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*The Nightmares of Sasha Weitzwoman* is an extended exploration of identity, sexuality, and Diaspora during times of war. It is also the remnants of a prophetic and feminist retelling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the eyes of Sasha Weitzwoman, an erstwhile journalist living in a haunted hotel in Jerusalem during the 1990s. These remnants have been collected and reorganized by the Unicuntry Liberation Press and the Labyrinth of Fecundity; the reflections of these editors and their notes on the annotating process make explicit *Nightmare’s* larger themes (that militarized conflict cannot be separated from homophobia and sexism) and also critique a knowledge production system that is not interested in stories filtering the historical through the individual. This latter issue is particularly highlighted through Sasha’s original project as a journalist working for an apparently unreachable publisher. These themes resonate in a historical moment where individual acts of resistance to the state are often subsumed into larger histories of complacency. Scholars interested in the rise of neoliberalism in the US, the US’ impact on Middle Eastern conflicts, histories of resistance and solidarity, and Jewish women’s history will find Sasha an intriguing narrator, one that reflects on contemporary American Jewish identity while registering the constant American presence in Israel and while being haunted by both a Zionist ghost and an unread book of Arab history.

The reader experiences multiple Jerusalems through Sasha’s eyes, as she is unmoored in time and tasked with exploring different facets of the region’s identities through ghosts, out-of-body-experiences and her own travels through the city. As she searches Jerusalem for an Israeli Jew to father her child, she befriends several of its denizens, including Isaac, a closeted hotel owner; Rebekah, a make-up artist; Leah, the folksinger both Rebekah and Sasha fall in love with; and a host of other characters, each acting as a momentary distillation of the city’s spirit. While this may at first appear to be a difficult text for undergraduate students, the wry humor, the
clever use of magic realism, and the constant return to eroticism, love, and the body all suggest that an advanced cohort of undergraduate students may find this work incredibly engaging. Further, the sheer quirkiness of the plot will both challenge and titillate readers interested in exploring utopia in fiction; what begins as a fish-out-of-water tale of self-discovery eventually becomes a story of the return of the goddesses as they usher in a new women’s-only state, where computers dictate the creative process and archivists receive transmissions from the past.

Like Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home*, *The Nightmares of Sasha Weitzwoman* creates a world through presenting a variety of types of media from that world, including poetry, song lyrics, letters to and from Israel, and letters to and from the fictional publisher from the future. Also inviting this comparison are the shared themes between these two works. LeGuin describes a nation of people that “might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California” (i); Weinbaum describes an alternative past (one where Jerusalem becomes a city of women) leading to an almost-familiar future (where professors fall in love on other planets, leaving their poor graduate students to navigate the publication process without them). Both works grapple with the utilitarian aspects of pacifism; *Nightmares* specifically asks the reader to engage with feminist rhetoric surrounding the anti-war/Free Palestine movement in both the US and Israel and challenges the reader to think through the implications of a kind of “imperial feminism” (Mohanty 3), where a Western narrator is presumed to have all the answers regarding structural inequity in a non-Western context. It is in this conversation that Sasha’s naiveté and bewilderment become pedagogically useful. Not only does she lack the financial resources to bankroll an anti-war movement in Israel, she has a hard time even finding the Women in Black protestors, is initially unable to name Leah as the founder of an activist movement, and spends a portion of the novel avoiding the book of Arab history that haunts her hotel room.

*The Nightmares of Sasha Weitzwoman* is not a conventional historical novel. It is, however, a history: a history of feelings, desires, passions and dreams experienced in a city where militarized conflict is ubiquitous. It highlights the interconnected nature of the US and Israel, and the porous nature of home, as Sasha irresistibly compares her neighborhood in
Jerusalem to Brooklyn. This novel also emphasizes queerness and feminism as radical forces, placing the militarized landscape of Jerusalem in conversation with the casual sexism and homophobia experienced by the city’s everyday citizens. Threaded throughout the text is an overarching story of hope, even as Sasha removes herself from the narrative.

Works Cited: