

CRITICAL COMMENTARY:

The Politics of the Interior.

Resistance, Whitewashing and Propaganda

in *The Mandelbaum Gate* by Muriel Spark and *The Lord* by Soraya Antonius.

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I. ANTONIUS, SPARK AND I.

A. INTRODUCTION.

'It is in a spirit of opposition, rather than in accommodation, that grips me,' Edward Saïd wrote to explain why the figures of James Baldwin and Malcolm X defined the kind of writing that influenced his own representations of the intellectual's consciousness. 'Because the romance, the interest, the challenge of intellectual life is to be found,' he goes on to explain, 'in dissent against the status quo at a time when the struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them' (1996: xvii). Like the novelist Jean Genet, he could be said, as could I, to have been 'drawn to people in revolt' (Genet, 2003: x).¹

The tension between 'opposition' and 'accommodation' informs my analysis of Muriel Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) ('TMG') and Soraya Antonius's *The Lord* (1986) ('TL') and I will use this to reflect on my choices for my own creative work, *Infra Dig*. All three are novels set in Palestine/Israel but differ significantly. Debates on politics and the novel inform my approach, as does a recent analysis of fictional strategies that tie in with literary techniques referenced in Spark's propaganda training, namely the 'deployment of verifiable facts, evidence, precise information, appropriate tone, narrative coherence, targeting, covert motives, chronological disruption and repetition to construct key elements of fiction,' in her work (Lopez, 2020: 969).

I am specifically interested in fictive depictions of interior space and place / homes and gardens in Palestine/Israel in these novels. When land is contested, writers' choices on how settings, as well as characters, are depicted, can guide readers into positions of opposition or acceptance. I argue that is most apparent when it comes to Palestine/Israel. A question that is central to this commentary is whether these novelists recognised or ignored settler-colonialism and, whichever position they took, I examine what literary techniques they used to persuade the reader of their fiction.

To introduce myself, I am a writer of fiction who has been publishing short stories and novels since 2003, most notably a novel, *Out of It* (Dabbagh, 2011), set between Gaza, London and the Gulf. I recently edited the anthology *We Wrote in Symbols: Love and Lust by Arab Women Writers*, which contained over 3,000 years of prose and poetry writing by Arab women writers on the subject (Dabbagh, 2021). I have also worked on scripts for film, TV series and the stage, as well as writing numerous reviews and articles of non-fiction, mainly on Palestinian art and culture.² My writing is mainly, but not entirely, set in Palestine, where my father is from, or features Palestinian characters. My mother is English and I have lived in both the Arab world (Palestine, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia,

¹ Genet is quoted in Ahdaf Soueif's introduction to the English translation of *Prisoner of Love*, Genet (2003).

² See www.selmadabbagh.com.

Bahrain and Egypt) and Europe (Scotland, England and France). I read and write only in English although I have a passable understanding of both Arabic and French. Before turning to fiction, I studied law and have worked as a lawyer in the field of human rights and international criminal law, focussed mainly on issues relating to Palestine. In early 2022, I started working for a human rights group working for justice in Palestine, the International Centre of Justice for Palestinians (ICJP). I have occasionally written autobiographically about myself and my work (Dabbagh, 2020b) or been interviewed on the subject (Moore, 2014).

My vocational experiences inform my interest in the intersection between law, literature and politics. The centrality of justice issues related to the Palestinians has informed both what and how I read literary texts; how fiction writers position themselves as political actors (or choose not to) informs my critique. I believe in the international solidarity, articulated by revolutionary movements, that encourages writers and intellectuals, no matter where they are from, or what language they write in, to engage meaningfully in situations of injustice (Rooney, 2018).

I have also always been attracted to writers of hybrid ethno- / religious / linguistic backgrounds and exiled writers. Although often depicted as a state of not fully belonging, I also recognise a degree of liberation, found in Edward Saïd's writing on exile. He sees it not just as a negative, an absence, a loss, but also remarks on the 'pleasures of exile, those different arrangements of living and eccentric angles of vision that it can sometimes afford' (Said, 1996: 59). The two writers I selected for my critique, Muriel Spark (1918-2006) and Soraya Antonius (1932-2017), like myself, also come from hybrid backgrounds.

The term 'interior' in the title refers not only to the indoor spaces of buildings but also draws on the term used by the British to refer to inland Palestine during the 1936-39 revolt, when sustained Palestinian resistance against colonial rule hindered British access to the heartlands of Palestine. I chose the cusp of this revolt as the historical setting for *Infra Dig*. How interiors are depicted, in terms of heartlands of resistance against settler-colonial rule, as well as the arrangement of domestic spaces sheds light on how to re-imagine complex interior lives of the past.

The Palestine of my novel does not exist, it is a fictional creation based on a destroyed world of the past. What exists now is a system of apartheid rule, one of the largest refugee populations in the world and a fragmented diaspora. In 2021, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation in the Palestinian occupied territories, Michael Lynk, reported, 'the now 54-year-old Israeli occupation of Palestine – always repressive, always acquisitive – has been metastasizing into something much harsher and more entrenched: the permanent alien rule of one people over another, encased in a two-tiered system of unequal laws and political rights'. He labelled Palestine/Israel as one of the 'greatest diplomatic failures of the past half century' (Lynk, 2021: 9). 'At the heart of Israel's settler-colonial project is a comprehensive dual legal and political system.' In a later report in 2022, he wrote it was a system that 'fitted the international legal definition of apartheid' (Lynk, 2022: 11). This report followed leading Palestinian, Israeli and international human rights

organisations findings that Israel practices a system of apartheid against the Palestinian population under its control.³

The critical, dire and criminal nature of the situation is my perspective, as evidenced in the reports referenced, but that is not the topic of this commentary, nor is a possible solution. 'It is time' Professor Nathan Brown declared in May 2021, as bombs dropped on Gaza, 'to stop whistling past the graveyards of diplomacy' (2021: 1). That is closer to the question at the heart of this commentary, namely how should fiction writers respond to war, apartheid, settler-colonialism, political crises, and situations of grave injustice? How much consideration, if any, should they have pay to international justice systems? Can fiction writers be free to effectively whistle past graveyards?

'Nowhere more enduringly did the mid-century struggle to legislate for human rights crash into the politics of self-determination than in Israel/Palestine,' Lyndsey Stonebridge, a key source for this commentary, observed in *Placeless People* (2018: loc.608). Any novel set in a charged, politically iniquitous environment like Palestine/Israel challenges writers of fiction as to how they position themselves regarding rules-based accountability, international law, colonialism, and authoritarian rule. It requires fiction writers to take risks, to assume responsibilities and not to practice what Saïd views as the most reprehensible of habits for an intellectual: avoidance, 'that characteristic turning away from a difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take' (1996: 100). I have found these expectations to be rarely placed on novelists, either by reviewers or by critics, particularly when it comes to the Palestinians.

B. CREATIVE WORK; *INFRA DIG*, A NOVEL.

Infra Dig is centred around a fictive grand house, Dar al Majlis in Sheikh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, Palestine. A girl of 15, Dunya, meets a boy of 16, Elias, at a time when their country and their families are on the verge of rupture. The novel commences when the Palestinian resistance movement of 1936-39 is about to start and it foreshadows the events of 1948, described as the *nakba* or catastrophe, which led to the division of Jerusalem (1948-67) and the expulsion of close to a million Palestinians from their homes, approximately two thirds of the population at the time.

The Jerusalem house lies at the core of the novel, and the emotional and political affairs of its inhabitants are its story. Grand, extravagant and full of guests, the fictional structure is built on layers of ancient ruins and has been extended into a model of art deco modernity. Urbane, prosperous, multilingual and passionate, the Arab nationalist couple who own it lobby English officials and Jewish intellectuals socially and professionally, while surrounded by servants and distanced from their daughter. Elias's father, Mustafa, is detained by the British as a rebel leader as Elias dreams of moving to Cairo as a member of a band.

³ Notable milestones in finding a system of Apartheid against the Palestinian are the Durban Declaration of 2001. In recent years, a Palestinian coalition of NGOs submitted a report to the UN in 2019; this was followed by reports by B'Tselem (2021), Human Rights Watch (2021) and Amnesty International (2022).

This commentary intersects with my creative work in multiple ways, for the main character in my novel, Dunya ('Didi'), is inspired very loosely by the childhood of the writer Soraya Antonius (1932-2013), author of *The Lord*. Dates, details, names, events, and personalities are almost entirely fictive although Antonius family has been a source of inspiration for the atmosphere in the novel. Dar al Majlis is inspired by a house built in 1930, the 'qasr' or castle, on Karm al Mufti (the Mufti's Vineyard) owned by the al Hussein family. George Antonius, father of Soraya, worked for a time as the private secretary to Hajj Amin Al Hussein, the Mufti of Jerusalem who, fleeing arrest, left Palestine in 1937. George lived in Karm al Mufti with his family – his wife Katy and Soraya – from around 1935. Katy stayed on after her husband's death in 1942. Some sources indicate she left in 1947 following an attack by Haganah on the property. During Jordanian control of the West Bank until 1967, the property was transformed into a hotel, 'The Shepherd.' In 2011, *The Economist* wrote that 'few architectural sites in East Jerusalem, the side of the city that Palestinians see as their future capital, capture the flavour of Palestine's British Mandate more acutely than the Shepherd Hotel' (2011:129).

I first saw the Karm al Mufti home sealed off and abandoned when I lived in Jerusalem in 1992. The Israeli authorities, who continue to illegally occupy East Jerusalem and the West Bank, had deemed it 'absentee property'⁴ and it became the subject of a protracted legal battle, with the Hussein family claiming ownership, before it was taken over in 2006 by a right-wing Israeli settler group, Ateret Cohanim, funded by Irwin Moscovitz, an American casino billionaire.

The takeover is contrary to international law and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The house has since been partly demolished and the historic section turned into a synagogue. Sheikh Jarrah has become the site of extensive Jewish-only settlement in the heart of Arab East Jerusalem. It has also become a focal point of sustained resistance (Jubeih, 2021). I recently published an article on this property and its story (Dabbagh, 2021), and in my work with ICJP, represent another family whose home was demolished on the large Karm el Mufti plot in January (ICJP, 2022). My fascination with Karm el Mufti is legal, historical, political, imaginative and aesthetic. It has come to represent, to me, a fulcrum, or intersection between world orders and value systems.

C. THE CRITICAL COMMENTARY.

i. Selecting The Literary Texts.

The selection of Soraya Antonius's work as a focus of study is more obvious than that of Spark, as she, like myself, is a part-Palestinian (for her, by birth, for me, by blood) writer who wrote in English. Spark is a writer I have long admired mainly for her wit, the element of surprise in her novels

⁴ Israel's Absentee Property Law (1950). A note explaining the workings of this law, which puts land in the hands of the 'Custodian of Absentee Property,' transferring it into Jewish ownership, is found here: https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/legal-opinions/absentee_law_memo.pdf [Accessed 31/7/22].

and her distinctively daring approach to chronological disruption. During the course of my research, I discovered that both of these authors were associated with propaganda. Spark worked in propaganda during the Second World War, Antonius was accused of being a propagandist for her work.

Spark and Antonius have influenced me, not just as writers but as thinkers, decision makers and political actors in different ways. I am impressed by how they have exercised agency and achieved efficacy with their craft. I am aiming at similar audiences, but writing during a different era, following developments in literature, particularly in the vital field of post-colonial studies. Many of the novelists who have written since Spark and Antonius have influenced my own conscience, vocabulary, and the way that I write.

The choice of setting for *The Mandelbaum Gate* and Antonius's *The Lord* (Palestine/Israel between 1917-1970) is not the sole basis for the comparison; Spark's novel was one of the first fictional responses to Palestine/Israel to be published in English by a British author of her stature⁵ and Antonius's *The Lord* was the first novel in English by a Palestinian-born writer. Both writers were insider-outsiders in the context of Palestine/ Israel. In terms of reception, circulation, and impact however, the two novels were in different leagues.

ii. Structure and Aims of the Critical Commentary.

Part I *Introduction* summarises the history of Palestine/Israel that forms the backdrop to *The Mandelbaum Gate* and *The Lord* situating the novels against the demands placed both on law and literature after the Second World War. It introduces the two writers and their novels explaining why I consider 'the interior' to be an important space for enquiry.

Part II, *Politics and the Novel*, considers briefly the potential political impact of literature and the responsibilities of fiction writers (and also journalists upon whose work fiction writers can rely), to not just assume but defend a moral stance on issues of public and international importance. The relationship between propaganda and these writers is considered here.

Part III *Homes and Gardens* focus on spatial imaginings of space and place, which will extend the discussion raised in Part II considering how these literary works not only reflect, but also stimulate, counter and reproduce spatial imaginings being used for political ends.

Part IV, *The Conclusion* of the commentary summarises how the choices made by these writers, both intellectually in terms of their methods of research and creative choices, influenced my own novel, *Infra Dig* and provide some observations as to what I have learnt, but also how I would like to develop as a writer.

Unlike Muriel Spark and *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Soraya Antonius and her out-of-print novel *The Lord* are now almost entirely forgotten. This commentary provides a new critique of Muriel

⁵ Ethel Mannin's novel *The Road to Beersheba* (1963) immediately preceded *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), but Mannin as a writer did not gain anything close to the popularity or literary acclaim for her *Beersheba* novel that Spark achieved for *The Mandelbaum Gate*.

Spark's *Mandelbaum*. In marked contrast with Antonius's obscurity, there are societies and statues in honour of Dame Spark, who won the lion's share of the most internationally prestigious literary awards. It is hoped that this commentary will bring the life and work of Soraya Antonius to the attention of broader audiences in an act of literary recovery.

There is a sharp imbalance of critical scholarship on the two novels and their authors. Spark's work has been widely reviewed and analysed, and she is the subject of several biographies. Antonius's life and work is rarely mentioned even in the growing field of Palestinian literature,⁶ it will therefore be described at greater length.

D. THE WRITERS.

i. The Author Is Not Dead.

I have heard writers say that they would like to be invisible to their reader; that they are nothing more than the driver of a car in the dark, shining their headlights on a scene. Some writers would like the text to stand alone without their lives or personalities being taken into account.⁷ In his novel *Je suis un écrivain japonais* (2008) by the Haitian Dany Laferrière the narrator, 'explains his decision to call himself a Japanese writer, concurring with the French literary critic, Roland Barthes, that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination"' (Danticat, 2020: 15). For the purpose of this commentary however, it is essential to pay heed to 'origin' as well as 'text.'

I include the biographies of Spark and Antonius and the personal exigencies they faced at the time of writing to provide my understanding of their personalities, intentions and how they saw their role as writers in the second half of the 20th century. Establishing who a writer was relies on secondary sources, sometimes controlled by the writer through their relationship with biographers and archives, or through the production of their own autobiographies. All writers are shaped by their origins, families, financial security, class, race, places they've lived, situations they've lived through and people they've met. The media and books they access, and the censorship they live under also come to define them as much as their intellectual and global curiosity, which informs both what they read, and how they read it. I believe that their aspirations for their vocation and the world they live in cannot but motivate how and what they write. How these realities are declared, or disguised, is another matter.

⁶ Rooney refers to Moore-Gilbert's essay, 'Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessoptomism' (2018), which addresses the belated uptake within postcolonial studies of the colonization of Palestine by Israel, tracing the emergence of a new field of postcolonial studies in transnational solidarity with Palestine (2018:80). Antonius is not mentioned in Abu Manneh (2016) work on Palestinian literature, which focusses, understandably, on writers in Arabic.

⁷ Debates surrounding the role of the author–reader relationship (e.g., Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author') cannot be embarked on here due to the constraints and focus of this commentary. My perspective is that although these debates were important and meritorious, their influence on how texts are read now is minimal. Agents and publishers scrutinise the author almost as much as they consider the text. I have writer friends who have tried to publish under pseudonyms and been told that publishers will not be interested, if the writer is not present, visible and actively available to publicise the work. There are exceptions, most notably Elena Ferrante who publishes under a pseudonym, but even she was 'outed' by a prying journalist. The exponential growth of literary festivals in recent decades underscores that the author is required to be very much alive, visible and accountable for their words.

Antonius and Spark both wrote in English, were educated, wholly or partly, at British schools and had English publishers. By all accounts, both liked to dress stylishly, socialise and owned distinctive cars and cats.⁸ They have both been described as efficient organisers and articulate speakers. Only one (Spark) was a mother, but one whose role as such was strained (Stannard, 2009: 400). Antonius never married. Spark married unhappily and soon divorced.

David Lodge notes of Spark, 'Most found her eccentric and unpredictable, and some thought she was a little mad – an insinuation which, if she ever heard of it, would cause their excommunication from friendship' (Lodge, 2015: 65). The insinuation of madness was not something that Antonius was immune from either in her later years, nor were excommunicated friends a rarity.⁹ Both writers moved internationally. Antonius ended up living between Cyprus, Lebanon and France, forcibly exiled from her place of birth. Spark was also a nomad, but one of choice, leaving Edinburgh for Africa upon marriage, then London, New York and Rome. Both writers ended their lives in small European villages, Spark outside Arezzo in Tuscany and Antonius in the village of Gadencourt in Normandy.

ii. Soraya Antonius.

Soraya Katherine Antonius (1923-2017) was born and grew up in Jerusalem, Palestine to Egyptian-Syrian-Lebanese Anglo-Francophile parents Katy and George, who were described by their friend E. C. Hodgkin as 'characters too rich and rewarding to be fobbed off in a sentence' (Hodgkin, 1984: 131). Soraya's grandmother Ellen Eynaud was French, British and Austrian. Soraya's father, George Antonius (1891-1942) was Lebanese born and the author of the seminal Arab nationalist work *The Arab Awakening* (1946). During his time in Alexandria before he married, he was a friend of the poet C. P. Cavafy (1863-1933) and the novelist E. M. Forster (1879-1970). George worked both for the British Civil Administration in Palestine and represented the Palestinians as a private secretary to Hajj Amin al-Husseini in the London Conference of 1942. An Oxbridge graduate, he is the subject of at least one biography (Silsby-Boyle, 2001).

Soraya's mother, Katy (née Nimr) was the daughter of the Syrian-Egyptian press magnate, Faris Nimr Pasha and was a woman of significant wealth at the time of her marriage. In Jerusalem she was renowned for her parties and, after her husband's death, had a documented affair with General Sir Evelyn Barker (1894-1983) (Segev, 2001: 468). Soraya's aunt, the artist Amy Nimr Smart (1898-1974), was part of the Art and Liberty group in Egypt (Bardouil: 10).¹⁰

Schooled partially at a Girl's College in Alexandria, Soraya followed her aunt Amy's footsteps in later attending Cheltenham Ladies' College (1949-1950) and then the Slade School of Art.

⁸ Spark had an open-top sports car in Italy according to Alan Taylor (2017), Soraya Antonius drove a yellow Renault, decorated with brightly coloured floral fabrics (photos shown to me by Nadia von Maltzahn, Soraya Antonius's goddaughter). Photographs of Spark's cat feature in Stannard's biography, which Alan Taylor also mentions.

⁹ One acclaimed Palestinian writer I spoke to about Soraya Antonius when I started this research put it simply, 'She's mad and her novels are bad.'

¹⁰ Amy Nimr's work featured in a Tate Liverpool exhibition on Egyptian Surrealism in 2017 and was on display at the Venice Biennale, 2022.

