

# Landscapes in Translation: Traveling the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel with Raja Shehadeh and David Grossman<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract



This paper investigates the translation of raw terrain and territory—rocks, streams, canyons, packs of wild dog and clusters of cyclamen—into two parallel, contrapuntal, and mutually referential forms of textualized landscapes: Israeli nature, landscape, and travel in Grossman's *To the End of the Land* and Palestinian landscape as figured in Raja Shehadeh's renderings in *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*. By examining Shehadeh's and Grossman's translations of the same topoi—olive groves, paths in woods, wildlife, wildflowers, wild dogs and their behaviors, streams, footpaths, memorials, walls, and checkpoints—this paper investigates how topographical facts on the map and on the ground—geomorphological, biological, and cultural features of terrain—are differentially translated, transformed and moved into distinctive national natures—the multiple ways in which natural landscapes and national identities are conflated. The paper argues that the cultural and psychological scars of Israeli and Palestinian historical relations over land, boundaries, and political control saturate these landscape descriptions and narratives of “walking the land.” A second question animates this analysis: How are Shehadeh's and Grossman's *personal histories* of “the situation” carried over and translated into these landscapes and travel narratives? Slavoj Žižek asserts “already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its [the subject's] 'blind spot,' ...is the point from which the object itself returns the gaze. Sure the picture is in my eye, but I am also in the picture.” Might Žižek's claim assist us in understanding how the poetics and politics of the Israeli landscape and the occupied Palestinian territories are translated into topography and moved, from one place to another, as we see and walk these lands in tropes painted by Grossman's and Shehadeh's hands?

**Keywords:** Landscape, language, translation, memory, occupied Palestinian territories, Israel.

## Resumen

Este ensayo investiga la traducción del terreno y el territorio crudos—las rocas, los arroyos, los cañones, las hordas de perros salvajes y los ramilletes de ciclamen—a dos formas paralelas, contrapuntuales y mutuamente referenciales de paisajes textualizados: la naturaleza, el paisaje, y el viajar israelitas en *Al Final de la Tierra* de Grossman, y el paisaje palestino tal y como está figurado en las representaciones de Raja Shehadeh en *Excursiones Palestinas: una incursión en un paisaje en vías de desaparecer*. Al examinar las traducciones de Shehadeh y Grossman de los mismos *topoi*—los bosquecillos de oliva, los senderos en los bosques, la fauna, las flores silvestres, los perros salvajes y sus comportamientos, los arroyos, los senderos, los memoriales, las paredes y los lugares de inspección—este

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ensayo investiga cómo los hechos topográficos en el mapa y sobre la tierra—los aspectos geomorfológicos, biológicos y culturales del terreno—son traducidos diferencialmente, transformados y movidos a las naturalezas nacionales distintivas y a los paisajes móviles. El ensayo argumenta que las cicatrices culturales y psicológicas de las relaciones históricas israelitas y palestinas sobre la tierra, las fronteras y el control político están saturadas en las descripciones de los paisajes y las narrativas de “caminando la tierra.” Una segunda cuestión motiva este análisis: ¿Cómo las *historias personales* de Shehadeh y Grossman de “la situación” están transportadas y traducidas a estos paisajes y narrativas de viaje? Slavoj Žižek afirma que “ya inscrita dentro del objeto mismo disfrazado en el punto ciego’ del [sujeto]...es el punto del cual el objeto mismo devuelve la mirada. Es cierto que la imagen está en mi ojo, pero yo también estoy en la imagen.” ¿Puede que la afirmación de Žižek nos ayude a entender cómo la poética y las políticas de Israel y los territorios palestinos ocupados son traducidas a la topografía y movidos de un lugar a otro mientras vemos y caminamos por estas tierras en tropos pintados por las manos de Grossman y Shehadeh?

*Palabras clave:* paisaje, lengua, traducción, memoria, territorios palestinos ocupados, Israel.

A fifth [effect of Earthquakes] is the translation of mountains, buildings, trees &c. unto some other places.  
(J. Swan, *Speculum Mundi* VI §3. 238)

Although translations are not often associated with the cataclysmic rifts and roiling of the terrain that earthquakes cause, acts of translation have the potential to move, to dislocate and to reorient both the observer and the landscapes he or she traverses. The Latin *transfero*, “to translate,” also means “to bring across,” suggesting traversing a physical territory or barrier such as a river or gorge. Both the Latin *transfero* and *traduco*, which means “to lead across,” point toward the active force and agentive capacity of translation: translations not only aid us in moving from place to place, or in carrying a burden of meaning from one language to another, but, in the archaic usage in the epigraph above, translations can move mountains. Translations of landscape as renderings, in maps or sketches, can alter perception of places and lead to the transformation of topographies.<sup>2</sup>

This analysis advances the idea that acts of translation are acts of perception.<sup>3</sup> Translation in this sense entails rewriting or re-creation rather than a transformation from one text or spoken utterance to another.<sup>4</sup> I forward a conception of acts of translation as acts of seeing and interpreting. How, I ask, do practices of translation as “renderings” recreate and re-inscribe the brute facts of geomorphology and ecosystems

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on landscape, vision, and visual studies is enormous. Among other key theorists see Mary Pratt, Simon Schama, and W.J.T. Mitchell. On the power of translations of landscape into cartographic representation, see Harley and Woodward, Harley, Cosgrove. Within Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, the work of Benvenisti constitutes a primer in the way naming, cartography, and the imperial gaze works to reconstitute nature, nation, and historical memory. On imagery of the desert and the forest in Israeli politics and literature, see Zerubavel. See El-Haj on the poetics, politics, and practices of Israeli archeology. See Ghazi Falah’s meticulous mapping of the extent and location of former Palestinian villages in lands now claimed as part of Israel. On the history of hiking in pre-1948 Palestine, see Stein. For a comprehensive account of the conversion of Palestinian lands into nature reserves and nature parks in Israel, see Kadman; see also Egoz and Merhav on the history of nature parks.

<sup>3</sup> See Pratt on the interlinked roles of vision, politics, and landscape description.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer of this article for this insight.

into sensuous phenomena, visual images made of words? Renderings of the “facts on the ground,” and the poetics of landscape description, may be saturated with political implications, positions and meanings. In this essay I investigate how two authors, Raja Shehadeh, an eminent Palestinian human rights lawyer, legal historian and non-fiction writer, and David Grossman, a distinguished Israeli novelist, journalist and activist, rewrite or recreate landscapes in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The idea of translation as rendition is also used in a second sense, to illuminate how two gifted writers deploy representations of landscape to embody political, historical and personal dimensions of the “situation” in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. How are environmental facts and landscape topoi refracted and reassembled by the authors to reveal a character’s inner turmoil, the narrator’s positionality, or the larger roiled political history of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories? Slavoj Žižek suggests this sense of translating landscape when he asserts that “already inscribed into the perceived object itself, in the guise of its [the subject’s] ‘blind spot,’ . . . is the point from which the object itself returns the gaze. Sure the picture is in my eye, but I am also in the picture” (Žižek 17). Might Žižek’s claim assist us in understanding how the poetics and politics of Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories are translated into topography and moved, from one place to another, as we see and walk these lands painted in tropes by Grossman’s and Shehadeh’s hands? How are the political, ethical and historical perspectives of these two authors, transcribed into poetics of landscape description, from the operation of bulldozers, the planting of a gardens, the formation of terracing, to the behavior of wild dogs? How are the personal histories of the protagonists in these very different stories about walking “the land,” and being in “the situation,” translated—in the sense of transposed onto these landscapes and travel narratives?

