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Threads of Resistance: Unraveling Palestinian Identity in Isabella Hammad's *The Parisian*

Direnişin Dokusu: Isabella Hammad'ın *The Parisian* Romanında Filistin Kimliğinin Çözümlenmesi

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ABSTRACT
Isabella Hammad, a British-Palestinian author, drew attention with her 2019 debut novel, *The Parisian*, earning a place on the Granta Best of Young British Novelists list in 2023. The novel navigates the complex nuances of the Palestinian issue through the personal narrative of Midhat Kamal, a young Palestinian sent to France to study in the early 20th century. Through Midhat's journey, readers witness the multifaceted relations between identity, displacement, and geopolitical dynamics that have historically shaped the fate of the Palestinian people. *The Parisian* intertwines the personal and the political, introducing the historical complexities of the Palestinian quest for self-determination amidst ongoing challenges. This paper argues that Hammad's work reclaims historical narratives of colonialism and displacement, constructing a powerful vision of self-determination that challenges dominant discourses. By centering individual trauma within collective resistance, the text reveals how personal identity becomes a site of political transformation.

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Introduction

The deep-seated Palestinian Conflict stands as a historically central issue in the realm of international politics regarding human rights. Seated in the history of colonialism, Palestinian people and their narratives continue to be the center of attention and dispute through evoking fervent worldwide discussions in their struggle for self-determination and sovereignty. After 1948, when the state of Israel was established, the Palestinian Conflict manifested itself as displacement, dispossession, and systematic marginalization. Basically, the cause of the conflict is shaped by the Palestinians' quest for justice, recognition, and the right to exist as a nation, and this quest has resulted in a cycle of violence and resistance for decades. Since it includes several interconnected elements, such as territorial disputes, refugee rights, and displacement and relocation, it is complex to discuss in multidimensional terms. Beyond the historical background of the issue, colonialism, imperialism, and religious identity play an intricate role in the effort to understand it. As the historical conflict continues into contemporary times, by escalating day by day and erupting on October 7, 2023, the Middle Eastern region, once again, took its place on the world's agenda. On the one hand are the fervent worldwide discussions, and on the other hand is the literature in which representations of Palestinian conflict and identity are explored through lived experiences. In *The Parisian*, colonialism is a notable issue having a lasting effect on the protagonist's life. Tracing the roots of colonialism during the last years of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent partition of the region by European powers, the novel expertly analyzes the effects

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of colonialism on Palestinian society. How the colonial background shapes the construction of Palestinian identity is readily evident in the protagonist's conversations with French intellectuals during his time in France. In search for national identity, resistance plays a vital role, as reflected both in the protagonist's small acts of defiance and in the larger struggle for a Palestinian self-determination. Hammad brings the period to life by weaving together the big-picture issues of colonialism and oppression in Palestine with the personal experiences and choices of her protagonist. Through this connection, the story highlights how the broader fight for freedom is mirrored in individual acts of courage and resilience. One of the most significant aspects of the novel that reflects this intersection of personal and collective identity formation is its treatment of language, which plays a central role in portraying the construction of a palimpsestic identity—layered, shifting, and shaped by colonial encounters. In search for a national identity, resistance plays a vital role, reflected both in the protagonist's small acts of defiance and in the larger struggle for Palestinian self-determination.

Historical and Palimpsestic Construction of the Palestinian Identity in *The Parisian*

Born in 1992, Isabella Hammad, the daughter of a Palestinian father and an English mother, is a young British-Palestinian author who unfolds the threads of Palestinian identity in her debut novel, *The Parisian,* published in 2019. After studying English Language and Literature at Oxford University, she completed an in Creative Writing at Harvard. During her education, she started her literary career. Just prior to the publication of her debut novel in 2019, Hammad had already established herself as a short story writer with *Mr. Can'aan,* which was awarded the Plimpton Prize for Fiction in 2018 (Hammad, 2017).

Hammad's literary career accelerated with the publication of *The Parisian*, which received Palestine Book Award in 2019 and was nominated for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. Additionally, notable journals and magazines like *The New York Times, The Paris Review* and *The Guardian* also featured her literary works. The novel also centers on Palestine's colonial past and its struggle for independence, intertwining historical events with personal identity crises.

Later in her career, to consolidate her position as a promising young author, Hammad published a widely-praised novel, Enter Ghost, in 2023 following *The Parisian*. By situating Hammad's profound historical background and distinct literary style within a modern context, the novel reflexively explores contemporary Palestinian life and resistance. It offers a deep investigation into the search for identity. By situating Hammad's profound historical background and distinct literary style within a modern context, the novel reflexively explores contemporary Palestinian life and resistance. It offers a deep investigation into the search for identity, which "could be considered Palestinian literature because it tackles the topics of Palestinian and Arab nationalism (Awajan & Nofal, 2023, p. 157). Although Hammad spent most of her life in London, her works engage in a deliberate dialogue between Arab literature and classical Western literary traditions, drawing such as Edward Said, Ghassan Kanafani, and Naguib Mahfouz to critique and reframe dominant narratives. The long-lasting effects of colonialism and identity are the ideas she critically examines in her work.