According to the records held by Cheltenham College, there were no other girls of Arab origin at the school. Soraya's home address was registered as Alexandria and then Jordan.¹¹

Descending from members of Presbyterian Orthodox Christian denominations, her grandfather, Faris Nimr, had converted to Protestantism. My understanding is that Soraya was irreligious by nature although her gravestone in Lebanon bears a cross. There is scant biographical information available to date and her papers, at the time of writing, have not yet been archived or made available to the public.¹² E. C. Hodgkin, a friend of the Antonius family, in a draft obituary of Katy, wrote:

Essentially the Arab cause was for her always an anti-Zionist cause, and for that she would do battle anywhere and with anyone. It was to be her daughter, Soraya, so much her father's child in looks and abilities, whose intelligence Katy rated much higher than her own, who would campaign for a more contemporary version of Arab nationalism, though for her too it was Palestine which was to be the overriding cause – one for which she was to sacrifice her career as artist and art critic, only to launch out in her fifties as a novelist of considerable talent – but still with Palestine as her theme. (Hodgkin Papers)

Soraya's own draft biography of herself, provided by her goddaughter Nadia von Maltzahn to me in April 2021, reads as follows:

SA was born in Jerusalem when it was the capital of Palestine and educated in Egypt and England. She worked in Beirut as columnist for L'Orient: Editor of Middle East Forum; Editor-in-chief of Khayat Publishing house; and as a Director of the Fifth of June Society, of which she was one of the founders. She has organised exhibitions on 'Palestine in Art,' (London, 1969) and Palestinian Posters (Beirut, 1972) and wrote and produced 'Resistance -Why?' director Christian Ghazi (1971) a documentary film selected for the Alternative Cinema Festival (Damascus, 1972); the International Festival of Films on Palestine (Baghdad, 1974) and screened in France, Sweden, Denmark and the US.

The Fifth of June Society that Antonius headed was founded in the aftermath of the 1967 war as Palestinians increasingly realised that politically they needed to take their fate into their own hands, rather than relying on Arab state support. The aim of the Society was essentially to speak truth to power and promote the Palestinian cause in the Western media. Other similar initiatives such as those that promoted 'art expression' to convey [the Palestinian] 'voice and cause to all peoples and enable these peoples to participate in our struggle and for us to participate in their struggle too' (TPR, 2022).¹³ The June 5th Society's other members were the British born journalist Rosemary Sayigh (1932-) and Mariam C. Saïd (wife of Edward, c. 1950-) and the artist Vladimir Tamari (1942-2017).¹⁴ It later merged with two other associations to form the Lebanese Association of Information

¹¹ E-mail correspondence with Mrs. R. Roberts of the Archives Section, Cheltenham Ladies College, Dec. 2021 – Jan 2022.

¹² Conversations and communication with Nadia Von Maltzahn. Dr. Von Maltzahn has explained that she has not had the opportunity – for personal reasons – to organise the papers and that, given Soraya's sensitivities about hers and her parent's legacy, it would not be right to disclose them to others, before arranging them according to Ms. Antonius's wishes.

¹³ Quoted in Rooney (2018: 84) with further background to the movement.

¹⁴ When I contacted Vladimir Tamari in 2014, he told me that he and Soraya Antonius were good friends in Beirut between 1967 to 1970 when they were both members of The 5th of June Society. He said they created information kits about Palestine for the 'hordes' of news people who came to Beirut to cover 'the revolution' (email from V. Tamari, 23.12.14).

on Palestine (LAIP). Antonius was also a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) founded in 1964, actively involved in the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), the PLO's official representative of Palestinian women.¹⁵

In 1975, John Laffin in *The Spectator* rebuked Antonius and the society she headed for being propaganda organisations, using 'black propaganda,' and comments on Antonius as follows:

The Fifth of June Society, named for the day on which the six-day war commenced, was run by Soraya Antonius, who now directs LAIP. Highly intelligent and intellectually ruthless — and so feminist that she will feel patronised by this description — Miss Antonius is forging LAIP into a competent propaganda factory. (Laffin, 1975:7)

Although there is no space to replicate Laffin's outraged reporting in its entirety, it appears difficult for him to conceal his admiration for Antonius's abilities. Apart from her being a woman and the sources being Arab, it is hard to understand what exactly Antonius and her colleagues were doing wrong, given the circumstances. He states for example:

The Arabs have had three spectacular propaganda successes already: they have turned the once friendly Afro-Asian nations against Israel, they have bulldozed the PLO into the UN Assembly and Israel virtually out of UNESCO. Now they are mounting a drive to prove that the oil countries are not inconsiderate brutes trying to inflict economic collapse on the rest of the world. (ibid)

Antonius's efforts to convey Palestinian reality to Western audiences corresponded with Edward Saïd's advocacy of the 'power of culture against culture of power' (1996:96) believing that it was possible to effect change in the Middle East through influencing the Western media, cultural production and output. This approach was not wholly embraced by all members of the PLO. Journalist and founder PLO member Shafiq al Hout (1932-2009) writes in his memoir, 'I was not such a fool as to think that we could change American policy through the media. That was impossible, and it was a lost battle from the start because of the power of Jewish influence in the West in general, and the United States in particular' (2011:140). Antonius later in her life became more ambivalent towards the power to influence change through verbal argumentation, saying that 'it may have been better to encourage people to do military service' (2000:263).

A commitment to the Palestinian cause was manifested in Antonius's life's work for Palestinian resistance organisations such as the PLO's General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW). She also wrote non-fiction, on politics, women and architecture, reviews of memoirs and thrillers (1965, 1973, 1979, 2000). Upon her death, she bequeathed a vast collection of Palestinian women's embroidered thobes to St Antony's College and the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford as well as bequests to Palestinian students 'when Palestine is free.'¹⁶

¹⁵ Further research is needed on Soraya Antonius's life. I do not know when she became a member of the PLO although I am aware that she was actively involved in the General Union of Palestinian Women in the 1980s. She writes 'It happens that I sat on a committee of GUPW, some of whose leading lights were women who had played active parts in Palestinian history, some in the 1930s and in 1948, some at the time I met them' (2000:264)

¹⁶ Conversation with Nadia von Maltzahn.15.09.17.

At the time of commencing this study of Soraya Antonius's work, her books had been out of print for many years, although in 2021 interest was shown in republishing both novels.¹⁷ There is also sparse knowledge about the author and her life, even within the growing field of literary and cultural studies on Palestine. When I first became interested in Antonius and her work in 2013, there were hardly any references to her online. I contacted several of her friends and former colleagues. None of them had heard of her for years, were not sure whether or not she was alive and, if she was, where she was. The artist Vladimir Tamari, a close friend of hers, wrote to me of their friendship and told me how she had gone by the nickname 'Tutu,' given to her by her father late into her life.¹⁸

It was not until a chance meeting in 2016 that I discovered that Antonius was alive and came annually to the Middle East Centre in Oxford, visa permitting, to attend the George Antonius Annual Lecture in honour of her father. Regrettably, I was unable to meet with her prior to her death in early 2017, although since then I have been in contact with her goddaughter, Nadia Von Maltzahn. I was also provided access to Israeli archival material of letters and documents taken from the property belonging to the Antonius family. This has been referred to as 'the pink dossier,' in an article in the Israeli press¹⁹ and contains many photographs and letters of the Antonius family seized, apparently, by the Haganah in 1947, following their attack on the house, where Katy was living as a widow. According to the article, attempts to warn the household of the forthcoming attack were not possible as the phone was perpetually engaged.²⁰

iii. Soraya Antonius and the writing of *The Lord*.

In 1973, Soraya Antonius reviewed a thriller, *The Levanter* by Eric Ambler, a writer highly praised by Graham Greene and others and one who is still in print. The novel contained deplorable, odious Palestinian characters, many of whom were refugees and resistance fighters. Antonius concluded her review with the following question:

I know nothing of Mr. Ambler's political allegiances, but throughout this book I asked myself one question: would he, in 1940, have written a book, no matter how 'light' in which the most repellent of protagonists was a German Jew? Can one choose a real tragedy involving the life and death of millions of living people, and airily dismiss it as just a novel? A thriller-writer may have political impunity, does he also have no moral responsibility? (Antonius, 1973: 124).

Very little is known of the writing process of Soraya Antonius, other than what she has written of it herself in 'A Day of Outside Education' (2000). Her political engagement was clear from an early

¹⁷ Email from Nadia von Maltzahn, 6.4.21

¹⁸ Nadia von Maltzahn commentated on one of Vladimir's illustrated letters to Antonius from Tokyo to Beirut in 1991, written on a McDonald's flier into a presentation on exile and friendship. Von Maltzahn (2022).

¹⁹ 'Jay Gatsby in Jerusalem,' 3rd September 2009, Ha'aretz. <https://www.haaretz.com/2009-09-03/ty-article/jay-gatsby-in-jerusalem/0000017f-f87c-d318-aff-fb7f87380000> [Accessed 15/9/22]

²⁰ Collins and Depierre, report on this call differently. After the Partition Plan of 1947, the Zionist leaders, noting that Jewish residents were leaving mixed neighbourhoods (like Sheikh Jarrah), decided that 'the best way to stop that trend [...] was to drive the Arabs out of those neighbourhoods first' (1972: 109). The tactics were psychological, including plastering handbills on doors and Arab cars, with threats telling Arab owners to leave for their own safety, they also made 'anonymous threatening calls. Ruth Givton, a secretary at the Jewish Agency, was assigned the job of threatening Katy Antonius. The ploy didn't work. The garrulous Arab woman's line was always busy' (p. 110).

age, writing, at the age of 17, 'Jerusalem also divided has been much damaged by the war [...] thousands of homeless Arabs are living just outside the town and their condition is as appalling as the world's apparent indifference is incredible.'²¹ By the time Soraya Antonius's first novel, *The Lord*, was published, Antonius was in her fifties.

Despite her privileged upbringing, Antonius was, along with most of the people she knew and worked with, a refugee from her place of birth and she found a kind of home in Beirut. Since its inception in 1964, the PLO has been controversial, branded as a 'terrorist organisation' and targeted. Many of its members have been assassinated, including writers and artists that Antonius would have known, such as Ghassan Kanafani (1836-1972), who was killed by an Israeli car bomb in Beirut in 1982, with his niece.

In 'A Day Outside Education', Antonius writes of the literary response to the aftermath of the 1967 war. The war resulted in the acquisition of all of former Palestine Mandate by Israel together with lands of neighbouring countries (Syria, Lebanon, Egypt) and the expulsion of a further 325,000 Palestinian refugees:

A flood of instant paperbacks by US, British and to a lesser extent French correspondents (some of whom were living and continued to live in Arab countries) appeared, peppered with bloodthirsty Old Testament quotes implying that the ancient God of the Jews had at last avenged the Holocaust and gloating over the fact that he has chosen to inflict vengeance on a people innocent at least of this [...] It's hard to communicate just how dark, how convulsive a night that period was. (Antonius, 2000: 264)

Antonius started to write fiction during nights which were dark and convulsive in the most literal of senses, under the Israeli siege and bombardment of Beirut in 1982. Israel invaded Lebanon in June of that year, with massive air and ground forces, striking at Palestinian refugee camps, schools and the airport. PLO commandos were forced out of Lebanon, leaving Palestinian families unprotected in refugee camps, many of whom were later massacred, (Tel al-Zaatar in 1976²² and Sabra and Shatila in 1982)²³ or suffered and died whilst trying to survive under sustained sieges, e.g. Bourj el Barajneh (1984-87).²⁴ The war made it 'impossible' for Antonius to continue with her book on Palestinian women, or, she writes, 'to do any research (the Israelis had stolen the entire library, archives and even the furniture of the Palestine Research Centre)' (2000: 266). The siege ultimately prevented her from leaving her home: 'Beirut was in the throes of a really bad round, shells fell, one had to write by candlelight or those horrible little butane gas lamps which tended to explode in sympathy with the field-mortars, personal circumstances were grim' (2000: 267).

²¹ 'The Middle East,' article by Suraya [sic] (Katherine) Antonius, College Magazine (1950). Provided by the College Archivist, Cheltenham Ladies College 13.1.22.

²² The camp was home to 40-50,000 Palestinian refugees, of whom 1,500-2,000 were killed in 1976. Many are still unaccounted for. <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/features/thousands-victims-tel-al-zaatar-massacre-still-missing>

²³ <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/9/16/sabra-and-shatila-massacre>

²⁴ The siege of the camp by Amal militia lasted from 1984-87. Few statistics are available on the number of deaths that resulted from this siege. Pauline Cutting's memoir, 'Children of the Siege' (1988) is an account of her time working in the camp. See also my review of *Fadia's Tree* (Dabbagh, 2022) a film by Sarah Beddington, mainly set in the camp (which now has a population of approximately 65,000 living in 1 square kilometre).

Yet, despite all of this, 'the book virtually wrote itself.' *The Lord* was her first attempt at fiction

and it flowed out of her with ease. She sought, rather than to document the situation she was living through, to re-invent the past and by doing so, to re-establish a lost world, its land, livelihoods, customs and its peoples.²⁵ There is no record of the process of publication or editing of Antonius's *The Lord* or her later novel *Where the Djinn Consult* (1987), except her own limited account (Antonius, 2000). Although her work found a reputable publisher, *The Lord* contains errors, for example phrases printed twice (page 206). I have heard that Antonius wrote a third novel, hoping to form a trilogy, but that it was unsuccessful in finding a publisher.

Antonius was not a writer afraid of ideologies or taking a political line. Antonius's ethnic origin, particularly at the time, would have been more likely to brand her as 'political,' whatever and however she chose to write fiction. As Toni Morrison writes of the critical reception of Afro-American fiction, 'when matters of race are located and called attention to in American literature, critical response has tended to be on the order of a humanistic nostrum – or a dismissal mandated by the label "political,"' (1992: 12). All indications are that Antonius clearly believed in the novel as a vehicle for social change. *The Lord* starts with a quote by the British diplomat Sir Mark Sykes (1879-1917) '*Le monde d'avant la guerre est mort, mais le monde d'après la guerre n'est pas encore né; si nous nous trompons aujourd'hui, nos petits-enfants supporteront le châtement de nos fortes,*' [italics in the original] warning that the mistakes of today will be suffered by 'our grandchildren.'²⁶

Here, Sykes' name is associated with the division of the Arab world in the Sykes-Picot agreements (1916) between the British and the French. These agreements reneged on and undercut pre-existing commitments to the Arabs, most notably the McMahon-Hussein correspondence of 1915-16 that George Antonius communicated to a wider audience in *The Arab Awakening*. Sykes, however, prior to his premature death in 1917 from the Spanish flu, had become ardently opposed to Zionist ambitions for Palestine. Antonius here appealed to her readers to act to rectify an injustice. *The Lord* serves if not as a call to arms, at least as a call to action.

iv. Muriel Spark and the writing of *The Mandelbaum Gate*.

Muriel Spark (1918-2006)'s own short autobiography, *Curriculum Vitae* (1965), ends in 1957 and does not continue beyond the publication of her first novel. At the age of 19, she left Edinburgh for Rhodesia with her new husband, Oswald Spark. It soon became apparent that he was mentally unstable. 'He got more and more violent,' she wrote in *Curriculum Vitae*, 'I thought I could argue rationally with him. This never worked for any length of time,' she observes, before dropping in an act of femicide, as a passing comment²⁷, 'When Nita McEwen, a friend from school, was killed that

²⁵ See Part III and Sabbagh (1989:66) on Antonius's reversal of the historical process through fiction.

²⁶ From a speech given by Sir Mark Sykes in Paris on 23 December 1917. Reproduced in the frontmatter of *The Lord*. The full quote can be translated as, 'the world before the war is dead, but the world after the war is not yet born. If we make mistakes today our grandchildren will be punished for our faults.'

²⁷ There are similarities with the writing style of Penelope Mortimer ((1918-1999), a contemporary of Spark's who, as Daphne Merkin writes of Mortimer's way of nonchalantly passing off her sexual molestation by her father, 'this is of course, the heart of her literary style, to make light of the traumatic, while making visible the trail of damage it leaves behind' (Mortimer, 2011: viii).

night by her husband in the hotel where I was staying, I got seriously frightened.' The war broke out,

Oswald Spark joined the army and she started the process of divorce. 'As it was, I escaped for dear life,' she records (1992: 130-2).

Upon returning to England, during the war, Spark got a job in the 'world of method and intrigue in the dark field of Black Propaganda or Psychological Warfare, and the successful and purposeful deceit of the enemy,' in the Political Warfare Executive (PWE). '[T]he Foreign Office secret intelligence service was M.I.6., of which our department was Political Intelligence' (1992: 147-159). The unit was run by Sefton Delmar. Spark later transformed it into fiction in *Hot House on the East River* (1965).

The intrusive surveillance at the PWE unit and inability to distinguish fact from fiction put pressure on Spark. It came after her abusive marriage and was later exacerbated by a Dexedrine addiction which caused her to hallucinate. At their height, her 'delusions intensified, she became convinced that [T.S.] Eliot had taken a job with some of her acquaintances as a window-washer in order to rifle through their papers' (Newton, 2010: 1). In *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Barbara Vaughan, the protagonist at one point during the Eichmann Trial, 'thought she was caught in a conspiracy to prevent her brain from functioning' (TMG, p. 226), but it is a description that could just as well have applied to Spark during different phases of her life.

A Protestant-Jewish Scottish divorcée and convert to Catholicism, she stood out in the predominantly Protestant, public-school male literary establishment of 1940s-50s London. Her despatch books show multiple rejections of her work prior to '*The Seraph of the Zambezi*', winning *The Observer* Christmas short story competition in 1951. In 1954, she joined the Roman Catholic Church and Graham Greene, who encouraged her decision to convert, became one of her most ardent supporters (both morally and financially); she referred to him as playing a role in her 'rags-to-riches career' (Stannard, 2009: 300).

I was intrigued to discover in *After Nuremberg* that Spark had written a novel set in Palestine/Israel, *The Mandelbaum Gate*, and that she had spent time in Jerusalem. It struck me as anomalous as I had never considered her as a writer who would be attracted to the region, or its politics. In her biography she describes herself as 'first, last and always a poet' (Stannard, 2009: 141).

Spark was already well on her way to becoming a literary superstar when she started writing *The Mandelbaum Gate*. Settled in New York (where she lived from 1962 to 1967), with several best-sellers under her belt, she is described by Stannard as 'enjoying her money and celebrity, demanding attention. Manicures, waxes, perms, designer dresses, perfume and jewellery honed the public image [...] She was turning herself into a work of art' (2009: 302). She effectively transformed herself and her work into a brand that she personally managed closely.²⁸

²⁸ Lohan (2010) on Umm Kulthum provides an excellent study of an Arab example of this.

The New Yorker is, to this day, known to pay handsomely for accepted fiction. Being published in its pages was the height of American literary prestige, with Spark herself considering it 'the best in the world'. The editor, William Shawn, influenced Spark's writing and was believed to have been behind encouraging Spark to write something more 'international.' It is not apparent whose idea it was for Spark to write a novel set in Palestine/Israel. The origins of the novel are linked to her *New Yorker* short story 'The Gentile Jewess', about her Jewish grandmother Adelaide²⁹ which itself was written following a lunch with the editors at *The New Yorker*, McKenzie and Shawn (Harrison in Herman, 2010: 42).

As Spark tightly controlled her image, publicity and press, she also negotiated her commercial agreements carefully and expected maximum support from her publishing team. Spark not only received a considerable advance for *The Mandelbaum Gate*, but her publishers were also on standby to support family members in need. When her mother, Cissey, fell and broke her leg in Edinburgh, they were called upon in order for her to continue with her writing, 'she would, she explained to Maclean [her editor at Macmillan] be desperate if she had to discontinue composition again' (Stannard, 2009: 303).

