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AMJRA EL-AZHARY SONBOL

# Arab Women's Lives Retold

Exploring  
Identity  
Through  
Writing

Edited by

Nawar Al-Hassan Golley

With a Foreword by

miriam cooke



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Moving toward a homespace, getting back to work, imagining possibilities for the future: Hammad's call for a transnational mobilization of diasporic communities in ghettoized spaces is one critical approach. The wide circulation of Hammad's 2001 poem, "First writing since," describing the complex contradictions of Arab American identification in the wake of the Trade Tower attacks, is one sign that these strategies for transnational mobilization are gaining a foothold after 9/11.<sup>5</sup> Another is the open-ended run of Simmons's *Def Poetry Jam on Broadway* in New York City, in which Hammad—and many other members of diasporic communities—critiques the nation form through its connection to the logics of U.S. imperialism. They are indeed signs that transnational autobiographical identification—placing the autobiographical self in solidarity with a network of diasporic populations—has had the effect of carving out access to increasing publics. But just as U.S. foreign policy continues to deepen its military and economic engagement with the Arab world, just as "the nation question" for Palestine is answered through policies of otherness and exclusion, so too must the multiple contradictions in the nation form continue to be addressed, critiqued, and utilized as a basis for social transformation.

5. Hammad reads this poem in the series premiere for *Def Poetry Jam*, and it has been widely distributed via the Internet.

## 5

## Postnational Ethics, Postcolonial Politics

Raimonda Tawil's *My Home, My Prison*

JAMIL KHADER

How could I be free?

I am a Palestinian living under occupation.

I am a woman living in a male-dominated reactionary society.

I am a wife in a society that has made men into gods and women into submissive dolls. My house arrest has ended. My enslavement persists.

My battle for emancipation has only begun.

—Raimonda Hawa Tawil, *My Home, My Prison*

The Palestinian journalist and writer Raimonda Tawil is a unique voice in contemporary Arab women's writings. Her moving and controversial autobiography, *My Home, My Prison* (1980), contests and problematizes the dominant thematics and tropes of Arab women's literary tradition. Evelyne Accad (1995) and Mona Fayad (1996) point out that despite the opportunistic displacement and "metaphorization" of gender in the metaphysics of national presence, Arab women writers have traditionally valorized the metanarratives of nationalism, resistance to colonialism, and the unified community over women's personal identity and freedom from oppressive patriarchal traditions. Like many other women around the third world, Arab women felt obliged to identify with national resistance to colonial powers, consequently subsuming women's struggle for independence under the banner of masculinist national identity (Kandiyoti 1994). Ultimately, any womanist, or feminist, critique of Arab patriarchal structures and its nationalist master narrative had

to be suspended until a collective subjectivity and a national sovereignty were affirmed. Especially in Palestine, since the convention of the Arab Women's Congress of Palestine in 1929, Palestinian women have been expected to commit themselves to the project of nationalist mobilization (*al-aʿmal al-watani*) at the expense of their struggle for social rights and gender equity. Julie Peteet, for one, notes that "Palestinian women perceived themselves as victims of Zionism not as women, a separate social category, but as Palestinians who felt their national identity and survival in their homes threatened by British occupation and a hardly disguised Zionist claim to their country" (1991, 42). Palestinian women, however, have paid a heavy price for prioritizing national struggle over gender concerns. By 1990, as Rima Hamami and Eileen Kuttub correctly argue, the Palestinian national movement depoliticized gender, marginalized women's social rights, and even went as far as considering "women's political activism not as a contribution to national liberation but as a threat to it" (1999, 4).<sup>1</sup>

Unlike many of her sisters, however, the outspoken Palestinian journalist Raimonda Tawil insists on narrating her struggle for women's autonomy and national self-determination simultaneously as a Palestinian woman living in a repressive Arab society under Israeli military occupation and Zionist settler colonialization of the West Bank and Gaza. Raimonda Hawa Tawil was born in Acre in 1940 to an urban, bourgeois, Christian family and reluctantly became, after the 1948 Catastrophe (*al-Nakbah*), a citizen of the Israeli state, "the home of the Jewish people." She experienced firsthand the trauma of dispossession, separation of families, "minoritization," and the daily negotiation of the alien language and culture of the Israeli occupiers. She continued to live in Israel, but moved to Nazareth, where she attended a convent school. After her mother divorced her father, an unprecedented act of gender rebellion in Arabic culture, the father sent Tawil to a new school in Haifa, in order to separate her from her mother. In 1957, Tawil revoked her "second-class" Israeli citizenship, crossing the Mandelbaum Gate (Gate of Tears) to settle in Amman, Jordan. In Amman, Tawil endured the repressive puritanical traditions of Arab patriarchy, which robbed her of any sense of economic independence and the freedom of movement. Unable to return to Israel, because the Law of

Return did not apply equally to the indigenous population of Palestine, Tawil had no option but to get married. Her marriage entrapped her in a "golden cage" under patriarchal custody. But in her quest for personal autonomy and emancipation, after reading none other than *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, her marriage was troubled, as she continuously contested the image of a passive and docile wife.