Two works are at the center of this essay, David Grossman’s novel, entitled *To the End of the Land* and Raja Shehadeh’s non-fiction work entitled *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*. Raja Shehadeh and David Grossman are both internationally honored, distinguished journalists. Both are writers of fiction and non-fiction, ardent walkers and fervent observers of the landscapes that surround them. They have both suffered intimately, yet in different ways, from the violence and pain of the historic turmoil within Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. As public intellectuals, both have participated in international and national fora, as well as in local demonstrations, for dismantling of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in Gaza.

Grossman wrote in Hebrew, his native language. The novel was initially published in Israel, for an Israeli audience, and only later translated into English. Shehadeh, although Arabic is his native language, chose to write in English to reach an international, cosmopolitan readership concerned with human rights, land rights, and the balkanization of the Palestinian landscape.

Raja Shehadeh was born in 1951 and comes from a distinguished family of Palestinian jurists. Shehadeh’s father, Aziz, also a lawyer, was one of the first Palestinians to support a two-state solution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Aziz Shehadeh was stabbed to death in the family’s driveway in 1985. Shehadeh’s grandfather, Saleem, was a judge in the courts of the British Mandate of Palestine and

Shehadeh's great-great uncle founded the newspaper Al-Karmil in the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Shehadeh is one of the founders of a prominent Palestinian human rights and property rights non-governmental organization, Al-Haq. In addition to his highly regarded *Occupier's Law: Israel and the West Bank*, Raja Shehadeh has published an account of the Israeli occupation of Ramallah, where his home is located, entitled *Occupation Diaries*. The non-fiction *Palestinian Walks*, was awarded Britain's prestigious Orwell Prize for political writing. Shehadeh deepened the temporal horizon and expanded the territorial scope of *Palestinian Walks* in 2010 with the publication of *A Rift in Time: Travels with My Ottoman Uncle*, his account of his great-great uncle Najib Nassar's travels throughout areas now known as Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

David Grossman is among the most celebrated Israeli novelists and journalists of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Born in Israel in 1954, Grossman is also a noted activist and critic of Israeli policy toward Palestinians, particularly the occupation. Grossman began his career as a radio announcer and journalist. Fluent in Arabic and, in his youth, having reddish hair, Grossman was not infrequently addressed as an Israeli Palestinian. These interactions led him to realize that he could pass as a Palestinian, a possibility permitting unparalleled access to Palestinians' life worlds. Grossman used his capacity to travel, observe, and talk to Palestinians. His ethnographically informed journalistic account of Palestinians living in the occupied territories and commuting across checkpoints to labor in Israel evoked the extremely difficult circumstances of Palestinians everyday.

Grossman's non-fiction account of the lives and suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, *The Yellow Wind*, provoked enormous controversy as well as praise within Israel and abroad. Along with his two friends, Amos Oz and A.B. Yeshoshua, both distinguished Israeli novelists and critics of Israeli policy, while remaining strong supporters of an Israeli state, Grossman urged the Israeli government to accept a ceasefire while the United Nations supervised peace negotiations with Lebanon.

George Packer, journalist and *New Yorker* contributor, provides an account of the uncanny links between Grossman's research for *To the End of the Land* and circumstances surrounding the death of his beloved son, Uri, during the last days of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon:

In February 2004, the Israeli writer David Grossman set out to walk half the length of his country, along the Israel Trail, from the Lebanese border, in the north, down to his home, outside Jerusalem. The journey, a fiftieth-birthday present to himself, would provide material for a novel that he had begun the previous May, about a woman, Ora, whose younger son takes part in a major operation at the end of his military service. . . Ora believes, or at least hopes, that she can keep her son safe by telling the story of his life to her hiking companion. (Packer 50)

Setting the scene for the denouement, Packer continues:

Grossman was on the Israel Trail for thirty days, waking at five-thirty and walking about ten miles a day, occasionally joined by Michal. He stayed in rented rooms, in farming villages, where after dark, he took notes on what he had seen: the trees and flowers of the Galilee, a group of Arab shepherd boys. The journey frightened him. He was an urban man, afraid of navigating his way home from afar. In Israel, being on your own in nature has its perils. An Israeli soldier had been kidnapped near the hiking trail recently and murdered. (Packer 50)

On August 14, 2004, asleep at home, Grossman was awakened in the middle of the night by a “notifier,” an Israeli term for someone whose task it is to alert the living of the death of a relative serving in the Israeli Defense Force. Grossman’s son, Uri, had been killed in action during the last hours of Israeli invasion and operations in Lebanon. After learning that Uri had been killed, Grossman resumed writing *To the End of the Land*.

Few lands in the Middle East are subject to more conflicted, contested, torturous layers of claim and counter-claim, to cultural, legal, ethnic, territorial and religious entanglements than the region that might be called Israel-Palestine.<sup>5</sup> The geophysical, mineralogical and biological features of this region have been drafted into a political and economic struggle in which control of descriptions as well as control over ownership and political status are contested, often violently. Trees, for example, are not merely symbolic tokens in a war of landscape descriptions, but material tokens of the legal and national ownership status of particular patches of the landscape.<sup>6</sup>

Simon Schama’s magisterial tome, *Landscape and Memory* (1995), forms the lyrical bedrock for contemporary discussions of memory, terrain, and perception. In *Sacred Landscape*, the Israeli historian Meron Benvenisti introduces his provocative history of the early decades of Israeli settlement by quoting and then reflecting upon Simon Schama’s aphorism: “Landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from the strata of memory as from layers of rock” (Benvenisti 1).

Naming as well as mapping are among the instruments used to shape memory as well as practices. Building upon this foundation, Benvenisti cites the groundbreaking work of historian Thongchai Winichakul. In *Siam Mapped: Constructing the Nation Body*, Winichakul asserts:

A map is perceived as a scientific abstraction of reality. A map merely represents something that already exists objectively ‘there.’ In the history I have described, this relationship is reversed. A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map was a model for, rather than a model of, what it purported to represent—it had become a real instrument to concretize projections on the earth’s surface. (Winichakul 130)

Benvenisti is the son of an influential Israeli geographer who, in 1949, just after the war of 1948, was one of a group of scholars “well known in their respective fields of cartography, archeology, geography and history,” who gathered in the prime minister’s office in Tel Aviv. The charge of the prime minister was to change the names of more than two thousand Arabic place names to Hebrew in an effort to Hebraicize and nationalize the landscape.

All landscapes are ambiguous, multi-dimensional, continually changing at varying time scales. We are taught through graphic and textual media how to see, what to see, and how to interpret what we perceive. Benvenisti reveals, through his autobiographical

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<sup>5</sup> See Rafi Segal et al., and Weizman for a deeply researched Foucauldian analysis of space, power and politics of Israeli control of space in Israel, on the borders, and within the occupied Palestinian territories. See also Sine Najafi and Jeffrey Kastener, Salim Tamari, and David Shulman.