Despite the institutional, financial and editorial support at hand, Spark's health was delicate, perhaps, her biographer, Stannard, suggests, because of Spark's struggle with *The Mandelbaum Gate*, which had become an 'albatross' around her neck, taking her far longer to complete than any of her other novels (2009: 303). 'By her standards it was taking an inordinate amount of time to squeeze out the chapters and [...] she was experiencing the unusual experience of self-doubt' (ibid: 284). The impasse in writing and personal fall out was such that Milton Greenstein, *The New Yorker* magazine's new Vice President, encouraged her to 'hop on a plane to Mexico' and 'buy a nightie at the other end,' where she 'drank, danced, gossiped,' while staying with her 'arch-reactionary host.' She wrote that she was troubled by poverty in Mexico yet returned 'amused and refreshed' to New York to finish the manuscript and hand it in in January 1965 (ibid: 305).

'To Muriel,' Stannard comments, somewhat acidly, 'a book was not only a work of art, it was also an investment' (2009: 309). When Spark tried to negotiate with Knopf to publish other works of hers that they were less keen on, they offered instead to increase Spark's advance for *The Mandelbaum Gate*. The publishers were keen for her to stay focussed on her 'magnum opus.' In addition to providing a guaranteed outlet, the *New Yorker* magazine provided office space to Spark. They had previously paid her \$6,000 to serialise the full text of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, an unprecedented step for the magazine. The unusually long length of *Mandelbaum* and its 'panoramic longwinded tone' (*Observer*, 2006) compared to all Spark's other novels has been commented on by various critics, including Herman, who writes:

²⁹ *The Mandelbaum Gate* is quite distinct in tone and setting from *The Gentile Jewess*, which is a gentle, endearing portrait of her Jewish family, although there is some similarity to the description of Barbara Vaughan's family in the novel. Despite these differences, the short story has been referred to a 'trial run at what became TMG.' (Herman, 2008: 478). Spark describes the story as 'nearly factual' (Spark, 1992: 81).

Situated near the other pole of the Sparkian dialectic – the pole of engagement with sociohistorical contexts and contingencies – is the novel many commentators characterize as a kind of outlier or exception within Spark's oeuvre,³⁰ (2008: 475).

Brian Cheyette likewise calls *The Mandelbaum Gate* 'her longest, least serene and most ambitious novel to date,' He quotes Ruth Whittaker calling it, "heterodox and anarchic" with an "untidy and crowded cast of misfits," before adding that it 'became her bulkiest work, closer than any of her others to the sprawling English realist tradition of George Eliot and E. M. Forster' (2000: 63-65). Anthony Burgess calls it her 'only attempt at a fullsize novel,' going on to write that in his view, 'there is a certain lack of the old ruthlessness and magic here,' but despite that, 'it is a well-wrought and stimulating novel, hard to forget' (1984: 95).

Harrison when considering the influence of *The New Yorker* on Spark's writing, writes, 'the self-contained *Mandelbaum Gate* sections, submitted and published in the magazine, dovetail neatly with the *New Yorker*'s editorial design, suggesting, at least on the surface, that the novel had one metaphorical eye on her contractual obligations under the first-reading agreement as well as the magazine's penchant for editorial brevity' (2010: 46). The anomalous length and style of *The Mandelbaum Gate* has frequently been pointed out, but none of the critical scholarship has indicated that she may have been under political pressure, however subtle, from her New York editors and environment at a time of heightened pro-Israeli sentiment in the United States.

The extent of pro-Israel pressure in Hollywood has recently been documented closely by Shaw and Goodman (2022). Apart from the blockbuster *Exodus* (1960),³¹ multiple other examples of how this pressure worked in the early 1960s, when *TMG* was being written, include Sam Spiegel, the producer of *Lawrence of Arabia* who 'met with Israeli officials several times in London to assure them that his film would not in any way hurt Israel' (2022: 116) as well as the commissioning of the British-Irish novelist Lawrence Durrell to 'work the idea up to a story for' *Judith* (1966) starring Sophia Loren. Produced by the Israeli Kurt Unger the 'production budget was set at nearly \$3 million, with Loren herself being paid \$700,000' (2022: 117). On the stage in New York, Marlon Brando had a ten-week hit in 1946 with the play *A Flag Is Born*, that compared 'the Jewish revolt in Palestine to colonial America's rebellion against the British, and proceeds from it went to the purchase of a ship named the *SS Ben Hecht* used to smuggle Jewish refugees into Palestine' (2022: 26). Stage, screen and literary figures were all being caught up in the well-funded pro-Israel propaganda machinery. It would be naïve to consider that *The New Yorker*, which has, to date, only once published a work of Palestinian writing and reviewed only one Palestinian novel,³² was not caught up in this frenzy.

It is also important to recognise the background and pressures that Spark was writing under in New York at the time. In terms of the critical assessment of *The Mandelbaum Gate*, none that I

³⁰ Herman goes on to describe how Norman Page considers that it 'could almost have been written by George Eliot' (2008: 475).

³¹ The scriptwriter Donald Trumbo was brought on to work on the script, despite his presence on the McCarthy blacklist. It was a shrewd move, that served the multiple ends of improving the script, exonerating Trumbo and discrediting McCarthyism in Hollywood. 'While Trumbo was penning the script, Preminger's production office was in daily contact with the Israeli consulate in Los Angeles for additional material and information' (Shaw and Goodman, 2022:99).

³² The non-fiction writer Raja Shehadeh is the only Palestinian writer to have been published by the magazine and a review of *Against a Loveless World*, by Susan Abulhawa, the only review.

have read considered the contractual incentives for the length of the work, beyond the editorial demands of the magazine. Spark may not have been paid to write 'at a dollar a page,' as Henry Miller and, later, Anaïs Nin were, in their case for erotica (Nin, 1978: vii), but material drivers for Spark to write at length were likely to be present.

The first four opening chapters of *Mandelbaum* were published between May and August 1965 (Harrison in Herman (ed). 2010: 51) in *The New Yorker* as promised. The magazine then withdrew from its commitment to serialise the whole novel. The reasons to discontinue, diplomatically put to Spark, are not entirely clear.

Spark felt, according to Stannard, 'peculiarly vulnerable' when writing *Mandelbaum*; it was to be her 'Great Book,' which 'discussed no less a subject than the intersection of Judaic and Christian culture' (2009: 285). It is possible that Spark, a devout convert to Roman Catholicism, was more ambivalent towards her own Jewish heritage and its 1960s political implications than her editors had anticipated. It is suggested that Spark's apparent irritation with pro-Israeli nationalistic ideology,³³ and her equivocal enthusiasm towards the new Israeli nation, as found in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, may not have hit the right note with the *New Yorker* editors.³⁴

When it came to colonialism and legacy of European empires, Spark was not unaware of the inequities imbued in British colonial policy and she showed disdain for the casual racism she encountered when living as a young wife in former Rhodesia. Although requiring greater research and beyond the range of this commentary, it is my reading of Spark that the violence she took offence to in Africa was predominantly direct violence by non-state actors, e.g., gratuitous acts of violence by British colonial racists towards the indigenous population, which would be viewed as criminal, for example, in England, but was acceptable in African colonies as the victims were black. For example, Spark writes, 'sometimes I was horrified by the stories I was told mainly by Afrikaners, or people of South African Dutch origin – who would proudly narrate this or that story of how an impertinent black had been "fixed,"' (1992: 126). Indirect violence, through structures of oppression and policing leading to the disruption of centuries-old ways of lives, economies, and linkages to the land, are not commented on by Spark in interviews with her that I have read, but are, in the main, defended. Criminal behaviour of other whites is singled out for condemnation, but the systemic nature of colonial oppression is unobserved, the worst abuses, she writes, having been corrected by 'pressure from London' (1992: 126).

In a 1998 interview with McQuillan in Arezzo, Spark's understanding of colonialism is not only dated, but defensive, patronising, and dismissive of the 'other,' viewing them only as lacking or deficient in comparison with the West. Speaking of the indigenous population of Africa, she says, 'They had their witch doctor system, they died early, they had pneumonia. They had a lot of things that were put right by us, because most of the good work was done by missionaries; much maligned'

³³ To date no substantive statements by Spark of her views on Palestine/Israel have been identified.

³⁴ *The Mandelbaum Gate* is not judged to be universally supportive of the nascent Jewish state; The Jewish Virtual Library describes it as having an 'anti-Israel bias' (JVL, 2008).

(McQuillan, 2002: 220). Contemporary readers, particularly those of novels like Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) would undoubtedly balk at this statement.

Even at the time of writing *Mandelbaum* in the 1960s, or being interviewed in the 1990s, Spark's pronouncements on colonialism and racism were far more reactionary than those of some of her contemporaries. Doris Lessing (1919-2013), a writer Spark is frequently compared to due to them both having lived in Africa (Rhodesia/Zimbabwe), had published *The Grass is Singing* an original and searing tale of the brutality of colonialism in 1950, which was quoted with reverence by Afro-American writers like James Baldwin in 1958 (2003: xviii).

In the same McQuillan interview, Spark herself says that she is not 'party political,' like Lessing, who was an active anti-apartheid campaigner and supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and was closer, in this respect, to Antonius. Earlier in the same interview Spark affirmed that she just didn't 'write political novels, any more than religious novels,' but that 'you have to live in this world. You can't be non-political, not unless you are empty headed' (2002: 220). The desire, it appears, for Spark, was to avoid causes, ideologies, and party politics.

'A novel can do it.' Muriel Spark responded when asked by McQuillan whether she thought the novel was there 'to effect social change,' but she qualified her answer, 'it just depends on the time and the circumstances, if it does do it. I think if you set out to do it, that's another type of novel; it's really an *Uncle Tom's Cabin*³⁵ type novel. You set out to right a wrong. I haven't ever done that' (2002: 220).

Spark's global outlook fitted comfortably within the expectations of the mainstream Eurocentric belief systems of the time. Later in the interview she states that 'you can't beat Western religion. All these religions round the Mediterranean, the Judeo-Catholic tradition, seems to me to have a better set of values altogether, politically and in every way,' (McQuillan, 2002: 217-8). I find this a curious and misguided statement, when set against the genocidal atrocities and war crimes revealed to have taken place in predominantly Christian territories on the Northern side of the Mediterranean during the first half of the twentieth century and the nature of the forced expulsion and violence that the creation of the first 'Jewish state' had brought about in 1948. Muriel Spark was no revolutionary, nor was she even progressive when it came to matters of empire, race and the destruction wrought by colonial-settler projects. Respect for her distinctive, amusing and intelligent writing style should not obscure that aspect of her politics to her critics.

E. THE LITERARY TEXTS – TWO NOVELS.

i. *The Lord* (1987) By Soraya Antonius.

³⁵ Baldwin also found fault with *Uncle's Toms Cabin*, which he refers to as 'the cornerstone of American social fiction' (1958: 13), for different reasons. He writes, '*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a very bad novel, having, in its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality, much in common with *Little Women*' (1958: 14). The reliance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on slave narratives is alluded to by Morrison (1992b: 189). Baldwin goes on to write of it, 'her book was not intended to do anything more than prove that slavery was wrong; was, in fact, perfectly horrible. This makes material for a pamphlet, but is hardly enough for a novel' (1958:15).

The Lord is a novel, Antonius's first, told by an unnamed female narrator writing fifty years after the events that form the heart of the story. The narrator works as a journalist and is irritated by her partner, Nicholas, with whom she travels around an unnamed part of the Mashriq area, presumed to be Lebanon. On the trip, she rescues a baby hawk. Their story, set some time in the 70s /early 80s, is slight, appearing at the beginning and the end of the novel.

The main storyline nests in the account given by Miss Alice, an elderly teacher from Jaffa who recounts events of 1910s-40s to the journalist narrator some 'fifty years on' (p. 18, TL). It is not entirely clear where or when this story was relayed although a tape recorder is used. Miss Alice fades in and out smoothly from the story telling. The narrator sometimes provides Miss Alice's story, her arrival in Jaffa as the daughter of a missionary, entranced by the new land of Palestine and falling in love with a young British man, Kit Fallon, who loves her in return but drops her for Lady Camilla, who will provide him with better prospects. The story Miss Alice recounts is the life of the Palestinian, Tareq, a figure who gains mystical proportions as a magician and political leader during the Palestinian revolt of 1936-39.

Tareq's mysterious-heroic tale is weaved in with other accounts of British and Palestinian lives, ranging from the journalist Eagleton³⁶ who, like Kit Fallon, fell in love with Miss Alice and believes in Palestinian self-determination, to the malevolent English policeman Challis, who pursues Tareq by spying on Eagleton and using a system of informants, to the beautiful peasant (*fellahin*) girl Buthaina, who entrances Tareq. Palestinian society is not idealised in *The Lord*; there is political rot, ignorance and heartless practices in the towns and villages. Tareq's mother is possibly the worst culprit, a woman who aborts her own babies by throwing herself upon a '*jum*' as well as being a *simsar* a trader in land to the Zionists and an informant. Tareq, despite his beauty, charm, wit and apparently supernatural powers becomes tired out, pudgy, defeated. Buthaina despairs of him. Tareq is ultimately hunted down and hung unceremoniously. This description, is reproduced in full here and is reminiscent of George Orwell's short story, *A Hanging* (1931):

His face had grown thinner after the questioning and his eyes were again the huge luminous stars of his youth. Then they were hidden by the coarse black cloth hood that the guards pulled down over his face, sparing the witnesses the sight of what they were to witness. He was placed on the trap and his ankles bound together. The trap was sprung and everyone then waited until the prison doctor could declare the man dead. In this case it took twenty-eight minutes for his heart to stop beating. The governor then invited Green to join him for breakfast. (p. 244, TL).

The hanging is followed by the description of an explosion in a market, killing Palestinian women and children: 'The 'bomb,' had been an oil drum, packed tight with old bits and pieces of rusty iron scrap and nails [...] there was a British officer³⁷ training the extremist Zionists, who until his advent

³⁶ It is possible that the character of the journalist Eagleton is inspired by E.C Hodgkin, a friend of the Antonius family, whose letters (Hodgkin, 1986) inspired the character of Robert in my creative work, *Infra Dig*.

³⁷ This is likely to be an allusion to Orde Wingate, whom I fictionalise as Rutgate in *Infra Dig*. Pappé writes of his decisive role (2006:15). He was a man of brutality, madness and fervent religiosity. He is revered in Israel as being the founder

had never done this sort of thing' (p. 206, TL). The novel ends with the shooting of the hawk by a French hunter once the narrator releases it back to the wild.

The most distinctive features of *The Lord* as well as Antonius's later novel, *Where the Djinn Consult* (1987), are their vivid depictions of place, the sharpness of Antonius's ear for social chit chat and dialogue and the insight into the Palestinian social fabric of the cosmopolitan upper / middle classes before the *nakba*. There are descriptions of British clubs that exclude natives, as they excluded her father, as well as one curious magical-realist scene reminiscent of the tale of the Emperor's Clothes, where the High Commissioner is exposed naked in front of his guests, by Tareq's magical powers.³⁸ High life is contrasted with torture scenes at the notorious Moscobiya police station, known as 'the slaughter house,'³⁹ given its reputation for torturing its inmates under the Israelis, but then run by the British, and village homes detonated by British forces and Palestinian villages before their destruction, such as Tarshiha, Anabta, Qalqiya, Silwan as well as larger towns such as Safad, Nablus, Jaffa and Jerusalem.

Social and agricultural customs of the peasantry that formed the bulk of the Palestinian population prior to 1948 – up to 80% of the total population – are also described, as well as visits to Nabi Rubin, picnics on the dunes, in the *biyyara* (orchards) and 'banana leaved jungle' of Jreishi. The topography and land described by Antonius is far from being a desert, it is a populated, verdant with ancient peoples, a hard-working peasantry, its traditions, and festivities. Antonius appears in tune with Rousseau's interpretation that, 'just as it was necessary to do violence to nature to establish slavery, nature had to be altered to perpetuate that right' (1984: 128), for the hunting and killing of animals by the British in Palestine, is referenced frequently, as is their enslavement of the population. Antonius's eye for architecture, economy and security apparatus is astute, uniquely so for a writer on Palestine in English at the time. Antonius also provides her female characters with agency and depth.

ii. ***The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965) by Muriel Spark.**

The title of Muriel Spark's eighth and longest novel refers to the name given to a border checkpoint in Jerusalem that divided the city from 1948 to 1967, separating the Arab East side from the Israeli West. The novel is considered to be exceptional in her oeuvre partly, as mentioned, due to its length and relative realism. Glavin writes of *Mandelbaum* that 'with the exception of Kermodé, it has rarely been admired' (ed. Herman, 2010: 153).⁴⁰

of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). The biography by Trevor Boyle (1995) describes him as, 'one of a select handful of soldiers who influenced the development of modern warfare.'

³⁸ This scene is similar to the story that the PWE produced while Spark worked for them. Stanford writes 'Part of her work was the distortion of news, slanted for German consumption, so as to undermine morale. One such report put out by her team was the story that Hitler had had his pants burnt off him when the bomb exploded in the Generals' plot. This item, I feel, had the true Sparkian touch' (1963:43).

³⁹ <https://www.addameer.org/content/jerusalem> [Accessed 17/09/22].

⁴⁰ Another exception is Anthony Burgess (1984: 95), see above.

Most of the action in the novel takes place in the city of Jerusalem during the summer of 1961 as the Eichmann trial – the historic war crimes trial against a former Nazi officer – is in progress. The two main protagonists are Freddy Hamilton, a British diplomat, and Barbara Vaughan, a visitor to Palestine / Israel from England. Barbara is hoping to see her fiancé, Harry, a divorced archaeologist who is working in the West Bank (then under Jordanian control). Barbara, who, like Spark, is a part-Gentile, part-Jewish convert to Catholicism, is also keen to visit Christian religious sites in the West Bank.

The plot line can be summarised as follows: Freddy shows Barbara around; they meet English friends of his, some Palestinians and Barbara's Jewish cousin who is covering the trial. Barbara is given a tour of Israel by a zealous guide. Freddy and Barbara then cross to the West Bank where Barbara is hoping to see Harry, her fiancé, an archaeologist, working on the Jordanian side. The couple are seeking an annulment from the Vatican of Harry's previous marriage and want to visit religious sites together, but in the end are not able to meet. In Jericho, Freddy uncovers a pro-Nasserist spy ring being operated by the treacherous British Gardnors (Mr. Gardner is a colleague of Freddy's at the Consulate). Barbara, recovering from scarlet fever, attacks Ruth Gardner for her antisemitic, pro-Nasserist views, throwing a clock and a vase at her in a rage.

Barbara is also being pursued by Miss Rickworth (Ricky), the headmistress of the school she used to work at in England, who, it is implied, has a strong (possibly romantic) interest in Barbara. Ricky instead has a sexual adventure with the dubious insurance broker, Joe Ramdez. Barbara goes undercover in Jordan, as she has been photographed in an Israeli newspaper and is made to understand that in an Arab state, her part-Jewish identity would, at very least, be a cause for suspicion and possible deportation as a spy or may even have life threatening consequences. Meanwhile, in suburban England, Freddy's elderly mother, Ma, is stabbed to death by her carer. Back in the Holy Land, the main characters, including Barbara dressed now as a nun (she had been dressed as a mute slave before), return to safety in Israel. Freddy temporarily loses his memory but is fine in the end. Barbara Vaughan is able to join Harry, whose marriage, she finds out – due to Ricky's attempt to thwart the marriage backfiring – was invalid after all, opening the path for the couple's marital union.

The lead English characters go on to live smooth existences, thinking back on the events encapsulated in the novel as being amusing, although Freddy later gets a bit maudlin reminiscing about the sexual and romantic frisson he shared with Suzi Ramdez in Jericho, although it is hinted at that he was probably only attracted to her because she looked so much like her brother, Abdul. Suzi, the reader is told, evades arrest and manages not to get shot, ends up marrying a lawyer in Athens and stays in touch with Barbara and Harry; Abdul also ends up happily with his Jewish friend Mendel Ephraim in Tangiers. Freddy goes on to live a life tinged with poignant nostalgia for Suzi.

II. INTERIOR RESISTANCE; POLITICS AND THE NOVEL.

A. DEMANDS ON LAW AND LITERATURE AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

i. Transcending National Sovereignty in Public International Law.

Traumatized, re-aligned and reeling with outrage at the genocidal horrors of the Second World War, Europe led the way in altering the international legal order in a manner that was unprecedentedly profound and far reaching. After 1945, new international organisations were developed, legislation enacted and ratified. Unprecedentedly broad global consensus was reached, and these bodies had far-reaching aspirations.⁴¹ The new legal world order emphasised accountability for mass criminality while promoting non-discrimination, egalitarianism and self-determination, sentiments that were instrumental in further stimulating global movements for decolonisation. Pointing to the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other international legal standards, Edward Saïd states the essential nature of their universality: 'None of these documents says anything about *disqualified* or less equal races or peoples. All are entitled to the same freedoms' (1996: 97, italics in the original).

The ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians is not unique in history, but it was the first of its scale to occur in the post-colonial era heralded by the end of the Second World War. It followed on from, and was intimately connected with, the large-scale ethnic cleansing of the Jewish population in Europe, that these legislative measures sought to prevent from ever happening again. The new legal provisions were unprecedented in terms of the laws, sanctions and fora in which the accused could now be tried (de Than and Shorts, 2003: 273).

The concept of universal jurisdiction was born, based on the principle that some crimes are so unconscionable and heinous that they require mechanisms to be developed to allow for perpetrators to be tried no matter where the crime took place or where the victims or perpetrators were based.⁴² New judicial fora were established, such as the Nuremberg Trials of 1949, but it was the trial in Israel of the former Nazi officer, Adolf Eichmann (1906-1962) that took notions of international justice to another level.

Adolf Eichmann, a German abducted in Argentina by Israeli special forces resulted in a trial for war crimes in Jerusalem that was as unprecedented as it was controversial. Western media coverage was engaged and extensive. The philosopher Hannah Arendt had been commissioned by the *New Yorker* magazine. She delivered her copy to the long-term editor William Shawn (1907-1992), who also commissioned Spark's fictional work including the first four chapters of *Mandelbaum*. Arendt's articles formed the basis of *The Eichmann in Jerusalem; A Report on The*

⁴¹ Provisions were encapsulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 and given legal force in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and 1957 and later in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998).

⁴² For a fuller definition of universal jurisdiction and the work of lawyers in this field see: <https://www.ecchr.eu/en/glossary/universal-jurisdiction/> [Accessed 23/09/22].

Banality of Evil (1963), the seminal work on the trial.⁴³ Arendt, a critic of the new Jewish state, was not afraid to report on unpalatable realities.⁴⁴ She nonetheless justified the trial taking place in Israel: 'one could say that it was for the sake of these victims that Palestine became Israel,' she wrote to the philosopher Karl Jaspers (Reizbaum, 2018: 1610).

ii. Literature and Social Change.

After the devastation of the Second World War, there were hopes that not just law, but also literature could serve as a bastion against totalitarian injustice. The rule of law and the freedom of artistic expression were viewed as instruments capable of ensuring that such genocidal horrors were never revisited. Before the Second World War, in the Soviet Union, Leon Trotsky had called for art to be a 'hammer' to mould society, 'rather than a mirror,' that reflected it. The revolutionary cry of 'never again,' inflamed the post war debate. In 1949, Theodor Adorno famously declared that to write poetry after Auschwitz was 'barbaric' (1983 [1947]: 34). Among artists and writers who agreed that fiction should be deployed in the service of justice and a new world order, there was far greater clarity on the need for change and what they shouldn't do, than what they should. A debate ensued as to what they could, or should, do and how.

To summarise, in 1947, the novelist, philosopher and playwright Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) wrote *What Is Literature?*⁴⁵ a manifesto for the future, which raised almost as many questions as it answered, but developed new lines of critique, which Albert Camus, Theodore Adorno and Jean-François Lyotard among others responded to in turn. Like Karl Marx, Sartre distanced himself from philosophers who just interpreted the world. It was, he believed, imperative to change it too (2001: xii). Camus in his 1957 Nobel Acceptance speech spoke of the need for writers to 'create dangerously' (2020: 105), a phrase that inspired the title of Edwidge Danticat's more recent book on immigrant writing (2011). Critiquing Sartre's idea of 'commitment,' Theodore Adorno's essay 'On Commitment' (1978) highlights its risk of reproducing the authoritarianism that it claimed to fight, and draws on a further distinction between 'commitment' and 'tendency/ tendentiousness' in aesthetic theory saying that 'Committed art in the proper sense is not intended to generate ameliorative measures, legislative acts or practical institutions – like earlier propagandist (tendency) plays against

⁴³ The philosopher Arendt viewed the surprising incongruities revealed during the Eichmann trial and the ordinary nature of the defendant (she refers, at one point, to Eichmann as a 'buffoon') as an opportunity to broaden and extrapolate her own views on how human behaviour in times of widespread injustice and totalitarian control should be assessed. People must, essentially, think for themselves. It was, she wrote, the capacity to exercise an 'independent human faculty, unsupported by law and public opinion, that judges in full spontaneity every deed and intent anew whenever the occasion arises.' Kathleen Jones summarises Arendt's beliefs as 'those to be endorsed were those people who "dared to judge by themselves," in situations where conformity would leave them "unable to 'live with themselves,'" sometimes they even chose to die rather than become complicit' (2014: 19). 'The dividing line between those who want to think and therefore have to judge by themselves, and those who do not, strikes across all social and cultural or educational differences,' Arendt concluded (ibid.).

⁴⁴ Post-1948 Israel aside, Arendt's relationship with the political Zionist movement was complex and often very critical, controversially stating in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that the Zionists' 'conviction of the eternal and ubiquitous nature of anti-Semitism... was also the cause of the otherwise inexplicable readiness to negotiate with the Nazi authorities during the early stages of the regime' (1961:10) as cited in Muller (1981:239).

⁴⁵ Published first in 1947 in the magazine, *Les temps modernes*, and then revised slightly and published as a book in 1948.

syphilis, duels, abortion laws or borstals – but to work at the level of fundamental attitudes’ (Adorno, 1978: 6).

The debate influenced Palestinian literature as well; ‘part of the general radicalisation of the post-*nakba* generation that protested against Western colonialism and internal forms of Arab domination, *iltizām* conveyed the search for a new politics and culture based on social justice and freedom’ (Abu Manneh, 2016: 75). Although different styles of writing were adopted and different camps and approaches existed among Palestinian artists, a central belief in the writer’s individual sense of responsibility during a time of national crisis prevailed.

The counter argument to calls for social engagement rested on notions that the artist should be more concerned with beauty and extracted from societal and political pressures of the times. I do not believe it is possible for any writer to disconnect themselves from the society, era or political issues. Even if attempted, complete extraction from modern surroundings into a reified state of contemplation is a political stance in itself. I believe Orwell goes too far when he says that all art is propaganda (Packer (ed) 2009), as my understanding of the definition implies a degree of conscious deceit, but I do consider, as Orwell also says that all art is political. As René Girard pointed out when referencing the works of romantic novelists, in his example Stendhal, they are all prepared to contrast the ‘exceptional’ with the ‘normal’, an impossible feat without value judgements being introduced as to how to distinguish the two (1976: 140).

The Lord and *The Mandelbaum Gate* are being viewed here, in the main, as literary responses to the aspirations for self-determination of peoples. In *The Mandelbaum Gate*, Zionist aspirations for Jewish self-determination have resulted in an Israeli nation state being built on Palestinian lands. The origins of Palestinian demands for self-determination are featured in *The Lord*. Jacqueline Rose considers *The Mandelbaum Gate* in terms of modern statehood and fantasy; shown through the personal struggle of the protagonist, Barbara Vaughan, to reconcile herself with the ‘modern state’ she is accused of deferring a visit to (Rose, 1996: 1). To consider the nature of these claims for self-determination, some historical background needs to be provided.

iii. Historical Background to The Literary Texts.

The Occidental Jewish settler movement known as Zionism began in Palestine in the late 19th Century and expanded and militarised exponentially in the 20th Century. European political Zionism made its bid for Palestine during the greatest phase of European territorial acquisition overseas in history, describing itself not simply as a Jewish liberation movement, but rather as a Jewish movement for colonial settlement in the Orient (McCarthy, 2010: 80). By the twentieth century, as the appetite for settler movements waned, political Zionism sought to distinguish itself from previous colonial-settler movements, on two main grounds: firstly, due the extent of the persecution and genocide of Jewish people that preceded its creation and secondly due to the historical religious links connecting the Jewish religion to the territory.

But even during its period of philosophical inception, these assertions by the Zionist settler movement met with resistance. All three monotheistic religions have historical connections to holy sites in Palestine. Jews prior to 1948 held only six percent of the land area of Palestine (McDowell, 1988: 46). Two Zionist slogans are particularly relevant for this commentary as I wish to explore the depiction of space and place in these novels. The first, 'a land without a people for a people without a land,' is frequently attributed to Israel Zangwill (1864-1926) a writer and, like Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), the founder of modern Zionism, a playwright.⁴⁷ The ostensibly humanitarian desire to protect the Jewish people, frequently framed in Biblical terms, evolved in partial response to the pogroms being carried out by Russia against the Jewish populations of Eastern Europe. Lord Lindsay was the first major politician to propose a programme by the British to settle Jews in Palestine, stressing the economic opportunities for Britain in developing the agricultural production of the 'very fatness of the lands' which only required security, labour and skill. The elision with the second slogan, that Jewish labour could 'make the desert bloom,' started at this time.

During the British Mandate for Palestine (1917-1948), 'Zionist organisations' overriding concern was to ensure unhindered Jewish immigration to Palestine. To this end, they attempted to convince world opinion that the country was a virtually uninhabited desert [...] in which Jewish immigrants could settle without prejudice to anybody's interests' (George, 1979: 88). The message to be communicated developed in different directions during this sensitive period of political history for the Palestinians, as earlier myths dissolved, new strategies took their place, most notably the concept of expulsion in Zionist thought (Masalha, 1992). Several early Zionists like Arthur Ruppin pointed out that the land of Palestine was 'densely populated' and furthermore, he wrote in 1930, there 'is hardly any land which is worth cultivating that is not already being cultivated' (Masalha, 1992: II).⁴⁸

There are numerous primary sources from the time, such as that of Sir John Hope Simpson reporting on Palestine in 1930, where he verified Ruppin's position stating, 'it has emerged quite definitely that there is at the present time and with the present methods of Arab cultivation no margin of land available for agricultural settlement by the new immigrants' (Newton, 1948:293). The demographics, agriculture and economy of Palestine during the Mandate has been charted by a variety of historians, economists and political scientists whose work is referred to in this respect.⁴⁹

There was ample evidence to counter the myth that Palestine did not have a settled population at the beginning of the 20th Century, yet the line that Palestinians formed part of a homogeneous nomadic mass who had only come to the lands of Mandate Palestine in response to

⁴⁷ The roots of the slogan, however, preceded Zangwill's reassertion of the phrase in 1901, and date back to the early 'restorationist' beliefs of the early nineteenth century, held by British clergymen, American evangelists and more prominently by the Victorian reformers, Lord Shaftesbury (1801-1885) and Lord Lindsay (1812-1880).

⁴⁸ Arthur Ruppin (1876-1943), one of the founders of Tel Aviv and chief Zionist land agent, wrote this after he resigned from the Brit Shalom peace movement, which he co-founded.

⁴⁹ Sarah Roy's ground-breaking work on the political economy of de-development in Palestine, with a focus on the Gaza Strip, charts the destruction of an agricultural sector since the times of the Ottomans (Roy, 1996) articles have been written contesting the myths of making the desert bloom (George, 1979) and the most robust countering of the idea that the non-Jewish Palestinian population of the former Mandate area was largely due to immigration from neighbouring states is found in Finkelstein (Ch.1, 1995).

the economic growth that Jewish immigration and labour had brought about was then developed and is cultivated to this day. Shortly after the 1967 war, Levi Eshkol, former prime minister of Israel stated, 'it was only after the Zionists 'made the desert bloom' that 'they [the Palestinians] became interested in taking it from us' (Eshkol, 1969). A year later, Shimon Peres reinforced the myths: 'the country [Palestine] was mostly an empty desert, with only a few islands of Arab settlement; and Israel's cultivable land today was redeemed from swamp and wilderness' (Peres, 1970). In recent years, the Zionist discourse has shifted again to one closer to the evidence and far more cynical, as in the view put forward by the 'liberal' Ari Shavit, which acknowledges the mass expulsion of Palestinians but contends that ultimately the end justified the means (Shlaim, 2014: 1). Worse still, some Israeli Ministers in the Knesset, such as Bzalel Smotrich, are of the view that the only problem with the Nakba was that it didn't go far enough (Brown, M, 2021: 1).

In conversation with David Barsamian in 2003, Edward Saïd described the impact of these myths as follows:

Because so much of [the Palestinians'] history has been occluded [...] they are invisible people. The strength and power of the Israeli narrative is such that it depends almost entirely on a kind of heroic vision of pioneers who come to a desert and in the end deal not with a native people in the sense that these are people who have a settled existence and lived in towns and cities and have their own society, but rather with nomads who could be driven away. (2003: 20-21)

Never has the relationship of people to a land, to the buildings that lay on it and plants that grew out if it been so hotly contested. The depiction of this land in literature is rarely an incidental choice for a novelist writing for a Western audience, although now perhaps less so than when Antonius wrote and more so when Spark wrote. The influence of these choices when depicting space and place cannot be underestimated. These myths directly encouraged violence. The British Mandate authority governing Palestine from 1917-1948 initially clamped down on yet ultimately encouraged the development of militant Zionist forces who violently oppressed dissent from the native Arab population, who were, taxed heavily and given little representation in Mandate governance and had ample cause to oppose Mandatory policies, particularly on immigration and land sales.

The extreme persecution, and genocide, inflicted on Europe's Jewish population greatly accelerated occidental Jewish immigration to Palestine. It had just risen sharply during the years when my novel begins, in 1936, a trend which continued, despite sporadic Mandatory Government efforts to limit immigration. 'Finally, in 1936 the peasantry of Palestine rose in revolt in an attempt to drive out both their unwanted rulers and settlers' (MacDowell, 1994: 18). My novel begins in 1936, before the outbreak of resistance and focusses on a moment in time, when it seems possible that a couple of individuals could have altered the course of history in another direction.

The deportation of Palestinian leadership, mass incarceration, killing and displacement of Palestinians under British mandate rule was a core strategy within the British Empire's ideological and military support of the Zionist movement. Historians have documented the rise to dominance of

the concept of expulsion of the native population of Palestine within the Zionist movement from the late nineteenth century onwards (Masalha, 1992; Pappé, 2006).

The suppression of Palestinian resistance that developed from the 1920s to fight this movement was brutal and unflinchingly oppressive. During the years of the Great Arab Revolt of 1936-39 that forms the background to *The Lord* and *Infra Dig*, more British troops were in Palestine than in any other part of the Empire, at a time when the British Empire's geographical reach was at its peak, with direct or *de facto* political control over nearly a quarter of the world's resources and a third of its territory (Khalidi, 2020: 8). During the crushing of the 1936-39 revolt, '10 percent of the adult male population were killed, wounded, imprisoned, or exiled, as the British employed a hundred thousand troops and air power to master Palestinian resistance' (ibid:8). The brutality was exacerbated by 'one British officer in particular, Orde Charles Wingate, who made the Zionist leaders realise more fully that the idea of Jewish statehood had to be closely associated with militarism and an army' (Pappé, 2007: 15).

In 1938, George Antonius published his highly acclaimed study, *The Arab Awakening*, which 'provided conclusive proof that 'the British had promised Palestinians an independence in exchange for an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire in World War I' (Silsby-Boyle, 2001: 1). In 1939, he was part of a delegation of Arabs and British officers who gathered in St. James' Palace to decide on the fate of Palestine. The profound efforts by Palestinian delegations made absolutely no difference to the fate of the Palestinian people, who were ethnically cleansed from their land. As Pappé describes it, once the decision was taken by the Zionist leadership in March 1948,

it took six months to complete the mission. When it was over, more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages destroyed and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants. (Pappé, 2007: xiii)

The term 'ethnic cleansing,' although not amounting to an independent crime under international law, has been defined by a UN Commission of Experts in 1994 as "purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas".⁵⁰ This describes the ongoing experience of Palestinians since the first half of the twentieth century and is a process that continues to this day, through a series of legal and military measures taken by the Israeli government.

The six writers in Stonebridge's *The Judicial Imagination* are silent on, damning of, or nonplussed by, the plight of Palestinians although it was not being unreported at the time, the journalist Barbara Thompson (1893-1961), to whom Chapter Six of Stonebridge's, *Placeless People* (2018) is devoted, took significant risks to do so. 'Thompson is important to the modern history of statelessness,' Stonebridge rightly states,

Because she insisted on seeing symmetries between the refugee histories of the Jews and Palestinians that very few were willing to concede at mid-century. She drove a moral

⁵⁰ United Nations Commission of Experts (former Yugoslavia), <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/ethnic-cleansing.shtml>. Further discussion of the relevance of the term to the Palestinian is found in Chapter One of Pappé (2007).

and historical truck through the new human rights pieties – and lost friends, work, and public confidence as a result. (2018: 23)⁵¹

The Lord (1986), written more than twenty years after Spark's *The Mandelbaum Gate* (1965), is mainly set approximately thirty years before the events in Spark's novel. Between the time periods of Antonius's novel and Spark's, a population had been expelled, a state had been established, and the 1948-67 border divided Palestine, with the Mandelbaum Gate providing a heavily policed passage from one side to the other. Between the time Spark and Antonius wrote their novels, the West Bank and Gaza Strip had also been occupied by Israel and a further 325-355,000 Palestinians expelled (McDowall, 1988:38). Over 400 Palestinian villages were destroyed in a deliberate act to ensure that the Palestinians had nothing to return to (Green, 2016:82). Other homes were occupied by a new immigrant population. 'The symbol of the key, made iconic with the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians in 1948, took on a new resonance after 1967' (Ghalayani 2019: 5).