Largely inspired by the ancestral ties of the author, Midhat Kamal, the protagonist of the novel, draws from the experiences of Hammad's great-grandfather. The historical accuracy, blended with memoirs and literary narratives, explores depths of transformation, an inevitable requisite to end the colonial domination for the sake of national identity. Midhat Kamal's political and personal experiences are so realistic that the reader finds themselves transcending the boundaries of time and place.

The main setting of the novel is Nablus in Palestine, and this is no coincidence: by choosing this specific location, Hammad intentionally constructs her narrative on a historically and politically charged space central to Palestinian identity and memory. What may surprise readers, however, is the near-total absence of Jewish characters although Samaritan figures do appear, which contrasts with typical expectations of a Palestinian narrative shaped by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Instead, the novel focuses inward—on the internal dynamics, culture, and lived

experiences of Palestinian society. In this context, Edward Said's (1980) observation in *The Question of Palestine* becomes especially relevant: he notes that most Palestinian Arabs were traditionally agricultural villagers, reminding us of a more grounded and everyday dimension of Palestinian life that is often overshadowed by dominant political narratives (12). Urban centers such as Nablus, however, represent an important exception to this pattern. Additionally, he remarks on Nablus among the principal Palestinian cities Arabs built. Even after the Zionist colonies expanded pretty close, they did not leave their land and continued to live there. Besides, "there were also a respectable Palestinian intellectual and professional class, the beginnings of small industry, and a highly developed national consciousness." Hammad, evoking what Said previously wrote about Nablus, writes in the novel that "Merchants were the glue that bound Nablus to the surrounding villages: for the village people they functioned as credit lines, patrons, employers" (2019, p. 210). Nablus holds significant importance for Palestinian Arabs, which is why Edward Said criticizes the prominent Arab novelist Naguib Mahfouz in his novel *Love in the Rain* (2011) for placing the Palestinian guerrilla in Cairo rather than in Nablus (Said, 1980, pp. 156-157). Therefore, Hammad carefully incorporates Nablus, a city of historical importance to Arab Palestinian intellectuals and professionals, as the novel's main setting. In doing so, she avoids the pitfalls that drew criticism toward Mahfouz and once again makes this important locale visible within the fictional narrative.

The Parisian tells the story of Midhat Kamal, a young Palestinian man during and after World War I. The novel delves into political and social changes in Palestine as well as France, together with exploring the search for individual identity and cultural conflicts. Midhat Kamal goes to France to study medicine, where he encounters a different culture and begins to question his own identity and origin. The novel, which opens by capturing the images, sounds and emotions of a crowded city, is to depict Midhat's departure from Egypt to France to pursue his education. In the novel's opening, Midhat's family, particularly his late mother and sister, are shown watching him depart, their emotions a mix of pride and apprehension.

A wealthy tradesman and Midhat's father Haj Taher's decision to send Midhat to France should not merely be regarded as a reflection of his wealth but a strategic decision shaped by the shifting political atmosphere of the Ottoman Empire on the edge of the World War I. He is quite a widely recognized merchant; he also has business partners in Cairo and Syria. Midhat Kamal, thanks to his father's wealth, received a good education; he studied his secondary school in İstanbul, which was then the Ottoman capital. His leave from Nablus portrays how wealthy families used their economic privilege to navigate political instability. Noteworthy is that, none of those places, Nablus, Cairo, Syria, or Istanbul, then reflected different places or identities under the dominance of the Ottoman Empire. Arranging an academic path for his son in France was not only for educational reasons. Haj Taher was also acutely aware of the political upheaval in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. As Hammad (2019, p. 166) notes, "[u]nder the pressure of the Great War, the Empire that so recently had been reforming towards democracy now attacked," which is why he sought to prevent his son from being conscripted. The broader theme highlighted in *The Parisian* is the intersection of class and imperial politics, which is capable of providing mobility for certain individuals while the others are trapped within the empire's shifting demands. Locating his departure as an academic opportunity and a self-preservation, the novel criticizes the instability caused by imperial decline while elite families manage to flee from such uncertain political circumstances.

The reader then witnesses Midhat's estrangement in Montpellier, France, where he experiences a variety of emotions as an unfamiliar person to study medicine. Mithat's first encounter with French culture proves to be a profoundly shocking experience, as the complexities of his dual identity, which emerge through his engagement with a new culture, combined with the challenges of adapting to life in a foreign land, place him under considerable pressure. In other words, Midhat Kamal, the Parisian, experiences a profound sense of estrangement, as everything around him feels unfamiliar compared to what he has known. His cultural displacement and struggle with belonging offer a lens through which to explore postcolonial themes of dislocation and identity,

as theorized by Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha. In his theory-forming work *Orientalism*, Said analyses cultural prejudices and preconceived beliefs. He defines Orientalism as "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said, 1985, pp. 2-3). Midhat Kamal, in *The Parisian*, highlights the struggle with cultural alienation as he is navigating life in France.

