Herzl, Nakba, and Nationalist Escapism in Israeli and Palestinian Science Fiction

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Abstract: This paper addresses the omnipresence of nationalism and escapism in prominent science fiction literature in Israel and Palestine during the late-20th- and early-21st centuries. For both populations, science fiction offers an escape from the struggles of their national conflict and a means for playing out nationalist fantasies. Israeli science fiction's identity as a nationalist endeavor stems back to Theodor Herzl's second book, *Altneuland,* which imagined a Jewish Palestine decades in the future, having become a futuristic and cosmopolitan utopia. Subsequent Jewish authors and thinkers built upon Herzl's initial vision and patterned the eventual Israeli state upon it as a technocratic "startup nation," which has seen the country become a global leader in medicine, technology, education, and astronautics. Despite this, Israel remains a territorially-minuscule country of eight million people lacking in natural resources and beset by never-ending war and internal strife. Thus, this utopian identity serves as a form of escapism from the struggles of everyday Israeli life. Israeli science fiction works, such as Savyon Liebrecht's "A Good Place for the Night" and Elana Gomel's "Death in Jerusalem," allow readers to balance the utopian nationalism of Herzl with the omnipresent struggles of the colonial Zionism that pervades modern society. Conversely, Palestinian science fiction serves as an escape from Israeli occupation and statelessness. While traditionally Palestinian writers have been expected to present a very contemporary reality of life in Palestine, in recent years, Palestinian authors such as Majd Kayyal and Saleem Haddad have attempted to use science fiction as a means of grappling with centennial anniversaries of Zionism, Balfour, and the onset of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For Palestinian authors, science fiction offers them a liberating way to explore current problems and imagine a future without the Israeli occupation or a refugeed population.

Keywords: Zionism, Palestinian Nationalism, Nakba, Colonization, Anti-colonialism, Nationalist Imagination

American writer and former President of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Norman Spinrad, said of the genre in 1975: "You can't really deal with the times without writing science fiction. You have to have a future perspective" (Prescott, 1975). Spinrad's quote represents one of the core functions of science fiction—alternatively referred to as speculative fiction, futurism, or SF—the ability to escape a troubled present and dream of a better future. This has long been one of the genre's biggest appeals to literary audiences. Western science fiction television shows, such as *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*, rose to prominence during the turbulent Cold War decade of the 1960s and imagined peaceful futures in which political strife and chaos were replaced with overtures to science, discovery, and co-existence.[1]

In Israel and Palestine, science fiction does not enjoy as rich a history as in Europe and North America. Instead of offering an escape, Israelis and Palestinians largely believed the genre too frivolous and unrealistic for the decades-long national conflict they endured. Instead, regional literature primarily focused on realism and memoir as a means of maintaining and shaping communal and national histories. Even when science fiction experienced small boom periods, national events often derailed any sustained success in the regional zeitgeist.

As science fiction grew in regional popularity in the late-20th and early-21st centuries, however, Israeli and Palestinian authors increasingly found ways to blend science fiction with nationalist identity. For both populations, science fiction became a way to grapple with national traumas, questions over identity, and visions of a possible future beyond the ongoing national conflict between Israel and Palestine. The genre offered authors a way to process and grapple with complex national issues through the medium of imagined realities, alternate histories, or possible futures. Through science fiction, authors could carve out nationalist visions that examined their colonial pasts and form a cohesive cultural identity that explores what it means to be Israeli or

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Palestinian.[2]

Because of the relative newness of science fiction in both Israel and Palestine, there is comparatively little written on the subjects. For Israeli literature, speculative fiction and utopianism have a long history in Zionism, but most analyses focus on early works of utopian fiction, such as those of Theodor Hertzka, Theodor Herzl, and Edmund Eisler. Examinations of later utopianism and speculative fiction are relatively lacking, and where they exist, they are part of larger discussions on Israeli identity. Authors such as Danielle Gurevitch and Elana Gomel recently tried to reassess the mystical and fantastic in Israeli literature, however, their analyses focus on mystical fiction and fantasy as a genre and largely ignore science fiction. Existing discussions of Israeli science fiction often explore how science fiction struggled as a genre, rather than exploring the existing cultural output. The literature for Palestinian science fiction is even more sparse. Works that examine the growth of Palestinian science fiction, such as Jussi Parikka's 2018 article in *Culture, Theory, and Critique*, did so primarily through the lens of wider Arab science fiction literature. Existing literature discussing regional science fiction overlooks how Israeli and Palestinian science fiction often work in dialogue.

While in reality, the national conflict between Israel and Palestine often finds the two diametrically opposed, in science fiction, the two nations are typically far more linked. For both, science fiction offers a route for escapism from their shared history of colonial violence and a medium through which they grasp the existential questions facing their respective communities. As a result, science fiction authors in both Israel and Palestine often examine similar themes in their literature, including the ideas of displacement, colonial trauma, fear of extermination, struggles over identity, and a desire for a hopeful future. Because of this, Israeli and Palestinian science fictions cannot be understood apart from one another.

Science Fiction as escapism

As a literary genre, science fiction offers a utopian means of escapism, or relief from unpleasant realities. It offers readers heroes, monsters, and imaginary worlds, and assuages the reader's conscience by asking important questions on ecology, population, and sociology, among other themes. This serves an important role in the twenty-first century. With rates of anxiety, depression, and mental health issues increasing globally, societies are increasingly suffering from reality overload, necessitating a means of escape and distraction. Science fiction writers take minor aspects of what is familiar and drop them into exotic landscapes that are "strange" enough to give the reader psychic and emotional distance to understand their daily malaise with fresh eyes. Science fiction often presents readers with relatable protagonists or heroes grappling with social, economic, and political issues similar to their own. The imagined settings, however, offer the reader a level of critical distance that allows them to grapple with complexity and use their imagination to consider alternative ways of navigating social challenges—a process that Darko Suvin has famously titled "cognitive estrangement." From this, readers often gain clarity into their own lives and struggles. Rather than limiting readers' capacity to deal with reality—as is often the critique of futurist escapism—exposure to outside-the-box creative stories often expands readers' ability to engage reality based on science and make sense of the world around them.

Science fiction also serves as a way for colonized populations to process the malaise of everyday life around them. Since a key function of colonization is separation from ancestry, language, culture, and connection to an indigenous homeland, science fiction often functions as an endeavor for recovering knowledge of self, home, and a sense of belonging. In subgenres such as Afrofuturism, authors re-envision histories that liberate a Black future while demonstrating how a subject's past is irrevocably scarred by a shared history of colonization. Mark Dery, who initially coined the term Afrofuturism in his essay "Black to the Future," posed the fundamental question of minority-futurist literature: "can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, imagine possible futures?" (Dery, 1994).

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For Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs alike, Dery's question is common in speculative literature. As both societies struggle through over a century of colonial violence, the question of searching for legible traces of history and imagining possible futures takes on increasingly nationalistic themes. Both Israeli and Palestinian nationalism rose from the ashes of harsh colonial violence, between the pogroms and genocide against Jews in Europe and the ethnic cleansing and massacres of Arabs in Palestine. In both cases, speculative fiction and utopianism's thriving resulted from authors' attempts to try and make sense of the communal tragedies and project a way forward.

Literature and the National Imagination

Beyond mere escapism, science fiction literature offers a unique platform for nationalism and national imaginations. Science fiction as a genre often contains nationalist overtures. Novels and films explore nationalist discourses like invasion, occupation, resistance, and conquest. The genre is often obsessed with the same colonialism and imperial adventure that made the British Empire so expansive and still sustains America's global prominence. Science fiction first coalesced in Britain and France amid the most fervid imperialist expansion of the late-19th century and it surged in popularity during the ideological colonizations of the Cold War. Early works in science fiction demonstrate this nationalist tone as giant vegetables and bug-eyed monsters that threatened scantily-clad white women on the covers of pulp magazines, and comic books that served as representations of the "Red/Yellow Peril" to be fought off by valiant heroes from Earth bearing overtly Western, jingoistic, and masculine characteristics.

Contrasting these colonial portrayals are works like H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*, Gwyneth Jones's *North Wind*, and Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* trilogy, which rebuke Western imperialism and colonialism. H.G. Wells used the invasion by Martians in *War of the Worlds* to directly criticize European colonial practices in the nineteenth century. Gwyneth Jones satirizes America's history of ecological imperialism over its native population by portraying an alien race callously destroying farmland to achieve their colonial goals. Similarly, Octavia Butler used her trilogy to explore the history of colonization of Africans in Africa and the Americas. These authors used the threat of extraterrestrial invasion to turn the colonial gaze on its head and lionize imperial subjects over the traditional European empires.

In decolonizing nations, this anti-colonial element of science fiction serves as a means for establishing a nationalist future. Writer Harlan Ellison argued of the genre, "Science-fiction writers have become the new dreamers. We are all optimistic. Science fiction, no matter how down-beat, says there will be a tomorrow" (Prescott, 1975). This was the goal of one of the earliest works of Arabic science fiction, the 1962 Algerian novel *Qui Se Souvient De La Mer* (*Who Remembers the Sea*) by Mohammad Dib, written during the Algerian Revolution. Instead of speaking explicitly about French colonialism, Dib depicts small groups of Algerian nationalists armed with mere handguns fighting off and defeating a ransacking horde of alien robots. The robots in Dib's work serve as stand-ins for the French occupying force against which the Algerians rebelled, and allowed Arab readers to glean inspiration from the travail and ultimate victory of the story's revolutionaries.

However, for many decolonizing nations, early science fiction offered little cultural independence from their former oppressors. For example, in the decades following their independence from Britain, India's trove of science fiction literature, comics, and films were often carbon copies of Western standards such as *Superman* and *Doctor Who*. It was not until the 21st century that a unique nationalist science fiction developed. However, as Bollywood thrived and an independent Indian culture grew, science fiction became a place where authors could explore Hindu national identities, redefining what it meant to be Indian after nearly 350 years of colonial occupation.[3]

In the case of Israel and Palestine, the very idea of literature, not just the individual texts, retains authority and influence that extends beyond both cultures. Within Israeli culture, literature's privileged position dates back to the early days of the Zionist movement, after the revival of Hebrew literature during the Haskalah, or Jewish enlightenment, helped Jewish writers imagine themselves as part of a larger Jewish nation. Many poets from the Yishuv, or pre-state Jewish community, gained heroic status in popular memory, while contemporary novelists like David Grossman and Amos Oz are prominent public intellectuals and media figures.[4]

Similarly, Israeli popular culture often serves as an outlet for the expression of nationalist identity. Satirical movies—including *Givat Halfon, Zero Motivation,* and *Atomic Falafel,* which skewer Israeli militancy, and television programs, such as *Chartzufim* and *Eretz Nehederet*, which featured a mix of sketch comedy and news satire—allowed Israelis to engage with the country's history of war and nationalism with an air of levity and comedy. Dramatic movies and television shows, including *Fauda* and *Hatufim*, portray the gritty reality and negative byproducts of Israel's history of militancy and occupation, offering viewers a critique of the national conflict with Palestine that pervades Israeli identity.

The expression of national identity and culture extends into forms of fantastical and speculative fiction in popular media as well. Horror films like *Jeruzalem, Golem*, and *Mi Mefakhed Mehaze'ev Hara* enable viewers to deal with national historical traumas and allow them to "reopen old wounds" in a manner that had not been attempted by Israeli filmmakers before (Rosen, 2020). These movies and shows use the annihilative traumas in zombie invasions and stories of monsters run amok to highlight Israeli insecurities around communal destruction and genocide (stemming from a shared Jewish history of persecution), with the fantastical elements of the stories allowing audiences a level of cognitive distance.

Palestinian literature, on the other hand, long struggled for survival, as it lacks the same conditions of production and circulation as Israeli writing. In recent decades, however, opportunities for international publication improved, especially for writers living in the diaspora in Europe and North America. From this, writers like Mahmoud Darwish and Ghassan Kanafani achieved an iconic national and regional status. Through the importance of Israel and Palestine in regional and global politics, Arab and Jewish writers often exert an influence well beyond what might be expected from the size of their relative populations.

Beyond local and regional validation, translated Palestinian and Israeli literature holds a level of currency for non-national readers. As a form of cultural export "from" Israel or Palestine—internationally circulated Palestinian writers are often based in the diaspora—literature assumes more nationally representative stature than any other medium, except perhaps film. Israeli literature enjoys a built-in non-national audience through the large Jewish diasporic communities in North America and Europe. As a result, Israeli writing has been a staple in American and British trade publishing since the 1970s, making authors such as A.B. Yehoshua and Etgar Keret household names in the West. While Palestinian literature has not historically attained a comparable international audience, the increased visibility of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the 1990s spurred interest in Palestinian writers and expanded the market for Palestinian cultural production. However, the largest market for Palestinian writers is still in English-language autobiography and memoirs, leaving fiction and prose a distant second (Bernard, 2013).

For colonized populations in the 19th and 20th centuries, literary intellectuals—including poets, novelists, and literary critics—nationally played a politically critical role in building collective identity, producing common myths, and creating social vision. With their main goal being the production or distribution of culture, intellectuals in colonized populations are expected to provide their societies with an interpretation of the surrounding reality, construct meaning from the experience, and invent ways through which it can be

confronted, while marking the boundaries of the community in the process. In this way, literary intellectuals become the trustees of national identity.

Science Fiction Struggles in Israel and Palestine

Given literature's importance in forming Israeli and Palestinian national identities, and science fiction's role in forming national discourse in the West, it seems logical that the genre would permeate throughout the regional zeitgeist. However, science fiction was slow to expand across Israeli and Palestinian cultures. One of the largest cultural reasons for that delay is that Western science fiction typically offers no escape from the struggles of both populations. Anti-Semitism is still a lingering problem for Jews in Western science fiction. Jewish caricatures of short, hook-nosed, greedy humanoid creatures with shrill voices—and sometimes even distinctive hats and glasses—are common throughout the history of science fiction in the West. From early examples of the gold-obsessed dwarves in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* to Gene Rodenberry's greedy, capitalist Ferengi in the *Star Trek* universe—who were almost exclusively played by Jewish actors such as Armin Shimerman and Aron Eisenberg—Jewish stereotypes have long played an important role in science fiction and fantasy.

Arab populations similarly dealt with Orientalist tropes and caricatures in Western science fiction. Cold War depictions of East versus West and discussions of emerging populations were a key theme in 20th century Western science fiction, particularly Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* franchise, and with these depictions came the portrayal of backward and barbaric brown people who could scarcely understand the advanced technology of the larger empires. These characters, typically played by either people of color or white actors in brownface or blackface, often wore Eastern styles of clothing, donned headdresses, and bore the mannerisms of savagery that Americans and Europeans increasingly associated with postcolonial violence. Particularly noticeable is the Tusken Raiders of the *Star Wars* universe, who are wrapped in Bedouin-style cloaks, live in a desert, ride a came-

liod creature, and are derisively referred to as "sand people." The Tuskens are portrayed in the franchise as a constantly primitive and violent menace to a more civilized (white) human populace. Missing from all of these depictions was a nuanced portrayal of non-Western populations that comes with abandoning orientalist gazes and embracing the cultural diversity of previously-colonized peoples. As a result, Western science fiction struggled to gain strong footholds in Israel and Palestine.

In Israel, science fiction went through boom and bust periods over the past 70 years. The first boom period in Israeli science fiction was in the late-1950s and continued into the early-1960s. Like in other decolonized nations, early Israeli interest in science fiction focused on translating Western science fiction staples into Hebrew. The Hebrew publishing house Matzpen published Hebrew translations of Heinlein's *The Puppet Masters*, Fredric Brown's *What Mad Universe*, and Frank Robinson's *The Power*, all of which achieved mild sales success, but not enough to sustain the genre in Israeli fiction. A second boom period arose in the late-1970s and early-1980s when Israeli authors themselves entered the realm of science fiction for the first time. Brought on by a Hebrew reconceptualization of Flash Gordon and the growing popularity of the Israeli magazine *Fantasia 2000,* Hebrew presses released hundreds of translated novels, and science fiction magazines hit record circulation numbers.

Early science fiction's decline and bust periods in Israel largely coincide with periods of national conflict. The initial science fiction boom in the 1950s sharply declined in the mid-1960s as national tensions rose between Israel and its Arab neighbors in the leadup to the Six-Day War in 1967. The national disinterest in science fiction continued through the early 1970s until the later years in the decade, when Israel began to recover from the stresses of the Yom Kippur war in 1973. The resulting boom period lasted only until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. These tensions coincide with the collapse of the Israeli science fiction market the same year in which Hebrew presses

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stopped publishing science fiction translations and *Fantasia 2000* stopped circulating due to financial difficulties. The genre only managed to recover in the 1990s after peace accords between Israel and its Arab neighbors were enacted. Israeli disinterest in science fiction also stemmed from the manner in which early Zionists set out to create a Jewish nation. Creating a nuts-and-bolts nation called on resources and faith of a much more practical nature. This proved consuming, grueling, and costly in blood and resources, all of which discouraged the fanciful and imaginative nature of speculative fiction. Jewish writers were expected to render the fantasy of a Jewish homeland in starkly mimetic and naturalistic terms. Writers were expected to depict the Zionist mission with all the grit and realism they could muster.

Stemming from this aversion to the speculative and imaginative, a generation of gatekeepers controlled the Yishuv's cultural output. Publishers, the editors of literary magazines and journals, literary critics, and professors of literature all held final say over what the public should and should not read. Their choices typically displayed a loyalty to ideological, socialistic, and overtly Zionist literature, all of which they believed would inspire loyalty to and participation in the state-building project of Zionism. These gatekeepers tended to be Labor Zionists, who largely turned their backs on the mystical, supernatural aspects of the Hebrew Bible, believing that religiosity in all its forms helped perpetuate Jewish rootlessness, passivity, frailty, dependence, and helplessness. As a result, speculative literature—including fantasy, science fiction, and horror—had no place in their world of literature and belles lettres.

This aversion and the booms and busts of Israeli science fiction gave way to a permanent fanbase in the mid-1990s with the founding of The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy in 1996. The organization came together on the heels of several events hosted by the British Council's branch in Israel which featured prominent British science fiction writers and approached local writers known for their association with the genre about finding an audience for these

events. Among these were Emanuel Lottem, one of Israel's most respected translators of genre literature, and Aharon Hauptman, the founder of *Fantasia 2000*, both of whom believed that the burgeoning prospects for diplomatic peace on the back of the Oslo Accords offered a perfect environment for the growth of Israeli science fiction.

Palestinian science fiction's relative lag in gaining the same foothold as its Israeli counterpart is symptomatic of the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Palestinian writer and translator Basma Ghalayini argued that fiction, and in particular science fiction, was rarely a popular avenue for Palestinian authors because "it is a luxury, to which Palestinians have not really felt they can afford to escape. The cruel present and traumatic past have too firm a grip on Palestinian writers' imaginations for fanciful ventures" (Ghalayini, 2019). For many Palestinian authors, escaping into the speculative often felt like a betrayal of a national duty to maintain histories and cultural legacies through the period of exile and upheaval in which they lived. Palestinian writing, therefore, focused on maintaining close ties to an uprooted and vanished national history.

Palestinian speculative literature is a uniquely contemporary phenomenon, only existing from about the mid-20th century onward. From its onset, this form of literary expression was an expression of the Palestinian national fight, even as it manifested in children's and young-adult literature. Like the utopian Zionists of the Yishuv, Palestinian authors in the latter half of the 20th century used the speculative as a means of imagining a future in which they lived in a free Palestinian state, having escaped from the continuous cycle of colonial persecution and violence. Speculative and science fiction became a way for Palestinians to assert their visions of the utopian state free from Israeli occupation.

The early speculative fiction texts that existed in Palestinian literature were often more likely to explore nature than technology, futurism, or alien realities. A 1970 collection of short stories, *Palestinian Stories,* included several examples of this Palestinian connec-

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tion to nature. The short story "The Sad Sisters" depicted trees replanted in Tel Aviv that held true to the rich Islamic history they witnessed; "The Land of Sad Oranges" centered on oranges that decomposed once Jews take over the lands from which they originate; and in "The Dog Brown," a dog proves itself superior by returning to the village where it was raised despite the presence of Jewish forces. In these stories, Palestinian authors chose to focus on the Arab physical connection to Palestine as a means to not only reflect on what was lost, but also assert their continuing right to return to a unified Palestine.

As Western science fiction entered Arab-language cultural outlets, young writers increasingly saw it as a vehicle for expressing national themes common to Palestinian identity. Despite the stigma, many Palestinians grew up reading science fiction and eagerly consuming science fiction films and tv shows. However, the genre never seemed like a viable option for aspiring writers and many simply never conceived it as a way to tell the story of Palestinian national struggles.

The growth of Palestinian science fiction is part and parcel of a larger genre boom in Arab countries. The postcolonial landscape of the Middle East and the emergence of oil-rich Persian Gulf countries fueled an emergence of Gulf and Arab futurisms that quickly became a way for Arab popular cultures to map the connection between a burgeoning luxury consumerism and the geopolitics of the wider Middle East. In the work of Gulf futurists like Fatima Al Qadiri and Sophia Al-Maria, rapid changes in architecture, urban life, and popular culture are viewed through a geopolitical horizon where the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula become stages for international capitalism in multiple material forms (Parikka, 2018). Gulf futurism is a way for cultural consumers to address the often-disparate lifestyles of localized Islamic traditionalism and petrol-funded consumer capitalism.