The recent findings of the crime against humanity of apartheid and persecution have their roots in Israeli legal instruments, many inherited from the British that have remained in force since 1948. Inequalities are embodied in the national *raison d'être* of the creation of a Jewish state, legislated in the Law of Return (1952) and the Prevention of Infiltrators Acts (1949-52); most notably by the military law, which controlled the lives of Palestinian Citizens of Israel between 1948-1968.⁵²

Whatever a writer's exposure, experience or upbringing, I believe that it is for writers to build on their knowledge, or lack of it, by researching the worlds of their characters and their setting and to show courage in seeking truth when depicting Palestine/Israel. In an October 1965 interview Muriel Spark characterised *The Mandelbaum Gate* as 'very important book for me, much more concrete and solidly rooted in a very detailed setting [than earlier works]' (Herman 2010: 16). It was, she said in interview to McQuillan, her *Passage to India*.⁵³ After writing the book she says she 'felt I'd got out of myself what I wanted to say, but I certainly didn't want to go in for more sociological books' (McQuillan, 2002: 215).

Described as an 'exceptionally efficient woman' (Kermode, 2009: 1) Spark's efficiency did not extend to research on the Palestinians when embarking on her Great Book.⁵⁴ Stonebridge notes her reliance on Martha Gellhorn's article in *The Atlantic*, 'The Arabs of Palestine' (1961), when developing Palestinian characters and settings in *The Mandelbaum Gate* (2014: 5). She read Arendt's *New Yorker* reports too.⁵⁵ Compared to her other novels, Stannard comments that her

⁵¹ It is not being suggested here that Barbara Thompson was always correct, nor that I concur with everything she wrote with regards to the Palestinians, but I do applaud Stonebridge's scholarship and admiration of a formidable writer who was effectively silenced for holding an unpopular viewpoint. See <https://thesilencing.org/> [Accessed 22/7/22]. Another source on Thompson is the biography by Kurth (1990).

⁵² The Interactive Encyclopaedia of Palestinian <https://www.palquest.org/en/highlight/14340/palestinians-under-military-rule-israel> [Accessed 29/09/2022].

⁵³ All roads lead to E. M. Forster in this commentary in one form or another. Isa Boullata compares *The Lord* negatively to Forster's novel, saying that Antonius 'does not achieve the depth of *A Passage to India*, but she manages to convey the single mindedness of policy aiming at dispossessing a nation' (1987: 149). E. M. Forster was a friend of George Antonius in Alexandria (Boyle, 2001) and is fictionalised favourably as E. M. the writer in *Infra Dig*.

⁵⁴ 'Mandelbaum was to be Muriel's Great Book and the weight of her ambition oppressed her,' (Stannard, 2014: 285).

⁵⁵ Stonebridge notes that source material for *The Mandelbaum Gate*, found in Spark's archive in Tulsa, included 'well-thumbed pages of Arendt's five reports for the *New Yorker*' (2011: 82).

research was on a 'grander scale (Arab grammar, rural and natural history, Israeli culture, the Eichmann trial)' (2014: 301). There are lines of Arabic grammar mentioned in *Mandelbaum* and one quotation from the Quran (a section from *Ayat al Kursi*, the Throne Verse, p.318, TMG) both of which add to a sense of absurdity, rather than cultural richness. The Muriel Spark collection in the Tulsa archives lists tourist guides, maps, insurance advertisements and postcards and Eichmann court records as the main sources of Spark's research.⁵⁶

Spark has been found not to be infallible when it comes to her research. In *Territorial Rights* the free movement of Bulgarian characters at the time was implausible (Kassabova introduction, quoted by Lopez, 2020: 975) in the same way that I find the movement of Palestinian characters (from Jerusalem, to Jordan and back, as well as to Lebanon when it comes to the Ramdez family) unrealistic in *Mandelbaum*. I doubt that Spark ever anticipated having an Arab readership, or one familiar with the Middle East, which allowed her to liberally present harsh, inflexible borders as porous, temporary ones. I understand her feeling, that 'in a novel the narrative runs away with you while you're writing' (McQuillan, 2002: 229), but given the setting of this novel, I concur with Antonius that the novelist has some moral responsibility, which is, in part, reflected in the depth and care of their research.

Spark engaged in writing *Mandelbaum* at a time when there were works by writers she should / could have been aware of who were outraged by the fate of the Palestinian people. Erskine Childers' Spectator article, 'The Other Exodus,' was published in 1961. There was also the work of Dorothy Thompson, mentioned previously, as well as of the novelist Ethel Mannin (1900-1984).

A word more on Thompson. She has, unlike Gellhorn, been largely forgotten, but when Spark was researching *Mandelbaum* she had held just as formidable a reputation (if not quite as glamorous) as Gellhorn. At the peak of her career, she was said to be as influential as Eleanor Roosevelt and 'more controversial, more opinionated, more irreverent and more quoted,' than any other journalist at the time (Kurth, 1990:10). Furthermore, Spark had taught the work of Thompson's former husband, the Nobel Prize winning writer Charles Sinclair Lewis, while at Rutgers university (Stannard, 2009:315). According to Thompson's biographer, her 'first trip to Palestine in 1945, convinced her that Zionism was not the liberal crusade she had thought it to be.' Thompson then, through her writing and her later charitable work, sought to 'explain why the Arabs think and feel as they do [...] as The American Zionists have misrepresented this civilization in a shocking way, as everybody who knows anything about it would testify' (Kurth, 1990:428).

Ethel Mannin,⁵⁷ former friend of George Orwell, should also have been on Spark's radar. The author of over 90 books, Mannin was keenly aware of the dire conditions in Palestinian refugee camps and the nature of their expulsion. Her novel, *Road to Beersheba* (1963), drew on interviews with Palestinians. There is no indication that any of these works, or writers were sought by Spark,

⁵⁶ https://utulsa.as.atlas-sys.com/repositories/2/archival_objects/67593 [Accessed 29/09/22].

⁵⁷ See Rooney (2018).

instead she chose to rely on Gellhorn's long form journalism in *The Atlantic*, which requires greater consideration of propaganda and the whitewashing of state violence by writers.

iv. **Destroying and Re-Building Histories – The (Mad) Arabs of Palestine.**

The *Atlantic* magazine claims that it has, since 1857, 'been challenging assumptions and pursuing truth.'⁵⁸ By 1961, Martha Gellhorn (1908-1998) had an established reputation as a journalist, due to courageous reporting during the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War and also as one of the first journalists to cover the Holocaust. Her brief marriage (1940-45) to the novelist Ernest Hemingway added to her significant public profile. She was daring, photogenic and highly respected. As a journalist she would have been trained by her editors in professional codes of conduct that would have included impartiality and balanced and accurate reporting of sources. Several biopic films have been made about her life and biographies published.

'The Arabs of Palestine,' is written a tone of even-handed enquiry and was produced as a companion report to her report on the Eichmann trial. Stonebridge describes the difference between the two pieces thus: the article on the trial is an 'act of ethical witness' whereas the tone of her article on the Palestinians, 'is very different. Measured, precise, descriptive, one might be tempted to describe it as trauma free' (2011: 5). In it, the narrator (Gellhorn) presents herself as both compassionate and authoritative, she asserts that she was endeavouring to find Palestinian suffering but was thwarted in her efforts to find either objects of sympathy, or reliable sources.

The emotional journey followed in Gellhorn's 1961 article is that of the diligent, well intentioned, female 'suffragette' investigative journalist,⁵⁹ seeking to be sympathetic, but failing to locate people to sympathise with. To shore up her plausibility, Gellhorn is at pains to point out how many Palestinians she interviewed in her 'mini-Gallup poll' of refugee camps and in Israel, although of the almost one million Palestinian refugees at the time, she enters the home of only two.

There is no space in this commentary to go through this hugely damaging article point by point to highlight the inaccuracies and distortions presented within it with regards to the causes of the Palestinian refugee crisis in 1948 and their situation in 1961. To use Laffin's not entirely accurate understanding of black propaganda,⁶⁰ (as used against Antonius), it should be noted that few of Gellhorn's sources, camps or villages visited are named. Most subjects have little, or no, education and many of her most controversial statistics and claims are not backed by sources but follow on

⁵⁸ See Atlantic Magazine's own History page: www.theatlantic.com/history/ [Accessed 23/09/22].

⁵⁹ Gellhorn describes herself and her Palestinian fixer Nissim in these terms when they go to visit the founder of a Muslim women's club: 'I am a suffragette like Nissim' (1961: 32).

⁶⁰ Unlike Spark, Antonius when working in promoting the Palestinian cause did not pretend that she was anything other than an Arab voice. Black propaganda 'purports to emanate from a source other than the true source,' as was the case of Spark's PWE German radio broadcasts by the British.

from less controversial quotes by reputable sources.⁶¹ Fact and opinion blur or are misleadingly presented.

Gellhorn's article would have been influential. Few, if any, journalists of her stature had interviewed Palestinians for such a high-profile magazine. Apart from the obvious allegation that Gellhorn was 'blaming the victims,' as Saïd describes it, for, among other things, being nostalgic, bitter, vengeful, dependent, resilient, hopeful, smiling, it is also worthy of note that several of the ridiculed assertions made by Palestinian interviewees in the article are currently accepted as evidenced realities by historians. Toni Morrison's words are apposite here, when she writes, 'the crucial distinction for me is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth. Because facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot,' (1987: 193). Gellhorn created facts that have since been disproved. The role of the artist remains with the truth.

According to her biographer Caroline Moorehead, Martha Gellhorn was known for her unflinching support of the Zionist project and the State of Israel. She held the Palestinians in contempt and viewed them with utmost derision. Gellhorn's political position is encapsulated in the conclusion of 'The Arabs of Palestine'; 'the children of Palestinian refugees will make themselves at home among their own kind, in their ancestral lands. For the Jews there is no other ancestral land than Israel' (1961: 32). Moorehead writes of Gellhorn, 'her blind spot was the Palestinian cause, in which she saw nothing honourable or good' (2004: 6), and later, 'Martha was, however, deaf and mute when it came to the Palestinians. Able to reduce most moral problems to clear black and white, on the question of Israel, she carried this certainty to an uncomfortable extreme. Palestine, and the rights of the Arabs whose lands had been taken away, their houses knocked down, their children locked up, was not a subject that could be discussed. It became a blank on a map otherwise rich in irony, humour, self-deprecation, and curiosity' (ibid: 327). 'What a bunch of poor dumb clots,' Gellhorn recorded in her notebooks, having taken 'viscerally against the Arabs, she seldom let a chance pass to compare them to the Germans' (ibid: 423).

Arab nationalism is personified by Gellhorn in the Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, who is repeatedly equated with fascism, Nazism and Adolf Hitler, as well as the former Soviet Union. Muriel Spark in *Mandelbaum* amplifies the pernicious association of the Palestinian cause with Hitler and antisemitism, through the mouthpiece of Ruth Gardner, the novel's key antagonist, 'Nasser is marvellous. Really let's face it, Hitler had the right idea. Ten days of Ruth's chatter. It's a network on a world scale. The Jews. They've got us in a net' (1965: 230). Ruth Gardner's views allow the reader

⁶¹ Gellhorn quotes from Trygvie Lie's book (1961: 21) regarding the Palestinian violent resistance to the Partition plan, but does not give one single reason as to why the Palestinians may have objected to the Plan (for example that the Jewish population being offered more than 50% of the land – including the most arable land – though they had only owned 6% of the total according to McDowell). The paragraphs following Gellhorn's reference to Lie's work are highly controversial and are not credited to any reference.

to empathise with Barbara Vaughan, in bed sick with scarlet fever,⁶³ who lashes out in the only act of personal violence⁶⁴ in Palestine/Israel that appears in *Mandelbaum*.

For Gellhorn, the Palestinians she meets who support Nasser were not just bad, they were mad too, 'to listen to these conversations is work for a psychiatrist, not a journalist,' Gellhorn complains (1961:32). 'There is only so much Mad Hattery than any writer can endure,' she goes on to state, repeating the term three times in the article, alluding to *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1865), where logic is lost after a passage through the looking glass. Logic is lost to both Spark and Gellhorn when they move out of Europeanised terrains, such as Israel, and have contact with the Palestinians. Anthony Burgess writes of *Mandelbaum*, 'the moral seems to be that in a mad world – which a divided Jerusalem well enough symbolises – we must become mad ourselves, throwing away our traditional allegiance to logic' (1984: 95). It is a frivolous approach to peoples in conflict and crises.

Gellhorn's views are asserted with impatience to her interviewees as she reports them in her article. The Palestinians are a population she clearly sees as idiotic, 'now the Jews have won back their land by right of conquest. "Turn and turn about,"' I said, feeling as beastly minded as an Arab myself. "Fair's fair,"' (1961: 38). From an international legal perspective 'right of conquest,' is not just 'beastly minded', but also illegal and outdated. Even the philosopher Rousseau in the 18th century thought it 'no true right in itself' (1984: 125).⁶⁵

The political influence of Gellhorn on Spark is mellowed, yet palpable. It is not necessarily the case that Spark lacked a political position, although I have not managed to discover one in my research, she's just more guarded and sophisticated in her method of conveying it through fiction than Gellhorn. Spark does not convey her stance through across the board negative stereotyping of the Arab characters. For example, Suzi Ramdez, a Palestinian character, is one of the most loveable in *Mandelbaum* and the Israeli tour guide is boorish. Characterisation is not the clue here. Such an approach would clearly have been identified as racist and far too obvious for a writer of her calibre. I do not consider promoting the Israeli nation to have been Spark's main interest in her novel, although it was likely to have been her editor's and her publisher's desire for her to produce a literary work that was supportive of the new state. Spark uses the (mis)information provided by Gellhorn as a background both to a fictional story, but also to other debates that interested her, 'love, divine and carnal' and 'the intersection of Judaic and Christian faiths,' for example (Stannard, 2003: 285).

Both Gellhorn and Spark belittle the logic of Palestinians in their works. Their political mobilisation is demonised or made ludicrous and the material realities of their situation and struggles are downplayed. For Spark, I believe, this came from her own desire to ridicule ideology in all its

⁶³ Worthy of note is the idea in *Mandelbaum* that physical illness leads to a clarity of vision. In another Suzi relates to Freddy, "'Then Abdul got sick with T.B. and was in hospital, and there he said to me, "Omar Khayyám is all olive oil poured over the troubled waters. Too much oil, and you don't see the truth"' (p.321, TMG).

⁶⁴ Personal or direct violence is distinguished from structural violence here using the distinction made by Johan Galtung (1969) and referenced in Boehmer and Davies (eds.), namely the 'distinction between personal or direct violence where there is an actor that commits the violence – and structural or indirect violence, where there is no such actor' (2015: 5).

⁶⁵ The United Nations can only justify the use of force only in extreme situations e.g. violations of territorial sovereignty, when other remedies are exhausted.

forms and her 'scepticism towards unconditional national loyalties' (Lopez, 2020:71), as well as her defensive outlook on colonialism / Eurocentric beliefs. For Gellhorn, Zionism was a clear political belief, the righting of a wrong she felt passionately about. Both writers only refer to violence being directed against Jewish people. The Palestinian characters have, in their accounts, been left almost unscathed by recent history. To understand the political line taken in *The Mandelbaum Gate* towards Palestine/Israel, I believe the reader needs to avert their gaze from the Palestinians and the Israeli characters and to focus on the motives, morals and actions of the European characters in the novel; both German and British.

Spark's PWE training encouraged covert, not overt, motives; recruits were also taught that "propaganda must have an individual or sectional appeal" (Lopez, 2020: 977). The guiding hand of Spark on Palestine/Israel is shown most clearly when it comes to the antagonists, namely Adolf Eichmann, a German, or more precisely, 'an imperative deity named Bureau IV-B-4 of whom he was the high priest' (TMG, p. 226) and Ruth Gardnor, who is the living representative of Eichmann and all he stood for. The target audience is the Western reader who is warned not be fooled by (the Palestinian sympathetic) Gardnors' glamour, for the couple are pernicious agents, who must be stopped. The message to the reader is not to get involved – the Palestinian cause is confusing, dangerous and ludicrous – they do not need to expend their energies concerned with their history, or their fate, as they are wily, adaptable and their situation is not as bad as the readers may have been led to understand. This is far from an a-political stance and coming from Spark and would have been influential. One of her readers was Harold MacMillan, the former British Prime Minister who wrote to Spark that he thought it 'by far the best book you have written. But more than that, it is one of the best books I have read for a very long time.'⁶⁶

Spark visited both the West Bank and Amman in 1961,⁶⁷ yet not one trustworthy *bona fide* Palestinian refugee's plight⁶⁸ is seen or heard in *Mandelbaum Gate* except, perhaps for the account of Abdul Ramdez, but even in his case, he is forced out of Haifa, as the 'bullets were flying from all quarters' (TMG, p. 98). They were not necessarily directed at him and their source is not clear. When Suzi writes to Abdul about his orange groves, he was already aware that the Palestinians, 'bewildered homeless souls' were supposedly fabricating their losses of land holdings (TMG, p. 100). His sister encourages him to do the same. The 'bewildered homeless souls,' are never met as individuals, but Abdul and Suzi are fleshed out as being charming, but similarly lacking in honesty. Given that Jews only owned less than 6% of the land in 1948, Palestinians must have held, or lived on /off the rest. At the time of Spark and Gellhorn's visits, Palestinian citizens of Israel were under military rule and would continue to live under repressive curfews and closures until 1966 (McDowall, 1988:51). Expulsions of Palestinians continued after 1948 and included plans to deport the

⁶⁶ Spark Archives, National Library of Scotland. <http://digital.nls.uk/muriel-spark/first-novels/>

⁶⁷ Stannard records Spark's journey to Amman in 1961, 'which, like Tel Aviv had sprung from almost nowhere in the last twenty years. A million or more Arab refugees had spilled out of the former Palestine since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948' (2009: 245).

⁶⁸To give a sense of the desperation of millions of Palestinians living in refugee camps, I would select a couple of lines of poetry by Yousef M. Qasmiyeh 'while waiting, we bite our nails and flesh [...] In the camp, directions are needles in time's back. The camp, to sustain its body, shrinks its limbs,' from 'A Sudden Utterance Is The Stranger,' (2021: 72).

Palestinian farmers of the Galilee to South America (ibid: 45). The mass land grab of 1948 was being legalised through a slew of discriminatory legislation and strict border controls that exist to this day. There is no state violence depicted in Gellhorn's reporting, nor in Spark's novel, except references to historic Nazi war crimes during the trial.

In *Mandelbaum*, Abdul ends up leaving Palestine/Israel and does not care for history, 'the past has got nothing to do with you, my friend, and nothing to do with me. It's all dead history' (TMG, p. 136). 'In question is History as it is epitomized in the novel's account of the Eichmann trial, the novel's pivot' Glavin writes (Herman ed. 2010:166). I do not read *Mandelbaum* as having the trial as its pivot. The sense the novel gives me is one of avoidance. In it, Barbara Vaughan 'had thought of the trial as something apart from her purpose; it was political and temporary' (TMG, p. 221). Spark could not engage with the gravity and horror of the trial with Arendt's cool intelligence but was honest enough to reflect on its tedium and pick out key debates on natural justice and command responsibility.⁶⁹ Although sent by *The Observer*, Spark did not file copy with them, at least not an article that was printed.⁷⁰

Rather than viewing *Mandelbaum* to be calling on its readership to disregard all history, it calls on the West to continue to view it selectively. The novel reinforces the need to protect Christian sites, Judeo-Christian links, and *a fortiori*, the need for Eichmann to be tried and supporters of the Palestinians (such as the treacherous Gardnors) to be punished. It is Palestinian history that is erased from the picture, whilst other histories and ideologies are reinforced. Gellhorn called for support of the new Israeli state directly. Spark does not do so, but she does encourage the reader to not engage with either sides' politics. In such a situation, where the Israeli state was far more powerful, her position of a-political disengagement reinforced that power and the continuing dispossession of the Palestinians with it.