Mithat Kamal's first encounter with French culture is a profoundly disorienting experience, as everything around him feels unfamiliar compared to what he has known. Arranging an academic path for him in France, Haj Taher seeks both educational advancement and protecting his son from the pressures of conscription amid the political upheaval of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War (Hammad, 2019, p. 166). His family, particularly his late mother and sister, sees him off with a mixture of pride and apprehension, highlighting the personal and emotional stakes of his departure. In rural regions, Palestinian Arabs were traditionally agricultural villagers, which provides a grounded context for understanding Midhat's sense of belonging; urban centers such as Nablus, however, represent important exceptions to this pattern.

Edward Said's concept of binary opposition, grounded in prejudiced and preconceived notions, offers a lens for understanding cultural alienation under colonial rule. Building on Said, Homi Bhabha's notion of "unhomeliness" in *The Location of Culture* emphasizes the in-between space where identity becomes unstable and belonging is disrupted. These theories are vividly reflected in Midhat's experiences in France, where his emotional and psychological estrangement, along with his sense of otherness, exemplify the postcolonial challenges of dislocation and cultural misinterpretation. Through his fragmented identity, the novel explores themes of cultural dissonance and displacement, portraying the deep psychological impact of imperial domination.

This theoretical framework sets the stage for a closer examination of how the novel conceptualizes the idea of home and belonging, as illustrated by the line: "But for an adult, though allegiances from childhood might subsist, they no longer constituted belonging. You needed something else—and now he had it. Now he would belong" (Hammad, 2019, p. 385). Although the themes of alienation and belonging that we see throughout the novel may seem like a result of a postcolonial situation, Midhat's search shows us that these feelings actually began much earlier—specifically, when migration started flowing from the colonized to the colonizer, or more precisely, when the third world began to encounter the first world. The concept of unhomeliness links the idea of home to a feeling rather than a fixed location. As Bhabha observes, "[t]he unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow and suddenly you find yourself with Henry James's Isabel Archer, thinking you are at home when you are really in the midst of the uncanny" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9). Bhabha's concept of the *unhomely* captures the unsettling feeling of being physically present in a place that appears familiar, yet emotionally and culturally alien. This idea resonates with Midhat Kamal's experience in *The Parisian*, where Hammad powerfully portrays the psychological tension of displacement. Both in France and in Palestine, Midhat navigates spaces that evoke a simultaneous sense of belonging and estrangement. Through his story, Hammad highlights how migration and colonial entanglements disrupt the clarity of "home," making identity a constant negotiation between cultures, just as Bhabha describes. *The Parisian*, through Midhat Kamal, puts a strong emphasis on the experience of displacement where alienation and estrangement are highlighted both in France and Palestine. Showing the displacement of the Palestinian diaspora, Hammad also highlights the difficulties of maintaining a sense of belonging in foreign places and the longing for one's own land. In a world defined by migration and intercultural exchange, Hammad, through *The Parisian*, explores questions of identity through Kamal's connections with France and other Palestinians.

The novel illustrates how colonial and orientalist ideologies shape interpersonal relationships through the character of Professor Molineu and his treatment of Midhat Kamal. When in Montpellier, Midhat Kamal stays in the house of an anthropology professor, Molineu. Professor Molineu has a condescending manner throughout the narration since he evaluates his tenant from a purely orientalist point of view, and his whole relationship with Midhat Kamal is geared towards making observations that proves the backwardness of Muslims. As if to underscore the historically

accumulated colonialist/orientalist prejudices of the Westerners, Professor Molineu does not regard Midhat as an equal human being, but as a person who must be guided and educated. This is evident in their intellectual debates, where Molineu often rejects Midhat's views or considers them less valid because of his cultural background. Even though at first glance the professor manages to hide his perspective against him, he later does not hesitate to express it frankly in their conversations. He establishes himself—or rather his Western identity—as a superior one by uttering his views: "Which might lead you back to the same point about the Orient deviating from the line of progress, but it summoned something else for me too, about origins, primitive form" (Hammad, 2019, p. 104). This remark not only exposes his belief in the inherent primitiveness of Eastern cultures but also reflects the deeply embedded orientalist mindset that defines the "Orient" in opposition to Western notions of progress and civilization. The psychological impact of this power dynamic is later revealed when Midhat, in a moment of emotional turmoil, remembers Frédéric Molineu: "A memory blurted across Midhat's mind. He saw the Nablus hospital in the fog of his derangement, and there, Frédéric Molineu... He looked at the memory in astonishment; anger flooded him, pursued by a kind of holy terror" (Hammad, 2019, p. 368). This haunting recollection suggests that Molineu's orientalist views not only shaped their interactions but left a deep, unsettling imprint on Midhat's sense of identity and self-worth.

