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Public Mourning, Online Spaces: Virtual Memorialization and Binational Grief in
Israel-Palestine

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

in Anthropology

by

Lillian Kohn

2022

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Public Mourning, Online Spaces: Virtual Memorialization and Binational Grief in

Israel-Palestine

by

Lillian Kohn

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor Suzanne Slyomovics, Chair

This thesis, grounded in the work of digital anthropology, examines contemporary mourning practices in Israel-Palestine, looking at the ways in which people construct, interact with, and grieve within memorials both online and offline. This paper looks specifically at the binational mourning practice, the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, that takes place during Yom HaZikaron, and further analyzes this ceremony as a form of counterpublics that bears witness to personal, communal and binational grief. Rather than reinforce a stark dichotomy between online and offline memorialization, however, this paper situates this memorial ceremony as an assemblage of bodies, objects and narratives that interact in both online and offline spaces. Through an examination of the digital components that work to construct the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, this paper then turns to a discussion of the implications of binational mourning and memorialization practices that aim to commemorate a singular conception of Israeli-Palestinian grief.

The thesis of Lillian Kohn is approved.

Salih Can Aciksoz

Douglas Hollan

Suzanne Slyomovics, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2022

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Introduction

I began writing this paper during the summer of 2021, in the immediate aftermath of the latest resurgence of violence in Israel-Palestine. Triggered by Israeli evictions of Palestinians from their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah district of East Jerusalem and days of violent confrontations between Palestinian protesters and Israeli police at the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, the violence further escalated to an 11-day war between Israeli forces and Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. This heightened period of violence was an all too real reminder that in discussing mourning and grief in the context of Israel-Palestine, one must always view memories of past violence as part of an ongoing story; or as Lila Abu-Lughod writes, “both memory and postmemory have a special valence because the past has not yet passed” (2007, 79). This thesis aims to examine questions regarding the temporal and physical boundaries of digital memorialization practices through the use of Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory (2012). How do we mourn, grieve and commemorate during periods of active violence? In what ways do virtual memorials contribute to Hirsch’s postmemory? Further, what role does memory play in driving our present-day actions, and how might the digital landscape play a role in shaping the ways in which we mourn? These are a few of my driving questions as I examine one commemorative practice that holds a particular saliency in the formation and maintenance of Israel’s collective memory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Yom HaZikaron, or Israel’s Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers and Victims of War and Terror, also referred to in various literatures as Israel’s Remembrance Day or Memorial Day.

Yom HaZikaron is one of many commemoration days (Young 1990) recognized and celebrated within the State of Israel. In her book, *Co-Memory and Melancholia: Israelis Memorialising the Palestinian Nakba*, Ronit Lentin argues that Yom HaZikaron is part of a larger

socio-political landscape that links commemoration, war and nationalism (2010, 64). According to Lentin, this link between Israeli politics and memory dates back to the establishment of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948 and the immediate aftermath of the preceding War of 1948. It is well-documented (Bashir and Goldberg 2014) that the War of 1948 resulted in distinct cultural memories and commemoration days for Israelis and Palestinians: victory and expansion for Israeli Jews celebrated as Yom Ha'atzmaut, or Independence Day, and loss, dispossession and displacement for Palestinians who mourned al-Nakba, or the Catastrophe. These dual cultural memories, and the politics therein, will be discussed further in the first section of this thesis. It is important to note here that these commemoration days play an active role in Israeli state-building, with what is remembered and what is forgotten creating a “sociology of memory” (Zerubavel 2003, 3) by which groups of individuals come to remember historical events as a collective entity. Through this lens, commemoration days can be understood as structural underpinnings that aim to create continuity (2003, 39) with the memory of a past event by attempting to dictate what of an event is remembered, when it is remembered, and through what rituals and practices it is commemorated.