I always gravitate towards indications of hope in novels set in Palestine/Israel. In *The Lord*, there are few of these sadly, but it is a far more realistic novel than both *Mandelbaum* and *Infra Dig*. and in *Mandelbaum* they are found in the friendship of Abdul Ramdez and Mendel Ephraim. Spark's description of the heterogenous liberated group of friends in *Mandelbaum* who 'belonged to nothing but themselves, for whose temperament no scope existed in any society open to them, and who by day enacted the requirements of their society,' is worth quoting in full:

These were lapsed Jews, lapsed Arabs, lapsed citizens, runaway Englishmen, dancing prostitutes, international messes, failed painters, intellectuals, homosexuals. Some were silent, some voluble. Some were mentally ill, or would become so. (TMG, p. 123-4)

These scenes in *The Mandelbaum Gate* are similar to scenes in Eytan Fox's feature film *The Bubble* (2006), which shows Palestinians and Israelis of different religions and sexualities coming together in Tel Aviv. A similar space where Jewish and Arab intellectuals mingle, exists in the Innsbrück Bar

⁶⁹ Command responsibility in international law, allows for commanders to be held responsible for the actions of their subordinates. In terms of natural justice (too broad in scope to be dealt with here) one of the most pertinent cases relates to the trial and conviction of East German border guards in 1992.

⁷⁰ A search of *The Observer* newspaper archives (newspapers.com) for 1961 and 1962 showed no report by Spark.

found in Manning's novel *School for Love* (1951) set in Jerusalem in 1945. I used the historical works of Lazar (2016) and Klein (2014), which I reviewed, Dabbagh (2015) to create places in my novel with potential across ethno-religious boundaries; as spaces to cultivate optimism. To do so, I had to set the work in the distant past and for it, I was inspired by Katy Antonius to hold a party as one of its centrepieces.

B. INTERIORS.

I use the term 'interior,' in this commentary to encapsulate a range of meanings. It is a term that has had a specific geographical connotation in the Palestinian context, firstly as a space of resistance to settler-colonialism⁷¹ as used by the British before 1948, and secondly as feminised spaces of domestic organisation and industry. The potential impact of these depictions of space and place, as they tie in with techniques of political persuasion and whether they are grounded in reality and factual research is considered here.

Prior to 1948, particularly during the Palestinian revolt of 1936-1939, 'the Interior' was a term used to refer to the rural inland areas of Palestine where coordinated resistance against colonial rule was most consistently sustained, making these areas hard to access and rule. Since 1948, a broader connotation to the term 'interior,' Palestinians *min al-dakhil* (from the inside) has developed to refer to the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Said, 1985:51). For the purposes of this commentary, the main points of consideration are physical interiors, referring to the indoor or private spaces of mainly Palestinian homes, as well as the the 'interior' in terms of a native population, against whom violence was used by the British during the revolt. The removal of Palestinians from their homes and interior spaces to the outdoors, or exterior, mirrors their expulsion from the *dakhil* (inside) of Palestine to a life as refugees in a diaspora.

As a writer of fiction, another interiority of primary concern to me is that of the interior lives of Palestinians. There are marked similarities between the Afro-American slave narratives and the first memoirs written by Palestinians after the *nakba*, in terms of what they were trying to say. Toni Morrison summarises them in two points: firstly, that their 'historical lives are single, special' examples that are personal, but also representative of their race and secondly, they write to persuade the reader 'that we are human beings worthy of God's grace and the immediate abandonment of slavery.' With these two missions in mind, the narratives were clearly pointed,' she concludes (1987: 186).

Morrison's admires Olaudah Equiano's work and the fact that 'he and his co-authors did change things. Their works gave fuel to the fires that abolitionists were setting off everywhere' (1987:187). She then speaks of what these narratives lacked, firstly 'whenever there was an unusually violent incident, or a scatological one, or something 'excessive,' one finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day' (1987: 190). The authors would 'drop a veil,' over events for fear of

⁷¹ As Ball states, 'not only did Zionist ideology appear to be heavily influenced by models of European colonialism, but the Zionist establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine also bore a striking resemblance to the 'settler colonies,' founded in North and South America, Australia, South Africa and the Indian subcontinent (2018: 4).

offending the reader. But for her as a novelist setting fiction in the past it was the second absence that Morrison wrote with regards to the slave narratives that resonated most: 'most importantly – at least for me – there was no mention of their interior life' (1987: 191). Memory, Morrison continued, can facilitate 'access to the unwritten interior life of these people,' but for total access, 'only the act of the imagination can help me' (1987: 192). Descriptions of, and relationships with Palestinian interior spaces complete with sensory descriptions of rooms, cooking practices and household habits, as they appear in novels like Antonius's, provide vital prompts for novelists' imagination.

The battle for Palestinian land was a struggle largely fought through the conveying of literary images, as well as pictorial and later moving images, to capture Western sympathy and support. The force of political Zionism also coincided, more broadly, with the introduction of the image into the Arab world. Figural images are broadly proscribed in Islam and the introduction of photography, cinema, and television revolutionised the way the Arab world saw itself and the world.⁷² The invention of photography altered both art and literature, diminishing the need for pages of description or intricate brush strokes to capture reality.

In 2015-2018 I conducted research for a film project⁷³ which required me to develop an emotionally compelling, realistic story set during the Palestinian resistance movement. I needed to construct Palestinian villagers, male and female, with complex interior lives. This was a challenge, both in terms of images and texts, for multiple reasons, which can be loosely grouped into the following categories:

- (a) **Destruction:** this refers not only to the destruction of around 520 Palestinian villages, but also that of court records and photographic archives (Aderet, 2017). The destruction of the Palestinian Research Centre in Beirut, including its films, is referred to by Antonius (2000) and is the subject of a several documentaries.⁷⁴
- (b) **Physical access:** as a British-Palestinian with a career in international criminal law, it has not been easy for me to gain access to locations, archives and individuals in Israel/Palestine, as the borders are controlled by Israeli security and I have twice been refused entry and once been held for seven hours before being allowed entry.⁷⁵
- (c) **Bravado / shame:** A traumatic event can result in idealisation of the reality prior to expulsion, or a sense of shame about its outcome, both of which can distort accurate storytelling. The desire of Palestinians to overemphasize the heroism of their role in resisting their own expulsion has sometimes distorted the accuracy of accounts of life before the exodus of 1948, eradicating flaws in pre-1948 society (Tamari, 2009; Davis, 2011). Assaults associated with shame, for example sexual assault and rape, are infrequently referred to. One of the only accounts of rape during the *nakba* that I have read in fiction was written by Ethel Mannin

⁷² See Abdelfattah Kilito (1995).

⁷³ Working title, 'Historic Palestine Film Project.'

⁷⁴ *Kings and Extras* documentary film by Azza El Hassan (2006). <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1202192/> [Accessed 17/09/22].

⁷⁵ The threats at the border are referenced in Dabbagh, 2021.

(1963)⁷⁶ although the threat of rape, as a form of psychological warfare, is frequently referenced. There was also, as Antonius writes 'a belief [among Palestinians] that their own ignorance had contributed to the disaster' (1979: 28).

- (d) **Gender and class bias:** this refers to the universal phenomena of paying less attention to the lives of the economically poorer classes in society and to the women. The vast majority of the Palestinian population prior to 1948 were peasant farmers (*fellaheen*) predominantly illiterate and considered socially inferior, making accounts of their lives, particularly their internal lives, almost non-existent, an exception being the writings of anthropologist Hilda Grandquist (1935). As the interior of the home was the female domain it was also less accessible to outside observers. Women's lives were rarely recorded; Antonius writes of the women in GUPW 'if any of these women had published an account of her life she would have done as much for her country as sitting through a thousand committee-meetings could achieve' (2000: 265).
- (e) **Original lack of images:** the lack of Palestinian portraits and limited number of photographs, as well as relatively low levels of literacy, given the prevailing oral tradition, all restricted the number of preservable depictions of daily life. Early flash photography was problematic and expensive, so the photographs that exist tend to be taken outdoors, relying on natural light and depict formal occasions. Suad Amiry and Vera Tamari's *The Palestinian Village Home* (1989) rely on the watercolours of James Clark in the 1880s, to illustrate the traditional arrangement and colours of these homes.
- (f) **Fantastical religious mysticism:** This refers to the outsider or Western gaze on Palestinian society, which for centuries exaggerated or selectively viewed Biblical connections, encouraging Palestinians to dress up for tourist photographs of nativity scenes that blurred the realities of village life.⁷⁷

Palestinian interiors, personal lives for the first half of the twentieth century, if not longer, fell into a black hole of memory and imaging. Spatial literary imaginings based on in-depth knowledge, like Antonius's, are a source for being able to see these interior spaces and through them to be given an insight into the interior complexities, and the social and economic fabric of life in Palestine under the mandate. Her first-hand knowledge of these spaces and access, as a woman and an Arabic speaker, into domestic homes and lives through the oral testimonies she collected in the refugee camps of Lebanon and elsewhere is unique.⁷⁸ Antonius's descriptions range from the incidental to the deliberate attempts to create a lost world from memory, or to create images and narratives that counter

⁷⁶ Echoes here of editor Maria Child taking on responsibility to 'draw the veil aside,' when it came to sexual abuse of slave writer "Linda Brent," Morrison (1987: 191). The rape scene of two women in their Lydda home by soldiers from the Haganah is at (21: 1964).

⁷⁷ Saïd (2003), Christison (1999: 16-23), Fox (2001: 10) are some of the multiple sources here.

⁷⁸ There are a number of memoirs and novels by Palestinians, for example Ibrahim Jabra Ibrahim's *The First Well; A Palestinian Boyhood* (1987) and Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* (1990), but neither of these have the range of access to pre-*nakba* Palestinian life, including interaction with the British that Antonius had. Antonius considered the amount of autobiography to be insufficient (2000:265).

political objectives that rely on deception or distortion. Her writing creates a possibility for furthering Palestinian history, art, legacies, and projections for the future.

III. HOMES & GARDENS.

A. INTRODUCTION.

'I must show the house,' states Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, as 'one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind [...] the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life' (1964: 28-29). In the Palestinian context, discussion of a Palestinian home is more likely to be about its destruction than its creation or its aesthetics; since 1948, over 130,000 Palestinian homes have been demolished (ICHAD, 2021: 1). As the Israeli lawyer Michael Sfard puts it, concurring with, and adding to, Bachelard's metaphorical description, 'A house is not merely a physical structure. To the extent that a house is a building that functions as a home, its demolition signifies that the people who used to inhabit it have become homeless: both roofless and rootless. They have lost their ability to exercise control over their inner space, as well as their communal space. The destruction thus, affects their material, emotional and ontological sense of security – that is their identity' (Sfard in Viterbo et al, 2018: 162).

The architects who authored the Riwaq Registry write, 'Palestine – the people, land, culture and the history – was the victim of catastrophe in 1948. And while the human, social, and political dimensions of this catastrophe have been subjects of extensive research, not much attention has been given to the cultural impact of this catastrophe' (Riwaq vol1, 2006: 13). I believe that against this process of ongoing dispossession and destruction, it is the role of the author to rebuild and to create resistant literary works that counter the violence carried out against physical structures, and the ongoing process of dispossession and dislocation that ensues.

Novelists, together with other agents of cultural production, are tasked with conveying not just a pictorial representation of what these homes were, or are, but how they functioned as economic and social units; the way that their inhabitants related and lived around them. By doing so, a novel can convey precisely and intimately what these spaces signified to their owners and how they were used. To write fiction is an imaginative act, one that is connected to fantasy which can be distinguished from dreams using Jacqueline Rose's interpretation of Sigmund Freud, when she writes 'for unlike the latter, which travel back from perception to unconscious, disintegrating and reordering themselves as they go, fantasy is always progressive' (Rose, 1996: 3). When representing black lives – and others have written on how similar 'Palestinian' lives can be⁷⁹ – writing should be, as Toni Morrison states, a form of 'literary archaeology,' where 'memory, imagination and language all come together to create continuities in black lives past and present' (Morrison, 1998: 192). Like

⁷⁹ This refers back not just to the findings of apartheid, mentioned in the Introduction, but to also to other literary works, for example Suha Hammad's *Born Palestinian, Born Black* (1996). James Baldwin was also keenly aware of the similarities of the 'US brand of racism' with the treatment of the Other in countries where he lived, for example the Algerians in France and the Kurds in Turkey (Zaborowska, 2015: 233). Christison states how Palestinians were 'equated with 'uncivilised,' American Indians,' in the orientalist framework of the US from the nineteenth century onwards (1999: 19).

Afro-American literature, Palestinian literary prose has its roots in memoir, oral testimony and autobiography.⁸⁰ The fictive form was introduced later, particularly in English, from the 2000s with the work of Susan Abulhawa, Isabella Hammad and others (Abu Manneh, 2019: 3).

Through the act of creating settings and physical worlds for characters, novels are also producing spaces, albeit fictional ones. 'The concept of space,' as Henri Léfèbre wrote, 'links the mental and the cultural, the social and the historical' (2017: 236). It is a reflection on the interrelationship between the actions of societies on the nature around them. Focusing on homes and gardens is reflective of personal aspirations of peoples' lives, not the public, or dictated ones found for example in the structures like public monuments (Sakr, 2012).

The interplay between peoples in the same natural terrain when it comes to interior spaces as well as with plants and their classifications are treated very differently in Spark's and Antonius's works. Spark describes cities, architecture, homes, wildlife and gardens in England, Israel and Jordan/Palestine having the Mandelbaum Gate, a border crossing, as its title. Antonius's descriptions of environment are limited to Palestine and the broader Mashriq region, which does not reference boundaries, or state names.

To explore the positioning of these literary works, their descriptions are set against the two influential Zionist slogans mentioned in the introduction, which were imbued with notions of Western colonial ideologies. Palestinians, like many other colonised peoples, were depicted as part of a broader nomadic Arab population and 'nomadic people were never,' as Robert C. Young puts it, 'in possession of the land in a European sense, which is how colonists were able, following the 17th-century English philosopher John Locke, to declare the land empty, 'terra nulla' (2003: 51). Every choice made by a novelist producing spatial imaginings in this terrain influenced aspirations for self-determination and post-war notions of justice. Writers' choices either counter or reinforce these slogans; thereby either opposing or accommodating the status quo.

B. CITIES.

One of the elements of Soraya Antonius's personality that impressed me was her choice to return to the Palestinian revolution in Beirut of the 1960s-80s. As a Franco-Anglophone single woman of a minority Christian background who came from one of the richest households in Palestine, she had far safer and more comfortable options that she could have pursued, rather than to devote herself to Palestinian resistance. It is also a credit to the revolutionary movement that she was broadly accepted into it, despite her ostensibly counter revolutionary class background.⁸¹ In his chapter on 'Ghassan Kanafani and Revolutionary Ethics,' Bashir Abu Manneh (2016: 79), quotes

⁸⁰ Toni Morrison in, 'The Site of Memory' (Zissner, 1998: 185) says of her presence at the conference on memoir, 'the authenticity of my presence here lies in the fact that a very large part of my own literary heritage is the autobiography.'

⁸¹ Tamar's 2009 article touches on the opposition felt towards urban leaders by Palestinians for fleeing cities like Jaffa, prior to the *nakba* in 1948. The Palestinian resistance movement was influenced by Marxist-Leninist beliefs during Antonius's time. See for example Chaliand (1972). The seminal literary account of the Palestinian resistance movement in exile available in English is *Prisoner of Love*, by Jean Genet (1986 translated 2003), which covers the author's two-year period spent in the Palestinian refugee camps of Jordan.

the novelist Radwa Ashur (1946-2014), “‘Kanafani creates many crushed characters that throb with life and that testify to their creator’s existential and intellectual conviction that the tragedy of losing a homeland is first of all a tragedy of the poor.’” Antonius’s heart and mind may have been in the right place, but her background wasn’t.

Salim Tamari, in his article ‘From Emma Bovary to Hassan al-Banna’ (2009), charts the loss of Palestinian centres and cities since 1948 and the impact of this on Palestinian culture, ‘the values of small towns became the values of society in general,’ he reflects, noting how ‘the loss of metropolitan centres through war also meant the loss of urbanism as a cultural product of big cities. Small towns became the arena for the formulation of the ethics of political resistance, but also for the restructuring of normative behaviour’ (2009: 55). Not only did the major cities, ‘Haifa, Akka, and Jaffa, as well as smaller cities like Ramleh, Lydda, Majdal and Isdud,’ experience ‘a displacement of their population, but Palestinian society as a whole experienced the demise of an urbane metropolitan culture that was developing in these cities and the relocation of its intelligentsia and dominant classes, not to the highlands of Palestine, but to the Arab diaspora’ (2009: 44). Antonius’s recreation of life in these cities provides an alternative vision not just of what Palestine was, but also of what it could be.

Prior to writing her first novel, Soraya Antonius, produced a short photographic book on architecture; *Lebanese Architecture, from the vernacular to the modern* (Antonius, 1965). In its introduction, she quotes Hans Kohn (1891-1971)⁸² who observed that ‘the soundest way of arriving at the historical essence of an unknown country was to study the architecture of the capital’s public buildings.’ Antonius remarks that in Beirut there was ‘no single Lebanese public building’ (they were Turkish, American, French). This, concludes Antonius, ‘expresses an age-old Lebanese suspicion of the State as an entity, of large abstractions which endanger the practical business of living. The rulers were left alone to build their sandcastles; the people sensibly went about their own affairs’ (Antonius, 1965: 6). This observation echoes observations on the peoples of Greater Syria under the Ottomans by the writer Marmaduke Pickthall (1875-1936) fifty years earlier:

These were happy. Poor they might be, but they had no dream of wealth; the very thought of competition was unknown to them [...] People complained that they were badly governed, which merely meant that they were left to their devices save on great occasion. (Pickthall 1918: 5)⁸³

A distinctive feature of Antonius’s novels are the vivid descriptions of Palestinian city homes, in terms of their architecture, history and décor, crossing the social scales, from village homes to grand Jerusalem homes, which emphasise not only objects, but interrelationships with them. As a rule, the poorer the characters in Antonius work (reflected in the village section below), the happier they are, whereas, the closer to Western styles of living and property ownership, the more inclined to moral weakness.⁸⁴ The corrupting power of money is seen less in Spark’s work.

⁸² Hans Kohn was a philosopher, historian of nationalism and a pioneer of the Brit Shalom movement that promoted a binational solution for co-existence of Jews and Arabs.

⁸³ Pickthall’s *Saïd the Fisherman* is read by the central characters in *Road to Beersheba* by Ethel Mannin. Rooney (2018: 89) suggests that ‘it is possible that Mannin and [Emile] Habiby may both be engaged in reworking *Saïd the Fisherman*, itself seeming to draw on Arab folk literature.’

⁸⁴ Umm Tareq who comes from a poorer class, is fundamentally disloyal and corrupted further by money.

In terms of cities, an affluent, bourgeois Europhile Jerusalem home is described in *The Lord*, complete with its 'gilt chairs with petit-point embroidery depicting ancient Europeans in contrived poses, the satin-covered pouffes with black silk cords, round the creamy bulge, the shelves crowded with knick-knacks of Murano glass animals' (Antonius, 1987: 35). Some of her descriptions read almost like police reports, documenting how many belongings and valuables existed prior to the *nakba*.