Professor Molineu, to prove the roots of Western Orientalist prejudices, in one of their usual conversations with Midhat, self-confidently explains the superiority of the Western culture by emphasizing how significant is the Enlightenment ideas to them:

> But what I meant was, and this is more interesting to me than the onward march to the universal whatever you, that they chose the wrong messiah, Muhammad not Christ and so on—which to be frank has always been slightly apocalyptic for my taste... Then the question becomes, for me at least, the extent to which one might actually recuperate a deviation. (Hammad, 2019, p. 101)

Not trying to offend him directly, the lack of progress of his culture covertly uttered, which was once more progressed, says: "But—is it common to visit France to study medicine, for men in your region? […] I mean, it was only two centuries ago they were using Avicenna's book in the Faculty, but I imagine things have diverged since then" (Hammad, 2019, p. 41). Yet Midhat's prideful past cannot be enough to meet the expectations of a Westerner's understanding of progress, and enlightenment since, to Western perception, philosophy and science are/must be dynamic rather than static. Frantz Fanon's (1961; 2004) analysis of the relationship between the superiority of the colonizer and the inferiority of the colonized should be kept in mind while witnessing Midhat and French intellectuals' conversations: "Every effort is made to bring the colonised person to admit the inferiority of his culture which has been transformed into instinctive patterns of behaviour, to recognize the unreality of his 'nation'" (p. 45). Validating Fanon's observation, Molineu dismisses what Midhat says since the progress of the east was like a tale from the past rather that a present dynamism. Midhat, unaware of Molineu's manner towards him, thinks that there is a friendship between them and acts accordingly, however, when Midhat stumbles upon Molineu's anthropological notes about himself, it causes Midhat profound sadness because he has become an object of a research or "the object of the knowledge" (Parla, 1985, p. 12) rather than a human being from Molineu's side. When Midhat heartbrokenly asks Molineu why he was being considered as a subject of his study, the answer he received was exactly the kind of answer supporting and even confirming the orientalist perspective of the West as he became the object of a study, because he is "in the service of knowledge" (Hammad, 2019, p. 534).

Midhat tries hard to define himself as an individual, yet he feels reduced to an object of study. The disappointment caused by this feeling affects both his intellectual relationship with Molineu and his romantic affair with Molineu's daughter, Jeannette. Though Jeannette and Midhat have an emotional attachment towards each other, Jeannette is more interested in Midhat's life back in Palestine. Jeanette often asks Midhat about his life in Palestine because she finds his cultural background rather fascinating. This curiosity is a double-edged sword because it expresses both an authentic interest in his surroundings and a form of exoticism. This tension is closely related

to how Orientalism operates as a system of knowledge and power. As Turner explains, Orientalism frames the East not merely as different, but as something to be cataloged, understood, and ultimately dominated*:* "Orientalism is a discourse which represents the exotic, erotic, strange Orient as a comprehensible, intelligible phenomenon within a network of categories, tables and concepts by which the Orient is simultaneously defined and controlled. To know is to subordinate" (1994, p. 21). For example, by asking questions about Midhat's customs and practices, Jeanette shows her desire to learn more about him, while at the same time drawing attention to their different cultural backgrounds. While their relationship may have started with mutual curiosity of each for the other, this curiosity is not enough to sustain their affair. Social pressure, personal disagreements and their different cultural and religious backgrounds set the stage for the relationship to end. Midhat's emotional and intellectual disappointment drags him from Montpellier to Paris where he adopts a more hedonistic lifestyle at first. His complicated and passionate relationships further complicate his sense of belonging and identity since he navigates the cultural and social difference with his romantic affairs.

A combination of personal struggle, cultural exploration and intellectual growth characterizes Midhat's experiences in Paris, where his sense of self becomes increasingly complex. Rather than simply offering new opportunities, Paris emerges as a space in which questions of identity and belonging become more pronounced. As Midhat himself reflects, the city turns him into "An outsider, a preacher, accessible to everyone" (Hammad, 2019, p. 484), a description that captures both his visibility and his ongoing sense of not fully belonging. This moment points to a deeper tension surrounding belonging, a concern that would later become central to postcolonial discussions. Within this context, Midhat's position can be better understood through a postcolonial lens. His time in Paris does not resolve his identity; instead, it places him in an in-between space shaped by both similarity and difference. As Homi K. Bhabha suggests, the colonial subject becomes the "[o]ther, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86). Midhat reflects this condition, as he comes to see that even small differences can prevent full acceptance into the dominant culture. In this sense, his experience also resonates with Edward Said's idea of Otherness, where difference is maintained through subtle but persistent distinctions. As a result, Midhat's identity in Paris develops through negotiation rather than resolution. Caught between his background and his present surroundings, he does not fully belong to either a Palestinian or a Western context. Still, this in-between position allows him to form a sense of self that, while divided, offers a certain kind of balance. This is most clearly expressed in his realization that he "was two men: one here, one there" (Hammad, 2019, p. 552), highlighting both the fragmentation and the sense of belonging that emerge from his dual experience.