Coinciding with Gulf and Arab futurisms' focus on an imagined future where the region is the technological and commercial capital of the world, is their focus on speculative solutions for modern geopoliti-

cal problems. Turkish artist Halil Altindere's exhibition *Space Refugee* drew on the Syrian civil war, returning to themes of place, placelessness, and forced migration through the lens of interplanetary travel. Similarly, Lebanese artist Ayman Baalbaki uses themes of space travel and science fiction as a critique of the continuous conflicts in the region in his 2016 installation, *Helmet*.

One of the most common political themes in Arab futurism, however, is the liberation of Arab lands, particularly Palestine. With the rise of Arab futurism, science fiction became a literary vehicle attached to the political history of Palestine, and a way to express the forced displacement that defines much of Palestinian identity. Egyptian writer Muhammad Naguib Matar penned "A Weapon Fashioned of Waste," as an ode to Palestinian resistance fighters, portraying them as outsmarting pheromone-sniffing Israeli missiles through the use of misleading urine trails. The fighters are subsequently able to further outsmart, and eventually defeat, the Israelis through the use of phosphorous bombs crafted from a base component of urine, gaining a tactical advantage over a technological juggernaut through the use of biological ingenuity (Matar, 2018). Celebrated Egyptian author Ahmed Khaled Tawfik followed Matar's lead and used science fiction to commend and inspire Palestinian resistance, most notably in his novels *The Last Dreamer* (2009) and *Jonathan's Promise* (2015).

These themes play out on modern Arabic science fiction television as well. The Egyptian dystopian science fiction thriller series, *El-Nehaya*, captured the imagination of audiences throughout the Arab world with its depiction of a near future in which a pan-Arab Al-Quds conglomerate, centered in an Arab Palestine, became the dominant world superpower. The series, set in 2120, imagines a future Palestine devoid of Jews and controlled by its homogenously Arab population. This aspect of the show drew widespread praise from many Arabic social media outlets, while simultaneously drawing strict condemnation from the Israeli Foreign Ministry. The show's popularity, however, can be attributed to a growing frustration around various Arab

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countries' increasing political and diplomatic normalization with Israel, and the corresponding feeling that Arab governments are abandoning the Palestinians (Khader, 2020).

When authors increasingly saw science fiction as a vehicle for a shared national imagination, the genre quickly gained momentum in Palestinian culture. The success of visual artist and filmmaker Larissa Sansour in the late-2000s helped open a floodgate for Palestinian science fiction artists to explore themes on national identity. For Sansour, science fiction became a form of resistance and came from "a need of not documenting stuff from Palestine and defying expectations of a Middle Eastern artist and a woman." Sansour uses science fiction as a way to examine nationalist themes of loss, memory, and exile, and to offer commentary on continued Palestinian displacement. The genre allows her to escape contentious political jargon tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and "create [her] own world and [her] own vocabulary in which [she] can address the same issues" (Chaves, 2019).

Science fiction's recent success in Israel and Palestine started a new boom period for the genre. Presses published numerous books in both Hebrew and Arabic, sparking interest across both nations. This boom also encouraged English-language anthologies for Jews and Palestinians in the Western diasporas. Anthologies such as Peter Beagle and Michael Chabon's *People of the Book*, Sheldon Teitelbaum and Emanuel Lottem's *Zions Fiction*, and Basma Ghalayini's *Palestine +100* all increased the visibility of the burgeoning science fiction scene in Israel and Palestine and increased the impetus for authors to address the national themes with which both populations regularly grapple

Herzl's Utopia, Colonial Violence, and Israeli Dystopia

The quest for Jewish nationhood was always entwined with the exercise of imagination, a concept which is exemplified in Theodor Herzl's best-known quote, "If you will it, it is no fairy tale." This quote first appeared in the frontispiece of his utopian novel *Altneuland* (The Old New Land), a work of speculative fiction that imagines the realization of plans for Jewish nationhood. Herzl, often called the "Father of Zionism" for his contribu-

tions to the burgeoning movement, was never simply a political ideologue or journalist, but rather simultaneously explored careers as a playwright and novelist. However, these pursuits remained increasingly marginal as he became swept up in the trans-imperial pursuits of state-building at the turn of the 20th century, in the wake of his publication of *Der Judenstaat* (*The Jews' State*) in 1896. Herzl realized these side pursuits as an author in 1902, with the publication of *Altneuland* just a few years before his death.

The early utopianism of Herzl and his contemporaries arose out of the colonial conditions facing the Jewish population in Europe. Though there had been a long history of colonial violence against Jews in Europe, the violence reached new heights in the late-19th century. The assassination of Tsar Alexander II and the false accusations that Jewish conspirators were the perpetrators unleashed a wave of violent anti-Jewish riots across southwestern Imperial Russia, an area with some of the largest Jewish populations in Europe. During the three years following Alexander's death in 1881, more than 200 anti-Jewish riots occurred across Russian-occupied Eastern Europe. Coupled with the violence was a set of restrictive anti-Jewish May Laws, which revoked Jewish citizenship, restricted Jewish businesses, and forbade residence outside of the designated territory in Eastern Europe. Waves of pogroms continued into the 20th century, where rioters killed nearly 2,500 Jews between 1903 and 1906.

Responding to this violence and colonial restriction, Jewish intellectuals increasingly sought national alternatives to living under the Russian Tsar. Jewish migration out of Europe dramatically increased at this point, as over 2.5 million Jews left Europe for Western Europe, the Americas, European colonies in Africa and Australia, or Palestine. Those who stayed in Eastern Europe grew increasingly political, hoping to improve Jewish conditions in the region. Participation in the nationalist General Jewish Labor Bund, colloquially known as the Bund, Bolshevik movements, and Jewish self-defense leagues, such as Hovevei Zion, increased dramatically during the three decades of violence.

In this atmosphere, utopian fiction flourished. Jewish

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intellectuals dreamed of an end to the dangers facing Jews and attempted to design a perfect place to which large Jewish populations could migrate. To be certain, Herzl was neither the only, nor first author to extend late-19th century utopian literature to the concept of Jewish nationalism. Edmund Menachem Eisler's *Ein Zukunftsbild* (*An Image of the Future*) in 1882, Elhanan Leib Lewinsky's *Massa l'Eretz Yisrael b'Shnat Tat l'Elef ha-Hamishi* (*A Journey to the Land of Israel in the year 5800*), and Max Osterberg-Verakoff's *Das Reich Judäa im Jahre 6000* (*The Kingdom of Judah in the Year 6000*) all discussed utopian Jewish states in Palestine 200-400 years in the future and predate Herzl's novel by twenty years.[5] These books, however, were relatively obscure novels and made little impact on the Jewish zeitgeist of the late-19th century.

Altneuland's impact, however, lay in the timing of the novel's publication. Published six years after Herzl's transformative book, *Der Judenstaat*, and amid several international Zionist conferences, *Altneuland* entered a Jewish intellectual world that was increasingly caught up in Zionist fervor.[6] Immediately upon publication in German, Herzl's novel was translated into Hebrew under the title, *Tel Aviv*. Jewish leaders would revisit this title of the novel when establishing a new Jewish neighborhood in Jaffa in 1909 that would eventually become the economic and technological capital of Israel.[7]

Altneuland embodied Herzl's vision for a utopian and futuristic Palestine. The novel tells the story of Friedrich Löwenberg, a young Jewish intellectual who, tired of European excess, retires to a remote Pacific island. Stopping in Jaffa along the way, they encounter a backward, destitute, sparsely populated Palestine—a land that was a far cry from the bustling metropolises of Europe. Returning to Europe from the Pacific 20 years later, Löwenberg again stops in Jaffa, only to find it drastically transformed, much to his astonishment. The reason for this transformation was the infusion of European Jews who "rediscovered" and re-inhabited the region. The new Palestine included a thriving cooperative industry based on futuristic technology, a cosmopolitan modern society, and full equality between Arabs and Jews.