In looking at the history of Yom HaZikaron, it is clear that the commemoration of war deaths has always been inextricably linked to Israeli nationalism and independence. Lentin (2010) discusses the ways in which Israel’s first Yom Ha'atzmaut in 1949 was structured in such a way that memorial services and prayers for deceased soldiers were embedded into the Independence Day observance; a separate day of mourning did not yet exist. During this first Yom Ha'atzmaut, mourning rituals for soldiers killed in battle were utilized to remind Israeli citizens of the human, Jewish cost of their State’s independence; the backdrop of the Holocaust and the precarity of Jewish life painfully resonant with the establishment of Yom Hashoah as an

Israeli national holiday in 1949. Additionally, according to James E. Young (1990), this foundational link between commemoration and nationalism in Yom Ha'atzmaut was further substantiated in Judaism by the State of Israel choosing to adopt the ancient Hebrew calendar to organize its holidays. Young believes the choice to utilize the lunisolar Hebrew calendar for contemporary Israeli events worked to commemorate Israeli victories as Jewish victories and nationalize a collective Jewish memory, writing: "Time would no longer be measured in the distance between the Temple's destruction and the present moment. Instead, the redrawn calendar would find its genesis, its anchor, in the birth of the state itself. All else, including memorial days, would now be regarded as either culminating in Independence Day or in issuing from it" (1990, 71). While memory itself cannot be so neatly contained, the attempt to shape Israeli collective memory through the use of commemoration days plays a significant role in which memorialization practices are deemed sacred, appropriate or taboo.

By 1951, the celebrations of Independence Day and the solemnity of memorial services would come to be acknowledged as distinct performative acts and each given their own separate day of observance. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's minister of defense at the time, announced that Yom HaZikaron would be observed on the fourth day of Iyar each year, with Yom Ha'atzmaut to immediately follow on the fifth day of Iyar each year (1990, 55). In "When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom Hashoah", Young further discusses the intentionality of this positioning between the two commemoration days:

The choice of this date for Yom ha-Zikkaron initially rankled many of the bereaved families, who found such a solemn day violated by the unabashed revelry immediately following it. But the government was steadfast, its reasons for linking the State's war-dead with national independence clear. On the level of pure statist ideology, no better model would be found than dying for the state: as the sole reason for living, the state would now be the only reason for dying. By yoking the deaths of its soldiers together with the birth of the State in this way, the government in effect nationalized the oldest of

all Jewish paradigms: destruction and redemption. A memorial day turning at sunset into Independence Day would make explicit that the destruction of these men was redeemed in the birth of the State: mourning was to be relieved literally by the celebration of independence. (1990, 57-58)

Israel's Knesset further anchored Yom HaZikaron as its own commemoration day, and its placement ahead of Yom Ha'atzmaut, in 1963 with the passing of the "Memorial Day Law for Those Fallen in the War of Independence and the Israel Defense Forces, 5723-1963," (The State of Israel, Knesset.gov.il, 1963). The law was renamed by the Knesset in a 1980 amendment as the "Memorial Day for the Fallen of Israel's Wars Law." This change expanded Yom HaZikaron from a memorial day solely for the fallen soldiers of the War of 1948 to a memorial day that includes all those killed in action during state battles, police officers, Mossad and civilian victims. Not only, then, would Yom HaZikaron come to commemorate a wider scope of lives lost in service of defending the State of Israel, it also would allow for an unbound temporal lens through which all lives lost between the War of 1948 to present could be narratively linked. This thesis thus argues that the creation of Yom HaZikaron into its own day, filled with its own performative commemoration acts, worked to further consolidate a hegemonic state memory of an unending, eternal conflict and contributed toward the larger goal of Israeli nation-building. These early efforts to produce a cohesive narrative and collective memory of the conflict were required in order to provide a dominant version of the events that had taken place during the War of Independence and the pre-State goals the war meant to achieve. Further, these efforts resulted in the creation of state-sponsored commemorative practices that would come to be second-nature, and in a sense sacred, to Israeli culture.