Grounded in different political movements and ideologies, more specifically from nationalism and socialism, Midhat starts to worry about the future of his homeland. In accepting his national identity, Midhat concludes he "would call himself a Palestinian Arab" (Hammad, 2019, p. 39). Beyond any doubt, Hani Murad, an Arab nationalism defender, is a great source of inspiration for Midhat's self-realization of his Palestinian identity. The conversations witnessed between Hani and Midhat, explore the conflicts between political activism and self-restraint, tradition and modernity, love and social expectations. Through their conversations, Hammad explores issues of identity, belonging and the challenges involved in navigating various political and cultural contexts. The contrast between Midhat's more cautious and thoughtful demeanor and Hani's fiery nationalism serves to underscore the diversity of perspectives present in the Palestinian struggle for autonomy. Hani believes in the struggle for an autonomous Palestine, and sees British rule as an obstacle which should be thrown by bringing together different voices: "To accept any British institution was to accept British rule" (Hammad, 2019, p. 445). The quote encapsulates that he views even partial corporation with British authorities as a form of submission. Hani's conviction contrasts with Midhat's hesitant and conflicted attitude, underlining the ideological divisions among the ones fighting for Palestinian self-determination.

One of the most significant points in the novel that portrays how the palimpsestic identity, a useful hermeneutic tool for analyzing the layers (Janette, 2014, p. 155), is constructed is its treatment to language. Although the novel is written in English, words, and expressions in Arabic (and French sometimes) are randomly sprinkled in the narration. In postcolonial theory, a concept called metonymic gap is used to describe such situations: "The metonymic gap is that cultural gap formed when appropriations of a colonial language insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language, or concepts, allusions or references that may be unknown to the reader" (Ashcroft et al., 2000, pp. 122-3). The key point is that this is an indication of the sophisticated cultural techniques of the postcolonial text, rather than a translation error or a warning that English is inadequate. The use of untranslated words such as *mu'allim, ya'ni, kuluna, habibi, inshallah, ya Allah, shukran, marhaba*, in the narration unexpectedly or/and expectedly, essentially contributes to arousing curiosity of the reader. The realist delusion that we are miraculously situated in a foreign country while still understanding everything said is shattered by the untranslated words. "They poke small holes in this experience, as though to remind us that the illusion is an illusion, that realism is just another convention" (Creswell, 2019). However, what Hammad aims to achieve might not be degraded to reveal literary artifice. The use of such Arabic words and expressions also questions the deeper understanding of readers' perception of "Palestinian characters—a more pointed and even disquieting idea" (Creswell, 2019). On-standard English works can serve as a forum for intercultural dialogue. These materials, including literary texts and theoretical frameworks, shed light on various cultural idioms are translated and modified for use in English. They help clarify the subtleties and complexities in translating cultural meanings across languages. The concept of "cross-cultural contact zones," as theorized in postcolonial studies, facilitate interactions that offer a unique perspective on the similarities and differences between cultures. In this context, texts on cultural translation offer diverse perspectives that enhance the study of how meanings shift across linguistic and cultural boundaries in cultural translation process. In other words, "The transcultural text is a space of negotiation, a space in which the boundary between self and other blurs" (Ashcroft, 2015, p. 86). In the novel, this negotiation becomes evident as the "other" gains the ability to show itself within the dominant language and culture's space, blending elements of its own language and identity.

While Arabic words appear occasionally in the text, the novel stands out as a notable example of Palestinian literature precisely because it is written in English. In her author's note to *Mornings in Jenin*, Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian-American author and activist, mentions that during a conversation with Edward Said, he complained that "the Palestinian narrative was lacking in literature" (2010, p. 252). Said's complaint or lament is certainly not because there is no Palestinian literature, but because literary pieces are not widely read and recognized unless they are written in English. Evidently there are some notable writers "wrote about the Palestinian issue and highlighted its history. Among those are Ghassan Kanafani, Mourid Barghouti, Radwa Ashour, and Elias Khoury. However, all their great works were written in Arabic and were not widely read outside the Arab World" (Rahman, 2021, p. 106). To address and fill this gap, Abulhawa has undertaken this task. Her great admiration for Said, what he did for the Palestinian issue, and his articulation of that lacking are among the most important factors motivated Abulhawa to write a book about Palestine in English: *Mornings in Jenin* which is translated into twenty-six languages and internationally acclaimed and recognized. Guided by Said's address and Abulhawa's footsteps, Hammad, with her debut novel *The Parisian*, has significantly contributed to filling this gap through her writing. Beyond being written in English, another merit that the novel has is the time span it covers, while most of the texts written about Palestinian issue examines the era commencing from the 1940s onwards, it chooses to look the origins of the Palestinian issue arising from the last years of the Ottoman Empire in 1914 and to 1936 and how the society is affected by the changes in rule and Zionist immigrants (Rahman, 2021, p. 106). By extending its narrative to an earlier period, the novel underlines the long-lasting social, cultural and political transformation in the society which paves the way to the establishment of Israel. This approach challenges the conventional focus on mid-20th century events by showing how colonial interventions prepare the later conflicts.

Historical Context, Identity, and Belonging in Midhat Kamal

After spending several years in France, Midhat returns to Nablus in 1919, where his life undergoes a major change since he tries to establish a balance between his experiences in a foreign land and expectations of his homeland. The struggle to adapt to the changing political environment in Palestine and the pressures from his family and community characterize this period. Remained trapped between imperial rule and the fight for autonomy like Palestine, Midhat finds himself in uncertainty feeling neither fully belonging to his Parisian past nor settling into Nabulisi society. Midhat's return to Nablus coincides with the political uncertainty in Palestine started with the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the British rule, and the beginning of this uncertainty is something that even people living there are unaware: "How did the riots actually begin?—that was one question people asked" (Hammad, 2019, p. 363). Caught between the imperial rule and the fight for autonomy like Palestine where "the past becomes a kind of private philosophy" (Hammad, 2019, p. 484) Midhat also feels neither fully belonging to his Parisian past nor Nabulusi society.

In Nablus, Midhat resumes his family's tradition and opens a shop called "Nouveautés Ghada." The name of the shop is evidently the very reflection of his attempt to integrate his European experiences into his new life signaling his continued connection to abroad and in-betweenness. The French name directly symbolizes his liminality, or an attempt to combine his Westernized past with his Palestinian present (Hammad, 2019, p. 468). Not only the name of his shop but also his business partner who is a Samaritan is the indicator of his being in-betweenness. Just as Palestinian identity being refined under British rule, Midhat also searched for the ways of finding his place. Midhat who "was not a political activist" (Hammad, 2019, p. 468) faces harsh criticism from the Palestinian side.

He is neither a political activist nor a typical Nablusi citizen, and is instead often marked as someone who "had gone into business with a Samaritan" (Hammad, 2019, p. 468), which already positions him slightly outside familiar social categories. In this sense, both his personal and professional life reflect the broader historical transformations taking place in Palestine. Following the Nabi Musa riots of 1920, which mark one of the early expressions of resistance against British rule, Midhat's awareness of political realities gradually begins to take shape; however, he still hesitates to fully commit himself to political activism. Within this shifting context, Midhat's marriage to the daughter of Nablus's mayor becomes an important moment in his life. Rather than being a simple personal development, this marriage also reflects how identity and belonging are negotiated through social relations. In this sense, it also gains a more immediate meaning in Midhat's own way of expressing change: "Yes," said Midhat with energy, grappling for the reins, "marriage changes everything. In fact, I wasn't actually thinking about politics when I made that remark—" (Hammad, 2019, p. 483). In other words, what seems like a private turning point is also closely tied to the wider social and historical structures around him, suggesting that his sense of self is continuously shaped in relation to his environment. The narrative situates Midhat's personal trajectory within the broader social and economic fabric of Nablus, a city shaped by dense networks of merchants, landowners, and religious scholars, as well as by its connections to surrounding regions. From this point on, his life increasingly unfolds in parallel with the historical trajectory of Palestine. Through Midhat's personal journey, the connection between individual struggle and the Palestinian search for self-determination becomes more visible, shaped by moments of negotiation, uncertainty, and change. By the end of the novel, Midhat, like Palestine itself, is unable to reconcile his fragmented self, as he is "caught a darkened flash of his younger self—there standing on the other platform… a young man stepping on a train in Montpellier" (Hammad, 2019, p. 552). In the end, he remains caught between competing identities that do not fully come together.

In parallel with Midhat's life, some pivotal political upheavals also occur. The conflict between Muslims and Jewish immigrants in Palestine has been a long-lasting one beginning from the early

20th century. One of the very first triggers of the tumultuous conflict in history is undoubtedly The Nabi Musa riots, which is also embedded in the narration of the novel. In order to have a deeper understanding of the narration, the unrest should be read within its own historical context first. In 1917, the British troops came to Jerusalem, which also ended the Ottoman rule in the region. Three years later, in 1920, the first shift from the spontaneous violence to organised and communal violence occurred Nabi Musa riots. The turbulent moments in the history beginning with a transition from the Ottoman rule to the British rule, then, "the establishment of the Zionist Commission, the spread of Palestinian nationalism and the politicization of the local elites were all signs that a paradigm shift was ready to take place" (Mazza, 2015, p. 180).

The Parisian, through intersecting, characters' lives with the historical events, locates Midhat right in the center of these events. One such moment is the Nabi Musa festival, a significant religious and social gathering in Palestine. Traditionally, this festival commemorates the death of Prophet Moses and symbolizes the Muslim community's historic triumph over Pharaoh. Originally declared a public holiday under Ottoman rule and later upheld by the British Mandate and the Kingdom of Jordan, Nabi Musa was more than just a religious celebration; it reinforced social, ethical, and religious ideals while fostering a sense of unity and solidarity among Palestinians. However, over time, the festival took on political overtones, evolving into a platform where national identity and resistance were expressed. On the day of the pilgrimage from Jericho to Jerusalem, speeches from city leaders, including the mayor, inflamed the public, as "Nebi Musa, the Muslim pilgrimage to the tomb of Moses in Jericho, had recently become the most significant religious festival in the region" (Hammad, 2019, p. 340). As tensions rose, the crowd chanted, "Palestine is our land, the Jews are our dogs!" (Hammad, 2019, p. 352). What began as a religious event escalated into a violent confrontation, resulting in the deaths of five Jews and four Muslims, along with multiple injuries. Following these riots, Jerusalem itself underwent a transformation, shifting ""from a space for the development of citizenship" into "a sacred space" marked by heightened national and religious tensions" (Mazza, 2015, p. 190). Midhat comes across with a group of pilgrims from Jericho to Jerusalem who are shouting out "a Zionist son of a dog" (Hammad, 2019, p. 363) as if to repeat the collective and public perception. The Nabi Musa riots are vividly and intensely depicted in the narration through Midhat's first person witnessing while he is capturing the chaos and violence of the event. Despite his initial reluctance, Midhat is carried away by enthusiasm of the gathering and joins in the hymns. The portrayal is quite in detail, with Midhat witnessing a violent fight with crowd that causes him to experience an interesting combination of communion and panic. The emotional and physical turmoil experienced by Midhat puts him into a mixture of fear and sense of unity with the other protesters. The complexity of his emotions and the escalating tensions in the region are most successfully portrayed with this historical moment both for him and for the Palestinian history. The intense scenes show the deep unrest and complex social dynamics emerging in the period.

Following the riots, Midhat and Hani becomes much aware of what is happening around them in terms of politics since the number of Jewish immigrants are increasing gradually. Hani, in one of his letters, utters his worry about the uncontrolled immigration and its foreseen consequences by writing, "I begin to wonder whether a revolution is what we need in Palestine, as they have in Syria... Our tragedy is that the Palestinian national movement currently has no strategy" (Hammad, 2019, p. 450). Hani is more involved in the politics with his involvement in Palestinian Nationalism. Also, he finds himself in deeper conversations with Midhat where they overtly or covertly revolve around Zionist movement and British colonial rule in Palestine. In one particularly poignant incident, Hani expresses his unease and anger about the growing number of Jews and accuses British policies that favor them. Hani frankly expresses his disturbance by the policies of British rule, and he is worried about being outnumbered by the Jews: "We might be the majority but we are treated as a minority, and I see they intend to make us one" (Hammad, 2019, p. 450). Hani's words are indeed a mirror in reflecting the despair and the fear of the future of Palestinian Arabs during the period, and he continues uttering his worries "More than a thousand Jewish immigrants enter the country each month and it is clear they wish to create a Jewish state" (Hammad, 2019, p. 450). The words summarize the perseverance and will of the Palestinian

people in the face of persecution and hardship throughout the turbulent period of British rule and increased Jewish immigrants. His discomfort from the British rule and Jewish immigrants is so pronounced that he constantly expresses it. In fact, what initially appears to be discomfort gradually gives way to fear and anxiety about the unforeseen or unpredictable future:

> Attacks on Jewish civilians were followed by retaliations against Arabs. In April, the Arabs set up strike committees across the country, agreeing on a list of demands and aims—proportional representation, a stop to Jewish immigration—and embarked on a countrywide refusal to pay taxes or to trade. In the hills, violence heaved against soldiers and Jewish settlers. (Hammad, 2019, pp. 524-525)

Hani is anxiously explaining how the 'others' aiming to control over without resistance, however, their determination and resilience are strong enough not to be defeated or destroyed through their ability to withstand and recover from difficult challenges. Hani's words propose a very strong sense of Palestinian identity and unity among the Palestinians.

Even though Midhat is often unsure about his place and commitment to the cause of nationalism, he, who is busier with his academic and personal interests, finds himself increasingly involved in political debates. Even the more reluctant people, like Midhat, are drawn into ideological debates as political discussions become inevitable in daily life as nationalist movements gain traction and British colonial power tightens its hold on Palestine. A recurring theme in their conversations is the conflict between their personal goals and the group struggle of their people. Midhat is ambivalent, caught between his own goals and the greater political turmoil around him, whereas Hani devotes himself entirely to the nationalist cause. Based on Hani's words and Midhat's hesitations and abstention at some points, the characters' individual reactions to political developments are emphasized, as well as the broader historical background of the novel.