The popularity of utopian fiction from Zionist authors of the Yishuv did not immediately translate to success for speculative and science fiction in Israel after the establishment of the state in 1948. Whereas utopian speculative fiction flourished in the pre-state Yishuv as a means for imagining a potential Jewish nation free from the constant persecution in Europe, the impulse toward utopian fiction dissipated after the achievement of statehood. As a result, the emerging field of science fiction grew with a decidedly less Zionistic flair than the utopian fiction that preceded it. Instead, Israeli science fiction grappled with national debates over Israel's character, history, and central identity in a world where the goals of Zionism seemed achieved.

Israel, from its inception, was seen by Jewish intellectuals as the culmination of Herzlian utopianism. Sociologist Baruch Kimmerling argues that Israel was, however briefly, considered the only successful materialization of utopia in the world and that it represented a horizon of expectations and a vision of perfection that was unattainable through the muddle of actual history (Kimmerling, 2001). Far from being utopian, the actual Israeli experience is one of ethnic strife, continued violence and national conflict, military occupation and colonialism of Palestine, and a lingering fear of extermination stemming from the violent history of European Jews. As a result, Israelis often found themselves seeking physical, psychic, or digital respite from the struggles of everyday Israeli life.

Fundamental to the disappointment of Herzlian utopianism in Israel is the lingering trauma from the Shoah. Modern Jewish identity fundamentally transformed in the 1930s with the rise of Nazism in Germany and the horrors of extermination. The systematic genocide and destruction of Jews in Europe not only killed two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population, but left Jewish life shattered and nearly erased. In the wake of the Shoah, the genocide became the antithesis to Herzlian utopia. If utopianism and messianism were the "positive" paradigm of a Jewish apocalypse, then Shoah, both as an event and as a symbol, became its negative

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pole.[8] Jewish culture and literature, both in Israel and the Diaspora, became a continuing confrontation with unimaginable evil, as Jews attempted to grasp the reality of their trauma.

In science fiction, the Holocaust's legacy as the first wholly industrialized genocide bolsters its presence in literature. Culturally, the Holocaust stands at the crossroads of three core elements in science fiction literature: the destruction of a population, the impingement of science and technology on modern life, and the insidiousness of near-faceless bureaucracy. While realism and existentialism dominated the bulk of literature related to the Shoah, authors have not shied away from examining it through the lens of the fantastic. American and British novels such as Len Deighton's *SS-GB*, Phillip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, and Harry Turtledove's *In the Presence of Mine Enemies*, all examined the Shoah through the prism of science fiction and fantasy. In these novels, which serve as alternate histories of World War II and its aftermath, the axis powers are victorious during the war and control large territories afterward, expanding their control across the world. This allows the authors to examine themes of authoritarianism and resistance through an all-encompassing and expanding Nazi empire.

Jewish speculative fiction similarly attempted to wrestle with the legacy of the Shoah. However, unlike in Western fiction, Israeli authors often focused on future and subsequent Shoahs, building off the seeming eternity of anti-Semitism. Amos Kenan's books *Shoah II* and *Block 23* both undertake this endeavor by portraying Shoah-like events that befall the Jewish people. *Shoah II* examines the Israeli survivors of a devastating, apocalyptic world, living in a refugee camp in which the sky cannot be seen, there is neither day nor night, and there are no birds, trees, or nature. There is no hope in the camp and random daily executions allow the unease of not knowing one's fate to pervade the camp. Through his discussion, Kenan grapples with existential and national themes of devastation and loss while exploring what it means for a population to push forward from trauma. In this way, he examines how

the Shoah lingers in Israeli identity and what looming threats from Arab neighbors meant for a Jewish future.[9]

As a result of this tangled history of colonization and violence, modern Israeli science fiction writers often focus on the dystopian end of all things Israeli. Israeli stories often depict destroyed futures in which the Jewish population is facing an extinction-level cataclysm, such as Savyon Liebrecht's "A Good Place for the Night," in which a small group of survivors of a futuristic Shoah-style devastation attempt to move forward; Shimon Adaf's *Shadrach*, which imagines a future Israel decimated by a "nano-gas" attack that turned most citizens into zombies and forced the survivors to live under an American-backed fascist government; and Jane Yolen's "The Tsar's Dragons," which examines a fictional reality in which the Russian pogroms continue into the future and Jews are the victims of periodic attacks from dragons controlled by the Russian Tsar. In each of these dystopian works, Israeli authors offer metaphoric destructions as a way for examining the impact of colonial violence and destruction on the formation of modern Jewish and Israeli identities. Through the pogroms and Shoah, Jews' own history is inextricably linked to such destructive events, forcing Israelis to regularly confront the communal traumas left in their wake. The examination of these themes through speculative fiction offers Israeli and Jewish readers this outlet.

While science fiction serves as an outlet for Israelis to examine the colonial violence enacted against them, the genre also serves as a way for Jewish authors to rectify the colonial violence perpetrated against Palestinians with their lingering colonial fear of destruction and extermination. Authors often achieve this through alternative history that imagine Jews facing indigenous resistance in states other than Palestine. This is a difficult subject for many Israeli authors to broach, particularly given the sensitive political and religious issues in the region. Israeli author Eyal Kless examined the theme of anti-colonial violence in his novel, *The Lost Puzzler*. However, recognizing his privilege, he opted to change a character who had been Muslim in an early draft to a fictional 24th century amalgamation of Islam and Judaism, allowing him to examine colonial

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resistance without stereotyping or attacking national groups. In Lavie Tidhar's *Unholy Land*, Jews living in the fictional African state of Palestina face a barrage of insurgent attacks by displaced indigenous Africans and begin to erect a large border wall to dissuade the violence. Like Kless, Tidhar explores the Jewish state's role in creating a displaced indigenous population—and the violence that crops up as a result—through the use of the speculative, allowing him to engage with Israel's role in the conditions that cause Palestinian resistance while avoiding direct political conversation.

While early Zionist utopian fiction imagined an idyllic Jewish state of peace, security, and scientific advancement, modern Jewish authors increasingly dealt with the non-utopian reality of Jewish life in Israel. Responding to the communal trauma of near-extermination in the Shoah, Israeli science fiction authors often portray dystopian landscapes that examine the existential frailty of Jewish life and communities. Through this, they could engage with a malaise in everyday Israeli life stemming from the Jewish legacy of colonial violence.

Palestinian Literature, The Nakba, and Science Fiction

Like its Israeli counterparts, Palestinian science fiction often grapples with a dystopian theme of destruction. Stemming from the communal trauma of the Nakba, Palestinian fiction—and, in particular, burgeoning science fiction—grapples with themes of loss, exile, and devastation. For Palestinians, this serves as a way in which Palestinian authors can attach meaning to the destructive Nakba, maintain a shared history and identity, and plot a way forward for the Palestinian people in imagined futures.