Right after the 1967 Six-Day War (*al-Naksah*), she moved to the town of Nablus in the West Bank, where she witnessed once again the traumatic history of Palestinian dispossession and mass exodus. Tawil now began to participate actively in relief work for the refugees in the camps, using her knowledge of Hebrew to help alleviate the miserable conditions of the refugees. Tawil thus joined the General Union of Palestinian Women to protest the Israeli ruthless violation of Palestinian human rights, especially practices such as house demolitions, collective punishments, land expropriation, and deportation. Tawil then moved to Ramallah and began working as a correspondent for the foreign press; she would later establish the Palestine Press Service in Jerusalem, in order to help the Palestinians gain "the permission to narrate," to use the late Edward Said's words, and to reconstruct the abysmal Western and Israeli media representation of the Palestinians as primitive, irrational terrorists. Against all national dicta and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) policy at the time, moreover, Tawil fought for the Palestinian right of self-determination and independence in coalition with "dovish" Israelis and other cosmopolitan Jewish figures. Thus, she turned her Ramallah home into a salon, where the local Palestinian and Israeli as well as the international Jewish intelligentsia would meet to discuss the future of the Levant. She also traveled to the United States on a lecture tour to promote her two-state solution not in the name of inherently divine or natural rights over Palestine but in the name of global ethics and justice. These transnational connections, however, infuriated the Israeli military administration in the Occupied Territories, and she was placed under house arrest for fifty days, during which she wrote her provocative autobiography.

As this brief biographical sketch shows, Tawil situates her struggle, or what she refers to as her "double alienation," or double colonization, within the history of anticolonial struggle for national independence as well as against the established structures of Arab patriarchy in Palestine. Suha Sabbagh (1989, 6),

1. For more on this issue, see Abdo 1994; Glavanis-Grantham 1996; Gluck 1995; Jad 1995; and Sharoni 1995.

therefore, frames her discussion of Tawil within Frederick Jameson's theory of "national allegory," mainly because this autobiographical act "combine[s] the political and the personal." But Sabbagh quickly dismisses Tawil's genuine national commitment, claiming that her interest in the national struggle is nothing but a ploy to protect her feminist agenda from patriarchal vengeance (5). Notwithstanding the problem of intention, Sabbagh glosses over those moments in the text when Tawil is adamant about not only refusing to conform to the PLO platform but also exposing the skewed sexual politics of national liberation movements. This defiance precludes any homological correspondence between Tawil's condition as a woman and the Palestinian nation, because the latter for her is predicated on the marginalization and silencing of the former. Instead of the prism of national allegory, I propose to read Tawil's autobiography within the discordances and tensions *between* the discourses of womanhood and nationalism, feminism and postcolonialism, through the prism of what is now referred to in literary circles as postnationalism.

Theories of postnationalism purport to resolve the ambiguous temporality of the notorious prefix *post* in postcolonialism, by encoding postnationalism as the time "after" the end of postcolonialism, and thus prematurely strike neo-colonial formations out of international geopolitics.<sup>2</sup> Postnationalist theorists thus reread the colonial encounter as a transcultural event, or as a "cooperative venture," as Said writes (1993, 269). As such, they foreground the ambivalences and indeterminacies in colonial governmentalism and its discursive practices as well as anticolonial nationalism, as Homi Bhabha (1994) has shown after Frantz Fanon. Postnationalists also shift the grounds of the discussion from resistance and its Manichaeic subtext of polarization to a recognition of colonizers and colonized as partners and collaborators against "institutionalized suffering," in Ashis Nandy's words (1989, 137). Colonialism, thus, turns out to be a mutually transformative process that celebrates the "mutual contagion and subtle intimacies" between oppressors and oppressed (Gandhi 1998, 129). It allows postnationalists to acknowledge not only that the oppressors are themselves victimized by their own "modes of oppression" but also that the

2. This same concern was articulated by Ella Shohat (1992), who contests the viability of postcolonialism to the question of Palestine, since the *post* as a temporal rupture with *colonialism* fails to register the continuous Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

colonized can act as "sometimes-collaborator, sometimes-competitor, with the oppressive system," in Leela Gandhi's words (138–39). Consequently, postnational discourse becomes a counterdiscursive site conducive to reimagining, as Edward Said writes, the "possibility of a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world," one that substitutes violence for collaboration (1993, 277).

