

The Aesthetics of Jerusalem Butterflies and the Illusion of Resistance

جماليات فراشات القدس و وهم المقاومة

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Abstract

In Sonata for Jerusalem Ghost (SJG) (2009), Waciny Laredj, the Algerian-French novelist, engages with one of the most, if not the most, pivotal cases that have dominated the Arab political and socio-cultural scene for more than seventy decades, namely: the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Laredj utilizes an interdisciplinary approach informed by postmodern, psychoanalytical, postcolonial, and ecological rhetoric to deal with issues pertaining to occupation, displacement, the nostalgia for the homeland, the problem of hybrid identity, and others. Elemental ecology operates as a discursive proxy that links up the different disciplines in SJG. Exploring the dynamics of this operation, I will underscore the role that Laredj's utilization of interdisciplinarity plays in articulating a feasible – or a potentially blurred – concept of resistance in a Palestinian context.

The different disciplines that Laredj utilizes are anchored on postmodern predisposition and ethics. Accordingly, I will explore if (and how) such ethics renders the potential of 'resistance' in the novel captive to possibilities of freedom and justice defined by a postmodern and global/Western rhetoric rather than by political ethics particularly germane to the Palestinian condition. In the process, I will show if SJG is an "aestheticized politics" that ultimately generates no more than a sense of "artistic gratification" consummated in the slogan "l'art pour l'art".

Keywords: Resistance; aesthetics; ecology; Jerusalem; postmodernism

الملخص

يخوض واسيني الأعرج، الروائي الجزائري- الفرنسي، في روايته «سوناتا لأشباح القدس» (٢٠٠٩)، في قضية قد تكون من أهم القضايا التي تهيم على الساحة العربية سياسيا واجتماعيا وثقافيا، منذ ما يزيد عن سبعين عاما، وهي قضية الاحتلال الإسرائيلي للأراضي الفلسطينية. يلجأ الأعرج في روايته إلى نهج سردي ما بعد حداثي، تتداخل فيه معارف مختلفة في مجالات: التحليل النفسي، والبيئة الطبيعية، وما بعد الاستعمار؛ للتعرض لقضايا الحروب والاحتلال، وإقصاء السكان المحليين، والحنين الى الوطن، وإشكالية الهوية المهجنة، وغيرها. ويستثمر الروائي عناصر الطبيعة، بوصفها واسطة استطرادية تربط بين هذه المعارف المختلفة.

وبناء على ذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة من خلال البحث في ديناميكيات هذا النهج إلى التحقق من مدى فاعلية خيارات الكاتب السردية في التصدي للاحتلال ومقاومته، أو في إحالة الوعي السياسي ومقاومة الاحتلال والظلم، في سياق فلسطيني، إلى فضاءات مهمشة غير ناجزة.

كما تهدف الدراسة إلى بيان إذا كانت المعارف المختلفة والمتداخلة، التي يستثمرها الأعرج في سرده الروائي، وتستند إلى أخلاقيات ما بعد الحداثة وفكرها، تسهم في جعل مفهوم المقاومة أسيرا لمفاهيم الحرية والعدالة، كما تم صياغتها في الخطابات الغربية في ظل العولمة، أم تسهم في تعزيز رؤى وأخلاقيات سياسية تنبع من الواقع الفلسطيني والحالة العربية. وفي هذا السياق ستبين الدراسة فيما إذا كانت «سوناتا لأشباح القدس» لا تعدو أن تكون تجسيدا لسياسات جمالية لا يتأتى عنها أكثر من إشباع الذائقة الجمالية، التي عبر عنها (والترينجامين) بـ: «الفن لأجل الفن».

الكلمات المفتاحية: مقاومة، وجماليات، وما بعد الحداثة، والقدس، والبيئة.

Introduction

In *Sonata for Jerusalem Ghosts* (*SJG*)¹(2009), Waciny Laredj,² the French-Algerian novelist, engages with one of the most, if not the most, pivotal cases that have taken over the Arab political and socio-cultural scene for more than seven decades now, namely, the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Laredj utilizes a diversity of narrative approaches informed by postmodern, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, and ecological rhetoric/politics to address issues pertaining to wars, the displacement of the native population, nostalgia for the homeland, the problem of hybrid identities, and the interrelation between loss and artistic creativity. Huggan (2008) asserts that an interdisciplinary approach enables “the practical implementation of a politico-theoretical insight” (p. 4). In this article, I endeavour to

show how the dynamics of elemental ecology in *SJG* operate as a proxy to verify the political effectiveness of Laredj’s interdisciplinary approach from a specifically Palestinian context. This task entails a scrupulous examination of the mode of resistance to occupation that Laredj depicts in the novel and the extent to which this mode proves viable and just to Palestinians.

In the process, I explore whether *SJG* is an aestheticized politics that ultimately generates no more than a sense of artistic gratification consummated in the slogan “*l’art pour l’art*.” For, in his well-known article, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), Walter Benjamin maintains that the self-alienation of mankind “has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.” Benja-

min argues that aestheticized politics is any aesthetic product that is controlled by fascism – a system of power that was rising in the first two decades in Europe and that was the milieu of his article. Furthermore, he maintains that the form and content of literature should be understood and analysed in relation to the time and space in which it is produced. As argued by Al-Nowaihi (2000), in an Arab context, the political consciousness of literature is specifically crucial, and writers are mostly considered in terms of the political impact of their writing (see also Lattuca, 2001).

The structure of this article is fundamentally influenced by the narrative structure of the novel itself. Laredj clearly experiments with a range of disciplinary boundaries to develop his plot and themes. The reader can clearly observe how very general issues pertaining to postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, postmodernism and ecology in the novel are interwoven to unfold the story of Mai, the Palestinian émigré, and the story of her son's completion of his sonata. Psychoanalytic theories prove useful in unravelling the mother's relationship with her son. Postcolonial concerns are manifest in underscoring the traumas experienced by the exiled in the hosting land, the problem of hybrid identity, the re-emergence of the past and its overlap with the present, and otherness in relation to the self. Profuse references to coexistence, the celebration of difference, the continuous projection of fragmented selves, and the deconstructed cores of unified forms of existence are also typical postmodernist subjects.

The "integration" of various disciplinary perspectives challenges the dogma of compartmentalized knowledge and is con-

sistent with postmodernism in its appeal to travel across different disciplines (see Leitch, 2013). Indeed, literature and all intellectual activities related to it have always been a site inviting interaction with different branches of knowledge, including politics, history, psychology, linguistics, religion, anthropology, ecology, and culture, among others. The strong presence of nature, whether in Mai's final union with its elements or in the persistent association of Mai with the land, invokes both a romantic perception of nature and a feminist critique that exposes the political dangers of maintaining inherent associations between nature and women. Nature as a useful proxy to verify the political effectiveness of Laredj's narrative approaches emerges more emphatically toward the end of the novel. Hence, the last two parts of the article underscore the role that nature plays in exposing Laredj's utilization of interdisciplinarity to articulate a feasible – or a potentially blurred – concept of resistance in a Palestinian context.

SJG: Aesthetics in the time of crisis

Waciny Laredj is considered one of the most accomplished Arab novelists of the twenty-first century (see Al-Riyahi, 2009). He has won a number of prizes for his work, including the Sheikh Zayed Prize for Literature in 2007³ and the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF).⁴ After a series of novels on terrorism, political upheavals and national predicaments related to Algeria, and following *The Prince (Al-Ameer)* (2005), a postcolonial novel about Algerian independence and resistance to French colonialism, in *SJG*, Laredj undertakes a different trajectory by embarking on the Palestinian *Naqba*.⁵

Many other novels have dealt with

the Palestinian *Naqba*, including Gassan Kanafani's *A'ai'd ila Haiyfa (Returning to Jaffa)*, and *Om Sa'd (Sa'd's Mother)*, Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Fi Zamanel Khiyoulel Bayda' (In the Time of White Horses)* and *Qanadeel Malikel Jalil, Sahar Khalifa's Al-Sabbar (The Cacti)*, *Hobbi Al-Awwal (My First Love)*, and *Babul Saha (The Door of the Yard)*, among others. Those novels explore realistic aspects and dynamics of resistance as actually practiced by Palestinians in the occupied land of Palestine. They do not transcend resistance in favour of some aesthetic value or ultra humanist concern. In *SJG*, Laredj utilizes a narrative approach that is common to his other novels like *Sayyidatul Maqam (The Lady of the Shrine)*, or *Harisatul Thelal (The Shadow's Guardian)*, or *Shorafatu Bahril Shamal (The Balconies of the North Sea)*. The sufferings of the characters in those novels are generally transcended through aesthetic values. Music and painting become the haven through which the trauma of loss and the nostalgia for the past are projected. Thus, in *SJG*, the pain that Mai experiences takes the shape of colorful butterflies that eventually merge with the horizon in a breathtaking panorama.

SJG depicts many of the repercussions of *al-Naqba* on the Palestinians, including their enforced displacement, the denial of their right to return to the homeland, and other socio-cultural and psychological dilemmas. At the age of eight, Mai has to flee her homeland, Jerusalem, with her father to the USA to escape the horror of war and the atrocities perpetrated by Israeli soldiers during the occupation of Palestine in 1948. Her father lies to her and tells her that her pregnant mother will follow them to the USA shortly; in reality, he knows that

she had been murdered by the Haganah⁶. In Brooklyn, she is adopted by her aunt Donya.

Settled in the new land and widely acknowledged as a successful plastic artist in New York, Mai continues to yearn to return to her lost homeland but remains sceptical about the value of this return, having spent most of her life “out of place.”⁷ She travels to Jordan with her German-American husband, Koney Smith, who is visiting Amman, the capital of Jordan, to find more information on the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁸ In the Dead Sea, Koney encourages Mai to visit Jerusalem, which is only a couple of hours away from the Dead Sea. She persistently declines, claiming that her visit can only deepen her painful sense of loss. The people she knew and loved there are now either dead or have fled. She denounces the thought of entering a city that, for her, has become a city of ghosts.

Diagnosed with lung cancer at the age of fifty-eight, Mai is constantly visited by the Jerusalem ghosts and by images from her stolen childhood. Hospitalized in the Central New York hospital in 1999, she calls the Alice Island Institution for Death Services to arrange for her body to be burned in the crematorium – with the exception of her bones. The sense of loss that she has experienced and the desire to fulfil her dream of revisiting *her* [emphasis mine] Jerusalem lead her to ask her son, Juba, to burn her body and scatter the ashes over the Jordan River and in Jerusalem streets and to bury her bones in a cemetery in New York, where Juba can put flowers on her grave every Tuesday. Her ashes, she reflects, “will only be a shadow of a body that has melted in the sweetness of the dew and the fragrance of wild violets. Unjust fates will know that I have passed through the road of fear with

the dignity of the colour and fragility of butterflies" (*SJG*, 139). Feeling the need "to open up all the sealed wounds and let the blood out" (*SJG*, p. 138), Mai decides to write her memoir.

Laredj uses a nonlinear narrative technique – so common in postmodern writing (see Connor, 2004) and opens *SJG* with Juba in Jerusalem executing his mother's will. He then goes back to New York and starts reading his mother's lilac memoir book. The narrative then returns to the present moment, disclosing the impact of the mother's memoir on the son. Juba tells us that he has visited Jerusalem three times in his life. The reader can discern that his first two visits are imaginary. In those two visits, he describes how his maternal grandfather dragged him to the Moroccan neighbourhood, where he observed his mother crossing Jerusalem streets shouting like Archimedes: "I've found it, I've found it," upon discovering that the colours of Jerusalem can all be found on the wings of a butterfly. Yet, Juba's grandfather had died a long time ago, and Mai had not been to Jerusalem since her first departure (9). However, the third visit is real; this is the visit in which he goes to Jerusalem holding three small marble urns that contain the ashes of his mother.

Prior to his mother's death, Juba is struggling to finish his sonata and feels that he still lacks the necessary inspiration to complete a gratifying musical piece. Scattering the ashes in the first urn over the Jordan River, he reads his mother's letter expressing her passion for the River. Mai's request to have her ashes in the second urn scattered over the grave in memory of her killed brother, Yousi, manifests her profound craving for the days of her early childhood. By scattering the ashes in the third urn over

the grave of Mira, his grandmother, Juba conjures a lost past and home that Yousi has tried to claim through re-engraving the erased names of the deceased on the headstones. Walking in the old streets of Jerusalem and by the River Jordan, Juba is visited by many visions that help him approach the completion of his long-awaited sonata and also perceptively grasp the ghosts and shadows that loom in his mother's paintings. In front of the *Boraq* wall (*Ha'itul al-mabqa*) in the old streets of Jerusalem, Juba is stopped by a heavily armed Israeli soldier who asks him about his identity and what he is doing with the urn near the wall. However, when the soldier sees Juba's passport, he salutes him enthusiastically: "American, welcome, welcome!" (p. 11).

SJG mainly tackles two states of affairs: the first concerns Mai's zealous yearning for the Jerusalem of her childhood, while the second concerns Juba's longing for a sublime piece of music. The two conditions interweave in various ways and find expression in the realm of art. Mai's paintings are reflections of her cataleptic desire to return home. The colours she uses are the colours of Jerusalem butterflies, and the shadows that loom behind the buildings in her paintings are those of the domes of Jerusalem. Exposing Mai's inner grief and the son's overwhelming desire to determine the actual causes of this grief, Laredj offers the reader perspectives on some contemporary issues pertaining to cultural diversity, religious difference, hybrid and ever-emerging identities, mixed marriages, and ethnic pluralism. Images of the phoenix, the ghosts of deceased people, Jerusalem butterflies, and other ephemeral presences all become tropes of an identity that is continuously evolving. Nature is used as the border cross-

ing between homeland and the country of immigration and emerges as the intermediary through which Mai's anxiety, pain, and anger are contained. How resistance to occupation can be located amid a plethora of ecological images that both Mai and Juba evoke and how such images are ethically and politically effective in the current Palestinian context are the main concern of this paper. As Andrew Gibson argues in *Postmodernity, Ethics and the Novel* (1999), novels should "perform an ethical work, or can be made to, and it is worth trying to enable that work to take place" (1991, p. 1).

Postmodern poetics/postcolonial phantoms

SJG combines many of the common features that have characterized postmodern and postcolonial narratives, notwithstanding the already established link between the two. Critics such as Moore-Gilbert (1997), Moses (2008), Harvey (1990), Bhabha (1995), and Gugelberger (2012) argue that postcolonial writing is a branch of postmodern literature that is concerned with the dilemmas of the silenced, the oppressed and the marginalized. Nevertheless, they remain cautious of how postmodernism can assimilate this branch to the type of humanism and universalization defined by Western centres of power. This is not to overlook how postmodernism has questioned history, a category that is indispensable in defining and institutionalizing postcolonialism (Gugelberger, p. 2012).

Interviewed by Al-Ghirrah (2012), Laredj confirms that he has chosen "to deal with the Palestinian cause from a humanist perspective rather than from a political perspective" and that Mai is the "objective correlative" of the uprooted and homeless Pal-

estinian. By this, Laredj acknowledges the distance he maintains between the personal and its political repercussions – a position that, as McGowan (2012) contends, is often taken by postmodern authors. Arac (1989), for example, refers to the deep tension between postmodern writers such as Adorno, whose "negative dialectics" is reduced to "an aesthetic ideal," and Jameson, whose "politicized notion of desire inheres 'a revolutionary energy'" (pp. 126-127). Critics such as Eaglestone (2004), Connor (2004), Harvey (1990), and McGowan (2012) argue that postmodernism, whether in art or in philosophy, is ethical for its defiance of totalitarianism and concern with difference, local conditions, heterogeneity, and hybridity – issues to which *SJG* is emphatically attentive. According to McGowan (2012), tackling the above issues is not sufficient if it is not accompanied by resistance to universal standards. While Brockelman (2001) draws attention to how such issues can be infamously used, Connor (2004) contends that multiplicity, openness, and hybridity have become a "horizon to which art must try to live up" (p. 68).

In *SJG*, Laredj is open to embracing many of the above themes, including many types of the "other." The Palestinian case is all about the conflict over land between the Palestinians and the Israelis; nevertheless, he makes it clear that there is no inherent enmity between Muslims and Jews. It is the Jewish doctor, Harmon Simon, who asserts that "Palestine is a good land for all the Palestinians, Arabs, Christians, and Jewish" (p.42). Religious diversity is one of the themes that the novel persistently tackles; thus, Mai laments that something important "in the good city that we called the City of God seems to have broken...my

uncle Ghassan told me to pray wherever I felt that God is close to me and can hear me; it doesn't matter whether the place is a mosque, a church, or synagogue" (p. 262).

Muslims and Christians have always coexisted peacefully in Palestine. Witnessing the killing of Mai's pregnant mother by the Haganah soldiers, Mai's Muslim cousin seeks refuge with a Christian family (pp.323-324). Donya, Mai's aunt who is also an émigré in Brooklyn, tells Mai: "in my time, we didn't say that there were Jews, Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem. There were only Palestinians. Only! Their religion didn't matter. I still believe that civilizations and buildings are destroyed by politicized religions" (p. 248). Dying and gradually consumed by her aching and feeble body, Mai hears a mix of religious recitations of the *Qur'an* and the chants of the *Torah* and the *Bible*" (p. 511).

Fragmented subjectivity and ephemeral presences, as opposed to a single core or coherent entity, are other "postmodern" subjects with which the novel experiments (see Huggan, 2008; Harvey, 1990). Mai's visions and paintings are flooded with multiple and fragmented incidences. The image of the phoenix⁹ is repeatedly conjured to evoke Mai before and after her death: "For a long time now, I have lost my sky and was sure that I was like the phoenix that has been lost in smouldering skies" (p.524). Scattering the ashes of his mother, Juba sees his mother "ascend from her ashes like the phoenix to be transformed into countless butterflies with infinite circles on their wings...those butterflies lit the orphan and lonely City of God" (p. 16). Ephemeral presences such as butterflies¹⁰ and ghosts are invoked in many contexts: "He wanted

to tell her that the butterflies she left behind in Jerusalem didn't live for long but rather lived inside the colours that she left behind" (p. 129). Mai's marriage also proves to be ephemeral. She reflects: "I was afraid of my crazy attachment to him – he, the lost man in a world that has not been nice to him. I never stood in his way; but he always felt guilty towards me because his travels were his priority" (p. 398).

For Brian McHale, while "modernist fiction is epistemological – that is, concerned with problems of knowledge and understanding, postmodernist fiction is ontological – that is, concerned with the creation and interrelation of worlds of being" (in Connor, 2004, p.65; see also Harvey, 1990). Mai seeks to navigate in a world of her own making through painting. She continuously re/generates the colour of her old city and her present "state of being" (see Connor, 2004). Her paintings not only express moments of her present life or reflect images related to her new home, for looming behind Brooklyn's trees and colours are shadows and ghostly shapes that express her own unconscious repossession of the homeland. This phenomenon resembles what Connor identifies as an "emergent force rather than completed form" (2004, p. 66). Mai stubbornly refuses to visit her old city and is content to evoke it through her paintings, thus creating a situation that Connor describes as placing the "unpresentable in presentation itself" (2004, p. 67). It is also a situation that allows for difference to "coexist, collide, and interpenetrate" (see Harvey, 1990, p. 41).

The collage in Mai's paintings, which is most evident in her mixing of colours and places from the past with colours and places

from the present, corroborates a sense of processual and unfixed identity – another concept that postmodernists embrace (see Connor, 2004; Katz, 2000). Her paintings emerge as sites for ramification rather than unification. If Young frames the hybrid child as a “block ‘to desire for the other’” (in Grant, 2009, p. 166), then the images that Mai depicts are an expression of desire for the “other” – the place of her birth and childhood. The desire for the other does not undermine her need to legitimate her position in the new place; rather, the process of being is “a long chain of significations that cannot be totalized” (Katz, 2000, p. 86). Mai’s father advises her: “We will never be cured of the land disease. Now this is your land; you will live and die here. Do not look back behind you, or else you will be paralyzed” (p. 303). In Jordan, Koney tells her, “Mai...you are running from a world that sleeps in you, and whenever it wakes up, you feel the depth of the wound” (p. 390).

As émigrés, Mai and her father do not deny their love for the hosting home; rather, they attain a condition similar to that described by Murphy: those who “become citizens of a particular place do not necessarily become inhabitants and that one does not equal the other” (2010, p. 213). Hassan, Mai’s father, confirms that “New York is...a city that is much bigger than all of Palestine...all of its people have come from abroad...It is a big and good city...It has hosted so many people before us” (p. 212). Mai herself always reiterates: “New York my beloved city” (p. 440); “New York has become what water has remained in me before the body is completely dry. Its separation from me is happening with the same cruelty as when Jerusalem butterflies were stolen from me” (p. 485). Juba feels

that her last painting, N.Y., Death Leaves Rustle, “recapitulates all the pain that [his] mother went through” (p. 74). Mai begs Juba to forgive her for not telling him about the pain she has experienced due to the loss of her city: “Forgive me! Maybe I was naïve but was sincere in pushing you away from whatever shakes your confidence in the place that has given you life, love, art, freedom, and did not blame you for your little follies” (p. 109).

The formation of hybrid and instable identities, the fragmentation of subjectivities, and the problem of representation are themes that have recurrently featured in *S/JG* and also in postmodern and postcolonial writing (see Loomba, 1998; Huggan, 2008; Gugelberger, 2012). Postcolonial texts underscore people’s experience of “exploitation of other worlds” (Gugelberger, 2012, p. 384), of “subjugation, domination, the diaspora, displacement” (Bhabha, 1995: 32). They shift “focus from locations and institutions to individuals and their subjectivities” (Loomba, 1998, p. 17).

Although Palestine is still an occupied land, occupation as a geopolitical term overlaps in many of its aspects and dynamics with colonization. Both colonization and occupation involve invasive and violent acts (conspiracies, wars, genocides, executions, etc.), the building of settlements, and the construction of historical, ethnic or religious claims to justify one mode of domination or another. In the high colonial era, the European powers (the American case is different) would migrate, settle in the new territory and attempt to exert power over the indigenous people politically and culturally. Unlike the occupier, they do not displace the indigenous people nor do they deport

the masses by force. Hence, the ethical burden of occupation is far heavier. This is why it becomes necessary to comment on the artistic dynamics that Laredj incorporates in *SJG* to expose the “horror” of occupation, which, in reality, is no less appalling than the Kurtzean horror.

The nostalgia that Mai has for Jerusalem intensifies with time, and she continues to reiterate that Jerusalem “is the bread and water of God. It is a city that can contain all; its heart is spacious, its religion is big... and its walls are not for sale” (p. 33). The colours of her paintings, Juba realizes, are the “shadows of an old city whose domes and churches resemble those of Jerusalem – such domes are hardly visible. Time must have turned them into ghosts running towards death” (p. 61). Having been denied the request to be buried in her homeland by the Israeli authority, she wonders: “What is so terrifying about being buried in one’s own land?” (p. 85).

Mai’s colourful butterflies of Jerusalem and Juba’s sonata dominate the poetic images and the narrative structure of the novel. Huggan (2008) argues that “silence and music” can be used in postcolonial writing to either “serve or subvert the dominant discourses of the colonial system” (p. 156). The narrative form of *SJG* is clearly divided into two linguistic patterns: one pattern that is highly poetical and another pattern that is analogous to political manifestos in its blatantly straight-forward message. While the former features significantly in different parts of the narrative, the latter is mainly featured in the lengthy parts in which Mai’s father expresses his outrage at the Arabs who conspired against the City of God (p. 385) and who inflicted “political evil that has been garnished with elegance” (p. 30).

It is also manifest in his indictment of Zionism and the parallelism he draws between the Palestinians’ traumas and the Jewish Holocaust:

Does the European feel the horror of the Holocaust as we do? I do not think so...the Holocaust devoured innocent people who asked for nothing more than life. But what about our horror? Who has heard of it? Who defends it?...It is absurd! It is not us who committed the crime of the century. (p. 92)

Mother-son bond

Fredric Jameson calls for a “radically historicizing psychoanalysis” (in Loomba, 1998, p.142). This process, according to Grant (2008, 148), helps expound the correlations between psychoanalysis and post-colonialism. Kristeva, for example, does not deny the political implications of psychoanalysis as much as she rejects a “simplistic and fetishistic repetition of the political as a criterion for thinking” (in Edmonds, 2009, p.214). Utilizing psychoanalytic approaches to speak productively about political and postcolonial conditions has been a controversial issue. It is not merely a matter of using “the master’s tools to dismantle the master’s house.” Any such tool has proven instrumental when used selectively (and not as a meta-discourse) for analysing colonial and colonized identities and colonial rule and resistance (Loomba, 1998, p. 149).

Psychoanalysis has often been argued to be sympathetic to postmodernism. Freud discusses a fragmented and dissimulated psyche and an irrational and incoherent unconscious. Although many of his ideas are grounded in modernism, nevertheless, he is concerned with representations rather than presentations and with exposing the instability of human subjectivity (see Hoorick,

2001). Yet, it is Lacan who “arguably transformed psychoanalysis from a modernist to a postmodernist discipline” (Hoorick, 2001, p. 19). Further it is Freud’s obsession with phallocentrism and father-centeredness that has led to “a huge counterrevolution in psychoanalysis...in favor of a mother-centered psychology,” that is “Oedipal psychology is downgraded in favor of pre-Oedipal psychology, where the relations between mother and infant assume great importance” (Hoorick, 2001, p. 131).

The mother/Mai-son/Juba relationship as developed in the novel attests to how a psychoanalytic approach can yield political connotations without being over-anxiously political. In *SJG*, nature is the intermediary through which political anger and hard-hitting resistance are contained. The special mother-son relationship in *SJG* is mutually redeeming – even if only aesthetically. Mai, or rather her ashes, eventually achieves union with the wind and earth of Jerusalem, thus invoking the traditional literary association between the mother and the land/homeland. Her nurturing ability as a mother is further emphasized when, although already dead by the time of the September 11 attacks, she salvages her son’s life and prevents him from being killed with the thousands who were killed in the attack (p. 66, p. 561); Juba wonders: “What’s next, yamma?¹¹ Thanks for offering me another fate – even when you are dead – to be saved from being murdered by lunatics...what was the fortune that drew me that morning towards your grave, mother?” (p. 562).

After Mai’s death, her agent tells Juba: “you had a mother who gave you all the beautiful things...you have all the right to love her...and to refuse to cut the umbilical cord that connects you to her” (p. 80).

Her death does not stop Juba from continuing to “desire to listen to [her] and sleep on [her] bosom like when [he] was a child” (p.89). He struggles to complete his sonata and feels “the sharp music and the moaning that resides in his depth – but to no avail.” He also “feels the music of nostalgia on the tips of his fingers, but there is something that is obstructing its flow” (p. 89). Reading his mother’s diary and empathizing with her sorrow and joy, he feels inspired and eventually completes his long-awaited sonata, which he calls “Sonata for My Mother.” Mai does something similar to what Pluth identifies as the function of the mother when she “incarnates an Other who has the power to answer the child’s demands” (2007, p. 71): The mother is resurrected, urging her son to complete the sonata: “No. I will never leave this place, ever. Didn’t you promise me? So, I will not budge from my place unless I listen to the sonata that you made me look forward to its completion...The dead also need the touch of the living to go on dreaming and not to surrender to the subjugation of the endings...no...do not bother...I will stay here...now everything has become alive, in harmony and beautiful in your head. (p. 575)

The centrality of the mother is clearly emphasized in the novel. Juba is introduced to his father through what Mai has to say about him. The father hardly had any significant impact on his son. The situation is reminiscent of that described by Lacan: “the paternal function comes into being by virtue of what the mother says of the father: real fathers, apparently, have little to do with it” (In Pluth, 2007, p. 71). Lacan’s post-Freudian theory is based on shifting “the emphasis from the father (whose figure always has frightening features...) to the mother... He shows that human desire cannot find its

place without questioning its link with the mother's desire" (Rabaté, 2001, p. 13). By pushing her son towards success, Mai fulfils the function defined by Lacan; she is "all the omnipotence of the subject of the first demand, and this omnipotence must be related back to the Mother" (Rabaté, 2001, p. 63; see also Beardsworth, 2009).

Hoorick (2001) contends that remembering the past is psychologically regenerative (see also Beardsworth, 2009). Mai's paintings and colours are markers of the subconscious call or desire for the lost homeland. Hence, the collages in Mai's paintings reflect the extent to which her life is torn to pieces and her identity resists narrow and mono-dimensional definitions. Unaware that it is the pain of loss that makes her a successful artist, she tells her son that she prayed for him "to be protected from the painful feelings of loss" (p. 20). Yet, it is the loss of the mother that enables Juba to complete the sonata and thus proceed towards being. Kristeva maintains that «the maternal feminine is a lost past that is constitutive of the subject in its separateness and connections with others." According to her "art and literature are the recovery of 'the lost,' being the Other (the maternal feminine)" (in Beardsworth, 2009, pp.128-129; p.135). Mai has also lost her mother at a very young age. Her artistic creativity is an expression of both her lost land and her lost mother. Mai repeatedly laments her early loss of her mother: "I never had enough of the face of my mother, who was stolen from my hands...to this the day I have to imagine her caressing my hair so that I can close my eyes" (p. 126).

Nature-assisted resistance: a non-invasive antidote

The association between women

and nature is a vibrant presence not only in Western culture but also in Arabic culture. Goodbody (2007) notes that, in different historical periods, nature assumes different connotations that are of cultural significance to the period (see also Wolloch, 2011). Interestingly, *SJG* does not seem to be sensitive to concerns expressed by social-constructivist ecofeminists who mainly, unlike spiritual-essentialists, resent the representation of mothers or females as nature or the motherland. Social-constructivist ecofeminists are critical of what they see as misogynist connotations of such metaphorical uses. The connection between the female and the land is perceived to reinforce biologically based ideologies of female subordination to men. It complies with hierarchical oppositions in which women emerge as nature and nurturing and men as culture and rationality (see Milne, 2012; Mayer, 2011). The association is viewed as universalizing and an effacement of women's cultural, political and social specificities (Grewe-Volpp, 2006; see also Rugg, 2007). The death of Mai's mother is simultaneous with the loss of homeland. Mai urges her son: "Disperse me, as your grandfathers do when they cultivate a fallow land, on my first land, if you can...don't forget me in my grave; graves die out of forgiveness. I cannot tolerate desolate lands even when I am dead" (p. 494).

Landscape and nature contour many of the narrative aspects of *SJG* and interweave in a manner that "resemble[s] the processes in which, in an ecological view, life organizes itself" (Zapf, 2006, p. 56; see also Roos and Hunt, 2010). Mai's state of mind reverberates melodically with the rotation of seasons and swings in a diversity that resembles the diverse colours of her Jerusalem butterflies. Laredj's utilization

of nature/the environment is similar to a romantic view of nature as a whole organically unified with humans (see Westling, 2007). Mai explains to her son why she wants her ashes to be scattered over the land of her dreams:

If my ashes are placed in their actual places, they will leak and settle in the hearts of the plants, the flowers, and the colours of the butterflies. I will remain alive in the singing of the birds, as my mother used to tell me, in the layers of the lovers' flower, and in the sap of the plants. We don't die when we choose to die, but we die when we accept the endings that fate imposes on us. (pp. 166-167)

With the rise of the environmental movement and in its attempt to reconsider humans' relationship with the natural environment, nature has begun to assume an ecocritical trajectory, focusing on an angle of ethical attention and an ethical role. Gatta and Glotfelty define ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment, [taking] an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (in Milne, 2012, p.139). By creating this organic unity between Mai's ashes and nature, Laredj establishes what Goodbody sees as "respiritualisation" of nature, thus creating "a counter-balance to the hegemony of anthropocentrism and instrumental reason" (2007, p. 270; see also Westling, 2007). Laredj is focused on depicting the seasons, the colours of trees and butterflies, clouds, and other elements in nature as inspirational sources for Mai's artistic creativity. This depiction calls to mind Zapf's account of productivity as the outcome of linking "the cultural memory to the biophilic memory of the human species" (2006, p. 67).

Acknowledging postcolonial eco-

criticism as a site for incurring a constructive transformation of our relationship to the world, Huggan draws attention to modes of tension between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. For, while postcolonialism is anthropocentric and "committed first and foremost to the struggle for social justice," it is "insufficiently attuned to life-centred (bio or ecocentric) issues and concerns" (2008,161). Yet, both fields remain committed to "improving the conditions of the oppressed" (2008, p. 176). Additionally, Nixon locates further problems between the two by stressing that, while ecocriticism "value[s] ideas of purity" and "ties to place," postcolonialism stresses "hybridization," "border crossing," and "displacement" (In Roos and Hunt, 2010, p. 253).

SJG draws strong links between productivity and loss. Mai's displacement has rendered her a fragmented self who, nevertheless, takes pleasure in her hybrid identity informed by multiple worlds. Her desire to achieve union with the earth, plants, and air of her homeland expresses deep involvement with and nostalgia for this land. By choosing to reconnect with elemental biophilic spaces, she renders herself an offering for Jerusalem and redeems herself for her persistent refusal to visit her city, which has become a city of ghosts. The novel intertwines the biotic and the political, demonstrating one of the important aspects that characterizes postcolonial ecology (Deloughrey, 2012). For, ecocriticism, according to Westling, "illuminate[s] the ways literature opens upon the many voices of the world and reveals the human enmeshment within the biosphere" (2006, p. 45; see also Milne, 2012). Mai is reconciled with nature; she humanizes the land and becomes a vibrant body that is symbi-

otic with her environmental surrounding.

Conclusion: Eco/chimerical resistance?

Postcolonial ecology/green ethics are based on unfolding how contemporary postcolonial crisis echoes and continues with ecological crisis (Huggan, 2008). In *SJG*, ecology is a vivid presence that maps many of the aesthetic aspects of the novel. The use of ecology in the novel does not basically differ from traditional depictions of nature in many literary works across different cultures. Furthermore, such use is not shown to be specifically instrumental in alleviating ecological crisis; rather, the postcolonial subject (Mai) emerges as perfectly harmonized with nature, thus expressing a mode of integration with a landscape that is portrayed as already perfect. Both the ecological imagery and the psychoanalytic connotations in *SJG* interoperate to enhance the aesthetic/poetic dimension of the novel. The novel ends with a beautiful vision that is suffused with a certain nihilistic tendency— a vision that prescribes a limit to what a Palestinian can ultimately offer/sacrifice to return to the homeland and puts an end to occupation and oppression. Resistance is rendered a delicate and frail process that corresponds with Mai's ephemeral butterflies resurrected in rainbow colours:

Juba's fingers drowned in the "Sonata for Absence." From the wide window, he saw the New York morning unusually lit and drowned in beautiful shine that he wished to embrace along with the clear sky, and the halo of a star whose shadow remained still on the right corner of Mami's piano [the one that Mai inherited from her aunt] and overshadowed all the other stars in its light. Then he saw a dove that was looking at him warmly with baby eyes...when the dove flew up high, a beautiful line in rainbow

colours was drawn in the horizon, forming a semi-circle in which thousands of colours merged— colours that reminded him of Mai's butterflies – the missing butterflies of Jerusalem. Death has subsequently withdrawn with all its daunting smells and fatal accidents, leaving behind a fragrance reminiscent of the violet of the mountain of the wild olive that he smelled for the first time while crossing the narrow streets of Jerusalem, the Jaffa oranges, and the swishes of the butterflies seeking out places amid a wedding ceremony of fugitive colours in the hidden places of the old city – the city of God that is afraid of its new prophets. (pp. 565-566)

Mai's desires, her postmodern identity, and her postcolonial pain all dissolve in the elemental nature of which she becomes part; she finally finds a home in the world of nature and in the colours and swishes of Jerusalem butterflies. The fact that it is her grave in New York that saves her son's life suggests a continuous dialogue between two spaces: the homeland and the hosting land of the diaspora. While Mai's ashes merge with the ethereal, the ghostly, and the horizon in the poetic realm, the actual impact manifests in the deliverance of Juba. Mai acknowledges her own defeat by confirming that "I know that Jerusalem is no longer my Jerusalem; it has been inhabited by so many ghosts that I can no longer identify with" (p. 85). Her inability to identify with her homeland carries her away from the overwhelming majority who still painfully and persistently do. Although haunted by the Jerusalem butterflies, she is completely cut off from other Palestinian women. Her lifestyle does not basically differ from that of other Western women. She demonizes her "veiled aunts" and accuses them of ignorance and a lack of taste. She comments

on them: “They were full of light when they came to New York. After a few years, they veiled” (p. 330). She describes them as greedy and insensitive (p. 329, p. 330) and then admits that she was “was painting the ugliness of [her] aunts and their husbands” (p. 380). Laredj both embraces and excludes many categories of the “other.” His choices often surface as a proof of the type of “liberalism” with which he likes to identify; hence the depiction of veiled women in the novel as repugnant stereotypical images (see Al-Riyahi, 2009a).

Harvey confirms that “postmodernism comes dangerously close to complicity with the aestheticizing of politics upon which it is based” (1990, p. 117). Laredj’s novel is significantly informed by instances of the “postmodern anesthetization of politics,” which, even if “it only appears radical...is essentially conservative and tends to prolong the imperial” (Gugelberger, 2012, p. 386). Mai, according to Juba, “won the most powerful tool for life: art – the ability to play with colours to create a parallel life – one that is beautiful and amazing” (p. 126). Juba’s above testimony privileges “aesthetic gratification” and works to mitigate a vision of resistance that is politically effective in a Palestinian context. Although torn by painful memories and nostalgia for a lost homeland, Mai and her father hardly raise ethico-political questions pertaining to the role that Western politics, or the new space they inhabit, play in exacerbating the Palestinian dilemma. She is constantly caught between the desire to belong to one space and to claim one past, on one hand, and the need for continuity and freedom, on the other hand. Mai eventually discovers her colours, emphatically acknowledges that her city has become a land of ghosts, insists

on being absorbed by the ethereal sphere, and chooses to merge with the ephemeral. Aesthetic values grounded in postmodern rhetoric take considerable precedence over political and ethical values conducive to triggering viable political responsibility and action. The indulgence of interweaving these platonic visions throughout the novel and more insistently towards its end may downplay the traumatizing repercussions of Palestinian losses. It also can work to neutralize the magnitude of violence perpetrated against Palestinians, thus resonating with an official Western discourse that systematically mystifies the reality of occupation and the violation of basic human rights it incurs. In this context, Eagleton’s warning is worth noting: postmodernism cannot remain “forever free-floating” because our subjectivity arises from our “ethical responsibilities,” which must interrupt the unethical (2004, p. 193). The aesthetics that Laredj promotes and configures intensively in Juba’s final poetic vision are mutually exclusive and fail to avoid confronting political economy and global power.