I first became acutely aware of Yom HaZikaron during my time spent working with members of the organization Combatants for Peace (CFP), a self-proclaimed "binational" (Combatants for Peace website, n.d.) organization made up of Israelis and Palestinians

committed to a non-violent end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. Their use of the term binational refers to the organization's ideological belief that Israel and Palestine are two separate nations; it also refers to their political goal of working toward the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. According to their Mission Statement: "Our Ultimate Goal is to end the occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders; two states living side by side in peace and cooperation or any other just solution agreed upon in negotiations," (Combatants for Peace, 2021). The binational aim of the organization falls into the category of a "two-state solution," and does not explicitly discuss the possibility of working toward a one-state solution. As opposed to a two-state solution, a one-state solution is characterized as solution where there would be a single country made up of pre-1967 Israel, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank (Abunimah 2007; Azoulay and Ophir 2012; Lustick 2019). In his book *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One State Reality*, Ian Lustick outlines three obstacles that have obstructed the advancement of a two-state solution, which he defines as the: "Iron Wall" strategy, "Holocaustia," and the power of the Israeli lobby in the United States. Instead, Lustick argues that the one-state solution is in fact a one-state reality and that while "two states for two peoples *was* a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it is not a solution today" (2019, 121; emphasis original). Instead, analysis and activism around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should ground itself in the reality of what Israel is today, writing: "There is today one and only one state ruling the territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, and its name is Israel" (2019, 2).

My time with CFP began in July 2016 and continued to June of 2017, as I was working on a documentary film *Disturbing the Peace* which captured the origin and evolution of the organization. The film, directed by Stephen Apkon and Andrew Young, follows the stories of

four Israelis and four Palestinians who move from violently and actively participating in the conflict to founding and/or becoming members of the “nonviolent, binational” CFP organization. While the film explores violence endured and executed on both sides of the conflict, there is little attention paid to the settler-colonial context within which this violence lives, which this thesis plans to explore further.

Additionally, while working on the distribution of the film, I became increasingly aware of the way CFP organization members narrated their personal experiences of violence while others bore witness to their testimony. Both in the film and in their organizing activities, the testimonies of CFP members focused on finding commonality in the Israeli and Palestinian experience of conflict. The presentation of testimonies were specifically ordered, with a Palestinian member sharing followed by an Israeli member and so on, in order to demonstrate the mutual, shared grief experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians as a result of ongoing and past conflict. The language used to describe personal, familial and community grief was one that centered a shared Israeli-Palestinian experience of loss. Missing from the testimonies were the unique histories and everyday experiences that differentiate Israeli and Palestinian lives, as well as a discussion of the role of power, colonialism and Whiteness play in shaping the conflict experience. This narrative formation of the conflict as something shared stands in stark contrast to the hegemonic narratives of the conflict discussed in popular scholarship, which will be analyzed later in this thesis. I would come to learn that this narrative of shared grief, which centers an affective and performance-based approach, was a formative principle of the CFP organization and one that members routinely reiterated in planning meetings, dialogue circles and community forums.

Beyond intra-organizational meetings and smaller regional events, CFP worked to create a binational, and eventually international, forum in which they could present this shared

experience of grief. The result was the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony organized in partnership by CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum, which first took place in 2006 on Yom HaZikaron as an alternative memorial ceremony for bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families. The event itself was held in Tel Aviv, a majority Jewish Israeli city with markedly less political contention and everyday Israeli-Palestinian contact than Jerusalem; an intentional choice that speaks to heightened political landscape of Yom HaZikaron ceremonies within Israel. Would such an event be viable in mixed, divided Jerusalem? In what ways is the location of this event indicative of the types of politics it upholds? Also of note here is that while the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony is branded as a binational event, it still is part of the uniquely Israeli Yom HaZikaron landscape. While it is considered an “alternative” ceremony (CFP, n.d.) to official or canonical ceremonies that take place in the public sphere in Israel and are organized by state representatives or actors, the alterity of joint-memorial ceremony will be further examined in this thesis.