For Tawil, the alternative language of possibility and transformation offered by postnationalism remains urgent for undoing the atavistic narratives of negation that imbue the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews.<sup>3</sup> I would like to argue, however, that Tawil proffers a corrective reading of postnational discourse, one that rereads contemporary, and anachronistic, contexts of colonial hegemony such as Palestine not only with but also against postnationalism. Although she wholeheartedly believes in reconfiguring the contact zone in Israel/Palestine in terms of its intimacies, contiguities, and cooperation, Tawil does not simply lose sight of the asymmetrical power relations between Israelis and Palestinians within the international power structure of the cold war era. She cannot afford to ignore the daily humiliation and brutality her nation is subjected to at the hands of the Israelis. As such, she not only destabilizes the self/Other, colonizer/colonized binaries in a true postnational fashion but also recenters the history of resistance to the Israeli occupation and Zionist settler colonialism in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Tawil's autobiography, thus, illuminates the preconditions for the production of postnationalist discourse about which theories of postnationalism seem to be silent. These theories never spell out the conditions, contexts, or circumstances in which postnational identities and subjectivities can be articulated and performed in their singularities: Which postcolonial subjects are capable of becoming postnationals? Under what conditions? How? Tawil demonstrates that postnationalism can still be a viable strategy for outsider and cosmopolitan postcolonial subjects who can balance the ethical demands of hybridity with the political project of resistance and national liberation through solidarity politics.<sup>4</sup>

3. On this politics of negation in Palestine/Israel, see Abu-Lughod 1988.

4. In relating issues of postnationalism and hybridity to the Palestinian case, I am taking issue with Smadar Levie and Ted Swedenburg's contention that "hybridity . . . does not appear to be a viable strategy in the struggle for Palestine—a case of an exilic identity demanding to return

In what follows, therefore, I would like first to address the context and preconditions for the production of an insurgent postnational subjectivity in Tawil's autobiography. I will explore her reconstruction of an outsider, cosmopolitan subjectivity through a postcolonial reinterpretation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*. I will also examine Tawil's critique of the sexual politics of the Palestinian national imaginary as she dissolves the boundaries between two major symbolic spaces of Palestinian resistance and regeneration, namely, the home and the prison to which she alludes in the title of her autobiography, and rewrites them into each other as uncanny sites of oppression, effacement, and unhomeliness. Second, I will show how her cosmopolitan outsidership and her critique of Palestinian nationalism clear a space for the production as well as the interrogation of postnationalism: she destabilizes the Self/Other boundaries to promote a sense of intimacy and contiguity between Israelis and Palestinians while at the same time engaging in material and discursive forms of resistance to the occupation.

OUTSIDER, COSMOPOLITAN FEMINISM: A POSTCOLONIAL  
REINTERPRETATION OF SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S *SECOND SEX*

The precondition for the narration of Tawil's postnational politics is an affirmation of the multiplicity of the outsider identities that she inhabits throughout her life. Tawil engages the multiplicity of her subject positions and difference within the universal referent of womanhood as she reads Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* (1980, 65). Thus, Tawil chooses not simply to valorize gender oppression and the Othering of woman as de Beauvoir does but rather to fashion a multiple subjectivity in a postcolonial context, or a postcolonial feminist subjectivity. Tawil does not blindly appropriate de Beauvoir's philosophical

to its historic territory" (1996, 12). Although Levie and Swedenburg are correct in claiming that because Palestinians' communal identity is "threatened with radical effacement" they "cannot not desire the basic privileges that accompany membership and citizenship in a community, group, nation," desiring a communal identity does not preclude the production of hybrid identities formed in the liberation struggle in solidarity with Israelis and reformed Zionists (12). Furthermore, Levie and Swedenburg's argument can be misinterpreted as saying that Palestinians are capable only of negating their negation, not transcending it in non-Manichaean forms.

discourse for an analysis of Palestinian women, as critics suggest.<sup>5</sup> She does, however, reconfigure de Beauvoir's valorization of gender oppression and the Othering of women across multiple identity narratives such as race, class, nation, religion, and education.

In her epochal work *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir claims that patriarchy posits "Man" concretely through projects as a "continual transcendence toward other freedoms" while constructing "Woman" in opposition as the absolute immanent Other. Transcendence entails a superiority emanating from man's ability to master and annihilate the earth and the body, with which women have been associated by virtue of their reproductive capacity. Moreover, she espouses a belief in the essential unity of women based on their biological destiny, representing "Woman" as a universal category owing to the shared experience of gender oppression. De Beauvoir's homogenization of women's oppression poses two main problems for Tawil and other third world feminists. First, de Beauvoir's Eurocentric feminist narrative essentializes women as a universal category and elides differences in the experiences of women across various cultural spaces. Presupposing gender Manichaeism between the sexes in this universalistic discourse, de Beauvoir is unrelenting in suppressing other multiple, interlocking, and intersecting social determinants, between and across which the subject is constructed. Not until she coauthored with Gisele Halimi their book *Djamila Boupacha* (1962), on the young Algerian suicide bomber who was tortured and raped with a bottle by French interrogators, did de Beauvoir start to decenter her cultural identity and to examine her location along various yet discrepant cultural spaces.<sup>6</sup>

Tawil, however, manages to salvage an outsider, cosmopolitan feminist subjectivity from *The Second Sex* itself, remarking that de Beauvoir inflamed her "to resist oppression in all its forms" (1980, 170–71). Realizing very early in her intellectual development that patriarchal domination collaborates with colonial powers to suppress and erase her from the public space, Tawil articulates her multiple subjectivity between and across discrepant but overlapping

5. For instance, Elise Manganaro oversimplifies Tawil's dialogic construal of de Beauvoir to a naive assimilation of "Western outlook and a Western system of references" (1989, 131).