Antonius's eye is shrewd, and her descriptions of Jaffa are some of her finest. Her ability to criticise, whilst not overly romanticising, comes through at several points in the novel, shoring up her reliability. The town is described by the main narrator, Miss Alice, in 1910 as being a 'crummy sort of town' and the novel commences with a disturbing account by her of Umm Tareq describing how a *jurn* could be used to abort children (p. 18, TL). Antonius nevertheless relishes in describing a home, seen through Miss Alice's eyes, as follows:

A house on the sea front. A perfect cube topped by an incongruously re-tiled pointed roof that gave it the look of a squat crystal. The tiles were imported from Marseilles and each one was stamped with a bee.⁸⁵ [...] The house was neatly sliced into two through its midriff; above were the living quarters, a huge central *dar* divided two thirds up its length by a triple arch, the gothic ogives filled in with sugary wooden curlicues at the apex, repeating those of the façade. Off this central meeting, sitting, eating, discussion space lay several rooms, to be used indifferently as necessity arose for sleeping, cooking, writing reports to the Society, women's reunions. (p. 13, TL)

The description moves from location, structure, materiality to function and movement and with precision. The reference to 'gothic ogives,' stresses the interlinking influences of Arab architecture on the West, for the 'ogive' has its roots in Abbasid architecture and went on to influence the Gothic in Europe, a form of architecture once referred to by architect Christopher Wren as 'Saracen style' (Darke, 2020).

The interior of the property, whose walls are bare of adornment, is described at length: the plain walls, windows, and the view. The conclusion of Miss Alice, who had commented on the bareness, the lack of objects and coverings compared to English homes, is the most relevant: 'but I can tell you this house has no need of art, it is art. There,' Antonius writes describing her pointing at the centre of the floor, where the tiles formed a small concentric circle, 'At the August full moon, the light strikes its bullseye, right in the centre of the circle. Just one night a year for a few minutes' (p. 16, TL).

This contrasts sharply with Spark's description of a house, seen through the eyes of Freddy, of Arab architecture as a haphazard affair:

The bungalow itself despite its English inhabitants, is not quite as it should be. 'It was a slightly crooked house [...] He had heard that the Arab builders simply built a house, they did not use any instruments, not even a set-square. (TMG, p. 54)

She is a 'slattern, who bred cockroaches and mice as much as children' (p. 43, TL).

⁸⁵ The bee is a reference to the Lafarge company in the Marseille region who exported tiles to the Ottoman empire and retain the 'bee' stamp to this day. <https://www.northernarchitecture.us/masonry-structures/introduction-ttq.html>.

This could well have been true, but it was also wondrous. The architect Hassan Fathy observing Nubian builders in Egypt, wrote:

They worked rapidly and unconcernedly, with never a thought that what they were doing was quite a remarkable work of engineering, for these masons were working according to the laws of statics and the science of the resistance of materials with extraordinary intuitive understanding. (1989: 10)

Antonius shows how Palestinian architecture was developed in alignment with nature, through the knowledge of precise, even if momentary, astrological configurations. It creates a 'magic house,' according to Tareq, who is himself described as a 'magician,' later (p. 43). Antonius also has an eye for the economics of the house:

The lower part of the cubic house housed the stables for donkey, mule goats and cows and a horse while at the back half separated by a wall three metres thick and low semi-circular barrel vaults, held the winter stores. Plaster silos lined the walls, decorated by the last inhabitant's wife, who had scratched patterns on a dado two-thirds up and pressed her child's hand, dipped in blue pain, repeatedly over the front. (p. 19, TL)

She goes on to explain other details, such as the working of electricity (p. 32, TL), the cost of rope (p.38, TL). The precise mechanics of domestic economies are mapped out clearly in *The Lord* in a manner similar to the domestic economics of an (English-run) house that is central to Manning's novel *School for Love* (1951), set in 1945 Jerusalem. In contrast, Spark's depiction of Jaffa is a place where Vaughan is offered to visit the house of the tenth century Saint Simon the Tanner:

Beside them was a paved courtyard leading to some low-built dark doorways. A woman from the interior screamed, then wailed and finally emerged into the courtyard sobbing loudly. She was an Arab girl wearing a tight, short Western dress, very unkempt.

At the end of the paragraph, Spark comments, 'The woman was wailing still from within the house' (p.22, TMG). It is a messy, dark, oppressive world, that of the Arab. The impression given is of one of a 'slum,' a word which by the 1820s, according to Anghi Mukherjee, 'had three distinct meanings: not just a room, but one in which low goings-on took place: a street, alley, or court, inhabited by people of a low class or by the very poor; loose talk and gypsy language, slang as slum' (2018: 87). Miss Alice in *The Lord* speaks generally of women in 'city slums,' at the beginning of the 20th Century (p.18, TL), but the term is not used in *Mandelbaum*.⁸⁶

Spark's descriptions of cities through Freddy's eyes, provides a sense of the sexually ambiguous and corrupting nature of the city streets:

Many young Arab boys in Palestine reminded Freddy of Hardcastle. They slightly disturbed him. He preferred the vivacious type in the alley bazaars, arguing, cheating flashing Arabic code-words at each other. (p. 61, TMG)

⁸⁶ Gellhorn however, when speaking of Palestinian refugee camps says that although they are not luxurious, 'many people live in a nastier state in American and European slums' (1961: 13). The depiction of Palestinian city space of the fairly affluent Manshiya district of Jaffa, that has been reinforced more recently in Linda Grant's Orange Prize winning novel, *When I Lived in Modern Times* (2000) set in Mandate Palestine.

When Freddy admires the furnishing of a Palestinian home, described tenderly in the *Via Dolorosa* section set in Jerusalem, 'on one wall was hung a carpet of great age and mellowness, the most beautiful Freddy had seen,' this is in the home of Alexandros, who is a Christian and an Armenian, and the room, 'was that of an uncomplicated, tasteful Arab, and it might have been a room in the house of any Western man of Freddy's past acquaintance' (p. 177, TMG); the allusion is to external, non-Arab, non-Muslim influences. 'Very shiny and tasteless' (1961: 21), Gellhorn says of a Palestinian home in the 'Arabs of Palestine'. I have found generally in literary and journalistic references that taste is rarely something that attaches to Arabs, particularly not to Muslims. Gellhorn and Spark are examples of this. Gellhorn admires the landscape, when visiting the depopulated village of Meron, whose inhabitants are now in Lebanese refugee camps, but seems to consider it valueless for those who have left it. The view, she writes, is a 'dream of beauty,' but 'hardship for hardship'. The view is something the refugees can do without (1961: 18).

References to Arab homes in *Mandelbaum* are few. These are set against multiple references during Barbara Vaughan's tour of the land by an Israeli guide, to places with Biblical names: Herod's city, the 'fertile plain of Sharon,' Mount Tabor, the burning bush, the Mensa Christi church in Nazareth, the Dead Sea Scrolls. These are experienced by Barbara Vaughan as she reflects back on provincial English settings: the Fighting Cocks Pub in St. Albans, the Bells Sands, Worcestershire, Golders Green and so on (TMG, pp.22-58) forming a subliminal connection between the Biblical and the familiarly English for her readership. *The Lord* also contains references to English towns and British associations, but their placement appears more random and does not have the same effect.

It is in the city of Beersheba where the Israeli nation state building project is seen most clearly through Vaughan's eyes, with attention being given to the exterior of the new town. It 'appeared in a white dazzle of modern blocks reaching down to the great desert waves of the Negev'. The reader follows the pointing hand of the tour guide, 'Look, all this has sprung up in 13 years,' he informs the irritated Barbara Vaughan, who replies that she is only interested in Beersheba of Genesis. 'This is the Beersheba of Genesis,' Spark's guide replies (TMG, p.23).

The implication being made by the guide is that God is behind the creation of the modern state of Israel and the genesis, or development of the city of Beersheba. This transference of Biblical stories onto Palestine/Israel being a notion Antonius reported as being taken up by even the most secular of writers and reporters after the 1967 war (2000: 264) to justify their unconditional support for the new Israeli state. Even when modern development insensitively intrudes on the Biblical, in Spark's depiction, it is clearly functional and impressive. The modern town, Vaughan concedes, 'had its own beauty' (TMG, p.23).

The expulsion of the residents of Beersheba followed the expulsion of 'those Palestinians who lived in urban spaces, who amounted to over 400,000 people at this time or some 30 percent of the total Arab population of the country, were the first to be dispossessed' (Khalidi, 2001: 14). Prior to 1948, historians have documented that Beersheba (Bir Sabi'), was a small town of 5,000 inhabitants, which was occupied on October 21, 1948 by Israeli forces. The historian Ilan Pappé records:

Habib Jarada, who today lives in the city of Gaza, remembered the people of Bersheeba being driven out at gunpoint to Hebron. His most vivid image is that of the town's mayor beseeching the occupying officer not to deport the people. 'We need land, not slaves,' was the blunt answer.' (Pappé, 2006: 195)

The historian Salman Abu Sitta, writes of his expulsion from his idyllic family home near Beersheba in his memoir, *Mapping My Return* (2016), and the raping and killing of a Palestinian woman from this district is the inspiration for Adania Shibli's novella, *Minor Detail* (2020), see Dabbagh (2020b). Today, the mosque in Beersheba has been turned into a shop (Pappé, 2006: 217). Even where Palestinian cultural buildings remain, their connotations have been stripped from them; the spiritual transformed into the commercial. None of this history is even obliquely alluded to in Spark's novel.

Spark writes of Beersheba and the story of the patriarch Isaac before concluding, 'The mighty blessing, once bestowed, was irrevocable. Smooth Jacob, not tough, hairy Esau, got the spiritual inheritance and took the place that the Lord had reserved for him among the Fathers of Israel, such being the ways of the Lord in the Middle East'. The next sentence flips back, with Sparkian brilliance, to English references and the irreverent, to capture the sympathies of Spark's most influential readership, 'Barbara reflected that God had not been to Eton' (TMG, p. 23). This 'in joke' about England's most élitist public school has the implication that she was witnessing something just and fair, as was the Lord, and that good prevailed, unlike Eton, where brutishness and ugliness was awarded. *Plus ça change*, was my initial response to her jibe about Etonians, but in this context with regards to Palestine/Israel, her humorous quip, through skilful juxtaposition, whitewashes an expulsion, by ascribing the toughness and hairiness of Esau to a population who had in this instance, been victims, not aggressors.

The Beersheba descriptions in *Mandelbaum* are the most pointed example of the triad of references: the Biblical, empty space with careless moveable people, and the appreciated, evolving modern state of a dedicated, victimised people, that recurs in Spark's description of Palestine/Israel. This ties in with slogans of 'making the desert bloom,' and 'a people without a land.' Lopez refers to how 'would-be propagandists' like Spark were encouraged to write various 'slants' on a message that could prevent the reader from getting bored and to 'play countless variations on the main theme,' (2020: 983). Spark re-iterates this version of history that justified the violence of the modern state, referencing back to the Biblical, as did Martha Gellhorn before her and other prevailing Israeli-sympathetic journalists, writers and film makers of the time up until the current day.

There is, however, a reticence by Spark to fully endorse this materialistic, militaristic new nation that runs the risk of rupturing the connection to the land of the Prophets, that would have appealed to her predominantly Christian readership. The continuum between the ancient and the modern is smoother on the Jordanian side of the border, although the lack of 'development' is pointedly observed. Spark juxtaposes the Biblical and the modern in Israel, with few references to Islam a religion that dominated Palestine since the 9th Century. There is only one call to prayer, no references

to Arab, Islamic or Ottoman architecture to mosques, or the Dome of the Rock that dominates the city. This ties in with Orientalist visions of the land that stressed the Jewish inhabitants and the Christian holy sites, discounting centuries of Arab rule (Christison, 1999: 20).

Cities are also the centres of power and where those who exercise sanctioned violence are based, whether in the form of the British colonial state or the Israeli state. There is no sense of violence coming from the newly formed Israeli state in *Mandelbaum*: Israel's Jerusalem is a place of safety. It is in Jordan where threats to Barbara Vaughan are feared. Compared to Spark's innocuous yet heroic Freddy Hamilton, Antonius however sees oppression running through the trained British colonial psyche at work and at play, for example when she writes, 'It was Farren who should have run the CID; his training in the nursery, at table with his parents, let alone Eton or Magdalen, fitted him beyond nightmares to extract the truth' (p. 48, TL). She also provides a rare but vivid description of the interior of a British prison cell where Tareq is held:

In this room, there were solid walls and the sounds didn't seep through, unless Challis chose to open the door, polishing his thin-rimmed spectacles as he did so, to remind the detainee that the eyes of the British were as keen as the pain they knew how to inflict with their talons, that the empire stretched everywhere, was omnipotent, unmoved by the anguish of those who were disloyal. (p. 165, TL)

Professor Isa Boullata (1929-2019) writes in his review of *The Lord*, 'Soraya Antonius's style is beautiful. However, occasionally her sentences are a bit long, as though she is breathlessly trying to include in each more than it can really convey' (1987: 3). I agree but feel that it is the ferocity of Antonius's outpouring and the juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous situations that gives her writing its urgency, rawness, sense of truth and outrage. Antonius does occasionally veer into hyperbole and cliché – 'inflict their talons,' for example⁸⁷ – which can distract readers more accustomed to restrained expressions of emotions, detracting from the heartfelt (and entirely legitimate) rage felt. Antonius's work is a *cri de coeur*, a lived work, with all of its violence, fury, verbal slippages and contradictions. Confusion and outrage at the injustice of British colonial policies breaks through when describing a people she knew, understood, socialized with and was educated by. She was experiencing a collective trauma and brutality at the time of writing, that she was unable to stop.

I believe Antonius was before her time, that editors and readers were unaccustomed to this level of honest rage by former colonial subjects. 'We are wary of being zealous,' Franz Fanon wrote in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952: ix). It was for black / Arab writers to hide the horrors and to avoid being angry or accusatory. Toni Morrison wrote with regards to slave narratives, 'In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things' (p. 191, TL). It could be however, that perhaps Antonius did not re-write enough. *The Lord* was her first novel. In the nearly twenty years since I started writing fiction, I do not believe that I write better than I did in 2003, but I know I am far more patient and more brutal

⁸⁷ This could be a reference to the hawk that is saved at the opening of the novel and shot at the closure, but if so, the symbolism of the bird (revered object / source of evil) is not consistent.

with my re-writing, something that Toni Morrison articulates, I believe, when she writes:

When you first start writing – and I think it’s true for a lot of beginning writers – you’re scared to death that if you don’t get that sentence right that minute it’s never going to show up again. And it isn’t. But it doesn’t matter – another one will, and it’ll probably be better. And I don’t mind writing badly for a couple of days because I know I can fix it – and fix it again and again and again, and it will be better. (1998: 200)

Antonius’s rawness has its own value; there’s a visceral urgency to it. The surprising juxtapositions in Antonius’s writing jar the reader. At the end of the passage above, Antonius moves on from describing a scene of state imprisonment and torture, to social gatherings:

Now he did open the door, and left it gaping, so that the life and agony of the place trickled, gushed in and formed the sort of background hubbub that makes large foodless parties so good a venue for private exchange. (p. 165, TL)

The juxtaposition here is as though Antonius is trying to form complicity with the English language reader, sharing the experiences of being at and hosting parties, sometimes with the men ultimately responsible for the brutality and injustice that they were responsible for. This uncanny admixture of oppressed (Palestinians) and oppressor (British Mandate officials) socialising together in 1930s Jerusalem is something that features centrally in *Infra Dig*. It is partly inspired by the formidable reputation that Katy Antonius (Soraya’s mother) had as a hostess in Jerusalem.⁸⁸ Here is a description of a party, by Antonius:

Kit was invited to a party. He usually was, but this time the hostess was an Arab: one of the rare examples of the capital who mixed races at her parties. At the spread of food, heaping an admirably eclectic mixture of tehina salads, smoked fish and roast beef on to his art deco plate, Kit found himself next to a local architect, doing the same. (p. 197, TL)

Again here, the level of observation by Antonius is never accidental, with the combination of foods, the type of chinaware, and the eclectic selection of guests. Similarly, the party in *Infra Dig* is a gathering not just of pleasure, but of political possibility. The eclectic range of guests and the apparent desire of Antonius’s fictive Arab host to ‘mix races’ to challenge, for example, British guests’ morality and confidence in themselves, by compelling them to communicate with articulate Arabs over food in a beautiful setting. She upholds E. M. Forster’s central tenet, ‘only connect,’ which I develop, with a potentially positive outcome in *Infra Dig*.

Compared with Soraya Antonius, Muriel Spark’s descriptions of buildings are sparse, but her writing style is less descriptive in general. On the Israeli side of the border, a sense of order is conveyed. Freddy Hamilton goes out ‘among the speedy wide streets of people and motor traffic in the modern city’ (p. 15, TMG). In his hotel he sits in a ‘small green courtyard,’ the last time he had met Miss Vaughan there, ‘the State of Israel had that day sent up its first guided rocket’ (p. 17, TMG).

⁸⁸ Katy Antonius’s skills as a hostess are frequently referenced. They appear in the obituary by Hodgkin, Segev’s historical account and by Collins and Lapierre where she is described as a ‘noted hostess’ (1972: 531). They wrote: ‘rare was the distinguished visitor who had not passed under the Arabic inscription, “Enter and be welcome,” on the stone arch above the door of her home. Over her parquet floors had passed a sampling of international society, bishops and Arab princes, scholars and generals, poets, and politicians’ (p. 50).

It is a modern state, with none of the romantic, spiritual connection to the Bible that Barbara Vaughan hoped for. She complains of being whizzed through Nazareth by her guide who:

wanted to show her the cement factories and pipelines of Israel instead of the shrines, and had been reluctant to drive her to the top of Mount Tabor, the probable scene of the Transfiguration. (p. 18, TMG)

In these cities a degree of familiarity is stressed to an English reader on the Israeli side: Miss Vaughan 'pulls at a fraying piece of wicker on the arm of her chair' (p. 20 TMG) as she talks of watering geraniums while waiting for the post. The characters have professions (lawyers, judges, journalists, tour guides) and family lives that are identifiable to the Western reader. There is a growing sense of purpose and a uniformity to the Israeli national character, lacking the class and national divisions found in Manning's depictions of the heterogeneous Jewish refugee populations of Palestine found in *School for Love* written just thirteen years earlier. The Israeli side of Spark's Jerusalem is a familiar yet brave new world in formation with a united body of people. The rag tag 'misfits' are the Palestinians with their Greek and Arab names, their divergent religions and their dubious relationship with the land.

C. VILLAGES.

Prior to 1948, Palestinian society was predominantly rural. Almost three quarters of the non-Jewish population lived in villages, although Palestine was not immune to global trends to urbanise. The 1945-6 Survey of Palestine indicates a drop in the rural population from 70% in 1931 to 66% by 1944 (SOP, Vol II, 1991: 697). In the hugely popular and numerous travelogues to 'the Holy Land' available in the 19th Century to the American reader, Palestinians rarely feature. 'If not reviled, Palestine's Arabs were often ignored altogether,' Kathleen Christison notes (1999: 20). They are frequently described as nomadic, or Bedouin, although in this period the vast majority of Muslim Arabs who 'made up well over 90 percent of Palestine's population' were inhabitants of towns and villages (1999: 20).