Having lived in Israel from December 2014 to August 2015, prior to my time working with CFP, I experienced Yom HaZikaron in the country, yet, I did not fully come to realize the importance of Yom HaZikaron memorial ceremonies in Israeli culture until 2017 when I witnessed the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony and the support, as well as backlash, it received. The in-person elements of the event were incredibly moving: the feeling as thousands slowly filled the event venue, the silence while bereaved family members were sharing their testimonies of loss, the role music played in the space, the palpable grief of people attending the event juxtaposed to the outrage from groups of protestors gathered outside. Equally interesting, though, were the elements of the ceremony that were taking place outside of the event venue: digital recordings of testimony from those who could not attend in-person, a simultaneous event taking

place in the occupied territories, watch-parties happening across the world, and individuals streaming the ceremony live in their own homes or choosing to view an archived recording of the event later. All these elements, referred to in this thesis as the digital or virtual components of the event, allowed for people outside of the event space to participate in this commemoration day ceremony, expanding the boundaries of the event and allowing for virtual memorialization and experiences of grief.

As the site of this thesis takes place both in-person and virtually, my methodological approach attends to both online and offline elements of the ceremony, as well as the way elements from these two spaces intersect. It is important to note here that this analysis of digital components of the ceremony is not a project of contrasting online/offline commemoration practices, but is rather an attempt to get a more complete picture of the many elements and experiences that construct this event. As Shireen Walton (2018) writes: “Digital ethnography does not establish fixed dichotomies between online and offline realms. There are no substantive differences between online and offline ethnographies but rather different kinds of environments and ways of social copresence,” (2018, 11). This specific conceptualization of the digital ethnography opens up space in which digital objects and virtual locations, as well as the interactions people have with and within, are embedded within the concept of the field. While this thesis will first look to the hegemonic narratives that inform both Israeli and Palestinian memory, as well as the landscape of Israeli Yom Hazikaron commemoration practices, this conception of digital ethnography will inform the ways in which I discuss the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony and analyze the accessibility and power inequalities within the site.

Collective Memory and Dual Narratives

There is a clear divide in the ways in which normative Israeli and Palestinian narratives discuss and memorialize Israel's origin and the resulting conflict. There are also, though, important divides within Israeli and Palestinian identity that are important to consider in relation to memorialization. As Tamir Sorek discusses in *Palestinian Commemoration in Israel*, there are differences in Palestinian commemoration in Israel by Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinian commemoration by Palestinians seeking liberation from Israeli occupation beyond the Green Line which Israelis usually designate as the West Bank and Gaza versus the Occupied Palestinian Territories. His work in particular highlights the struggle of Palestinian citizens of Israel for equality within the Jewish state as it relates to citizenship and integration through an examination of memorials and commemorations. Rather than consolidate a collective national consciousness, in the Palestinian context, these memorialization practices also serve to perpetuate deep divisions. This thesis defines memorialization as the act of collectively remembering past events in the present; further, practices of memorialization direct—and follow—current perceptions and emotions of a past event. This process of memorialization not only offers meaning to events, but also connects individuals with broader ideological and political projects. Additionally, through memorialization, personal memory can be moved into the public sphere; the question, though, of whose memory is recognized and legitimized by the state is profoundly salient.

If memorialization determines what will be remembered in the collective realm, it also therefore determines what is not remembered. The processes of remembering and forgetting cannot be disentangled from each other, and so just as memorialization is a project of remembering, it is also a project of forgetting. This is not only due to the co-constitutive nature

of remembering and forgetting, but also because in choosing what to remember and how to represent that memory, memorialization privileges certain narratives over others. The narratives that are “crystalized and secreted” (Nora 1996, 10) by memorialization are partial, biased and selective. This distortion of the past is both symbolic in function, yet also fulfills some sort of practical demand. Memorialization then can be read as a process that reconciles the past, present and future, as well as a process that generates a representation of the past that may be used to a particular end. On this subject, Halbwachs (1950;1992) suggests that collective memory defines the relationships between the individual and society and enables the community to preserve its self-image and transfer it over time.

