and the Palestinian resistance culture: the act of storing house-keys has to be interpreted as trans-generational transfer of hope. The fragment "*al-Miftāḥ Sayf 1980* (The Key Summer 1980)" reads: "Time cannot erase the footprints left on a key, the visible traces of the hidden emotions of the one who stored it, when he crossed the world or came out from it."⁴⁷

Other metaphors of storage, such as the closet, *al-khizāna*, the prison-cell, *al-zinzāna*, and the notebook, *al-mufakkira*, are likewise important in this perspective. The last embodies the perseverance of the generation of 1948 in recording their personal experience with the aim of preserving their collective history in the face of the politics of erasure. The wrinkled-face shaykh uses it to report his fully detailed life story:

"If I lost my notebook, I'd lose my whole life! I'm over eighty years old. Everything is recorded in here! I said to myself: I will die, but history will never die. Perhaps there are people who want to kill history. No! everything is written in this notebook!"⁴⁸

Like other personal media items, such as diaries, memoirs, autobiographies, family stories, the notebook serves the function of preserving a part of the knowledge of time past and making it available to the present community. Once it passes into public consciousness, it contributes to the production of cultural memory. The notebook is thus a repository of cultural memory, as it stores a collective heritage that would otherwise be lost. Nevertheless, as Aida Assmann argues, recalling Swift, "it is not the immanent power of the texts but the decision of posterity that will ensure whether they will survive or not". In fact, "texts depend on a social construction, on a pact across generations that will lend them support."⁴⁹ It is the Palestinian 'generation after' who should be charged with such a decisional responsibility. For Nāṭir, an enterprise for Palestinians today that is both challenging and decisive consists in setting up a uniform cultural project based on the reconstruction of their collective memory in order to counter the destruction and the loss of place occurring at the present:

We have our collective memory, and it is the memory of place and history. This is the most important issue in Palestinian narration, because we are witnesses to what is happening to the place whose inhabitants have been

⁴⁶ The key is a recurring symbol in the Palestinian folklore, in literary and visual production as much as in political and institutional discourses.

⁴⁷ Salimān Nāṭir, "Dhākira," op. cit., 167.

⁴⁸ Salimān Nāṭir, "Dhākira," op. cit., 114.

⁴⁹ Aida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 191.

kept away and who yearn to return in the future. The place is in a state of erosion and the space is narrowing; so much is changing and disappearing day after day before our eyes. So who can document this memory other than us, the one who is away or the one who remains? Despite all our efforts, we may fail to stop the erosion of place, but can we afford not to document our memory?⁵⁰

Palestinians cannot afford not to document their memory, in the context of constructing their own future. The guardianship of memory passes through media trans-generational interconnection. The notebook is a further symbol of resistance, a tool which embodies the possibilities of an 'another' story, a historical counter-narrative in contrast to both the long-lasting dominant Israeli narrative which has suppressed the voices of the 1948 victims, and the Palestinian mainstream nationalist narrative that has paid little attention to the oral accounts of refugees and groups from the rural strata of society. With the death of the old man, an allegoric representation of the ineluctable disappearance of direct witnesses, the generation after is entrusted with the task of preserving the memory of the Nakba. In the fragment *Intizar* (Waiting), the shaykh leads the young man through the threads of a topographical memory, encouraging him "to open a new page" and record all the names of the *ḥawā* and *sakīnat*, quarters and lodges, that are no longer on the map:

Write, my dear, that those who live beyond the borders know the city inch by inch, house by house. Reassure those exiles, we are still here and have not forgotten the quarters of our country. We'll keep them in memory for the living and for those who will come after us.⁵¹

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⁵⁰ Salmān Nāṭūr, "The Culture of 'the Inside': The Post-Identity Question," *Jadal* 12, Mada al-Karmel (February 2012): 3, last accessed January 10, 2015, <http://mada-research.org/en/files/2012/02/JADAL12/ENNG/Salman.pdf>.

⁵¹ Salmān Nāṭūr, "Dhākira," 126.

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