

*MODERN PALESTINIAN LITERATURE AND THE  
POLITICS OF APPEASEMENT*

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From the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982 to the signing of the Declaration of Principles on 13 September 1993, Palestinian politics witnessed the transformation of the PLO from a revolutionary national liberation movement to a partner in a U.S.-led peace process. The demise of the PLO as a revolutionary movement began a decade earlier with its negotiated withdrawal from Beirut and the establishment of new headquarters in Tunis. The Sabra and Shatila massacres and the painful war of the camps in the mid-1980s devastated the PLO and revealed the weakness of Arafat's leadership. Cut off from its major civilian constituencies in the refugee camps of Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan and wrecked as an armed resistance group, the post-1982 PLO was unable to formulate a coherent political strategy that could meet the demands of the constantly shifting grounds of the struggle.

The beginning of the Intifada in December 1987 interrupted the PLO's slide into inaction by upsetting the status quo in the occupied territories and opening alternative fronts of opposition to Israel. Long neglected by the PLO as a strategic locus of operations, the occupied territories emerged during the Intifada as the principal site of resistance and the real stake in the conflict. The remarkable achievements of the uprising, especially in its first two years, gave a new mandate to the debilitated PLO leadership in Tunis and somehow offset the failures of the post-1982 period. The escalation of confrontations between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian youths enhanced the PLO's ability to mobilize effective international opposition to Israel's policy in the occupied territories and also forced the organization to reassess its established positions. At the 1988 Palestine National Council meeting in Algiers, the PLO made a "Declaration of Independence" and announced a new plan of action that indicated a reorientation centered on achieving an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. By the early 1990s, however, the Intifada had run its course, and the many Palestinians living under occupation were finding it increasingly difficult to endure the worsened living conditions resulting from Israeli repression of the Intifada. The effects of the Gulf War—on the entire region, but especially on Palestinians following the PLO's announcement of support for Iraq—put an end to the Intifada and undermined many of the gains produced by the three-year uprising.

The 1990–91 Gulf War had a devastating effect on Palestinians in the occupied territories, sapped the Intifada, and isolated the PLO. One of the major outcomes of the war was the Middle East peace process, beginning with the public meetings in Madrid in October 1991, in which the Palestinian negotiation team was composed largely of personalities who had emerged during the Intifada as leaders from inside the occupied territories. The Madrid process came to an end with the announcement that the PLO and Israel had reached an agreement in secret meetings in Oslo, followed by the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington. The initial—and misplaced—euphoria following the Washington handshake between Arafat and Rabin, and Arafat’s subsequent arrival in Palestine in July 1994, did not last long. The actions of the Palestinian National Authority in Gaza and Jericho soon revealed the failure of Arafat to learn from the Intifada and understand the concerns expressed by the Palestinian negotiators during the post-Madrid bilateral rounds. No longer the head of a liberation organization—now the chairman of the National Authority—Arafat has proved himself to be often insensitive to Palestinians in the occupied territories and ineffective in negotiating with the Israelis. The years from 1982 to 1993 can now be understood as the period when the PLO abandoned the politics of resistance linked to those other struggles for national liberation and embraced the politics of appeasement, defined almost entirely in terms of U.S. recognition (Hassan 2001).

I have rehearsed briefly the historical trajectory of the PLO from 1982 to the early 1990s, from Beirut to Jericho, to provide a specific context within which to discuss the relationship between Palestinian literary production and national politics. Prior to 1982, in the period when the PLO still retained a certain revolutionary air about it, the critical expectation was that all writings by Palestinians were primarily statements of national sentiment. To a certain degree this expectation is confirmed by the significant quantity of Palestinian writing whose general themes are dispossession, the Israeli occupation, and the national struggle. These themes find expression in the narratives of 1948, references to life in refugee camps, allusions to armed struggle, and memoirs of imprisonment and torture. While some critics may see a creative poverty or limitation in the political engagement of Palestinian poetry and narrative in the era of protest (1967–82), others have found in it an example of what Barbara Harlow (1987), borrowing from Ghassan Kanafani, has called “resistance literature.” Harlow suggests that resistance literature is directly tied to armed insurgent political movements that have an organizational structure, such as the PLO or the ANC or the FLN in Algeria. Despite the often loose use of the term *resistance literature* to refer to any work that implies political opposition or subversion, in Harlow’s definition of the concept, resistance