<sup>6</sup> For a nuanced legal and political analysis of the contestation of landscape and land rights in which both Israeli and Palestinian participants use trees as material and symbolic vessels, see Irus Braverman. See Bardenstein for a nuanced analysis of the intersection of poetics and politics of trees, oranges, and prickly-pear cactus in Israel-Palestine.

reflections and painstaking historical research on the post-Independence war, how his geographer father and the team of Israeli scholars labored mightily to rename and reclaim an ancient landscape that was most recently Mandate Palestine, under British control. In large part, their mission was achieved through a marriage of biblical studies, archeology, control of the archives, and war. But renaming was also an act of word magic coupled with political power: the committee changed the names of hundreds of Arabic toponyms to Hebrew homonyms or cognates, erasing Arabic place names and inscribing Hebrew names on the map as well as road signs guiding travelers through this recently conquered, newly Israeli landscape. The new map of Israel produced not only an erasure from memory. It was an instrument for reorganization of the way the land was perceived and governed.

Ancient/contemporary Israel was being transposed and translated onto the renamed lands. Through renaming, a specific territorial imaginary was being transposed over and onto the land. Arabic place-names, repositories of indigenous knowledge, lore, and religious belief, names that could be sounded and understood in Arabic, were being erased. In a recursive cycle, this renaming and re-mapping became the plot line, one instrument in a colonizing process that continues up to the present day,

Benvenisti's account of this process is illuminating and provocative:

[...]Now it was necessary to establish "facts on the ground," and the creation of a Hebrew map was an extremely powerful means of doing so, no less important than the building of roads or the founding of settlements [...] the map infused with the sense that a new-Jewish-reality had indeed been created in the desolate expanses of the Negev. (Benvenisti 14)

What kinds of landscapes have David Grossman and Raja Shehadeh produced? What are some of the key topoi on which these writers focus and how are these topoi rendered? How might their strategic use of landscape description suggest aspects of their positions on "the situation?" We begin this journey by thinking about walking.<sup>7</sup>

*To The End of the Land* is the story of two people in motion: Ora, the mother of two young men, one of whom has reenlisted in the Israel Defense Force; and her childhood lover, Avram, who is the father of her beloved son, Ofer. *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape* is a story of one person, Raja Shehadeh, in motion. The two people at the center of *Land* are walking in territory identified as Israel, while Shehadeh, the narrator and protagonist of *Walks*, is walking through land identified he identifies as Palestinian.

Very early in *To the End of the Land* we are told by the omniscient narrator that Ora will be in motion.<sup>8</sup> Ready to move up north with Israeli troops preparing to invade Lebanon in 1987, Ofer calls his mother after she has delivered him to a mobilization site. We listen to her logic about not staying fixed in the house, a form of magical thinking: "But every moment she spends at home is dangerous for her, she knows it, and dangerous for him too." To not be home, according to this logic, is to not be present to

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<sup>7</sup> On the practice of the *tiyul*, hiking, and getting to know the land in pre- and post-independence Israel, see Stein (2009).

receive the notifiers, the Israeli officials who would knock on her door, early in the morning, in the event that Ofer had been killed.

Calling Ora while he is en route north, Ofer questions her, displaying his own anxiety and annoyance:

“[L]et’s say I get injured or something—where do they find you?” She doesn’t answer. They don’t, she thinks, that’s exactly the point. And something else flickers in her: if they don’t find her, if they cannot find her, he won’t get hurt. She can’t understand it herself. She tries to. She knows it makes no sense, but what does? (Grossman 81)

Dumped by her Palestinian driver on the edge of a field at dawn somewhere up in northern Israel in a region called the Galilee, Ora orders her old lover Avram to pick up his pack (originally packed for Ofer for a trip planned with him before the emergency call up and his re-enlistment in the IDF) and get on with it, walking with him. She announces to him:

“I’ll tell you everything on the way; we can’t stay here anymore.”

“Why not?”

“I mustn’t,” she replies simply, and as she utters the words she knows she is right, and that this is the law she must now obey: not to stay in one place for too long, not to be a sitting target—for people or thoughts. (Grossman 118)

As their journey from the northern edge of the Galilee proceeds south, it becomes clear that the journey has little or nothing to do with the landscape, and even less with it being a distinctively Israeli or historically significant landscape. Rather, the purpose of the trip is not only “to flee the news,” but also to narrate Ofer’s life from his conception, birth, early childhood and adolescence, up through his first love, young adulthood and his first service as a young man in the Israeli Defense Force. Ora’s travels with Avram are a hike of magical thinking in two ways: to forestall or prevent Ofer’s death by not being present to receive the news, and to narrate his life as a means of keeping him alive. Ora’s narration of Ofer’s life is simultaneously a performance that animates her son, enlivens and protects him by *saying* his life, and, at the same moment, Ora is vocalizing a funeral oration. There is something much deeper, more primitive and more unnerving going on with Ora and her insistence on speaking of Ofer. Her telling his life is not merely narrative or remembrance. In speaking Ofer, in reading Ofer, we as readers, Grossman as mourning father and as author, and Ora and Avram are keeping him whole, alive, with them on their journey away from death, from “the situation,” from carnage in Lebanon.

What is the landscape in which Ora and Avram find themselves at dawn, on the first morning of their journey? Grossman as omniscient narrator, above the scene at dawn, offers this rhapsody:

Daylight burgeons as they lie on the edge of a field, bright shades of green unfurl as far as the eye can see, and they wake from a nap, still blanketed with a gossamer of dreams. They are the only two people in the world, there is no one else, and the earth steams with a primeval scent, and the air hums with the rustle of tiny creatures, and the mantle of dawn still hangs overhead, lucent and dewy, and their eyes light up with little smiles of not-yet-fear and not-yet-themselves. (Grossman 116)

This passage, in its poetic, pastoral tropes, evokes the figure of dawn and her rosy fingers in the *Odyssey*. We are situated a dreamy, misty landscape, with few if any

features other than impressionist strokes of color. It is a landscape without people, without specificity, steaming with a primeval scent if not located in a timeless primeval epoch.

Is this, as anticipated, an Israeli landscape that is a counter-scape to Raja Shehadeh's landscapes? What would be the marks of an Israeli landscape? The reader is alerted, however, that Ora is not really interested in nationalist claims or landscapes. Ora wants to flee not only the news of "the situation" but she wants to be outside or at the end of the country:

"Drive," she said when she sat down next to Sami.

"Where to?"

She thought for a moment. Without looking at him, she said, "To where the country ends." (Grossman133)

In a single sentence containing a view of land and nation under intense compression, Sami, Ora's Palestinian driver lets go with a heated reply: "For me it ended a long time ago," he hissed" (Grossmann 133). How does Ora perceive the cultural landscape? What kinds of artifacts, at the scale of a well or at the scale of a village, are portrayed and what is the nature of Ora's gaze upon them?