As with Zionist writers, literary figures have long played a vital role in shaping Palestinian nationalism. Throughout the twentieth century, particularly since the 1936 Revolt, poets were the leading intellectual strata in Palestine, using their words to encourage their people to resist British mandates and the Zionist colonial project. Poets such as Abu Salma, Ibrahim Tukan, and Abd al-Rahem Mahmoud dedicated their lives to the Palestinian national cause and typically suffered a personal price for their politics. For example, Abd

al-Rahem Mahmoud—"alshaer alshahed" or the Martyr poet—left his job as a schoolteacher in 1936 when the workers' revolt broke out and joined the ranks of Palestinian resistance fighters, only to lose his life in 1948 during fighting between Israeli forces and the Arab Liberation Army.

Coinciding with the culmination of Jewish dreams of statehood was the destruction of Arab Palestine through the Nakba, or "catastrophe." During the 1948 War, Zionist paramilitary forces pushed more than 750,000 Arab Palestinians from their homes, constituting about half of Palestine's prewar Arab population. [10] Between 400 and 600 Arab villages were sacked during the war and urban Palestine was almost entirely extinguished. Following the expulsion, Palestinian refugees settled in refugee camps in neighboring countries, hoping the exile to be temporary. Following the war, however, the new Israeli government passed a series of Absentees' Property laws that prevented exiled Palestinians from returning to their homes or reclaiming their property. As a result of this, and coupled with neighboring Arab countries' unwillingness to grant Palestinians citizenship or asylum rights, Arab Palestinians remained landless refugees, a status that passed down through subsequent generations.

Though Palestinian nationalism arose before the 1948 War, the trauma of the Nakba had a profound impact on Palestinian national identity. When coining the term, Palestinian historian Constantin Zureiq wrote that "the tragic aspect of the Nakba is related to the fact that it is not a regular misfortune or a temporal evil, but a Disaster in the very essence of the word, one of the most difficult that Arabs have ever known in their long history" (Zureiq, 1956). The term was further codified by Aref al-Aref in his encyclopedia, published in the late-1950s, where he wrote, "How can I call it but Nakba? When we, the Arab people generally and the Palestinians particularly, faced such a disaster that we never faced like it along the centuries" (Ghanim, 2009). Like it was for Jews before the creation of Israel, for Palestinians, the constant state of exile and statelessness became central to their national identity. This centrality of the Nakba was typified at the 2001 World

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Conference Against Racism where prominent Palestinian scholar and activist Hanan Ashrawi referred to the Palestinians as "a nation in captivity held hostage to an ongoing Nakba" (Bowker, 2003).

The events of the Nakba also greatly influenced Palestinian culture. With the destruction of coastal cities, the Palestinian cultural sphere was destroyed. Newspapers that were once published in these cities shut down, schools and seminars closed their doors, cultural sites such as cinemas or theaters were razed, and the literary nationalism that flourished before the war all but ceased. Coupled with this destruction, some of the most prominent literary figures were either killed, as was the case with Abd al-Rahem Mahmoud, or expelled, such as Abd al-Karim al-Karmi, who fled to Damascus.

In the wake of this destruction, Palestinian intellectuals increasingly grappled with the national defeat at the hands of Israeli forces. Authors such as Samih al-Qasim and Ishaq al-Houssay depicted the Nakba as a surprising and cataclysmic event that disrupted Palestine's idyllic and peaceful homeland. In "An Incomplete Poem," al-Qasim describes it using the metaphor of an orchard, which is a calm and secure paradise, until a destructive "sneaking" of "fragments of swords," which swarm into the orchard, leaving them unable to repel the attack. In later poems, al-Qasim also portrays Palestinians as helpless and betrayed victims of the Arab state leaders who positioned themselves as a "rescue army," only to retreat from the war before recapturing Palestinian territory. This generation of early literary intellectuals bore the responsibility of breaking down the belief in Arab triumph and justice that pervaded nationalist literature before the war. In its place came a nationalist ideal centering around loss, displacement, and betrayal.

In the aftermath, the Nakba grew as a cultural symbol for a displaced and stateless Palestinian identity. Authors wrote countless songs, poems, and books about the Nakba, all penned in strongly emotional terms. Together with Naji al-Ali's cartoon, "Handala"—which depicts a barefoot child, always drawn from behind, the imagery of a key, which represents the house keys that most Palestinians carried with them, believing their exile to be temporary—looms large in Palestinian culture, with both indicative of the collective memory of the Nakba and how it fundamentally shaped the identity of the Palestinian refugees as a people.

For many modern Palestinian authors, the Nakba did not end in 1948. The trauma of dispossession continued with the construction of separation walls, watch towers, gun-turrets, and segregated roads between Israel and the West Bank. Dispossession only grew with continued confiscation of land, demolition of Palestinian property, and growing restriction of Palestinian travel. For many Palestinians, these actions are merely an extension of the expansionist ideology that destroyed countless villages in 1948 and evicted 750,000 residents. Similarly, the denial of a right to return makes the conditions of the Nakba unending, enforcing the conditions of exile for over 70 years. For Palestinian authors, writing often becomes a search for lost inheritance as well as an attempt to keep the memory of the loss from fading. In novels such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's *A Cry in a Long Night*, or Ghassan Kanafani's *Returning to Haifa*, preserving the memory of this loss becomes tantamount to a cultural duty.

The importance of the Nakba in Palestinian culture extends to their emerging catalog of science fiction. In Larissa Sansour's film, *Nation Estate*, the entirety of the Palestinian population is confined to a single skyscraper. Each floor houses a separate city or village, such as Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Gaza, and Jerusalem, to name a few. While the development and amenities appear slick, modern, and convenient on the surface, in the distance, we still see the façade of an Israeli separation wall around the settlement. Residents have a view of the Al-Aqsa mosque from their windows, a scene that adds to the sense of continued isolation and exile. Sansour explained that she designed this scene to be "quite emotional for Palestinians [as] they can actually see the real house that they were kicked out of…They can see their house in Jerusalem, but they still live outside" (Chaves, 2019).

Palestinian science fiction also often analyzes how the Nakba continues to shape the structure of Pales-

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tinian identity in the future. In Larissa Sansour's *In Vitro*, the characters grapple with inherited trauma and identity. Using an ecological disaster as an allegory for the Palestinian exile, the film portrays characters who did not experience the disaster first-hand, but rather have an inherited trauma from the stories of the disaster being passed down through subsequent generations. The main character, Alia, explains her experience and inherited trauma as being "raised on nostalgia. The past was spoon-fed to [her]. [Her] own memories replaced by those of others." Though she has no personal experience of the ecological disaster that created the dystopian world in which she lives, the impulse to preserve communal histories and pass down memories created a psychological landscape where the character's clouded present is suspended between past and future. This veneration of the past by the characters serves, as one character frames it, as an ongoing "liturgy chronicling [their] losses" throughout the film (Chaves, 2019).

Science fiction literature in Palestine similarly addresses the impact of the Nakba on Palestinian identity. Across the body of literature, authors continually attempt to contend with the meaning of their trauma. Throughout the futuristic landscapes presented in Palestinian science fiction, the Palestinian connection to the land remains a key factor in literature. Attempts and struggles to grow olive trees—a symbol of Palestinian life before the Nakba—in dystopian landscapes demonstrate the continuing legacy of exile and displacement for the stories' characters.