literature cannot be disassociated from revolutionary political organizations. She quotes Kanafani to support the connection between literature and armed struggle and the equal importance of both to a resistance movement: “For Kanafani, the extreme importance of the cultural form of resistance is no less valuable than the armed resistance itself” (11). The era of “resistance literature” had come to a close by the 1980s at the latest, and by the end of that decade many of the revolutionary groups that inspired resistance writing, such as the ANC and the FMLN (the Salvadoran guerrilla movement), were moving toward negotiated settlements, as did the PLO. At a certain level Harlow identifies “resistance literature” as a significant tendency linked to armed struggle, just at the moment when it ceases to exist.

If resistance literature can be used to describe those cultural projects that existed in tandem with the militancy of the PLO, then how is one to describe those quasi-official national literary endeavors that emerged with the Palestinian Authority? Published in 1992 by the prestigious Columbia University Press, the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* edited by Salma Jayyusi came into circulation between the 1991 opening of the Madrid Peace Conference and the public announcement of the 1993 Palestinian-Israel Declaration of Principles. The anthology arrived on the scene at an apparently indeterminate juncture in Palestinian political history, just prior to the moment when the PLO shed its revolutionary rhetoric and began to make its transformation into the Palestinian National Authority. When considered in connection with the shifts taking place in Palestinian national politics in the early 1990s, the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* entered the environment of U.S. culture and publishing unavoidably as part of a broader agenda that sought to rehabilitate and domesticate the Palestinian cause, to make it fit within the framework of the U.S.-sponsored peace process.

The anthology is the only substantial collection of Palestinian literature published in English by a major U.S. university press. Several other anthologies have been compiled that deal with Arabic literature on Palestine, and there are a number of small collections that include translations of works by Palestinian poets, but there is nothing that is comparable to the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, either in size or in prestige of publisher. Within the constraints of the moment, the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* participates in a twofold struggle against the U.S. and Israeli denial of Palestinian political and cultural self-representation: first, the anthology delivers English translations of Arabic literature to a U.S. readership; second, it uses literary texts to give moral and intellectual depth to the Palestinian national movement built around the PLO. The representation of a nation through an anthology or any other literary text

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does not necessarily secure political recognition of the nation represented. That is to say, at the level of representation, anthologies generally fail to generate substantive transformations in politics and literature. Rather, the production of a national anthology may be seen as a belated response to the political recognition of a people as a nation. Jayyusi's *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* is an instance of an anthology that connects political recognition of Palestinian national aspiration to literary representation of the nation, as if showcasing the work of Palestinian writers to a U.S. public might somehow give force to the political demands of the PLO in the 1990s. The *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* gives cultural validation to Palestinian nationalism as it enters the phase of appeasement. Before discussing this anthology in more detail, I want to make a brief digression to outline further the relationship between anthologies and nationalism.

### **Anthologies and Nationalism**

Whereas nationalism has often been the subject of widespread contemporary critical analysis, notably since the 1980s (Hassan 2001–2), there have been surprisingly few attempts to theorize the anthology as a central institution in the construction of national literary traditions. The word *anthology* comes from the Greek *anthos* and *logia*, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* translates in its definition as a “collection of flowers.” This rhetorical figure relies on the obvious analogy between the natural beauty of a floral arrangement and the cultural value of the choice pickings of poetic texts. The metaphor naturalizes and mystifies cultural production by suggesting that literary expression and a collection of literary texts are as innocent as flowers in a garden or a blossoming bouquet. Constantinus Cephalus's tenth-century *Greek Anthology* (1920–26), sometimes also called the *Palatine Anthology*, is the first widely recognized literary collection that used the flower metaphor to refer to a large compilation of literary texts. The *Greek Anthology* was intended to preserve Greek verbal arts through the ages and assert 2,000 years of historical continuity in the Greek literary tradition, running from the classical period to Byzantium. Cephalus's era is characterized historiographically as the Macedonian Golden Age, a period when Byzantium reasserted itself militarily in opposition to the Abbasids in the East. Consequently, at its origins in Europe, the project of anthologizing was the textual counterpart to what might be considered the nationalist activity of Byzantium. While the army established Byzantium's geopolitical borders, the *Greek Anthology* served as the state's cultural extension. The anthology gave moral weight to a resurgent

martial Byzantium that laid claim to classical Greek civilization and projected it into future literary developments in Europe.