Even as Midhat and Hani struggle with the different paths their lives take, external factors such as the aftermath of the uprisings, the harsh policies of the British, and the spread of Zionist settlements contribute to the strengthening of the bond between them. As the colonial rule is perceived as a source of injustice and oppression, Palestinians' growing anti-British feeling becomes more apparent. The British were regarded as responsible for the evil in the Palestinian lands as a consequence of their harsh policies, which included violent crackdowns during the 1936 Arab Revolt, such as the arrest of Midhat's friend Hani and the killing of his cousin Jamil for participating in the resistance. Therefore, the general perception against the British is uttered as follows: "[t]he strongest tonics concerned the British, source of all evil and oppression, of which the flogged and weeping bodies in the hospital provided sufficient proof" (Hammad, 2019, p. 527). Midhat responds with a more deliberate and thoughtful explanation. He is aware of the underlying issues and reasons for Hani's anger, but he often feels torn between his own goals and the more important political conflicts going on around him. His responses typically show an understanding of Hani's perspective and his own inner turmoil about taking on full-time political activism. Hani is driven by rage and resistance, but Midhat is cautious and doubts the efficacy of political resistance as well as the morality of British control. For example, Midhat may agree with Hani about the injustices that come to light in their conversations, but he may also express concern about the effectiveness of resistance or discomfort with the confrontational tactics being explored. This internal conflict arises frequently as Midhat finds his identity and place in the volatile socio-political environment of Palestine during the British rule. Midhat often struggles to explain his identity and position in a Palestine that is being progressively altered by colonial rule, nationalist movements, and external pressures.

Through the final chapters of the novel, one of the most notable historical events in Arab Palestinian history is also embedded into the narration: The Great Revolt or what is more commonly known as the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 which "represented the most fervent and sustained Palestinian challenge to British and Zionist colonialisms during thirty years of British rule in Palestine" (Anderson, 2017, p. 39). The nationalist uprising against the British Rule and the uncontrolled settlements of Jewish immigration involves a series of violent clashes, protests, and

strikes to overthrow British rule and stop further Jewish immigration. "Although its ultimate defeat has led to negative appraisals of its historical significance, the uprising was in its day the largest mass mobilization in Palestinian history and, at its apex, threatened to overturn the British regime" (Anderson, 2017, p. 39). The narration, the character development or arousing national consciousness overlaps with the historical events that Midhat finds himself more and more involved in the complex and violent struggle for independence and national identity. The revolt is a sort of taste for the characters since the without the revolt they think "there will be nothing to focus on. Ordinary life is boring" (Hammad, 2019, p. 629). The characters' search for an exit from the lives they are experiencing also becomes an adventure they are going through. By the end of the novel, readers may not encounter a definitive conclusion, leaving them in a state of uncertainty or ambiguity, which can be interpreted as a reflection of Palestinian literature's ongoing struggle to define itself, especially as the conflict continues. This ending, however, does not necessarily align with the expectation of all readers for a traditional resolution.

Conclusion

In Midhat's grappling with issues of cultural heritage and national belonging, *The Parisian* explores the effects of colonialism and imperialism on Palestinian identity. Midhat's encounter with French society and then with his own Palestinian society in France and in Nablus offer opposing perspectives on identity construction, highlighting the conflicts that arise between the preservation of cultural identity and assimilation. By situating Midhat between two distinct worlds, Hammad explores how Palestinian identity is shaped and transformed, and emphasizes how historical and geopolitical factors affect identity construction. Moreover, Midhat's personal journey demonstrates the interconnectedness of individual and collective identity as the Parisian. It reflects the larger historical and political influences that shaped Palestinian identity during this very particular period. Through Midhat's narrative, Hammad emphasizes the harmony and resilience of the Palestinian identity in the face of both internal conflicts and external influences. Eventually *The Parisian* offers a sophisticated examination of how Palestinians construct their identities, combining individual stories with broader historical and cultural backgrounds to reveal a complex tapestry of experiences and perspectives.

To conclude, Hammad's *The Parisian* is a testament to art's ability to shed light on the intricacies of human condition. Through her masterful narrative style and nuanced portrayal of Palestinian identity, Hammad enables readers to connect with characters whose lives are affected by uncontrollable circumstances. *The Parisian* provides a timely reminder of the enduring importance of the Palestinian issue and the value in understanding its historical roots as we navigate the complexities of the Palestinian geography. To Midhat Kamal "we do not want any more of that type of history which is the child of the imagination, […] No. Our method is one of precision and accurate data, though these may be of a more mediocre appearance. Careful, patient study—that is the history of today" (Hammad, 2019, p. 370). Hammad, as a Palestinian-British writer, produces works that delve deeply into both the historical and cultural heritage of Palestine and the complexities of modern works. Such achievements of a young writer at the beginning of her literary career promise great potential for her future career.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Declaration of AI Use

Any AI-assisted tools, if used, were limited to language editing. No AI tools were used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The author(s) assume sole responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and final content of the manuscript.

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