At the top of Keren Naphtali mountain, on a bed of poppies and cyclamens, they lie sweaty and breathless from the steep incline [...] Chiseled stone ruins sprawl behind them, the remnants of an Arab village or perhaps an ancient temple. Avram – who happened to flip through an article not long ago – believes the stone is from the Roman era, and Ora welcomes his theory. "I can't deal with Arab village ruins now," she says. (Grossman 267-268)

Immediately following this exchange, the image of an Arab village landscape flashes before Ora in a kind of nightmare scene:

But a momentary illusion in her mind, composed instantaneously from the ruins, projects a tank roaring down a narrow alley-way, and before it can trample a parked car or ram the wall of a hose, she moves her hands in front of her face and moans, "Enough, enough, my hard drive is overloaded with this stuff." (Grossman 268)

Precisely because Ora is fleeing the news, desires to be in a place where the country ends, beyond the prism of nationalism and the prison of nationalist ideology and the conflict, the last thing she needs to see is evidence of a Palestinian landscape, or a landscape in which wounds of Israeli history and conflict is embedded.

Landscape, in *To the End of the Land*, is never explicitly described as an Israeli landscape.<sup>9</sup> More often Grossman's loving accounts of the land are descriptions of local and regional biodiversity. The pleasure Ora finds in wildflowers is intense:

She quickens her steps. The path narrows, and bushes of spiny-broom—she remembers the name; that's what that guy was talking about—as tall as she is blossom in yellow on either side, giving off a delicate perfume. And there are those little flowers, yellow and white chamomile blossoms that look like they were drawn by children, and citrus shrubs, and hyacinths, and pale blue stork's bill, and the beloved Judean viper's bugloss, which she had barely notices all these days, but what had she noticed? "And look," she says,

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<sup>9</sup> Commenting on *To the End of the Land*, some critics have focused on the spatial sense of the title that suggests a walk beyond or away from the nation of Israel, a place beyond the national boundaries.



pointing happily, expanding her lungs and her eyes: “That pink over there is gorgeous—a flowering redbud tree.” (Grossman 284)

Precise yet lyrical common plant names proliferate throughout the text. Despite the fact that they are walking through northern Galilee, one of the most storied regions for all three Abrahamic religions there are few references to Jewish or Israeli landscape, nor are many biblical references to ancient Israeli or Roman history mentioned.<sup>10</sup>

Grossman produces a landscape leached of historicity, despite the fact that everywhere they walk history permeates the land. Grossman has created the landscape Ora sees, translating Ora’s wish to not only “flee the news” in the sense of current events, but her need to flee the entire realm of historicity, to get outside of Israel, its boundaries and its news, and into a nature devoid of human fashioning. The landscape descriptions Grossman produces are never proxies or alibis for Israeli nationhood or even Israeli fauna and flora. The Galilee, reputedly one of the most beautiful regions of Israel, and saturated with layers of historical meaning is never fashioned as a particularly Christian, Jewish, or Muslim landscape. We see the Galilee through the eyes of a woman who desires, and therefore finds, a lush landscape, rich in plants, in forests, streams, and scenic views. Ora’s averted glance rebounds from the signs of ethnicity, religious history, loss and struggle that surround her.

Ora and Avram, walking south from the northernmost region of the Galilee, up against the border with Lebanon, are traveling in a landscape saturated with meaning and memory of Israeli sons and daughters that were lost in struggles with Palestinians and other Arab nations. As Ora narrates her son’s history, she craves deliverance from the overload of memorials signaling grief, mourning and loss of other sons, in other Israeli conflicts, shunning and averting her eyes. Even Avram participates in shielding her from signs of loss and war:

[...] He presses two fingers together and smiles, trying unsuccessfully to distract her from the sparse grove of cypress trees—twenty-eight of them, each with a wooden name plaque, a cypress for each of the men killed here in April and May of 1948 while trying to capture the fortress from the Arab fighters. (Grossman 285)

As she walks, however, Ora is unable to prevent herself from hearing the recitation of a poem, verses in which sons and botanical imagery are expressed in similes and irritatingly amplified by rebounding from the mountains around them:

“Go on, go on,” she murmurs, heroically passing a plaque with a poem by Moshe Tabenkin, where a moustached tour guide stands reading it out loud to a group of tourists. They must all be deaf, Ora thinks angrily and speeds up: he’s practically yelling. The mountains echo back to her:

*Our boy was-like a pine in the woodlands  
Was-a fig tree putting forth its figs.  
Our boy was-a myrtle of dense roots  
Was the most fiery of poppies.* (Grossman 286; italics in original)

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<sup>10</sup> The cultural function of the *tiyul* or hiking the land, for post-Holocaust, eastern European Jews, was an act of fundamental importance. For cosmopolitan Jews from Europe, walking the land was a monumental project of familiarizing themselves with a radically unfamiliar environment in a way that was not only cognitive but somatic and psychological. I am indebted to Bella Brodzki for this insight.

At the peak of Mount Arbel, above the Kinneret Valley, Avram and Ora take pleasure in following the flight of an eagle as it glides “against the blue sky” until:

[O]ra notices a plaque in memory of Sergeant Roi Dror, of blessed memory, who was killed on this cliff on June 18, 20002, during a training operation of the Duvdevan special forces unit:

[H]e fell as gently as a tree falls.

*There was not the slightest sound, because of the sand (The Little Prince).* (Grossman 425; italics in original)

The narrator continues:

Without a word, they get up and flee to the opposite end of the mountaintop, but there is another monument in their new place of refuge, in memory of Staff Sergeant Zohar Mintz, killed in '96 in Southern Lebanon.” Tears flow from Ora’s eyes and she asks Avram: “Oh, Avram, where will this end? Tell me, where will this end? There’s no room for all the dead.” (Grossman 425)

It is no accident that Ora and Avram flee to the countryside, as far away as they can get on a nature trail. Although Grossman is a keen observer of appearances, of plant life, water, and forest animals, Ora and Avram do not wish to get “to know the land.” While they pause to take in the fragrance and beauty of natural scenes, pausing momentarily, they are on a journey away from the news, to avoid the knowledge of the moment—the latest incarnation of the war. Ora does not want to see memorials that punctuate sites along the trail; she averts her eyes from stone plaques and inscriptions because she fears her son may become memorialized in the same way. To gaze upon these memorials is to gaze on the possibility of Ofer’s death.

