

Day, like a child, sits on their shoulders.
 Silence then laughter.
 Their country does not have wrinkles
 it has an immense forehead where children run
 barefoot.
 The moon unfurls its transparent dreams.
 Today no bullet has reached these dancing bodies.

8.
 (...)

Obstinée,
 la lueur descend l'escalier du temps.
 Et à chaque corps, elle donne le pain et le nom.

(...)
 Stubborn,
 the faint light descends time's staircase.
 And to each body, it gives bread and a name.

Faithfulness and humility are the main quality of Cullen Goldblatt's translation. I could point out a few negligible mistakes here and there but they never affect the general meaning of the lines. One might occasionally regret this faithfulness that keeps the translator too close to the French and sometimes prevents him from producing a harmonious English poem. But in a way this is unfair. What matters is the general impression: if I hadn't read the poems bilingually, as this edition invites you to do, I am sure I would have been just as moved by, for instance, the calm elegy of grief that permeates the second poem (my favorite) in both languages.

This is a necessary book, whose relevance for us, unfortunately, has nothing to do with poetry. Twenty years later, violence is still raging in the Middle East and contrary to what the poet says, hope, for the moment, seems to stay safely enclosed in the pages of *The Rising of the Ashes*.

But what the French call "poésie engagée" is still poetry. We have to be grateful to Tahar Ben Jelloun, Cullen Goldblatt and City Lights for having proven that the media do not always have the exclusive privilege of addressing problems that matter to us.

YVONNE FRECCERO

SAHAR KHALIFEH. *THE END OF SPRING*. TRANSLATED
 FROM THE ARABIC BY PAULA HAYDAR. NORTHAMPTON,
 MA: INTERLINK, 2008. ISBN 978-1-56656-681-0.

The End of Spring is a Palestinian coming-of-age novel enacted in the years leading up to the spring of 2002 and the siege of President Arafat's compound. The Palestinians' struggle for survival after the 1948 Nakba (literally "the disaster", refers to the plight of Palestinians after the occupation of Palestine in that year) has been described in many recently published memoirs but few have penetrated the minds of the younger generation born into the chaos and violence of Palestine today.

Sahar Khalifeh introduces us to three young Palestinians living in the Nablus/Ramallah area who are unwillingly but inevitably drawn into the resistance movement: Majid, the eldest, his younger brother Ahmad, and Suad, the young woman who loves him. Although Majid is the star, most of the story unfolds through the eyes of Ahmad, who becomes the central focus of *The End of Spring*.

Majid is a handsome, athletic teenager, very popular among his fellow students for his singing and guitar playing. His mother is dead and his father has remarried, Ahmad being the son of the father's second marriage. Majid's songs of patriotism attract large crowds among the youthful population who are starved for the pop culture of the west. His one desire is to become a famous singer and travel abroad. Even to his disapproving father "his voice came in warm waves, releasing the soul from its lodgings, freeing it to live the dream in all its details, young again, stronger, deeper, believing more than ever in freedom and humanity."⁽⁷³⁾

Majid's accidental embroilment in the murder of a corrupt politician unleashes a chain of disastrous events. The resistance movement claims him as one of their own but "the only thing he knew about the revolution were the words he sang at parties and concerts."⁽¹⁰⁷⁾ Younger brother Ahmad is the complete opposite, always dreaming, head down, rarely talking, yet he idolizes his brother. Both father and teacher recognize Ahmad's artistic ability, and his father gives him a camera to encourage him to put his talents to work. One day, while taking

his brother's photo on a hill outside their town of Ayn al-Majon, he catches sight of a beautiful little blond girl, playing in the garden of an Israeli settlement on the edge of town. Fascinated despite all the negatives he has heard about the Israelis, Ahmad keeps returning to visit Mira, using his adored kitten as a go-between. Their friendship ends abruptly when Mira steals his kitten – a turning point that shapes Ahmad's life. He attempts to rescue the kitten, is caught, imprisoned and tortured. By the time he is released from prison, though still a child in years, he has become a hardened and embittered man and has found his voice.

Suad, the third of the trio, is a member of Majid's band. She loves him and fears for both the brothers. Unlike them she is attuned to the political climate in the West Bank. Her father has been a political prisoner in Israel for 20 years; she sees clearly the hopelessness of the situation for herself, her family and all the young people around her, but nevertheless she acts courageously to protect Majid, and to rescue Ahmad for the life he should be living.

Sahar Khalifeh creates an atmosphere of confusion and hopelessness both in her characters and in the descriptions of the West Bank, the Israeli settlements, and Arafat's corrupt government. Depicting young people, especially Majid, who want to live ordinary lives, she points out that "the occupation meant contradictions: revolution versus debasement, collaboration versus sacrifice, vileness and depravity and espionage versus the ultimate sacrifice, blowing oneself up." (116)

The deadly accuracy of Khalifeh's description rings even more true against the background of the recent hostilities in the Gaza Strip.

The hunger of the poor, the loss of young sons,
airplanes bombing targets all over the city, and the
powerlessness of the residents to lift the siege or
return fire made them see that stones no longer
served their purpose. (117)

The events of Part II are the inevitable outcome of the setting in Part I. Majid is wounded, rescued by Suad, and takes refuge in Arafat's compound, where he becomes a TV reporter,

full of his own self-importance. Suad, disillusioned with him, retreats to her home in Nablus to which her father has finally returned. There she faces the traditional family wish for her to get married, despite her plea "But what about my mind?" (231)

Ahmad by now is a lost soul, working for the Red Cross, white-faced, silent, rejecting family and friends. Even meeting Mira again --who is now protesting on behalf of the Palestinians-- cannot save him. His anger at the sight of his poor father, driven from the home he had spent his life creating by Israeli troops, and by the sight of the bulldozers crushing the young girl who tried to protect his father, that anger sends him marching towards the troops, in a shower of bullets, shooting photo after photo in his mind.

We are grateful that Paula Haydar has made this vivid, fast-paced Palestinian tragedy available to English readers in her excellent, fluid translation, bringing greater awareness to a wider public. Khalifeh's young people, and indeed the youth of Palestine today, are already the second generation born into chaos, poverty and violence. Trapped in a country they cannot leave, living under the shadow of a forbidding wall that cuts them off from family members, employment and even medical care, they are left with no hope, no dreams, and no future other than violence.