Antonius's architectural interest is not just taken by the grand houses of Jaffa, but also by the organic beauty and practical function of Palestinian village houses. She describes the material 'lumps of stone and mud,' that these houses are built with and their imperfect domes, whilst appreciating their logic, the entrance 'zigzag' that keeps the rooms private, the polished copper and brass 'shining like sun and moon,' the squared tiles in each room for muddy boots, as well as the smells. The sensory experience of the home is fully recreated in her work:

the great oil jar whose comforting smell reminded the household all through the winter of the sprint on the narrow-terraced fields, with cyclamen sprouting from every laborious dry-stone wall and the babies rubbing their cheeks purple and red with anemones.' (p. 154, TL)

Characteristic of Antonius's writing style is the admiration for the functionality of objects. She uses every opportunity to provide the reader with a sense of the daily and seasonal rhythms of life in Palestine, its villages and towns. As a narrator, Antonius's voice becomes clearer in this section:

– shuddering in some racist recess of the soul, where other people’s habits are too alien to be accepted or thought through [...] They don’t scrub their floors nor hose them down, an appalled woman told me a generation later. They nail their carpet to the floor and then they leave it there, and they never wash what is underneath. Children of the forbidden! [...] and you lived there long. How could you breathe in that filth? (p. 181, TL)

Antonius’s writing speaks back to such pejorative perceptions of village homes, depicting them with admiration and warmth, but regrettably, this is an example of where I consider that her writing lacks the narrative coherence and evenness of tone that detracts from the quality and intelligence of her writing. An attentive editorial team could have advised her to smooth out this paragraph. The reader is being directed as to what to think too directly, there is no playful obscurity here. Antonius failed to play the game of emotional restraint and reserve sufficiently, in this section, it would, in my opinion, have made her writing stronger for her voice to be less recognisable in the narrators.

Palestinian village life, as Antonius depicts it, was frequently carefree. There are echoes here of the sentiment of the title of a collection of Mahmoud Darwish’s poems, *Unfortunately, it was Paradise* (2003). But in Antonius’s writing the threat of colonisation and its sinister implications for this population with its indulgent approach to nature and easy living are always cutting through this world. Take, for example, this description of a village house after a raid by British forces:

the cotton stuffing of the slashed bedding lay everywhere; even when soaked with the contents of the smashed olive jar. The white or grey fluff covered the floor. The silos were split, butt-thudded open, and the grain has disintegrated into a mash that lay soaking, sodden on the carpets and clothing, inextricable, however devoted the washing. The pathetic contents of the *eisni* cupboard – the few bits of china that every woman treasured in her home, kept out of harm’s way in the specially curved niche – lay in a small heap, jumbled with the broken pane of flimsy glass that had been installed to protect them. (p. 154, TL)

After hundreds of Palestinian villages were destroyed in 1948, little remained except for tombstones and the sabra plants that traditionally encircled them (Khalidi, 1992). These can easily be missed when driving by. There is no reference to Palestinian villages in *The Mandelbaum Gate*. Hundreds had been destroyed thirteen years before Spark’s visit, with the express purpose that influential visitors like Muriel Spark would be happy to believe that they and their inhabitants never existed. The ethnic cleansing worked, not just to expunge a population from its land, but also from international consciousness, facilitated by writers prepared to turn a blind eye to it.

D. PLANTS.

Plants and nature feature strongly in both Antonius’s and Spark’s novels, but animals roam through the landscape in Antonius’s work: tigers, goats, wolves, jackals, hyenas, Syrian bears, hawks, kestrels, horses. The references to the agricultural cycle, economy and labour, point to the symbiosis between Palestinian life and the land. She not only has unique descriptions of Palestinian agricultural practices, but people’s annual customs and trips to the sea:

they were free: the children were rolling in the undertow, shrieking, and gulping, while a few young men took it in turn to guard the notorious currents of that shore. It was a picnic, a holiday from solid houses, from polishing and scouring, beating carpets, recording mattresses. The wild pleasure of living in a tent, with only the bare necessities, with the stars and sun visible in every corner and the breeze whistling through the sharp tough

grass. (p. 166, TL)

Antonius's later describes visits to the 'banana leaved jungles of Jreishi,' with its 'singing, ululating featherheads who invariably had a tambourine or a lute among them' (p.174, TL), and in trips to the *biyyara* the threat of empire's 'talons' is never far away:

... the noisy chirping children dodging under an arm to lick the huge copper ladle, the eternity of the seasons that had not yet learnt enough of the pallid empire. (p. 174, TL)

This empire, Mary Louise Pratt writes in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), was bolstered not just by philosophers, but also by an army of scientists, botanists and explorers. Pratt points to the significance of the year 1735 in terms of both the determining the exact shape of the earth and the introduction of Linneaus's system of nature which 'changed European elites' understanding of themselves and their relations to the rest of the globe' (1992: Ch.2). The mastery of nature leads to the creation of the English garden, control and discipline being ensconced in its beauty. Barbara Vaughan in *Mandelbaum* thinks back on her relatives' English garden with its 'lawn as beautiful as eternity' (p.34, TMG), and hints of this beauty are found in Joanna's garden for Freddy. Palestinians only disrupt this order, they do not add to it, or interact with it harmoniously: 'the Young Arab boy had been in the garden again, and had now slipped like a lantern-slide into the house, leaving the picture as before' (p.59, TMG).⁸⁹

Through Miss Alice's narration, the arrogance of colonial approaches to Palestinian farming methods is portrayed in the opening of *The Lord*:

When the British came in force they were scornful of the peasants' way of farming, said it was biblical, and they meant no pious compliment. They introduced deep iron ploughs... and they paid peasants to clear their fields of the stones that littered them in such visible profusion. You know the result? The stones had collected moisture all through the night and dripped it onto the earth; once they were cleared the earth dried out and the fields that had been so painfully cleared showed a sorry crop of grain, almost earless, compared to the stony medieval fields whose owners had refused to bother. (p. 21, TL)

Unlike Antonius, Spark's approach to nature was entirely British and imbued with the spirit of Empire. As Pratt writes, plant classification from the early 18th Century onwards led to 'the construction of a global-scale meaning through the descriptive apparatuses of natural history' (1992: Ch.2). The nomenclature and classification of plants imbues a sense of European ownership, separates the individual plants from their ecosystem, geographies and peoples to enable values (whether these were medicinal or culinary, both had economic measures) to be placed upon them.

Flowers recur incessantly in Spark's *Mandelbaum*. One of her most vivid images of cultivation appears in the following passage:

Freddy supposed he was wrong, he knew little about wildflowers really, but he had a theory that these plants that he had pulled from the soil for Joanna, and those she had gathered for herself, were not indigenous at all. Their seeds had been brought to Palestine and sown, he suspected by a conspiracy of the English Spinster under mandate. A second cousin of his had done the same service for India, where she had

⁸⁹ Another intrusion on the 'delightful English atmosphere,' occurs later when 'Freddy sat in Joanna's garden, appalled and altogether beset by an inarticulate dread while Ramdez approached, followed by his womenfolk' (p.76, TMG)

returned after every home leave with a shoe- box full of wildflowers gone to seed. This virgin cousin had expressed the sentiment that when she scattered these flowers abroad in the fields and sidewalks of India, she was doing something to unite East and West. (p. 54, TMG)

Freddy's absurd conviction is that the wildflowers of Palestine could not actually be Palestinian – potentially because they are too familiar, or too beautiful to be associated as an organic manifestation of the Arab world – but must be an import of empire. From an absurd proposition rebutted by Joanna, who protests that they can't all be imported, the notion is turned into a fact, as the flowers are assiduously categorised and cared for by English women, Barbara and Joanna, the latter who can make them look 'decidedly different to how they looked all over Palestine in the prolific spring' (p. 8, TMG).

In Manning's *School for Love*, Jerusalem in 1946 has also been visited by a flower transporter, but the movement of plants depicted by Manning is the other way around: 'I've all sorts of rare irises in the garden,' Miss Bohan, the landlady says; 'A young botanist planted them here. He was caught in the Middle East at the outbreak of the war. He'd been everywhere getting these bulbs – Mount Tabor, Djebel Druse, the Lebanon –' (1951: 104). This movement makes more sense, in light of Pratt, yet Freddy is obsessed with the idea that English women have scattered most (if not all of) the seeds for the wildflowers found in Palestine – even asking Abdul if his schoolmistress spread wildflower seeds (p. 103, TMG), after having his theory further evidenced by Barbara, who says that she scattered Anthyllis seeds on Mount Carmel (p. 92, TMG). Wildflowers and seeds are an example of Spark's use of repetition of a theme in *Mandelbaum*, coming in at it at different slants, as her PWE training had guided her to do (Lopez, 2020: 983).

The plant labels even stray into Freddy's mind when he writes to his mother, 'JERICHO, MOUNT OF OLIVES, GETHSEMANE. Hair Tare, Tufted Vetch, Hawk-bit, Corn Bluebottle' (p. 58, TMG); some more slip in later, 'SILOAM, JERICHO, Clarry or Wild Sage.' Spark here capitalises the Biblical names to enforce the ancient connections to the land. There are around forty references to flowers in the novel, with lists of them appearing on pages 59, 60, 69 and 71 of *Mandelbaum*. In *States of Fantasy*, Jacqueline Rose writes, 'put down roots, sow your seed, scatter it to the winds – Englishness abroad, territoriality or sweet freedom? Barbara Vaughan's gesture can be read as propriety or as irreverence, last-ditch colonialism or as running wild' (1996: 70).

My view is that it is last-ditch colonialism, in the specific form of the settler colonialism of the Israeli state, that is the underlying message here. Spark creates propaganda in a not dissimilar way to Gellhorn, whom during her visit to the depopulated village of Meron wrote: 'In 1949, the new immigrants, like ants on the hillsides, were planting trees: their first job. It looked as if they were planting blades of grass and seemed a pitiful act of faith. Now the trees have grown' (1961: 18). Gellhorn was never in Israel in 1949, she had never been to Meron previously, so this could only be the voice of her Israeli guide, speaking directly through her as mouthpiece. The message is repeated, in different permutations throughout *Mandelbaum*, that Europe and its mastery of the land creates growth and beauty where there was none. Antonius disagrees; there was beauty and

symbiosis with the land without destruction. Her writing sought to rebuild villages, agricultural economies, smells, customs and festivals surrounding the relationship of man and nature that moved away from the classified and the exportable, to non-material value systems and ways of living.

IV. CONCLUSION.

In 'Five Difficulties of Writing the Truth' (1935) Bertolt Brecht stated that the writer 'must have the courage to write the truth, even though it is suppressed everywhere; the cleverness to recognise it, even though it is disguised everywhere; the skill to make it fit for use as a weapon; the judgement to select those in whose hands it will become effective; the cunning to spread it among them' (Kuhn (ed), 2003: 143). I believe his words are as relevant today as they ever were.

The fictive house in *Infra Dig* is a literary structure built as an act of resistance against the erasure of Palestinian presence, history, culture and political identity. I have drawn on the descriptions in *The Lord* and *Where the Djinn Consult* (1987), as well as photographs and films of the time to create the home and garden and the Jerusalem and Palestine that surrounds it. I also relied on the archival work of organisations and individuals, the compilation of Palestinian photography and films, historical research and primary source documentation found in the Bibliography. *Infra Dig* creates a fictional social space for inclusion, diversity and potential optimism. It reasserts urban culture and the existence of an international intellectual culture in Palestinian society prior to the *nakba*.

Infra Dig had its origins, when I started the MPhil/PhD, as a novel painted on a much broader canvas, spanning a century, covering three continents, centred around Karm al Mufti with multiple viewpoints told in first person. I later decided to restrict the novel to one story, one location and a far shorter time span, of a period of months, not decades, and to follow a less disrupted chronological pattern, with fewer characters told in a close omniscient third person. The move from first to third person was liberating, enabling me to move from one scene to another, more naturally. It also allowed me to guide the reader and to insert flashes forward and a degree of prolepsis and analepsis (found in Spark's work, Lopez, 2020: 981) within the characters to show Dunya's anticipation of events to come.

One of the problems I have found with writing anything set in Palestine, or about Palestinians, is the stave off the compulsion to educate the reader too much. I have always considered it important to play close attention to the amount and tone of information that "deals with concrete illustration (in the sense of an example) rather than with abstract argument," (Lopez quoting PWE materials, 2020: 974), but the temptation to write more, to break the fourth wall and speak out to the reader, is often present, one that is palpable in *The Lord*. I still have ambitions to expand out the Karm al Mufti storyline, to include the international connections to the house, but they are for another work(s). I see *Infra Dig* as a complete novel, but also a starting point.

Muriel Spark remains someone I very much admire as a writer but not as a political thinker, and Soraya Antonius I admire more, for the latter. The devices that Spark uses deftly that I have tried at points to emulate in *Infra Dig* relate to chronological disruption and shifts forwards and backwards in time. Her turn of phrase is unique and not one I seek to emulate to have, nor will I ever have the same interest in religious or literary allusions in my work.

Regarding my research and how it informed my writing, the fictional Sinan family are inspired by the Antonius family, but almost all details have been altered. The dates of birth for example: Soraya was 4, not 15 like Dunya in 1936. Katy Antonius's affair with General Evelyn Barker occurred after the death of her husband, not during her marriage. The fictional Aunt Inji and her son, Freddy, have Amy Smart (née Nimr) and her son, Micky, as their real-life counterparts. Micky, Soraya's cousin, was, like Freddy, killed by a landmine while on a picnic in Sakkara with Soraya. The incident is depicted cruelly in Olivia Manning's *Levant Trilogy*. Penelope Lively's memoir *Oleander Jacaranda* is condemnatory of Manning's fictionalisation of the death.

Thomas Hodgkins and his brother Edward/'Teddy' (EC) were close friends of the Antoniuses and are brought to life in muted form, I fear, as a composite Robert in *Infra Dig*, as is friend Prudence Pelham (Fenella in my novel), whose hilarious letters are included in the collection compiled by E. C. Hodgkin (1986). Thomas Hodgkin became a communist after his time as the secretary to the High Commissioner to Palestine and did write a newspaper article, for Labour Monthly, 'The Events in Palestine, by British Resident' (1986: 191), a better argued account than the one that is summarised in *Infra Dig* that forcefully objected to British policy in Palestine. I found no trace of Prudence Pelham who did, according to her letters, tend to drive in reverse. The character of Mustafa is entirely fictive, but a blend of a couple of Palestinian leaders at the time, Sheikh Youssef Said Abu Dorrah Commander in Chief of the Arab Revolution being one. Dorrah worked as a luggage carrier on the railways, but wrote indignant, ridiculing letters to the British police officer, G. J. Morton, who preserved them and celebrated his seizure of Dorrah's ceremonial swords, 'complete with silver scabbards' (1957: 106), soon after Dorrah told him to respect the rights of the Arabs. The nature of Mustafa's arrest in *Infra Dig* is close to that of leader Yousef Hamdan, whom "Geoff" Morton happened upon wearing 'riding boots of exquisite quality,' and picked up. Hamdan could not be persuaded to collaborate with the vicious and deranged Orde Wingate and when asked to track down fellow rebels, called out warnings so that they fled (Martin, 2007: 96). Other officer's memoirs tell of the shootings of brave rebel leaders and Charles Anderson's exceptional PhD on the Palestinian revolt provided other invaluable source material.

To conclude this commentary, I wish to reflect on what I have learnt during the process of researching and writing it. The tone of this section is therefore more personal. There are five points that I would like to make.

Firstly, the reading and research for this commentary enabled me to reinforce a vocabulary and a philosophy that has strengthened my belief in the role of the intellectual in times of crisis. This is needed now, in 2022, as much as, if not more, than when most of these authors lived. Edward Saïd's *Representations of An Intellectual* (1994), was the most fortifying and stimulating book in this regard, providing me not just with a persuasive argumentation of an ethical framework, but also in providing me with a reading list of other works and authors. Saïd's opus was considerable as was his legacy (Abu Manneh, 2019). Although familiar with his work before starting this MPhil/PhD, he and his heroes will serve as a touchstone throughout my life both as a writer and as a lawyer. My belief in

an international legal system, however flawed and Eurocentric, has been reinforced as better than the alternative through reading his work, not just in terms of his importance as an intellectual, but that of a Palestinian.

Secondly, although Afro-American / black American / immigrant American / British and Palestinian histories and experiences are different, the essays by Toni Morrison (1987) and James Baldwin (1958) spoke directly to me, in terms of vocalising and resolving debates with regards to the duty of writers and their potential legacies. Morrison's sense of her obligation to 'lift the veil,' when working with slave narratives to access past interior lives through the imagination struck a chord. Baldwin's critique of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, where he points to the failure of Mrs. Stokes, when writing her 'catalogue of violence' (2003: 14) to ask what he considers to be the 'the only important question,' namely, 'what it was, after all, that moved her people to such deeds?' (ibid). The role of the writer in interrogating motives in situations of injustice is all too frequently forgotten compared to the compulsion to document the injustices themselves. The need for writers to surmount the protective mental obstacles of repression, denial, avoidance, and false memory, in order to see themselves and others more precisely and truthfully is an ongoing one.

Thirdly, for writers with political positions or misunderstood identities an aim is to persuade. As Morrison says of the slave narratives, their authors realised that objective. Lopez's analysis of Spark's writing, considering how propaganda used specific literary techniques, may be unnerving when affiliated with the term 'propaganda,' but much can be learnt by writers dedicated to a political cause or purpose who wish to convey interior realities to a larger audience. The aim does not need to be dishonest or deceitful and the research should respect for the truth.

Fourthly, I have become more interested in the past and the future as a writer. This is connected to being in the Palestinian diaspora and unable to visit Palestine at present and with an outsider relationship with the language (I only write and speak English fluently; my Arabic is a source of shame). As to the past, the recent work of historians in documenting the expulsion of the Palestinians, provides multiple opportunities for artists to challenge damaging historical narratives in a way that allows for the future to be built on reimagined histories. My focus on Anglophone Palestinian characters for *Infra Dig* and the intersection between Britain and England during the Mandate period, sat more comfortably with me in terms of my own linguistic skills and hybridity. There is also dystopia in Palestine. I was part of the PalFest visit to Gaza with the (now imprisoned) writer Alaa Abd El-Fattah, where he commented on the dystopia (2021: 108), which I drew on in a recent science fiction piece (Dabbagh, 2019).

Following on from the above and in light of reading the *Mandelbaum Gate* and my outrage at Martha Gellhorn's 'The Arabs of Palestine,' my last point is that I have come to believe more strongly that journalists have a moral responsibility to uphold their professional codes of practice and be vigilant against editorial pressures to distort and underplay injustices. I also believe that critics should be more alert to how political and financial pressures can influence fiction writers. No code of practice is expected of novelists, but critics should be more interrogative when established writers like

Spark, assert that 'ridicule and satire are the only weapons we have left' (McQuillan, 2003: 222, Lopez, 2020: 294).

The subject of 'politics and literature' is too broad to engage in sufficiently within the confines of this commentary, but the comparison between Antonius and Spark's novels, writings and interviews provides a unique perspective on not just how post-war writers could struggle to succeed when taking on a position of dissent against the status quo, but also more specifically how Spark's assertions on satire should be treated with caution. The question is, who is being mocked? There are times when circumstances require people to group together around ideologies. Situations of inequity when the penetrative moral intelligence of writers like Hannah Arendt is called for. During situations of gross injustice, wrongdoing needs to be identified and called out. Ridicule and satire are not always liberating. Musa Okwonga writing of his time at Eton describes watching comedy sketches at the school thus, 'this is the first time that I truly understand the power of satire as a weapon, how terrifying humour might be when turned in my direction' (2021: 134). Humour, wit and intelligence can be just as dangerous as they are endearing and disarming.

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