If Ora travels through the landscape averting her gaze from signs of memory, conflict and history, the loss of Israeli youths that flank the Israel Trail, she is devoted to remembering her son Ofer. The trail really becomes a substructure supporting her recapitulation of Ofer’s life. In a fantasy, Ora imagines herself reassembling Ofer by conjuring him up by placing his clothes on a rock:

[S]he has the urge to dive down into the backpack again and grab his clothes by the handful, spread them out here in front of Avram, on the bushes and on the rocks, and conjure him from the clothes-his height, his breadth, his size. Excitement flutters down her body: if she really tries hard—and for a moment she almost believes that anything is possible on this journey strung along on a thin web of oaths and wishes-she can pull him out, deliver Ofer himself from the depths of the backpack, tiny and delightful and twitching his arms and legs. She settles for an army hat, a pair of sweatpants, and the *sharwals*, and these make her happy, with her arms entirely immersed, kneading her child out of the fabric like a village baker shoulder deep in a basin full of dough. (Grossman 278)

Through acts of narration and recollection, and acts of re-collection of Ofer’s things—his clothing—“on the bushes and on the rocks,” Ora and Avram walk through the Galilee and Kinneret, remembering and re-collecting Ofer. These are acts of magical thought and action. At the same moment, these acts help Ora to integrate the shock of realization, to begin to imagine and deal with her premonition that her son may be killed, or may be dead already, as she and Avram walk the trail and recite his life. Is Ofer perhaps re-enacting Isaac’s sacrifice? “Ofer” in Hebrew is a young deer but the choice of name also echoes the English “offer.” The landscape, as described by Grossman is extraordinarily beautiful, described in terms that might be called springtime sublime. Can the rocks on

which Ofer's clothing is lovingly laid call forth Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as well as Ora's relinquishing Ofer to the Israeli army? At the same time, this is no religious site, no recognized and named place. Ofer's clothing is laid out on an anonymous rock shelf. It is as if Ora had hitched a ride on Baudelaire's exclamation: "N'importe ou mais hors de ce monde!"<sup>11</sup>

When, for a while Ora and Avram emerge beside a road, and the path markings have disappeared, the narrator informs us:

The road is not especially wide, but vehicles zoom past frequently, and they both feel slow and dull in comparison. They would happily retreat to the quiet, light-filled meadow, or even back to the shadowy forest. But they can't go back. Ora cannot and Avram seems to have been infected by her onward-and-forward purposefulness. They stand there confused, looking left and rights, pulling their heads back with every passing car.

"We're like those Japanese soldiers who emerged from the forests thirty years after the war was over," she says. (Grossman 326)

The contrast with the landscapes that Raja Shehadeh discovers and describes on his walks in Palestine could not be more striking. Shehadeh too is on the move and fleeing. He recoils from a sense of claustrophobia living in dense, lively Ramallah. But more than fleeing life in Ramallah, in his walks or *sarha* in the hills, Shehadeh was seeking a refuge from "the situation" Grossman's term for the trauma, conflict, and carnage associated with Israel's relations with its Palestinian citizens and neighbors, and a source of rejuvenation: "The hills began to be my refuge against the practices of the occupation, both manifest and surreptitious, and the restrictions traditional Palestinian society imposed on our life. I walked in them for escape and rejuvenation" (Shehadeh, *Palestinian Walks* 5). After returning to live in the occupied Palestinian territories, following in the footsteps of his distinguished father, a lawyer, and his grandfather Saleem, a judge under the Mandate, who loved going on a *sarha* with his cousin Abu Ameen, roaming freely and disappearing sometime for weeks or even months. Shehadeh informs us that

To go on a *sarha* was to roam freely, at will, without restrain. The verb form of the word means to let the cattle out to pasture early in the morning, leaving them to wander and graze at liberty [...] A man going on a *sarha* wanders aimlessly, not restricted by time and place, going where his spirit takes him to nourish his soul and rejuvenate himself. (*Palestinian Walks* 2)

Like Ora and Avram, Shehadeh found he must keep on the move, and to move freely and without a well-thought out plan. Shehadeh, unlike the desperate, if heroic and ragged protagonist Ora, seeks and discovers a very different kind of landscape, one that is replete with the richness of nature, green, many hued and various. Unlike Ora and Avram, Shehadeh pauses often to take in not only the biogeographic aspects of a landscape, but its specific cultural and historic character. Shehadeh travels and translates the terrain as a pre-eminently Palestinian landscape. In fact, it is in the profusion of landscapes in which nature and Palestinian labor and ingenuity are mixed

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<sup>11</sup> The original text, in Baudelaire's conversation with himself, in his volume *Spleen de Paris*, is "Enfin, mon âme fait explosion, et sagement elle me crie: 'N'importe où! n'importe où! pourvu que ce soit hors de ce monde!'" (n.p.)

that Shehadeh seems to find his greatest sense of release and rejuvenation, landscapes that are saturated with the craft and labor of his family and his countrymen.

It is in Shehadeh's portrait of a dwelling constructed by his grandfather Saleem's cousin, Abu Ameen, high in the hills above Ramallah, that Shehadeh's pleasure and excitement in a landscape both cultural and natural are manifest. Above a cliff Shehadeh discovers a *qasr*, an indigenous stone structure in which farmers stored their crops and slept on an open roof. Shehadeh shouts out for joy at finding this relic of the past, sign and symbol of the Palestinian farmer and his landscape, and his shout of "SARHA!" literally resounds throughout the hills, echoing from hill to hill until "I felt I had somehow touched the entire landscape." Shehadeh's shout is an embrace of his land and landscape, the hills of his immediate ancestors, and the landscape of agrarian Palestinian society. The echoing shouts expand out into the Palestinian hillsides: an auditory claim of exhilaration and land rights. But his epiphany does not stop there.

It is above the terrace on which the *qasr* rests that Shehadeh provides an intimate portrait of the mutual imbrication of human craft or *metis* and the natural world, a hybrid culture-nature meeting that underlies his vision of landscape in the hills everywhere:

Along the terrace wall was a rock rosebush with its thick leaves and muted pink flowers. It climbed hesitantly over the stones, green against the gray as if someone had carefully chosen it to decorate this ancient wall. The stones with which the wall was built were carefully picked and piled together, and had held back the soil over many years without a single one of them falling, come rain or flood. Between these neatly arranged rocks more cyclamens grew [...] By the side of the steps was a yellow broom with its spikey green leaves. Its sweet scent filled the air. Lower down were some tall white asphodels and lower still bunches of the blue sage... And when I looked up at the next level, I saw another beautiful garden, graced by a fabulous olive tree many centuries old, whose shallow roots were like thick arteries clinging together, clasping the ground firmly, forming a perfect wooden furrowed seat on which to sit and rest one's back against the trunk. I felt I could sit all day next to this *qasr* and feast my eyes on this wonderful creation. (*Palestinian Walks* 9-10)

What is Shehadeh describing in this passage? The reader sees a proliferation of color—yellow, pink, grey, green—and fragrance—a marvelous intertwining of wildflowers indigenous to the area and other flowers planted by the hand of Abu Ameen or his wife. Even more than the conjunction of opportunistic species with cultivated flowering plants, we are treated to the description of an amazing, multi-generational landscape composed of rock retaining walls, soil, plants, and the magnificent stone *qasr*, a wonderful creation that is the result of years of labor interwoven with decades of weathering, winds, rains, and the drift of wild pollen and seed. Here asphodels, blue sage, cyclamen, and rosebushes take root in the interstices of a man-made Palestinian retaining walls and a landscape that has been shaped over decades if not centuries. It becomes a site that is distinctive in itself and, in synechdocal relationship with the whole of the Palestinian landscape, shaped over the centuries by shepherds and olive farmers, as well as traders, craftsmen, judges, lawyers and educators.