My point is not to assert some form of historical or etymological determinism. Nor do I wish to imply that a national anthology is simply another text that gives form to, and attests to, the existence of “imagined communities,” as Benedict Anderson might argue. Rather, I want to demonstrate the connection between the production of the literary anthology and the glorification of a people’s past achievements, which serves the demands of existing political regimes. Anthologies consolidate a literary tradition that already exists and ennoble a community that has already been imagined. At a certain level, they are intended as an embodiment of the national spirit; they assume an organic and even worldly form, but through the evaluative and definitional discourses of anthologizers they attain a transcendent character. According to the logic of anthologies, every nation must have its anthology, and great nations have significant and large anthologies, while lesser nations have minor and small anthologies.

This hierarchy of national anthologies is matched by the internal hierarchy that characterizes every anthology. A national anthology operates within the literary field as a means of establishing the great works of the nation, separating major authors from minor authors. Most critics who have considered the effects of anthologies on the field have noted, as Kenneth Warren does in a 1993 article, that “the cut-and-paste operation of the anthology . . . acts to confer an *aura* upon a work and to embed it in, rather than detach it from, tradition” (341). But this observation focuses too much on the valorization of texts (“aura”) and the accumulation of a textual tradition. Increasing the variety of anthologized texts expands the center of the tradition but does little to transform canonical practices. Through its selection of texts, an anthology gives cultural definition and legitimacy to the political nation in terms of an exclusive intertextuality restricted to those works between the covers of the collection, which becomes the apotheosis of a shared and collective literary patrimony.

Critical studies of specific anthologies have been, therefore, largely limited to polemics concerning the ideological implications of the selection, indicated by what texts or authors are excluded. For instance, the publication of *The Heath Anthology of American Literature* (Lauter 1994) provoked a significant debate in the United States concerning the anthology’s “reconstruction” of the American canon. John Crowley, a professor of English at Syracuse University who has written several books on W. D. Howells, notes in a 1999 article that the debate around *The Heath Anthology* pitted revisionist editors, who sought to break open the canon of American letters, against conservative Americanists, who wished to defend the exalted position of the so-called great works. Crowley claims that dis-

agreement between the two groups was reduced to “yet another salvo in the Culture Wars.” For his part, Crowley’s critique of the contested anthology is built around his own understanding of U.S. literature and his interests as a contributor to *The Heath*; he focuses on the limits of the revisionist project, which he claims did not rethink the conventional presentation of “important,” but neglected, white male authors, such as W. D. Howells. Crowley’s critique of the anthological project of *The Heath* is decidedly conservative, and his gripe with the editors is largely beside the point. What is significant is his and the editors’ shared commitment to an anthological ideal and their acceptance of national anthologies as a valuable pedagogical instrument.

In the field of Arab literary studies, the anthology as a literary genre is not problematized but is rated a fundamental tool for the presentation of Arabic texts in translation. Commenting on the anthologies prepared by the U.S.-based PROTA (Project for the Translation of Arabic), Roger Allen (1994) has observed that “*Modern Arabic Poetry*, edited by Salma Khadra Jayyusi, [and] published by Columbia University Press in 1987, . . . was immediately recognized as a major contribution to modern Arabic literature studies in the English-speaking world. This anthology . . . is a critical selection of works, and not everyone has been happy about the selection in terms of inclusion and exclusion; I at least work on the assumption that no anthology can (or, probably, should) satisfy everyone.”

In this brief essay, Allen defends the importance of such anthologies primarily because they make available a wide selection of translations from Arabic. I discuss this issue in greater detail below but wish only to note here that as with criticism of *The Heath Anthology*, assessments of *Modern Arabic Poetry* have centered on problems in the selection, and not the idea, of producing an anthology. Regardless of the problems that inhere in national collections, projects of anthologization, the general concept of anthology, and the relationship between anthology and nation go unquestioned. An anthology is thought to be simply a practical compendium of important literary works that has primarily pedagogical uses and succeeds to the degree that it accurately represents the literary tradition.