6. On de Beauvoir's Algerian writings and her departure from the existential intelligentsia's complicity with French colonialism, see Murphy 1995.

social determinants. Thus, her outsider, cosmopolitan subjectivity emerges in the interstices of dominant and emerging national, class, religious, gender, and linguistic identity narratives. In between and across these interstices, she articulates her politics of disidentification with the pedagogical narratives of Palestinian nationalism as a woman; with the colonial military hegemony as a colonized subject who is deprived of citizenship after the 1967 war; with the partisan Arab regimes as a Palestinian; with the Palestinian subaltern groups as a member of the elite bourgeoisie (255); with the predominantly Muslim society as a Christian (37, 81); with the conservative patriarchal culture as a feminist; with the monolingual Arab society as a fluent and competent speaker of multiple colonial languages—Hebrew, French, and English; and with the peasant and illiterate culture as Western educated and cosmopolitan.

The constant remaking and unmaking of this outsider, cosmopolitan subjectivity across and between various discrepant power discourses engenders a postnational condition of productive aporia. Tawil thus continues to problematize her location at any historical moment of her life to express her reluctance to belong to any identity narrative and ultimately to transcend these identities into an alternative condition with a radical language of possibility. The problematics of citizenship can provide a good example with which to illustrate Tawil's politics of disidentification. After the establishment of Israel, she decides to renounce her Israeli citizenship, despite the personal freedom she enjoyed, because "Israeliness" is predicated on an exclusive ethno-religious identity narrative of "Jewishness."<sup>7</sup> But even when she reterritorializes in Amman, she realizes that she had to struggle not to forfeit her Palestinian identity under the Jordanian regime. Moreover, in the feudal, puritanical, patriarchal

7. As the "state of the Jewish people," Israel is based from its originary moment on the absence, or, better, the legal obliteration, of the Palestinian community that continued to reside in its lands after the Catastrophe. There still remains a disturbing confusion in Israel between nationality and citizenship regarding the Palestinian citizens of Israel. The writer Anton Shammas, who is a Palestinian citizen of Israel, points out that there is no nationality in Israel but rather "ethnic affiliation." To put it more bluntly, there are no Israelis in Israel but Jews, Arabs, or Druze. Both Tawil and Shammas, like the recent emergence of a post-Zionist discourse in Israel and in the Jewish diaspora, demand that Israel resolve the paradox of its foundational myth. In a post-Zionist era, Israeli law has to determine whether Israel is the state of the Jewish people or the state of its citizens. See, for example, Shammas 1995.

culture of Jordan, Tawil's personal freedom as a woman and an individual was restricted to the domestic space. At the interplay of privileged and oppressed positionalities in Israel and in Jordan along gender, national, ethnic, and citizenship discourses, Tawil contemplates her condition of aporia: "In Israel, I would belong to a despised minority and be treated as a second-class citizen. All the same, as a woman my personal lot would be much better than in Jordan. A difficult choice; humiliation as an Arab or repression as a woman—which is better?" (55). Yet Tawil decides to move to Nablus, in the West Bank, where she continues to defy easy classification in any comfortable cultural space. Tawil, in short, refuses to be fetishized in any slot of Otherness, by strategically articulating her location across shifting positions of both subordination and freedom, privilege and oppression, which undo the fiction of authenticity in the formation of identities and open up to an alternative postnational discourse.

#### UNHOMELINESS: THE UNCANNY CONTEXT OF POSTNATIONALISM

Not only does Tawil shed light on the preconditions for the production of postnationalist discourse in a colonial situation, but she also delineates the context for the production of such a discourse by engaging both the oppressive colonial occupation of Palestine by Israel and the sexual politics of the Palestinian national imaginary. She discloses not only the oppressive patriarchal traditions underpinning this nationalist imaginary but also the patriarchal complicity with Israeli colonial hegemony in suppressing Palestinian women. Tawil thus problematizes and deromanticizes the mythic representations of the home/land in the Palestinian national iconography, as she ruptures the phantasmagoric isomorphism between the home, the homeland, and women. Decentering the ideology of home, Tawil draws attention to the continuity of the terrain of terror and violence between the sphere of the Israeli prisons and the domestic sphere. Rather than dichotomize the prison and the home, Tawil suggests that the domestic sphere reproduces the oppressive economic and political technologies of Israeli occupation governmentality and Zionist settler colonialism and encodes them as gender ideology.

Tawil's confinement within the claustrophobic space of home/prison provides not only the occasion of the production of *My Home, My Prison* but also its narrative frame and major structuring trope. The autobiography begins

with a phone call, which replaces the “knock on the door” of traditional prison memoirs, from the military government bureau, summoning her to report to the military governor’s office in Ramallah.<sup>8</sup> Without trial, the Israeli military authorities accuse her of threatening the security of the Jewish state by practicing false and inaccurate journalism. Consequently, they subject her to “special supervision,” during which she has to “remain behind the doors of the house in which she resides in Ramallah, throughout all hours of the day and night” (6). Placed under this arbitrary house arrest, she realizes the implications of this sinister confinement on her mobility and freedom of thought and expression. In the meantime, Tawil decides to “record the story of all my prisons, all my walls,” the national and patriarchal domination that collaborates on reducing the feminist subject to a docile body (9). Foregrounding the continuities between national and gender subjection, Tawil renders home as a prison and prison as a condition of unhomeliness. As she narrates her multiple incarcerations, Tawil recognizes the underlying condition of her detention: she is locked up in an existential imprisonment under which her “battle for emancipation has only begun” (257).

In Tawil’s autobiography, the textual production of the home/prison configuration evolves into an uncanny space of displacement. Understanding this uncanny space, nonetheless, requires positioning the home/prison nexus in its cultural and political contexts. In particular, I shall examine how Tawil supplants the pleasures of the cultural discourses of Palestinian national formation with the tropes of deprivation, loss, and estrangement. These discourses are, first, the rhetoric of revolutionary regeneration in prison and, second, the familiarity of dwelling places. The radical nature of this strategy becomes even clearer when examined in the context of the political realities of arbitrary detention and house demolitions that Palestinians endured under the Israeli military occupation.<sup>9</sup>

Whereas Palestinian literary texts invoke the penitentiary as an imperialist topos, where Palestinian prisoners are dehumanized and Palestinian national identity is effaced, and home, in contrast, is seen as the space where women are

8. For more analysis of the conventions of prison writings, see Harlow 1989.

9. For a full discussion of the punitive measures undertaken by the Israeli military occupation, see Shehade 1988.

fetishized as the unadulterated image of cultural authenticity, Tawil deploys the trope of home in a way that projects the architectonics of the prison, turning both the prison and the home into embodiments of the condition of unheimeliness.<sup>10</sup> She reinterprets the topos of home and prison by describing home in terms of objectification and oppression as well as of psychic disruption of the identification with the maternal body and voice. Thus, her condition of captivity entails first and foremost the unraveling of the obscenity of entrapment and persecution that are usually masked, rationalized, and neutralized in the familiar spaces of the homely. This unmasking constitutes an urgent project for Tawil, for whom Arab women in their denial of their gender oppression are pathologically schizophrenic (67). She exposes, thus, the space of domesticity as that ideological domain of the cult of femininity in which Arab women’s autonomy and voice are subdued. Tawil writes: “My repression did not come from some amorphous and faceless ‘society’; it was my own home and immediate social environment that imprisoned me” (64).

Moreover, she reconfigures the semantics of sanctity used to depict the motherland and the landscape of Palestine itself. Since the surplus feminine presence threatens to decenter the normative narration, discourses of national formation authorize the allegorical figuration of home and nation as mother.<sup>11</sup> This figurative displacement of women in official national discourse manages to suspend Palestinian women’s agency in an ahistorical and apolitical realm. At stake here is the gender politics of revolutionary aesthetics that constructs the home in terms of the ideologies of the docile female body and its attendant discourse of virtuous female sexuality. Like home, the land becomes, in a metonymic economy, a part of her prison, “confining her to a stifling captivity” (68). The emotional investment in the rhetorical realms of home, homeland, and nation ends up reproducing the repressive allegiance to essentialist ideologies. Hence, Tawil asserts the ambivalence of her emotional attachment to an erogenous culture that devalues her as an erotic object of

10. A seminal literary analysis of Palestinian literature in terms of textualities of resistance can still be found in Kanafani 1987. See also Parmenter 1994 for a good study of place and identity in Palestinian literature.

11. For a discussion of the symbolic representation of women as mothers in the Palestinian national movement, see Antonius 1983, 67–68.

desire under conditions of spatial immobility. She remarks: "But as a woman, I could not feel that I belonged to this society that threatened to dehumanize me into a sex object. I felt like a stranger, persecuted and misunderstood. I did not want to remain a slave, a woman-child" (67). As such, the domestic space manipulates repressive masculinist technologies to efface, detain, constrain, surveil, discipline, confiscate, and dehumanize the body and agency of the feminist subject.

In short, Tawil correlates her imprisonment in the endogenous prison of patriarchal domination with her confinement in the colonial penitentiary. Home and prison, patriarchy and colonialism, then, function in an economy of synonymous substitution. Indeed, for Tawil the Israeli detention centers are not that different from the "prison called marriage," and her husband is not much different from her Israeli jailer and interrogator. Unsettling the carceral borders across and between the public space and the private terrain, therefore, Tawil is capable of envisioning a postnational language of ethics and possibility with the Other as same and different, intimate and hostile, at once, while insisting on the immanence of the language of resistance and national liberation in the name of the politics of solidarity.