Shehadeh claims to have left the practice of law after losing cases of land appropriation, the interposition of "the wall" on Palestinian farmers' lands, the cutting into the landscape by Rome Ploughs to make apartheid-like superhighways for Israeli

settlers commuting from the recently colonized eastern settlements to cities on the coast, Shehadeh never really left his work of advocacy. One reading of *Palestinian Walks*, and the volume of first person journeys over an even wider territory, *A Rift in Time: Journeys with my Ottoman Uncle*, suggests that Shehadeh simply exchanged the agon of legal battles in Israeli land courts and other governmental for a for another form of advocacy: first person, non-fiction accounts of the costs being sustained by Palestinian society, landscape, flora, fauna, soils, and water since the war of Independence, but particularly since the occupation of the West Bank by settlements.

For Ora and Avram the larger history, “the news,” current events, “the situation” is all anathema to be fled. For both, the only form of historical narrative that is crucial and bearable is the narrative of their lost son. Ora and Avram’s flight into the Galilee is not an expansion but a contraction. Their sojourn into Galilean nature can be seen as an inwardly circling spiral in which they diver deeper into their most intimate history and experience with each other and, for Ora, with Ofer. Landscape then becomes mere setting and surround: the natural scaffolding or staging on which their narcissistic wounds are exposed, nursed and narrated.

For Shehadeh the entire text of *Palestinian Walks* is a testament, in the form of six *sarha*, including an imagined one at the very end of this small volume, to the physical fragmentation of a Palestinian landscape, a balkanization which, with its elevated highways for Israelis and its underpaths and lower byways for Palestinians, crudely marks out the larger outlines of an apartheid-like dual-system of transport, citizenship, economy, and landscape. This is landscape portraiture on a larger frame than the micro-level detail lovingly described by Shehadeh in his musing on the cascading terraces, graced with flowers, in which his grand-uncle's *qasr* was built. Shehadeh rebuilds the *qasr*, in part, with his own hands, an excavation that has personal, familial, and national meaning.

Shehadeh describes the ways in which the landscape is has three modalities, Palestinian, Israeli, and geomorphological, reflected in the *qasr*:

As I walked up I looked at the unterraced hill to my left. What, I wondered, would it take to clear this and terrace it? What a feat it must have been to look at the hill and plan the subdivisions... They must have been very careful to follow the natural contours, memorizing the whole slope before deciding how to subdivide it... Where once was a steep hill there was now a series of gradually descending terraces. In this way my ancestors reclaimed the wild, possessed and domesticated it, making it their own. (Shehadeh 11)

Through Shehadeh’s own reflections, the reader sees this landscape as a product of decades, if not centuries of Palestinian labor and, as a product of art, in the sense of craft knowledge or *metis*, the indigenous knowledge of Palestinian peasant cultivators and herders. Shehadeh insists we are also looking at a cultural landscape that reflects and embodies the lived practices of his ancestors, who have merged their labor with the land, resulting in his final assertion: making it their own. *Palestinian Walks*, then, reveals in places, patches of a Palestinian landscape, a landscape thoroughly shaped, carved, remade. It is a landscape made with local knowledge and labor, an artifact in harmony with the *genius loci* or spirit of the place—“careful to follow the natural contours”—of

the existing environment, yet informed by the needs and aspirations of Palestinian peasantry.

At the same time, Shehadeh invites the reader to witness another landscape, prefigured in the subtitle to *Palestinian Walks: Forays into a Vanishing Landscape*. The trope, “a vanishing landscape,” is a mild, somewhat sentimental, nostalgic prelude to the landscapes of the Israeli invasion, to the violence, crudity, and ugliness of what Shehadeh witnesses on his land.

Shehadeh’s account of his journey into a nature reserve with his friend Mustafa Barghouti, a doctor and politician, in 1987, provides a pungent description of how the intrusion of Israeli settlements has penetrated former Palestinian lands, soiling Shehadeh’s boots and his experience of a *sarha*. In 1999, an order was passed forbidding entry into “area C” by non-Israeli nationals. All nature reserves are categorized as “area-C” and forbidden to Palestinians without permission from the military government. Shehadeh leads us into a nature reserve called *Shemurat Delavim*, located below the settlement of Dolev:

The track we were following diverted from the *wadi* that circled the Dolev hill and lead to what appeared to be a country club where Israelis and tourists could come to enjoy our lovely hills...

As we neared the top of the hill the clods of soil began to feel wet even though there was no spring nearby and it hadn’t rained. We soon realized that we had walked into the open sewers of the Jewish settlement of Talmon to the North. The settlement might have had a rubbish collection system, but it did not have one for treating sewage, which was just disposed of down the valley into land owned by Palestinian farmers. We tried to step lightly so as not to drown our shoes in the settlers’ shit. (*Palestinian Walks* 163)

If the saturation of Palestinian lands with settlers’ shit is one instance of the Israeli invasion of Palestinian landscape, Shehadeh’s description of Israeli settlements in the hills around Ramallah, above Ramallah and, indeed, throughout the entire landscape of the occupied Palestinian territories that he walks at night, is less bucolic: “When I look at night from the roof of my house at the horizon I can see the yellow lights of these illegal outposts creating an illuminated noose around the city.”

Shehadeh’s descriptions of the “separation” wall offer the most disturbing descriptions of the Israelification of the landscape:

But the most destructive development, which boded only misery and spelled continued conflict for the future was the wall begun constructed by Israel. This stretched in a jagged course that was determined not only by Israeli military considerations but also by the special interests of the settlers and land mafia lords, slicing through the hills, destroying their natural shape, gulping large swaths of Palestinian areas. Only in part did it follow the 1967 armistice’s internationally recognized border between Israel and the Palestinian territories, which had been deleted from official Israeli maps. The “settlement blocks” Israel planned to annex, which thrust like daggers into the Palestinian land, were not sheathed by the wall. (*Palestinian Walks* 181)

If Ora’s journey with Avram is a journey where orientation in space and time appears less important than movement, a natural landscape in which Ofer’s soul can hover over the landscape and in their memory, Raja Shehadeh’s landscape is deeply rooted in the past, the present, and even in the future.

As Shehadeh scrapes the soil with his own hands, and then with a rock that he uses as a chisel to uncover a stone *a’rsh* or throne next to his great-grand uncle’s *qasr*, he

found himself sitting and fitting into a “monumental chair” from which he “did not want to move.” Sitting in this stone throne, overlooking a landscape of hand-hewn agricultural terraces, Shehadeh describes a profound transformation of feeling and the revitalization of memories of his family, his great grand-uncle, his grey hair and cane and the pale curve of the bald crown of his smooth head. Shehadeh’s memories arise as he meditates on his family, the place of the *a’rsh* and the *qasr* and Abu Ameen becomes the ancestral presence that presides over this chapter, fittingly entitled *The Pale God of the Hills*: “As I sat there on the *a’rsh* the whispers of the pine trees sounded like the conversation of a family gathered in a circle in their garden. As I listened the memories of Abu Ameen and the kind of life he lived began to come back” (*Palestinian Walks* 17). Shehadeh’s landscape descriptions, as we have seen, vividly describe the obliteration of what remains of the vanishing Palestinian landscape in the present. A strange imagined encounter with a young Israeli settler at a stream “shimmering in the mid-morning light” takes the form of a tense, hostile yet provisional stand-off with Shehadeh asserting:

I have not been able to enjoy these hills since your people came. I walk in fear of being shot or arrested. There was a time when this place was like a paradise, a cultivated garden with a house by every spring. A small, unobtrusive house, built without concrete. . . . And the Jews came like the serpent and ruined everything in the idyllic garden. Whether we call it Israel or Palestine, this land will become one big concrete maze. (*Palestinian Walks* 195)

This reflection, posed in his imagined response to the young Israeli settler, is Shehadeh’s portrayal of the future of the landscape. Shehadeh does not hesitate to anchor his perceptions of the Palestinian landscape with the Israelification of the occupied Palestinian lands in stark terms: a paradise, a cultivated garden is being destroyed and in its place a concrete maze will arise. This is no elegant garden folly of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, nor is it a Renaissance maze in an Italian garden, replete with statues of beasts and gods, fierce and imperious. This is a maze that induces terror in the heart of the traveler, of the pilgrim, in which the familiar turns into the fathomless and uncanny.