Spivak (in Gugelberger, 2012) and McGowan (2012) envision postcolonial writing as a site of resistance that goes beyond nihilistic tendencies. *SJG* offers perspectives that do not essentially differ from this type of academic postcolonialism, which is regarded as complicit with the dominant Western political discourse (see Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Arac, 1989). *SJG* can be read as relishing an insight of postmodern rhetoric that is an “accomplice rather than an antagonist” (Connor, 2004, p. 71). The aesthetics deployed transcends the pain of loss, displacement, and genocide. While Mai’s ashes are scattered in the sphere and nature, her bones emerge as a regenerative

power that operates at an individual and private [emphasis mine] level through saving Juba's life.

Al-Nowaihi (2000) maintains that:

Perhaps the notion that we are creating a new language and transcending history is only an illusion, but it is an illusion that is necessary. We cannot abandon the struggle with and for our world. Our writing may not change ritual into reality, but if we move out of the game, then our narration is thus replaced by the silence of death. (p. 388; see also Beardsworth, 2009)

Arguably, Kristeva resents the prescription of positivistic stands in politics, stressing that monolithic and ethical advocacy is the attribute of totalitarian regimes (in Oliver, 1993). Laredj exposes the horror of occupation and the traumas experienced by an uprooted Palestinian woman. He narrates a story from the perspective of the oppressed and the occupied in an attempt to give voice to the subjugated. In doing so, he also paves the way for considering "the transformative power of imagination" and its ability "to create new possibilities of thinking" (Huggan, 2008, p. 13). I would like to conclude with Said's analysis of the role of the imagination and the aesthetic – a role that, interestingly, is not devoid of an ecological overtone but rather "a poetic, world-making one, in which the human relationship to the more than-human world and to a buried past must be reached for and conceived even if this nationalist recovery risks being romantic» (1993, 70).

1. The novel was originally written in Arabic and translated afterwards into many languages but not into English. The English quotations cited in the article are my own translation from Arabic.

2. "Waciny Laredj is born in 1954. He is a Professor at the Sorbonne University in Paris and the Central University of Algeria. He has written many novels dealing with Algeria's history and its harsh upheavals. For the past ten years he has produced work on the tragedies of the Arab nation, questioning the sacred and static account of its history. His books are published in Arabic and French." Available at: <http://www.arabicfiction.org/author/56.html>. Accessed on 9 November 2013.

3. Available at: <http://www.arabicfiction.org/author/56.html>. Accessed on 9 November 2013.

4. "The International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) is an annual literary prize run with the support of the Booker Prize Foundation in London and funded by the TCA Abu Dhabi in the UAE. The Prize was launched in Abu Dhabi in April 2007 with an intention to address the limited international availability of high quality Arab fiction ... The initiative was based on a suggestion that a prize modelled on the successful Man Booker Prize would encourage recognition of high quality Arabic fiction, reward Arab writers and lead to increased international readership through translation. The Prize is the first of its kind in the Arab world." Available at: <http://www.arabicfiction.org/about-the-prize.html>. Accessed on 9 November, 2013.

5. *Al-Naqba* means the Palestinian catastrophe. For a documented narrative on the Palestinian exodus that led to the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, the establishment of the state of Israel and the displacement of Palestinians, check the special series on the Palestinian case available at the following link: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/spe->

cialseries/2013/05/20135612348774619.html. The central narrative of the series is provided by Arab, Israeli and Western intellectuals, historians and eyewitnesses. The documentary also presents archival material and documents, many of which are only recently released for the first time.

6. This was "the Zionist military organization representing the majority of the Jews in Palestine from 1920 to 1948," and it was organized "to combat the revolts of Palestinian Arabs against the Jewish settlement of Palestine." Available at: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/251461/Haganah>

7. This is the title of the memoir of the Palestinian-American cultural critic Edward Said, published by Vintage in 2000.

8. In 1947, a Bedouin came upon a cave in the Dead Sea containing jars filled with manuscripts that, since being released, have fascinated scholars and the public into the present. Copies of these manuscripts reached Hebrew University, the Syrian Orthodox monastery of St. Mark, and the American School of Oriental Research, where they came to the attention of American and European scholars. It was not until 1949 that the site of the find was identified as the cave now known as Qumran Cave. Between 1949 and 1956, ten additional caves were found in the hills around Qumran, and thousands of fragments of scrolls were found. The manuscripts of the Qumran caves include early copies of biblical books in Hebrew and Aramaic, hymns, prayers, and some Jewish writings. The authors encouraged a strict and pious way of life, but they seemed to be disapproved of by the Jerusalem priesthood, and they anticipated an imminent confrontation between the forces

of good and evil. Available at: http://www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational_site/dead_sea Scrolls/discovery.shtml.

9. "A mythical bird of great beauty fabled to live 500 or 600 years in the Arabian wilderness, to burn itself on a funeral pyre, and to rise from its ashes in the freshness of youth and live through another cycle of years: often an emblem of immortality or of reborn idealism or hope" Available at: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/phoenix>.

10. The images of the colourful butterflies of Jerusalem are excessively repeated in the novel. Hardly more than five pages pass without a reference to them: 8, 9, 83, 84, 89, 97, 107, 167, and many other pages.

11. This is the colloquial term for mother.

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