Collective memory studies postulate that every community develops its own memories of the past, and these memories mark its boundaries. Further, though, is the idea that traumatic memories are passed down from the generation of survivors to the generation of their children, who, although never having encountered many of these experiences first-hand, still manage to carry with them remnants of these experiences. This phenomenon was coined by Marianne Hirsch as "postmemory" and further defined as “the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before — to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (2012, 8-9). The phenomenon of postmemory has been studied with considerable breadth in the context of Holocaust survivors and their successive generations, but is also relevant to the children of Palestinian parents, particularly those living in diaspora, affected by the Nakba, wherein the lived experiences of survivors would be passed on as memories to successive generations of Palestinians. The Palestinian experience of postmemory is additionally complex as experiences held by preceding generations are further compounded by the violence

experienced by present-day generations. This thesis argues that this violence, either in everyday experiences or in heightened periods of conflict, are inextricably linked to Nakba postmemory. Memorialization practices in Israel and Palestine are thus constructed and reconstructed across physical and temporal boundaries, creating multiple, competing narratives of past events.

The notion of the boundaries of collective memory is particularly resonant within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where we see competing narratives of a shared history come into contact and clash with one another. The same series of events are interpreted in very different ways. As Gutman and Tirosh (2021) write, “when Israelis celebrate the War of Independence as a miraculous victory against all odds that resulted in many casualties (1 percent of the population), Palestinians mark their loss in the 1948 war, which resulted in their massive displacement and dispossession, also known as *al-Nakba*,” (2021, 706). Gutman and Tirosh further define the Nakba as a Palestinian national narrative that commemorates the events of 1948 as “a tragedy inflicted on unequipped and unprepared peasants who were betrayed by both Britain and the Arab countries and subjected to an organized campaign of ethnic cleansing by Israeli military forces,” (2021, 709). In Palestinian collective memory, the Nakba signifies a dramatic rupture in the continuity of historical space and time in Palestinian history with historian Walid Khalidi writing that the Nakba was the “ineluctible climax of the preceding Zionist colonization and the great watershed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the beginning of their Exodus and Diaspora” (Khalidi 1992: xxxi). It is also important to explicitly note here the role Israeli settler-colonialism plays in the Palestinian conception of the Nakba. As Omar Jabary Salamanca et al write, “viewed through the lens of settler colonialism, the Nakba in 1948 is not simply a precondition for the creation of Israel or the outcome of early Zionist ambitions; the Nakba is not a singular event but is manifested today in the continuing subjection

of Palestinians by Israelis,” (Salamanca et al 2012, 2). This understanding of the Nakba as an ongoing event will be increasingly important as the role of postmemory in digital memorialization is examined and reflects the ways in which testimonies from bereaved Palestinian families are embedded within a larger tradition of Nakba narratives .

The Palestinian narrative of the Nakba runs counter to the hegemonic Israeli narrative of independence, as *al-nakba* overlaps yet stands opposed to Yom Ha'atzmaut. As Lentin writes, “Palestinians experienced the loss of a homeland and are engaged in a struggle for self-determination, human rights and justice. Jewish Israelis experienced the escape from persecution, achievement of self-determination and a homeland, and are engaged in an ensuing struggle to defend that position,” (2019, 60). These competing narratives or counter-memories (Slyomovics 2013) subsume new events, and offer both peoples a lens with which to interpret new experiences of violence. Additionally, as mentioned prior, the trauma of these events are passed on through generations of Palestinians, both through the ongoing oppression of the settler-colonial regime as well as through the mechanisms of postmemory.

Commemorative days in particular center around two competing historical narratives: Israel’s independence as a source of celebration for Jewish Israelis and a reminder of a great violence and loss for Palestinians, parallel sets of holidays and commemorative events. This duality of conflict narratives appears throughout fixtures of state commemoration practices and performances; one celebrates independence as the other commemorates catastrophe, with expansion comes occupation, and with victory comes visceral loss. Additionally, Lentin (2010) argues that even those that accept the premise of contrasting interpretations of events often disagree on which events mark the starting points or milestones of the conflict resulting in opposing calendars and commemorative practices. This point is further complicated by the

sacred-nature of Israeli-Jewish commemorative practices; as the next section of this thesis will discuss, mourning and grief rituals employed by the State rely on calendrical, performative rituals that mime sacred Jewish rituals.