The apocalyptic destruction of the Nakba presents in many Palestinian science fiction landscapes. In Mazen Maarouf's "The Curse of the Mud Ball Kid," a nanobot invasion in 2037 leaves the narrator the last Palestinian left on earth. As a result of the attack, he is left immortal, though kept in a glass box due to the radiation, and throughout the story, he is bound to maintain a Palestinian identity and to try to keep Palestinian history alive. This story serves as an allegory for those who survived the Nakba, remained in Palestine, and now bear the weight of maintaining a central national identity through increasing restriction on Palestinian life, represented by the narrator's glass box.

Given the emphasis on the Nakba, the right of return becomes a dominant theme in many Palestinian science fiction stories. Anwar Hamed's "The Key" examines this through the national imagery of the Palestinian key. Centered on an Israeli family, his story focuses on the haunting sound of someone attempting to unlock the front door with a key. This spectral noise serves as a metaphor for the Palestinians who left their homes, key in hand, believing they would soon be able to return. The continuing exile of Palestinians looms large over the family as they attempt to rationalize both the haunting and Israeli colonialism. Similarly, Emad El-Din Aysha's "Digital Nation" examines a non-corporeal right of return, this time in the form of digitized consciousnesses hacking into Israeli technological infrastructure in 2048, 100 years after the Nakba and the beginning of exile. Though Aysha's story is more sardonic than Hamed's haunting tale, both authors use shared national imagery to express their continued connection to the traumatic events of 1948.

Contestations of Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Science Fiction

Coupled with science fiction's ability to explore themes of trauma and violence is the genre's ability to examine national identity and what it means to be part of a people, particularly for diaspora or colonized populations. In Western science fiction, this manifested most noticeably in the rise of Afrofuturism in the late-20th century. In Afrofuturist works, the Black flight into space worked to signify the meanings attached to diasporic identity by articulating the "blackness" of space to Black cultural identity. Thus, the idea of planetary exile evolved from a grounding in an ideology of racial uplift to a collective embrace of cultural abjection. For Israeli and Palestinian science fiction, the themes of exile and identity play out in different, but interconnected ways. In Israeli science fiction, the contestations over the nature and meaning of Jewishness, which stem from the diverse cultures of the Diaspora, manifest in futuristic definitions of Jewishness and struggles over religiosity. For Palestinians, science fiction serves as a means for

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asserting shared identity as a form of protest or resistance. In both countries, however, the communal history of exile and diaspora, more than anything, prompts authors to examine the essential immutability of both Jewish and Palestinian identities.

One of the most omnipresent questions in Israeli science fiction is that of Jewish identity. Given that the country began as a nation-state for Jews, the question of what exactly constitutes a proper Jew has been the source of much national consternation since the mid-20th century. Israeli science fiction typically treats this in one of two ways. The first way is hopeful. As discussed in novels such as Lavie Tidhar's Central Station, the question of who can and cannot be considered a Jew has long since been solved in a multi-ethnic, pluralistic fashion. In Tidhar's novel, not only are the protagonist Chong family a Russian-Chinese biracial family with long Jewish lineages on both sides, but sentient robots are similarly welcomed into a broad Jewish identity. Opposing this optimism are dystopian stories such as Nir Yaniv's "The Believers," in which God's sudden appearance on Earth deems Jews to not be righteous enough, and enacts a swift divine punishment. These dystopian examinations echo contemporary Israeli conflicts over how to be properly Jewish, with religious conservatives increasingly narrowing the definition of a Jew.

Similarly, the question of what it means to be Palestinian presents in science fiction works that examine the growing divide between Palestinian refugees in camps and those in the diaspora, as well as refugees of different generations. In Saleem Haddad's short story "Song of the Birds," this question is central in an existential boundary between two realities, with the only means of traveling from one to the other being suicide, a story inspired by the suicide of Palestinian writer Mohanned Younis. The story serves as a metaphor for Haddad's own dilemma as a Palestinian exile: does he accept his condition and make a home where he is, or does he return, fight, and give up all the comforts of the diaspora? For Haddad, depicting the central crisis of his protagonist Ayal's struggle to decide between living in a comforting reality in exile or following her brother Zaid

into a reality of Palestinian revolution grapples with the central question facing many displaced Palestinians.

As Israeli colonization over Palestinians grew during the late-20th and early-21st centuries, Israeli science fiction struggled to reconcile the secular state with the religious conservatism that plays an increasing role in national politics. Fanatical groups such as the Sons of Simeon in Keren Landsman's The Heart of the Circle, or the Guardians of Zion in Shimon Adaf's Shadrach, often serve as allegories for Israel's growing religious right. The groups enforce a strict definition of proper Jewishness and use fascistic punishment to enforce their political hegemony. These groups most often appear in the works of left-wing Israeli writers, who use them to express concern over Israel's drift to the political right. Examining Israel's legacy of colonization from an inward lens allows them to indirectly cast aspersions on the increasingly fascistic treatment of Palestinians and relate their struggles to a Jewish readership able to relate to the political conditions.

On the opposite end of this spectrum is the Palestinian use of identity as a form of resistance in science fiction. In her film, In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain, Larissa Sansour depicts an alien "narrative resistance" heroine burying Keffiyeh-patterned plates underground for future archaeologists to uncover, fabricating connections to the land. After its initial screening at the London Barbican arts center, the film raised the ire of local Jewish communities who criticized it as anti-Semitic for suggesting that Jewish ties to the Levant are fabricated. Gillian Merron, the chief executive of the Board of Deputies, an umbrella organization representing British Jews, criticized the film as propaganda and an attempt to delegitimize Jewish ancestral claims to Israel and the Levant. This, however, was not the stated aim of Sansour and her co-creator Søren Lind. For them, the film is a commentary on the relationship between myth, fiction, and history in the formation of communal and national identities. These identities are often born of conflict and political turmoil, and the film serves as an examination of who gets to define history and influence the political realities of a region after the conflict abates. Through this discussion, Sansour and

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Lind attempt to propose counternarratives, albeit with the use of controversial and problematic themes, to a future in which the national conflict between Levantine-inspired states results in a one-sided solution—a dystopian future that many Palestinians fear.

Science fiction lends itself well to the sphere of Palestinian resistance literature. Recent publications from Egyptian author Ahmed Khaled Tawfik demonstrate how well these spheres comingle. In his book, *The Last Dreamer*, Tawfik imagined a world where geneticists resurrect Marxist revolutionary Che Guevarra and send him to fight Americans in Iraq before attempting to invade Israel, where he is martyred by Israeli forces. Tawfik's book, *Jonathan's Promise*, similarly speaks to resistance by reimagining a reversal of the roles in the Israeli-Palestinian national conflict, wherein the Arabs live in a diaspora and the US grants them a national homeland of their own. In these novels, Tawfik rallies his readers around visions of a futuristic Arab Palestine as a means for inspiring growing nationalism amongst his Arab and Palestinian readers.

This brand of literary resistance bonds perfectly to a Palestinian identity that, according to science fiction filmmaker Larissa Sansour, "is linked to resistance and projecting for a future and for a Palestinian state" (Batty, 2017). A key cultural product of Israeli colonialism is a growing malaise toward potential futures; thus, the act of imagining Palestinian futures becomes an act of literary resistance. Despite the dystopian tone that pervades a lot of Palestinian science fiction, one constant is continuing resistance into dystopian futures. In Anwar Hamed's short story "The Key," Palestinian ghosts haunt the Israelis who occupy their former residences, suggesting continuing Palestinian resistance even after death. Non-corporeal resistance is similarly addressed in Emad El-Din Aysha's short story, "Digital Nation," where a Jewish school system's e-learning portals are hacked so that Hebrew text and Israeli national symbols are replaced by Arabic and Palestinian national symbols. In both of these stories, both told from the perspective of Jewish antagonists, the characters are forced to confront the displacement that their migration caused. In this way, the Palestinians achieve a na-

tional victory by forcing Jewish Israelis to reckon with their own colonialism.