Ora and Avram are not disturbed by a lack of orientation or the vagaries of making their own trail and then finding or relocating *The Israel Trail* as they make their wandering way south. In fact they are somewhat delighted to realize that it doesn’t matter to them where they are. Even within the formal, legal, territorial boundaries of Israel, they often discover they are lost, disoriented, and confused. And they are not in the least phased by their lack of orientation. Isn’t this the purpose of their flight, to flee the relentless news, the military emergency, and the bulletins from the battlefield in Lebanon? Although Ora seems to be a cosmopolitan, left-wing Israeli, with “enough of this stuff” on her hard drive, she intentionally directs her attention inward. Disorientation is one of the purposes of their flight into what they think of as nature, the wilderness. Ora discovers she has left a notebook in which she has been making notes during their journey and alerts Avram “with frightened eyes:”

“Listen, I’m such an idiot, I left the notebook there.”

“Where?”

“Down there, where we slept.”

“How?”

“I was writing a bit this morning, before you woke up, and I somehow forgot it.”

“So we’ll go back.”

“What do you mean we’ll go back?”

“We’ll go back.”

“It’s a serious hike.”

“So what?”

She snivels. “I’m such an idiot.”

“It doesn’t matter, Ora, it really doesn’t matter.” He smiles. “We’ve been going around in circles most of the time for a week anyway

He’s right, and a warm ripple gurgles in her at the realization that only she and he can understand how little it matters, to go on or go back, turn around, lose their way. The point is to be in motion, the point is to talk about Ofer.” (Grossman 278-79)

For Shehadeh, disorientation in the Israeli-made maze that the occupied territories have become is a nightmare from which he struggles to extricate himself. Ora and Avram, confused and wandering down a trail in the Galilee, are traveling through lands they have never visited, and with which they are completely unfamiliar, yet they are at home within the nation-body of Israel. Raja Shehadeh discovers himself within the Israeli maze of new roads and new construction on a journey back from the Jordan border and terrified:

A slight damper on my audacity was my desire not to repeat a terrifying experience I had a few months earlier when, driving back from the Jordan valley, I got lost. I must have taken a wrong turn and found myself in the midst of new settlements and industrial zones, vast open spaces that made me wonder what country I was in. I told myself not to panic and that if I continued driving westward I must eventually emerge in an area I would recognize. But the further I drove the more lost I became. All the signposts pointed to Jewish settlements. I could find none of the features that used to guide me on my way: that beautiful cluster of boulders, those cliffs just after the bend that dips into the valley and up again onto the road with the attractive village on the right. “Where am I?” I kept asking myself. And I tried to pretend it was just a game. I had enough gas in my car and eventually I would find my way out of this maze. But as time passed and I was not seeing anywhere I recognized, panic set in. As a child I had a recurring nightmare in which I found myself in a strange place unable to find my way home. I would try to shout for help only to realize that I had no voice [...] I seemed to be the sole traveler in this never never land, experiencing a waking nightmare entirely alone [...] I felt I had finally been ensnared in the labyrinth of settlements I had long been pursuing in court and would never be allowed to escape. After my gas ran out I would have to remain here until someone came here to save me. But who other than armed settlers roamed this new world in the midst of my old familiar surroundings? I was utterly exhausted when, in the end, I finally managed to find a way out. How I did so, I will never know. (*Palestinian Walks* 182-83)

Shehadeh carries us into his experience of radical disorientation that has a nightmarish aspect. What began as a journey home from the Lebanon border, a journey through familiar territory, becomes increasingly a journey into deep confusion, anxiety and ultimately panic. The familiar landscape becomes the uncanny: familiar yet indecipherable, illegible, a labyrinthine landscape that induces vertigo and panic, populated by signposts posted by aliens in foreign language and new names. It is a landscape that ratifies the invaders’ cartography and confuses the local Palestinians. Shehadeh literally brings us into a psychological descent, a vortex in which we, like him, are carried into a phenomenological matrix: the maze of new Israeli highways, streets, and settlements that newly encrust a once familiar turf. How can the familiar become terrifying? When it leads us deeper into confusion and we know, somewhere beyond the maze lies home but we don’t know how to get there.



The contrast between Ora and Avram's response to being disoriented on their walk and Shehadeh's response to being lost could not be more striking. Shehadeh is traveling in his homeland. His discomfort at being lost may be triggered initially by the anxiety of disorientation, but it rapidly escalates into panic. Shehadeh finds himself in the nightmarish situation of being out of control and at the mercy of foreigners in a landscape riven by Israeli construction and destruction. In contrast, Ora and Avram actually want to get lost. Being outside of time and familiar places is a goal: as they walk the trail they are in a kind of never-never land, revisiting the vanished landscape of their relationship.

On the morning of the first day, Grossman paints the landscape in the roseate colors of French Romantic painters, with the chroma and glow of a Fragonard young woman on a swing:

Mist rises from the fragrant earth as it warms, and from the large, juicy rolls of excrement left by the cows that proceeded them. Elongated puddles from the recent rains reply to the dawn sky, emitting modest signals, and frog leap into the stream as they walk by, and there is not a human being in sight. (Grossman 127)

For Ora and Avram, two citizens fleeing knowledge of their country, not caring where they wander, the landscape is their apple. They are free to wander wherever they wish in the Galilee. At the very beginning of their journey the encounter an obstacle, a gate, and are free to open and enter into the trail beyond:

She...realizes that part of the fence is a narrow gate. She looks for the tether that secures it and finds a twisted rusty wire... Avram stands next to her without lifting a finger... But when she asks for his help he pitches in immediately, after she explains what needs to be done- he studies the tether for a long time, hoists the loop over the fence post in one swift motion, the barbed wire falls to the ground at their feet, and they walk through. (Grossman 127)

This scene of immeasurable freedom to walk wherever one wishes in the Israeli landscape is a pastoral miniature mirroring the psychological horizon, in which the psychological horizon of Israeli citizens who assume a free, untrammelled access to the landscape, to cross boundaries, gates, or to bypass twisty old roads via elevated highways. In this move tossing the barbed wire over the fence, Israeli freedom to move is rendered visible and performed. Contrast, is rendered visible and performed. Contrast this scene of freedom to roam and cross boundaries with Shehadeh's account of restriction of access to hundreds of villages, all cities, and the channelization of movement into marginal paths and inferior roads passing below the highways facilitates the free flow of Israeli citizens from the settlements to Israeli commercial hubs on the coast:

We now moved in our own country surreptitiously, like unwanted strangers, constantly harassed, never feeling safe. We had become temporary residents of Greater Israel, living on Israel's sufferance, subject to the most abusive treatment at the hands of its you male and female soldiers controlling the checkpoints, who decided on a whim whether to keep us waiting for hours or to allow us passage. (Shehadeh, *Palestinian Walks* 180)

If the gate, bound by wire, can be opened at the mere flick of Avram's wrist, revealing a vista of freedom, vegetation, an open landscape to explore and forget, if only for a

moment, “the situation,” the figure of barbed wire plays a role in Shehadeh’s unsparing description of constriction of access to other West Bank cities:

All entrances to the city [Ramallah] were controlled by the Israeli army. At the Beitunia exit southwest of Ramallah on the road leading to Beit ‘Ur, . . . a prison that began as a temporary tent facility for incarcerating juvenile offenders had now become a permanent, ever-expanding fortress, with watchtowers and high wall topped by barbed wire where the Israeli military court was convened. (Shehadeh, *Palestinian Walks* 180)

The earth figures centrally in both works. A few days out on their journey Ora pleads with Avram to say the name of their son, to say Ofer. Met with Avram’s silence, Ora lunges at the ground and begins to dig a pit in the earth. She kicks at the earth with her heel, then with a heavy, sharp rock, creating an egg-shaped pit deeper and deeper into the earth:

She sat on her knees, grasped the stone with both hands and struck down hard. Her head jerked forward with every strike, and each time she let out a groan. The skin on her hands began to tear. Avram watched, terrified, unable to look away from her scratched fingers... Dirt clung to her forehead and cheeks. Her beautiful eyebrows were covered with arches of earth and sticky channels plowed their way around her mouth. With three quick movements, Ora lay down and buried her face in the gaping earth.. Ora lay face down and told a story to the belly of the earth and tasted the clods and knew they would not sweeten, would forever be bland and gritty. Dirt ground between her teeth, dirt stuck to her tongue, to the roof of her mouth, and turned to mud. Snot ran from her nose, her eyes watered, and she choked and gargled dirt... she had to, she had to know what it was like. Even when he was a baby she used to taste everything she made for him to make sure it wasn’t too hot or too salty. (Grossman 159-60)

Ora’s rage at Avram, at his inability to utter the name of their son, is clearly one of the catalysts for her extreme behavior. But there is more: Ora is testing and tasting the earth. She is testing the earth as a as a potential burial ground, an act mimetic with her earlier sampling of infant Ofer’s food. It is “bland and gritty,” her eyes water and Ora “gargled dirt.”

The contrast between the earth and dust Ora encounters and tastes forms a striking contrast with the earth, soil and experience Shehadeh encounters as he digs with his hands in the hills above Ramallah:

The soil I was scraping more vigorously than ever was now blowing over my face and clothes. My thick eyebrows and hair were covered with a fine layer of silt, turning me into some sort of maniacal living sculpture... When I passed my hand over it (the throne) and swept off the last bits of soil I realized that I had clear away the hollow of a high carved seat... A gentle breeze blew in my dusty face. (*Palestinian Walks* 16-17)

In many ways these tales touch each other, as if we observed two entwined snakes, alternately touching and recoiling at the touch, repulsing each other because their skins are mirror images: opposite patterns yet driven by the same unruly algorithm. There is no conclusion here, no closure, no neat academic unfurling and revelation. These roiled narratives, formed by competing, intersecting, mutually imbricated stories about terrain and rights, mirror the political conflicts that have afflicted this land.

Each of the protagonists, Ora, Avram and Raja Shehadeh, are from the beginning caught in a physical and political labyrinth. Avram, tortured by Egyptians and psychologically scarred, and his former lover Ora, traumatized by the terrifying possibility of her son’s death in combat, flee “the news,” “situation,” finding they can

barely avoid it as they hike into the north Galilean hills. “The situation” faces them everywhere. Shehadeh, seeking refuge in six lyrical, nostalgic journeys in the hills above Ramallah, finds peace in the terraces at the foot of his grandfather’s *qasr*, at traces of Palestinian art and labor. He finds beauty in the presence of wild flowers steadfast and blooming in a dry and severe landscape. But Shehadeh too is progressively enclosed by a “noose” of settlements, guard posts and arrogant settlers. For each of these peripatetic protagonists, the landscape is a route to escape and a cage or prison.

At the same time, the landscape provides provides, albeit momentarily, a refuge for all protagonists. In these two narratives, pastoral visions have curative powers. Shehadeh finds refuge not only in the hills above Ramallah, but in his writing and his journeys in it. While Shehadeh tells us that he left off fighting as a litigator warrior for Palestinian land rights and human rights in Israeli courts and other fora, he clearly never gave up his work as an advocate for justice. His love of nature and steadfast support for recognition of Palestinian rights permeates this powerful yet graceful narrative of resistance.

If each character is a prisoner of “the situation,” each author attempts to recreate, in words, what has been lost in words. Shehadeh reanimates and momentarily inhabits his ancestors’ Palestinian landscape. He sleeps en plein air, on the roof of his ancestor’s *qasr*. He recreates his countrymen’s labors and artisanry in fashioning something of a paradise in this dry, hot world. With his own hands, he scoops out the throne-like stone chair that his grand uncle carved, overlooking his fields.

In *Land*, Ora narrates and performatively recreates her son, or her memory of him, through the telling of Ofer’s life, from birth to her parting with him as he rides out to toward Lebanon and battle. At one point Ora places some of her son’s clothes on a rock shelf, momentarily recollecting him.

These acts of mourning and memory, of resistance and refusal to look, to see, to forget and to relinquish, are different in kind and in purpose. In fleeing the news, in traveling to the end of the land, Ora flees the very conflict in which Shehadeh has been a major actor for decades. These acts of walking, of looking away and looking intensely at particular places, speak to each other across the landscape.

If sorrow and sadness as well as rage inform these tales, ambiguity and irony end both accounts. The journey into the lyrically portrayed Galilean hills has, in a limited way, supported and strengthened Ora and Avram. Although Avram begins to emerge with some capacity to face the immense loss he and Ora suspect has happened or is about to happen, he remains disoriented and incapacitated. Neither Ora nor Avram nor the reader know whether Ora’s son has survived the carnage Ofer chose to engage in Lebanon.

Shehadeh’s tale of a vanishing landscape is shot through with sadness, nostalgia, and resentment, yet he steadfastly refuses to cede the loss of the Palestinian world he knows with its specific trails and fragrances. It is the landscape his Ottoman uncle once inhabited and traversed freely as a native, a citizen and a Palestinian nationalist. For both Shehadeh and Grossman, literary and political kin in many ways, the landscape they inhabit, describe and inscribe, vivify and traverse, is permeated with the possibility of growth and saturated with remembered pain and loss. It is littered

with the awful wreckage of history that Walter Benjamin evokes in his essay, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*:

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 253-64)

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