Dialogue and peace-related projects operating in Israel-Palestine, such as CFP, have to take as their starting point the presence of these two dueling national narratives about the conflict. Additionally, attempts to reconcile the narratives must acknowledge the disproportionate violence and inequality Palestinians experience as a result, in part, of these competing narratives. In the literature, scholars have borrowed European colonial frameworks to understand Israel's systematic removal and subjugation of Palestinians historically. The language of settler-colonialism in relation to Israel-Palestine is most notably introduced by Patrick Wolfe in 2006. As Wolfe argues, the defining characteristic of settlers in settler-colonial regimes is that they intend to stay, remove, and replace natives who live on the land. For settlers, the most important factor is land takeover, which most settler colonial societies execute through the elimination of the Indigenous population. Wolfe clarifies that "invasion is a structure not an event," and the logic of elimination is a structure of organizing the new society that makes claim to indigeneity rather than singular occurrences (2006, 2). There is fierce opposition, however, to classifying Israel as a settler-colonial nation as it implicitly denies the nativeness of Jewish people to the land. Settler colonial societies across the world differ from each other, but some aspects of elimination include depriving natives of rights, citizenship, land, religious conversion, and forced assimilation to the colonizer's laws and institutions. This idea is further taken up by Judith Butler (2009) in her discussion of the resignification of the body, when she clarifies how the Israeli military system otherizes not only living Palestinians but also the death of Palestinians, considering it as others' death, undeserving of sorrow or grief. The singular

narrative of Israeli grief and loss within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is exemplified in the commemorative day of Yom HaZikaron and its sacralized, performative commemoration practices.

Yom HaZikaron and Sacred Performances of Memory

Yom HaZikaron begins with the sound of an air-siren filling the streets. The sound of the siren lasts for two minutes and indicates that it is time for the country, as a whole, to stop wherever they are, stand still, remain quiet and remember Israeli soldiers and civilians whose lives have been lost to political violence. The siren, usually an indicator of emergency and used to send Israelis to air raid shelters, is used instead on this national holiday to invoke an embodied, aural commemoration of the conflict while calling for a moment of solemnity and silence. As Abigail Wood writes, “the siren itself is a familiar sound in Israel, combining emergency preparedness and ethnonational narrative. It is iconic of shared national experience...” (2021, 190). She continues:

Banks of solar powered, electronic sirens pointing in four directions are mounted on the tops of buildings located throughout populated areas of the country. The loud amplitude of the sirens, easily penetrating buildings, tends to blot out the distinction between indoor and outdoor space and public and private listening. The sound is ambiguous in location: it is multidirectional in production and in any one location is usually heard emerging from multiple banks of sirens at once, the interaction of their relatively pure tones sometimes producing beating in the listener’s ears. (2021, 190)

The dual use of air raid sirens in times of conflict and on days of commemoration further highlights the link between Israeli nationalism and commemoration practices. It also, according to Yaron Jean, creates a landscape of “state-induced sounds” (2018, 145) where air sirens “contain all the elements for creating what the anthropologist Victor Turner brilliantly called a social drama... the chilling sound of the siren, and its political-memorial uses, give us a

momentous insight into the very relationships between the cognitive, affective and conative components of political commemoration,” (2018, 144).

As the sirens blare, Israeli-Jewish citizens remain still and silent. Whether in a restaurant, on a bus or in the privacy of one’s own home, this is a moment of personal and collective silence; a silence which can be compared to other grieving commemorations of war worldwide.

According to Michal Ephratt (2015), the use of a “moment of silence” as a commemorative practice began in the United Kingdom following World War I, writing: “the minute-of-silence was introduced in the UK in November 1919 to mark the anniversary of the armistice ending World War I (Armistice Day). This tradition then spread to other nations and occasions,” (2015, 1). The use of the air-raid sirens to enforce silence is a unique paradox, which requires that sirens in Israel not only serve as neutral warning devices, but also serve as a “stimulative force of silence and remembrance that is based upon a reverse action: upon hearing the air raid siren on (a commemoration day) you are requested to freeze in your place instead of running for shelter, as both instinct and convention would tell you,” (Jean 2018, 149). Through this reverse action, standing silent during the sounding of the siren becomes a powerful binding force that combines the traumatic past with the dangers faced by the state of Israel in the present.