#### POSTNATIONAL ETHICS, POSTCOLONIAL POLITICS

Disavowing the sacrosanct iconography of the Palestinian national master narrative, Tawil rewrites the traditional semantics of the Israeli-Palestinian colonial encounter with and against postnational discourse. She not only inscribes what Leela Gandhi calls the "unembarrassed—and potentially embarrassing—utopianism" of postnational reimagining of an alternative language of mutuality, intimacy, and solidarity between colonizers and colonized but also recenters the urgent language of resistance to the brutality of the Israeli occupation and Zionist settler colonialism (1998, 137). Like Edward Said's influential works on Palestine, Tawil warns against both fetishizing the production of a Manichaean colonial epistemology that posits not only the Self against its Other, Palestinians against Zionists, victims against oppressors, and conceptualizing their colonial encounter as a confrontation between antagonistic national narratives and identities (see Said 1993, 1994a, 2001). Tawil, thus, destabilizes the Self/Other boundaries by unraveling the indeterminacies and multiplicity in the

construction of the Jewish Other in the Palestinian national imaginary and the Arab cultural unconsciousness. She also appropriates the traditional signifiers of Jewishness to uncover the Otherness, or Jewishness, of Palestinian identity. And finally, she works in dialogue and coalition with the Israeli peace camp and the international Jewish intelligentsia, turning this colonial encounter into a "collaborative venture," as Said says.

After the June war of 1967, Tawil immediately realizes that Levantine spaces, histories, and identities should be urgently reconfigured to accommodate the new realities of the Middle East. In that historical juncture, the Jew occupied a monolithic image in the Palestinian/Arab cultural and political discourses (Harkabi 1972). The Jew in the Palestinian national imaginary and Arab cultural unconsciousness was seen only as a Zionist Other whose existence was interpreted as the negation and erasure of Palestinian presence. In the ambience of fear and mistrust that dominated the Levant after 1967, the nationalists invoked Manichaean paradigms in which the Jew was always constructed as an oppressor, a fascist and even nazi persecutor, and an European imperialist. As such, Tawil was always reminded that "the Israeli with whom you want to make dialogue is in uniform and carrying a gun" (1980, 124) and that "they are all Zionists, they all serve in the army—therefore they cannot be trusted" (159). Even her young daughter Suha is understandably brainwashed by this boycott mentality. On one occasion, Suha tells her mother, "When they're in uniform, they can't disobey orders, can they? They are obliged to kill" (192).

Tawil defies this nazification of the Jews by splitting the image of the Jewish Other into colonial Zionists, on the one hand, and humanitarian Israelis, on the other. She emphasizes that it is necessary to engage a nonviolent struggle against the colonialist Zionists who believe in the dream of Eretz Israel, but it is equally imperative to fight in coalition with "dovish" and leftist Israelis. Underlying her unstable, slippery representation of the Israelis is her belief in the essential humanity of the Israelis and their Jewish ethics. Even the most racist, evil oppressor does not lack a conscience or sensitivity to distinguish between oppression and respect for Others. Tawil would constantly strive to reach out for and relate to the humanity of the Other: "As long as [the Israeli soldier] was in uniform, he was an enemy—but inside the uniform, he remained a man nonetheless. Time and time again, I encountered the same



conflict—how to relate to an enemy as a human being? How to relate to a human being as an enemy?” (149). Therefore, she narrates how some Israeli soldiers did assist dispossessed Palestinians, despite the military prohibition against collaboration with the enemy. For example, the soldier Hanoch was honored by Nablus’s mayor for his tremendous help to the refugees in the Nablus areas (14). In addition, she mentions how after the 1967 war, when the residents of Kalkilya were displaced from their town for the second time, an Israeli-Moroccan soldier defended those villagers against his troopers’ sadistic humiliation of them. He angrily scolded them, saying, “You people don’t have a heart! Don’t you have a home, a family? Is this Judaism? You ought to remember Auschwitz!” (100). She also tells the story of Siah, a radical opposition group of dissident Israeli intellectuals who rallied in support of the residents of the small Palestinian village A’krabeh when the military government pressured them to sell their lands to Zionist settlers. By circulating these stories, Tawil shows both Palestinians and Israelis that there are Israeli Jews who “were prepared to clash with their own army, to risk beatings and imprisonment in order to express anger and disgust with their own government’s treatment of a remote Palestinian village” (159).<sup>12</sup>

Besides splitting the monolithic representation of the Israelis, Tawil debunks the Jewish/Palestinian polarization by recognizing the Otherness of the Self. Tawil redefines the mythic codification of the Jewish diaspora by calling the Palestinians “the new Jews” (77). The mass exodus of the Palestinians in 1948 and 1967 led to an ironic reversal: “The place of the Jewish refugees was taken by the Palestinians” (111). Blurring the Arabs/Jews, oppressors/victims binaries ultimately transmits a sense of the atrocities and genocide that characterize Palestinian/Jewish histories. Tawil notes: “Any person of conscience—Jew or Christian—should acknowledge this injustice, whereby the persecuted survivors of Nazi concentration camps were given a home by making the Palestinians homeless. ‘We are like you,’ I told my Jewish listeners. ‘We Palestinians are the Jews of the Arab world’” (201). This radical strategy problematizes dominant notions of identity, Self, and Otherness without offering absolution