For many works of Palestinian science fiction, the very act of maintaining identity is the central form of resistance. In Samir El-Youssef's short story, "The Association," the exhausted Israeli and Palestinian societies agree to a radical solution—to have the past eradicated and wiped from memory and move forward with a clean slate. However, many of the Palestinian people reject this solution, believing their identities to be too important. In asserting this identity and maintaining the memory of the Palestinian people, these protagonists resort to violence and murder as forms of protest. Through this, El-Youssef examines the importance attached to Palestinian history and continuity and its importance in any future.

Similarly hoping to explore the strength and immutability of a shared Jewish identity, counter-historical speculative fiction gained firm traction in Israeli literature. Counterfactual novels such as Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*, which imagines a Jewish state in Alaska, Simone Zelich's *Judenstaat,* which depicts a Jewish state being created in postwar East Germany, and Nava Semel's *Isra Isle*, which imagines the whole Jewish settlement living in upstate New York, all explore a sense of Jewish nationalism that is tied to statehood but removed from Israel. In each, the idea of Jewish nationhood is divorced from ancestral claims and a historic sense of belonging and instead, looks at a Jewish nationalism that centers on a concentrated population of Jews. In this way, the novels depict the idea of Jewish nationhood as an intangible connection to a collective population that is more immutable than a traditional territorial nationalism.

Likewise, new Israeli science fiction mirrored the larger collection of Israeli literature that depicts the immutability of Israeli identity beyond territorial constraints. Novels such as Lavie Tidhar's *Unholy Land* and Yoav Avni's *Herzl Amar* both address the meaning of a collective Jewish identity that is removed from Israel and Palestine. Herzl Amar takes this idea a step further by portraying Palestine as a foreign home for only the most religious and fanatical Jews. In these

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stories, secular Jewish identity is not attached to the land or a spiritual connection to the Levant, but rather a collective nationalism fostered through a concentrated population living in an independent Jewish state.

This is a concept shared in a lot of Palestinian science fiction as well. For example, the films of Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman typically dispense with traditional borders and roots, depicting their subjects performing a Palestinian national identity that is not rooted in any landscape nor space, thereby upending the very nature of territorial nationalism. These films stress the need for a post-national Palestine, in which Palestinian identities are not narrowly defined constructions of physical space. Rather, Palestine becomes a rather open-ended concept, which allows for concepts of identity and belonging to exist in more shared and inclusive ways.

Throughout all of these texts, Israeli and Palestinian authors grappled with the meaning of their own identity as contested in colonial settings. For Israelis, these contestations focused on Jewishness, shared identity, and the colonial system that oppresses Palestinians. For Palestinians, identity served as a form of resistance against exile and colonialism. Despite these differences, the shared concept that pervades both populations is the shared feeling that their pasts and futures are intertwined with one another.

Shared Utopian Futures

Given that Israeli and Palestinian science fiction writers see their futures as intertwined, many attempted to see past the muddled present into potential conflict-free futures. By its nature, science fiction also allows for the creation of a literary space that connects Israelis and Palestinians and potentially helps create hope, shared identities, trust, and conflict resolution. In areas of conflict, creative performances such as literature, film, and theatre can be powerful tools for resolution, as they often use space in more theoretical and malleable ways to imagine hope and peaceful alternatives, or to encourage communication and connection between rival sides. As science fiction is often not bound by the constraints of geopolitical, and even scientific or phys-

ical realism, it lends itself to creative speculation as a means of answering diplomatic regional politics.

Science fiction in Israel and Palestine similarly attempts to transgress geopolitical restrictions. The genre offers a unique opportunity for authors to be unhindered by the physical limitations of our modern world and instead, imagine a myriad of possible solutions to the issue of shared national space. In Majd Kayyal's short story, "N," Israelis and Palestinians both occupy Palestine, except on parallel worlds—one for Israelis and one for Palestinians. Similarly, in Lavie Tidhar's novel, *Central Station*, the colonization of extraterrestrial lands opens up countless opportunities for Jewish and Palestinian settlement, eliminating the territorial constraints of the Levant. Jewish and Palestinian states on Mars offset a core concern of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, opening the door for a multi-ethnic and egalitarian Levant open to both Jewish and Arab settlement alike.

Conclusion

Despite visions of shared possible futures, the bulk of Israeli and Palestinian science fiction remains dystopian and pessimistic. While recurring themes of identity and resilience offer promise for Arab and Jewish futures, the struggles and violence of everyday life pervade both literatures. In this way, Israeli and Palestinian science fictions are linked to one another. Just as the national conflict bound the two populations' histories over the past century, the dystopian and apocalyptic futures envisioned by both binds their literature today.

Though the literature remains mostly dystopian, the nationalist themes and the struggles depicted in each speak to a shared escapism. Science fiction as a discipline offers its readers a medium to grapple with complex contemporary issues by offering a level of spatial distance between the reader's world and the world playing out on the page or on the screen. Within Israeli and Palestinian science fiction, this spatial distance allows readers to examine their shared histories of national trauma, colonial past and present, and seemingly eternal conflict. Through this process, both Israelis and

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Palestinians gain a better understanding of their current malaise and hope for a brighter future.

Notes

[1] This paper focuses on Israeli and Palestinian science fiction that has gained an audience wide enough to facilitate its translation into English. Lesser-known works of science fiction may not conform to the same themes as works popular enough to receive English translations.

[2] This paper builds off the work of recent historians such as Ethan Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, and Derek Penslar, who examine Jewish literature through the lens of internal colonialism, given the lack of autonomy, equality, and safety for Jews in Europe. As a result, Zionism and Jewish migration must be seen as simultaneously colonizing and decolonizing movements.

[3] This is increasingly problematic in the wake of Hindu Nationalist movements of the 21st century that assert India's Muslim minority is an internal alien.

[4] Amos Oz was a prominent public figure until his death in 2018.

[5] The years in these titles use the Hebrew calendar. The year 5800 is 2040 in the Gregorian calendar, while the year 6000 is 2240.

[6] Zionist Congresses met every year between 1897 and 1901, and every other year from 1903 to 1913.

[7] Tel Aviv was initially supposed to be the national capital of Israel under the UN Partition plan, but in the wake of territorial gains during the 1948 War, Israeli moved the capital to Jerusalem, a move that does not hold universal international recognition.

[8] The Jewish interpretation of a messianic apocalypse is not one of destruction but rather of restoration, as it focuses on the Jewish messiah returning Jews to the biblical Kingdom of Israel and ushering in an eternal peace.

[9] *Shoah II* was written during the Yom Kippur War, in which Israel faced defeat at the hands of Egypt and Syria.

[10] This number is a matter of dispute. The Israeli government contends that only 550,000 to 600,000 Palestinians left, while some Palestinian scholars, such as Salman Abu-Sitta, contend the number is as high as 935,000. Most historians accept that the number is between 700,000 and 800,000. Ilan Pappe's estimate of 750,000 is used here.

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