The critical question asked about an anthology is whether it preserves or amends the established canon, and not whether anthologizing is a seriously compromised literary activity. I want to propose here that as a canonizing enterprise that seeks to define, represent, and validate a textual field, the anthology plays an especially key role in literary history connecting literature to nation. In a brief article on *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, Theodore Mason develops a similar if more modest claim about the national character of anthologies. “For the most part, . . . the anthologies that most come to our collective imagination

depend for their existence on an idea of cultural difference. . . . Further, the particular version of cultural difference that forms the basis for so many anthologies is the idea of the nation” (1998, 192). Mason’s interrogation of *The Norton* is one of the few attempts to complicate the practice of anthology making. His critique of the anthology as national text focuses in large part on the problems posed by revisionist canon formation that is marked by the conflict in a process of selection based both on the merit of texts and their ability to represent the nation in all its diversity (193). In other words, the tension is between the conventions of literary critical judgment and the transformative political demands of representing marginalized works and authors. Mason’s solution to this problem is to open the anthology onto the critical complexities of building a new tradition that stands in opposition to the dominant aesthetic values of the past. Rather than work against the cultural “grids” of selection by which national anthologies produce a particular literary history, Mason seeks simply to reclaim the political significance of an authoritative national collection, arguing that “the nationalist overtones of *The Norton* gestures toward the recognition of a community’s integrity and its capacity for at least literary self-determination” (190). Jayyusi’s *Modern Palestinian Literature* seeks to perform the same gesture on behalf of a repressed Palestinian culture. While this approach is certainly one way to understand the politics and problematics of national anthologies that challenge collective exclusions, it seems to me that despite claims of inclusiveness, all national anthologies exclude, and the exclusions are an important indication of the politics that condition every national anthology.

Mason seems to overlook this fundamental aspect of anthologies and considers *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* inclusive and comprehensive: “It is an exaggeration, but only a slight one, to say that it is hard to imagine who in the scholarly community interested in African American literature was not somehow included in the production of this anthology” (186). He later states, “The strength of the volume taken as a whole lies in its comprehensiveness and scope” (190). Past and current practices of anthologization circumscribe and reinforce the boundaries of ostensible literary traditions, partitioning the field of literary production into tidy categories of study. The national anthology is a literary project that self-consciously excludes works and severs significant links with literatures in order to set the borders of a unique culture, which is often tied to a particular geographical space. By sanctifying a specific spectrum of texts according to national cultural ideals, an anthology represses recalcitrant moments in the literary field in order to fortify a textual tradition that conforms to a manageable pattern of themes, styles, forms, and values. From this perspective, a national anthology is a limiting endeavor that

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justifies its selection on the basis of the originality and coherence of the nation's cultural ethos and its presumed continuity across time and space.

The term *anthology* is used today without any necessary national signification. Yet as John Guillory (1990) has observed with regard to the emergence of the English canon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, anthologies have played a key role in nation formation: "For the first time works of English literature were collected into anthologies comprising selections of the best in each genre; and these anthologies, which looked very much like the Norton or Oxford anthologies of our day, were employed in schools as a means of teaching and disseminating Standard English" (241). Guillory emphasizes the normative and pedagogical function of anthologies, but implicit in his observations is the evident link between anthologization, canonization, and nation formation. Still, English-language anthologies that have proliferated in the last thirty years—including some anthologies of Arabic literature in translation—have tried to challenge the narrowness of national configurations by organizing their selections around other conceptual categories, such as style, gender, sexuality, or region.

Recent anthologies of women's writing, like Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz's *Writing Red* (1987), correct the marginal position of women, and in this case leftist women, contesting the national character of anthologies and also working against patriarchal and conservative literary canons. Similarly, large and more conventional literature collections, such as *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, seek to present a synchronic literary history by presenting translations of poems, stories, and excerpts from numerous cultural contexts positioned chronologically in terms of distinct periods. The expansion of *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces* and other sizeable world literature anthologies attest to the transformation of the western canon in the wake of postcolonial studies and other projects aimed at making the field of literary studies more responsive to the plurality of the world.

While these somewhat revisionist anthologies offer correctives to past exclusions of women's writing and non-European literatures, they invariably fall back on national literary conventions to position the authors within the collections. They either select representative texts from a more inclusive national archive or multiply the number of national traditions included in the anthology. In both cases, the addition of women authors or of authors from beyond the borders of Europe and North America is generally symbolic and does not break open the national framework. Anthologies, like the entire field of literary studies, have not been able to shake off the national paradigm, which persists in shaping the conceptualization of cultural production. Indeed, anthologies have played a key



role in defining the literary field in terms of the national, which, despite the significant critique of nationalism, remains one of the most resilient categories of literary ordering.

Clearly, a national anthology participates in canon formation and asserts the unity of a literary tradition, but it should also be understood as responding to the historical contingencies of the nation that characterize the moment of its production. Although Cephalus's project may have aspired to contain the totality of the Greek poetic tradition in a period of Byzantine expansion, contemporary national anthologies have far more modest ambitions, which are conditioned by a troublesome contradiction; national anthologies face increasing pressure to be comprehensive, and at the same time they must contend with the practical impossibility of absolute inclusiveness. Still, recent anthologies seek to overcome the contradiction through a coverage model, which is underwritten by the supposedly representative quality of the privileged texts. Each text included in the anthology is assumed to represent a part of the entire literary tradition and even the nation as a whole. When considered in these terms, a national anthology operates according to a synecdochic chain in which part of a "major" author's work represents an author's whole oeuvre, all the authors in the anthology represent the entire national literary tradition, and the national literary tradition embodies the national culture. The anthology is a contrivance by which a fragment of an author's work can be construed through this chain as representative of the national culture.

In her introduction to the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, Jayyusi singles out Mahmoud Darwish as the representative national poet whose writing, she argues, expresses both the aesthetic qualities of modern poetry and the existential predicament of the Palestinian nation: "In a field teeming with poetic talent, Mahmoud Darwish stands apart, shining with a curious creative power; a poet of our times and of all times" (1992, 61). While one might agree that Darwish has been among the most important Arab writers to emerge in the late twentieth century, the special emphasis given to his work both in the introduction and in the selection of texts illustrates the process by which a particular author is made to represent the achievements of the national culture. Perhaps the best example in the anthology of the synecdochic chain is the long excerpt from Darwish's "Song of the Land," a literary part that most explicitly represents the whole of the Palestinian nation, notably in the following line: "I name the soil I call it / an extension of my soul" (146). The poetic fragment within the anthology holds the same status as the poet's soul in relation to the soil of Palestine. This association of the poet's soul—a metaphor for poetry itself—with the land or the national territory is a commonplace not only in Palestinian literature but also in many national literatures. Indeed,

it is the quintessential folding of the national into the literary. In this trope, the physicality of the usurped or contested national territory, Palestine in the case of Darwish and Jayyusi, is projected into the metaphysical through association with the poet's soul, achieving an alternative mode of being, as poetry in the absence of a nation-state.

### ***Modern Palestinian Literature and Nation Validation***

Described on the dust cover as a “definitive anthology” that “offers the widest selection ever made of modern Palestinian literature,” Jayyusi's collection brings together works by more than seventy writers and is unquestionably the largest selection of twentieth-century Palestinian writing available in English. The texts in the anthology testify to the existence of a modern Palestinian culture and work against the ugly images of depraved terrorists and helpless refugees. The collection is a literary reiteration of the modern history of Palestinian national existence. The anthology is not unlike *Before Their Diaspora*, a collection of photographs from the pre-1948 period that attests to the modern presence and lives of Palestinians on the land and in the cities of Palestine. The *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* is an ambitious response to attempts by official Israeli practices to erase Palestine and its cultural past. The collection of texts seeks more generally to give shape to a continuous and unified national literary tradition, provide an introduction to Palestinian literature, and reverse the political bias against Palestinians.

Given the severe repression of Palestinian political and cultural rights under occupation and in exile, the strategic significance of this unifying project should not be overlooked. Until the 1990s, the official Israeli position denied the very existence of Palestinians; consequently, the compilation of an anthology reconstitutes the narrative of Palestinian literary history in the face of a ruthless effacement of Palestinian material history. Indeed, many of the 232 poems, 25 short stories, and 14 novel and personal account excerpts present collective narratives of occupation, exile, imprisonment, and resistance. However, some of the texts work against the anthology's unifying project by foregrounding Arab culture, Third World solidarity, feminism, Marxism, or Islam. Ghareeb 'Asqalani, Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habiby, Akram Haniyyeh, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Ghassan Kanafani, Sahar Khalifeh, Hisham Sharabi, Anton Shammas, and Fadwa Tuqan are only a few of the writers in the anthology who connect Palestinian concerns with broader literary and political movements, struggling against cultural homogenization and isolation. Texts by these authors often fit awkwardly within the more moderate national literary framework set by

Jayyusi. As mentioned earlier, one of the unstated ambitions of the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* was to deliver an acceptable Palestinian politics and culture to a U.S. public at the very moment when the Palestinian national movement had unequivocally announced its willingness to enter negotiations with Israel on a two-state solution.

The anthology can be read as the offspring of the Palestine National Council's 1988 Declaration of Independence, the PLO's response to the Intifada. The Declaration of Independence states in its preamble:

In the heart of its homeland and on its periphery, in its places of exile near and far, the Palestinian Arab people has not lost its unwavering faith in its right to return nor its firm belief in its right to independence. Occupation, carnage and displacement have been unable to dispossess the Palestinians of their consciousness and their identity—their epic struggle has endured, and the formation of their national character has continued with the growing escalation of the struggle.

The Declaration of Independence stresses throughout “the constancy with which the people adhered to the land that gave that land its identity and which imbued its people with the national spirit.” On the one hand, this important document invokes a national unity that transcends place; on the other hand, it affirms the idea of a Palestinian nation tethered to the struggle in the historic land of Palestine. As a threshold political text, the PNC Declaration of Independence summons the language of resistance and self-determination that have been the identifying and unifying markers of the Palestinian national movement since the late 1960s, when the PLO defined itself in terms of Pan-Arab nationalism, Third World liberation, and anti-imperialism. The Declaration of Independence emphasizes both a “homeland denied” and the continuity of the nation in struggle.

A similar rhetoric of hardship, resistance, and attachment is echoed in the introduction to the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature*, which also alludes to the transcendent quality of the Palestinian national experience of dispossession and its concomitant unifying sentiments:

Modern Palestinian experience is harsh, unrelenting, and all-penetrating; no Palestinian is free from its grip and no writer can evade it. It cannot be forgotten and its anguish cannot be transcended. Whether in Israel, or in the West Bank or in the diaspora, Palestinians are committed by their very identity to a life determined by events and circumstances arising out of their own rejection of captivity and national loss, as well as by other people's intentions, suspicions, fears and aggressions. (2–3)

Despite the diverse locations of the Palestinian nation, the Declaration of Independence (“in the heart of its homeland and on its periphery, in its

places of exile near and far”) and the introduction to the anthology (“whether in Israel, or in the West Bank or in the diaspora”) define Palestinian national identity in terms of “the epic struggle” and “commitment” by the people. Repressed by both the Declaration of Independence and the anthology is the dichotomy between inside and outside the occupied territories that does not correspond with the image of unified nation evoked by the anthology’s framework. Even the geographical unity of the future national territory poses an obstacle to national unity as the divide between West Bankers and Gazans assumes an increasingly political form. In other words, the unity of Palestine, both within and beyond the territories, is rhetorical and premised largely on a past that has been shattered by colonial partition, exile, and occupation. This is not to say that there are not alliances and forces of national unification that have connected the inside and the outside, or that the national liberation movement represented by the PLO internationally did not possess credible popular support inside the territories. But since the crisis of the early 1980s, the social and ideological fractures in the Palestinian national movement have exposed the limits of the unifying rhetoric.

While the rhetoric of national unity is appropriate to a Declaration of Independence formulated in exile in support of an uprising on the national territory, in the anthology it serves to justify a selection of texts that privileges authors in exile and those works that represent the experience of dispossession. Accordingly, the dislocation caused by the creation of Israel becomes the defining moment in the Palestinian national narrative. The problem with this approach to defining the specificity of Palestinian culture is the implication that the Palestinian nation comes into existence as a consequence of Zionist oppression. This unintended and wrongheaded allusion is reasserted in the anthology’s chronology, which does not document the publication date of a single literary text in the collection but presents a detailed account of Palestinian nationalist activity consistently in relation to early Zionism and Israel.