12. Such stories of solidarity made it to the PLO’s 1981 *Committee for the Occupied Homeland Report on Contact with Jews*, which praised the “positive role which the democratic and anti-Zionist forces play” in the conflict (Lukacs 1992, 357).

for the history of aggression and violence upon which the Jewish state is built. Refusing to subscribe to an originary authentic Self that validates the primacy of one cultural space, Tawil transvalues the national signifiers into the site of ontological ambiguity as it is caught in a network of differences. She uses those ontological slippages to suggest interconnections and mutuality between Israelis and Palestinians while preserving their difference.

Encoding “Palestinianness” by the traditional signifiers of Jewish identity, including diaspora and genocide, Tawil decenters the privileged location of Jewishness as synonymous with trauma and suffering in post-Holocaust Eurocentric culture. As such, the archetypal representation of the suffering Jew is transformed into the haunting image of the persecutor. Tawil’s postnationalism is used to contest the Jewish monopoly of the industry of pain and suffering in Euro-America and to elicit sympathy for the Palestinian cause within a framework of justice. As Nubar Hovsepian correctly points out, the ideological “privatization of pain prevents the victims from imagining let alone comprehending that they are capable of heaping pain on another people” (1994, 53). Evoking this postnational interconnectedness, Tawil does not mean either to retrieve (like discourses of assimilation) or even subvert myths of origin, sameness, and purity. Instead, she endeavors to claim an *inauthentic* ontological origin that is marked always already by disjunctive hybridity. This inauthentic origin derives from processes of transcultural exchanges that do not render Otherness either antagonistic to sameness or identical to it. Rather, she postulates a constant slippage and recognition of the self in its heterogeneity and of Otherness in its diversity as she recognizes Otherness as the Self and the Self in Otherness.

This postnational reconfiguration of Israeli and Palestinian identities through intimacy, mutuality, and contiguity clears a space for a dialogic exchange and the politics of solidarity between Palestinians and Israelis. She thus becomes a worker for dialogue and solidarity between Israelis and Palestinians, as she struggles in coalition with “dovish” Israelis and other leftist cosmopolitan Jewish figures to promote channels of dialogue and to forge alternative relations between the two nations, for which other Palestinians accused her of treason and collaboration (1980, 122). Tawil turned her home into a salon where the local, regional, and international intelligentsia would meet to discuss ways of ending the Israeli occupation of the

West Bank and Gaza and guaranteeing the Palestinian people their legitimate rights for self-determination and national sovereignty. In the volatile context of the post-1967 period, Tawil's coalition politics can indeed be seen as radical. Tawil's political stand required a lot of courage and staunch belief in the possibilities inherent in dialogue and solidarity, for in the post-1967 context the few workers for dialogue and solidarity were jailed and interrogated by the Israelis, received death threats, or were even assassinated by Palestinian rejectionists.<sup>13</sup>

Although she calls upon both Palestinians and Israelis to rethink a century of relations rooted in antagonism, negation, and denial, through this ethics of postnationalism, by embracing dialogue and the politics of solidarity, Tawil does not gloss over the imperative of resistance to the Israeli occupation and Zionist settler colonialism. As previously stated, her postnational ethics is corrected by recentering the history of material and discursive resistance to colonial hegemony in the West Bank and Gaza. In her struggle against the oppressive military regime in the Occupied Territories, Tawil became committed to grassroots work and organization, which were capable of mobilizing most Palestinians around urgent issues of daily concerns for the lives of the refugees and dispossessed. She joined the General Union of Palestinian Women, which has been affiliated with the PLO since 1965, mobilizing women and organizing sit-in demonstrations, boycotts, protests, and strikes in the struggle for Palestinian rights, dignity, and humanity. Tawil also cooperated with other popular women's committees in the West Bank whose major goal was "to mobilize Palestinian women together in a joint struggle for defending their rights as Palestinian women and for improving

13. To put this situation in context, we need to remember the atmosphere of insecurity and fear during this nondialogic phase. As the Palestinian feminist peace activist and Beir Zeit University English professor Hanan Mikhail Ashrawi observes, "Nondialogue dominated Israeli-Palestinian discourse for a long time as an affirmation of conflict and the non-recognition by either side of the other in a mutually exclusive equation, whereby any direct verbal 'contact' was perceived as an implicit admission to existence, hence legitimacy" (1991, 103). Moreover, the assassinations of two leading Palestinian pioneers of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, Sa'id Hammami in London in 1978 and Isam Sartawi in 1983, as well as the imprisonment of Uri Adiv of the Revolutionary Communist League in Israel serve as painful reminders of the extreme difficulties and the high price of speaking out for dialogue and peace in the 1970s and 1980s.