In effect, as Jayyusi strives to explain the specificity of Palestinian writing within the broader context of Arabic literature, it is the idea of a particular historical experience of oppression that serves as the main criterion for defining the Palestinian national tradition. She writes, “While one can say that all Arabic literature nowadays is involved in the social and political struggle of the Arab people, politics nevertheless imposes a greater strain on the Palestinian writer” (1992, 2). And later, that in the face of a violent political adversary, Palestinian literature has “actually risen to the forefront of contemporary Arabic letters” (3). This line of argument fails to establish convincingly the particularity of Palestinian literature, but more importantly it reduces the significance of Palestinian

artistic expression to a second-order phenomenon that, like the Palestinian nation, is an effect of conditions created in large part by “the Zionist movement.” Much of the literature included in the anthology actually suggests otherwise and brings into focus a number of other important concerns that link Palestinian writers with writers throughout the Arab world and the Third World more generally. The overemphasis on Israel’s history in an effort to make a claim for Palestinian exceptionalism inadvertently dulls the more radical tendencies within Palestinian writing.

To contain these claims, Jayyusi reintroduces the importance of aesthetics, which she uses to supplement a definition of the Palestinian literary tradition that otherwise would risk reducing everything Palestinian to politics. For Jayyusi, the relationship between art and the world is construed as a dichotomy between internal and external forces. The internal forces of literature fall into the realm of pure aesthetics, whereas the external forces of politics negatively impinge on literature. These positions appear to be a simplification of a more elaborate argument developed by Edward Said in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1985). In contrast to Said, however, who seeks to break with a tradition of literary criticism that neglects the political forces that produce texts, Jayyusi insists that the value of Palestinian literature lies in its capacity to rise above politics or in some measure to liberate the aesthetic from the constraints of the political. She writes, “Art has its own internal laws of growth and development” (1992, 1) and that “the history of modern Arabic literature, particularly poetry, and especially in the decades since the Palestine disaster of 1948, shows that art has its own way of reasserting its natural course of development and growth” (2). What is interesting about this quotation is that it was primarily after 1948, notably after the 1967 war, that Pan-Arab nationalism and Third World revolutionary politics dominated the Arab cultural scene. Post-1967 Arab writing was influenced by the leftist movements in literature from around the world and connected the struggle in Palestine with anticolonial movements in, for example, Vietnam, Cuba, and South Africa. As Harlow (1987) demonstrates in *Resistance Literature*, the late 1950s and 1960s witnessed the emergence of a particular alignment of international literary positions that were closely tied to organized armed resistance.

While Harlow observes a remarkable trend that self-consciously disrupts the values of a literary establishment opposed to the marriage of politics and poetics, Jayyusi appears to be reacting to the excessive critical focus on political thematics in Palestinian poetry and prose. For example, she argues against a purely political reading of Palestinian literature: “What is involved in this literature, . . . is not simply a political situation that has to be expounded to the world. Literature would lose its immense

value if restricted to polemical narrations or to propaganda, and perhaps the greatest achievement of Palestinian poetry is its subtle and esthetically sophisticated portrayal of a genuine existential situation” (1992, 71).

By introducing the primacy of aesthetics in literature, Jayyusi holds at bay critical traditions of commitment and resistance that have played a central role in shaping Arabic literature since the 1950s. This gesture provides a corrective to politically reductive interpretations and the dismissal of Arabic literature as excessively didactic; Jayyusi’s corrective expresses, however, a rather reactionary position, which simply inverts the politics/aesthetics polarity by emphasizing the emergence of Arab literary modernism as a fundamentally aesthetic phenomenon. Accordingly, the introduction to the anthology describes the history of twentieth-century Palestinian literature as the unfolding of a modernist aesthetics within a narrow national context. “Modernism” and “avant-garde” are here code words for stylistically mature writing, which signals the realization of an original national literature that can stand beside the other literatures of the world: “Exiled Palestinian poets are now among the foremost avant-garde poets of the Arab world” (5). Later in the introduction, she adds: “Wherever one goes in the dispersed world of the Palestinian exile, there is at least one poet helping to create the new principles of a modern art” (57). Palestinian poetry is of course the privileged genre in the formation of Arab modernism, and the exiled poet is the central figure in this narrative of modern Palestinian literary history.

The second point concerning poets in exile is especially important in understanding the parallels between this anthology and the dominant tendencies in Palestinian national politics in the 1990s. Jayyusi explains her selection of texts by claiming that “the balance still tilts decidedly in favor of Palestinian literature written in exile, this being true of both poetry and prose” (7). *Modern Palestinian Literature* argues, therefore, that writers from the outside are “in,” while most of those living inside the territories are left “out.” Despite the rhetoric of national unity in the introduction, the underrepresentation of writers from inside historic Palestine is not explained in terms of the political conditions of occupation or the presumed isolation of writers inside the territories, but rather in terms of quality and aesthetic judgment. In order to construct a unified tradition of Palestinian literature in the name of national unity, the critical project of the anthology is abandoned. This issue seems particularly relevant in the broader context of the Arab world, where literature and art often critique national regimes as well as neocolonialism. While the leveling of geographical and political differences may be defended to satisfy the nationalist imperative in an era of armed resistance, this strategy does not translate into real gains in the period of appeasement.

The unity of the inside and the outside had been the ideological mainstay of the Palestinian movement from 1967 until the 1990s, but the Oslo agreement revealed that political representation of the nation was exclusively in the hands of a few PLO officials in exile. Rita Giacaman commented at the time of the signing of the Oslo agreement that “the people of the Occupied Territories had thought we were participating in making our own history, when history was being made for us halfway across the world” (1993, 19). Shafik al-Hout also said in an interview, “[Arafat] doubtless thought in Washington that if he was victorious, then we were all victorious. . . . He got trapped being in Tunis away from the masses” (1993, 19). Jayyusi’s anthology is a relatively benign expression of control in comparison with Arafat’s acceptance of the terms of the Oslo agreement and his continued attempt to monopolize the national authority now operating under severely circumscribed conditions inside the territories, but both the anthology and the Oslo negotiations produce authoritative documents that surrender the radicalism of Palestinian liberation in favor of U.S. recognition.

### **Beyond Past and Present**

It may seem harsh, inappropriate, and untimely to criticize the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* when, after all, Israel has intensified its assault against Palestinians, and the publication does challenge the Israeli effacement of Palestinians. In addition, the anthology has without question contributed to the small but growing body of Arabic literature published in the United States. It is nevertheless worth recognizing what the collection represents in both the literary and political fields in order to put the errors of the past in perspective and to clear the ground for the future. Just as it is necessary to address the conditions and compromises that produced the Oslo accords and the limited vision of the PLO leadership that signed the agreement, it is important to consider the literary projects that are an expression of that moment. Despite its massive reassertion of Palestinian culture in the face of an unyielding Israeli occupation and a U.S. public that is largely insensitive to the Palestinian situation, the collection does not make a powerful statement in the name of Palestinian politics or in the name of Arabic literature. The paratextual apparatus (namely, the chronology and introduction) of the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* flattens out ideological contradictions and historical tensions within the national movement in order to advance a harmonious representation of Palestinian cultural production that is an unthreatening expression of a literary tradition for which aesthetics are supposedly never made sub-

servient to politics. This broad national anthology speaks more to the concerns of a U.S. public than to the need for a challenging political presentation of Palestinian literature and politics.

The *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* is seriously constrained by the format of the national anthology and by the conditions of its production, two points that are the core of my critique. In addition, Jayyusi's attempt to reposition Palestinian literature in terms of modernist aesthetics, as opposed to resistance, does not seem to have opened a space for a more serious engagement with Palestinian culture. Beyond the limited world of Arabists, the collection has generally suffered a critical neglect that is reserved for Arabic literature in the United States. Said protested in 1990 that "critics, book reviewers and journal editors studiously avoid discussion of Arabic books" (278).

The discussion of Arabic books is rare still, and when it does take place tends toward the excessively appreciative. In the current conjuncture, what is needed most is a critical discussion of Arabic literature and politics that brings into the present the relationship between the two and exposes the failures of Arab national projects during the last thirty years. As I have noted above, in the era of revolutionary anti-imperialism, Palestinian resistance literature was a cultural extension of the PLO resistance movement. The parallel structure of this relationship was produced by the conditions of guerrilla warfare. Conversely, the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* is produced by the conditions that made possible the Oslo peace accords and seems to be motivated by some of the same concerns that led Arafat to sign an agreement with Rabin in 1993.

The publication of the *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* may satisfy a demand for English translations of Palestinian literature, but it does not take up the urgent need to question both the literature of resistance of the pre-1982 period and the politics of appeasement that characterized the Palestinian nationalist leadership as it entered peace negotiations with Israel. The failure of the resistance movement to dislodge the Israeli occupation and the alarming deterioration of the Palestinian situation in the post-Oslo period call for a rethinking of Palestinian national politics that breaks with all the paradigms of the past and the modalities of the present (see Khalidi 2002).



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