their socioeconomic position within the context of total national struggle" (Dajani 1995, 47). She would even contact the military governor to demand provisions for the expelled masses of refugees, bold acts that made others label her a "traitor" and "collaborator" (1980, 123). And to that Palestinian man, who was involved with other men, including her husband, in many matters, ignoring the predicament of the throngs of refugees outside her place but labeling her a traitor, Tawil and her friend the Palestinian novelist Sahar Khalifa say, "We have suffered enough from slogans and ideologies . . . Ba'athism, Marxism, and all the rest. Now we have thousands of mouths to feed, hundreds of wounded to care for. We've talked enough! Let's go to work and save what we can of the Palestinian people" (98). To ensure the continuity of the Palestinian nation, Tawil and her comrades consent even to cooperate with the occupation forces: pragmatism rather than empty rhetoric. The irony here is that the Israeli occupation managed to foreground the crisis of traditional (androcentric) leadership structures in the West Bank and Gaza and put women in the forefront of movements and organizations that resist the occupation as well as provide human relief services to the victims of the occupation. Such work laid the grounds for the politicization of Palestinian women and for the emergence of civil society in Palestine.

Tawil's struggle against colonial hegemony can also be seen in her discursive resistance to the colonization of the mind that is all too familiar in colonial contexts, namely, her journalistic work, her re-presentation of the Palestinian freedom fighter (*fidayeen*), and her intervention in the debate over the curriculum. Her journalism became a major site for the practice of anticolonial politics; as a freelance reporter, Tawil leaked reports to the international press about the realities of Israel's "enlightened, democratic occupation" of the West Bank and Gaza. She was thus censored and arrested for security reasons and accused of "incitements to riots, taking photographs of Israeli troops mistreating demonstrators, contact with PLO leaders in Beirut, and contacts with terrorist cells in the West Bank" (259). In her career as a journalist, furthermore, she found herself defending the cause of the Palestinian freedom fighters. Her celebration of the guerrillas is not a glorification of violence and bloodshed but an attempt to force Western public opinion to reconsider the legitimacy of the Palestinian will to exist. Instead of the abysmal representation of the armed resistance as an act of savage

terrorism, she interprets the textuality of the freedom fighter's body as a sign of agency and empowerment for the humiliated and defeated Arab and Palestinian peoples. She writes: "The fact that after the Arab defeat Palestinians had taken up arms restored our sense of dignity and self-respect" (125). This defense of the freedom fighters was a controversial issue throughout her travels in the United States to promote the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (1988) note, the distinction between terrorism and the universal right of "armed struggle" accorded to all nations under foreign occupation is deliberately blurred in the hype of U.S. media coverage of the Middle East. Moreover, the acquiescence of the U.S. media to represent the PLO only as a terrorist organization became, as the Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk argues, a tactic "to delegitimize Palestinian nationalism in toto . . . , the better to be able to ignore its undeniable claims on Israel" (quoted in Said and Hitchens 1988, 153). Ultimately, as Said and Hitchens correctly point out, ascribing terrorism to them, the Palestinians, the Arabs, and the Muslims, turns every act of Israeli terrorism into an example of the "nobility and purity of the Judeo-Christian freedom fighters" (152).

Moreover, Tawil fights imperial domination as manifested through the struggle over the curriculum in the Occupied Territories. After the 1967 war, Israeli authorities were determined to impose the Israeli-Arab curriculum on Palestinian schools, which can be seen as a pedagogy of colonial interpellation. Tawil was very conscious that the ultimate agenda of this pedagogy was to enforce a traumatic split between Palestinian students and their culture, history, and literature. Under the threat of erasing Palestinian identity and interpellating students to gain their consent to the occupation, Palestinians refused to send their kids to school. However, only after the Israelis had agreed to allow schools to implement the Jordanian curriculum were the schools reopened. Notwithstanding, the decision to implement the Jordanian curriculum was equally ironic for Tawil. Education was still a site of fierce struggle over the production of identities, since the Hashemite regime was aiming at camouflaging Palestinian identity by Jordanian citizenship and passports (1980, 120).

In these peculiar times of post-alities, globalization, and neoimperialisms, attention to existing, yet by all means anachronistic, sites of colonial

exploitation and oppression remains central to the utopian impetus of the postnational project. Raimonda Tawil's autobiography demonstrates the need to repoliticize postnational theory and to problematize it in more nuanced readings that examine the preconditions of its production and dissemination in colonial and neocolonial geopolitical configurations across the globe.<sup>14</sup>

14. The importance of reimagining new alliances or rereading the contact zone in terms of collaborations remains vital today, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have shown in their recent work *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. Imperialism, they argue, inadvertently produces its antithesis in the form of transnational alliances that can organize along "fluid matrices of resistance" (2004, back flap). And Tawil will look with pride at the proliferation of the local, regional, and international "multitudes" in Israel, Palestine, and the United States such as Women in Black, the Peace Quilt, Women for Women Political Prisoners, Shani (Israeli Women Against the Occupation), the Jerusalem Link, the Tikkun Community, and Seeds of Peace, all of which work in solidarity to bring about a lasting peace and social justice in the Middle East.