After the first siren ends at 8:02pm, the annual State Opening Memorial Ceremony continues at the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem. A number of selected officials, including the Prime Minister, the President, the Minister of Defense and the Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) take part in this ceremony. Additionally, there is an audience of state-selected bereaved families present. The next day, another air-siren is sounded at 11:00 in the morning. This siren marks the beginning of private memorial ceremonies that take place across Israel in cemeteries, schools and private institutions. Throughout the day, additional

ceremonies are held at each of Israel's military cemeteries; mourners dressed in IDF and police uniforms fill the space, as well as mourners draped in the Israeli flag. At night, the final, and perhaps most well-known, ceremony is held at Mount Herzl National Cemetery. This televised ceremony marks the end of Yom Hazikaron, and the beginning of Israel's Independence Day.

Attempts to theorize performance date back to the beginning of the 1920s, when efforts were made to establish a new discipline of theater and ritual studies. Researchers engaged with the connections between text, physical presence, and specific place and time in the creation of a performance. In the 1950s, John Langshaw Austin coined the term 'performative' as part of his theory of speech acts. According to Austin, performativity is the combination of a speech act and non-linguistic conditions. A performative utterance always addresses a community represented by the people present in a given situation, and can therefore be regarded as the performance of a social act. It can also exhibit elements of ritual and spectacle. In cultural philosophy, especially in the late 1980s, the term 'performative' was viewed differently and was related to bodily acts such as in Judith Butler's work. Both Austin and Butler claim that the performative contains elements of performance. Ceremonies, in particular, propose a subjective interpretation of history, by emphasizing certain content and themes while ignoring others, in order to merge with a society's ideology and the guiding principles with which it seeks to shape and define itself.

The performative aspects of Yom HaZikaron are inextricably linked to Judaism and Jewish grieving traditions. In her book, *Co-Memory and Melancholia: Israelis Memorialising the Palestinian Nakba*, Ronit Lentin writes:

It is worth noting that the relatively modern Hebrew word for commemoration, *hantzakha*... is a term reserved in modern Hebrew for commemorating Israel's (Jewish) war dead (Witztum and Malkinson, 1993: 241), not Holocaust victims or war victims on the Palestinian-Arab side – denoting the close links between memory, nationalism, and war (2010, 48).

Lentin continues by explaining that memory, according to Jewish tradition, should be connected to action. On an individual level, families routinely commemorate their war dead through the process of naming a newborn child, a physical place--- such as a library or cultural center-- or an awarded fellowship after the fallen. On the national level, the commemoration of fallen soldiers and civilians on Yom HaZikaron is marked by state ceremonies that take place in various Israeli institutions throughout the sunset-to-sunset memorial day.

Important to the context of commemoration, Israel's wars have taken place at home or in nearby nations and, as a small country, it is common for Israeli citizens to either know or to know of someone who has died in the country's wars. Personal memory and collective memory, as will be discussed shortly, intertwine here in meaningful ways where personal memories are compounded by the memories of others. This all contributes to the positionality of Yom HaZikaron in national commemoration practices. In his book *When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of Yom ha-Shoah*, Young notes that Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day is positioned as a performance through public ceremonies reinforced by private forms of grieving. He argues that memorial ceremonies are important sites of memory in the process of national identity construction and that memorial ceremonies are performative actions and serve as an effective tool for structuring a society's worldview. Of the many ceremonies that take place on Yom HaZikaron, there are similar features, or performances, that unite them all; testimony from bereaved family members, the singing of national songs, and the recitation of Israeli poems are all common fixtures in these ceremonies. Through these formal features, state memory of events and people are structured, with the aim of uniting the group around collective content. These commemorative acts are a part of the landscape of rituals that take place in Israeli society.

The study of rituals and the development of ritual theories is a major theme in the study of religion and society (Bell 1997: 3-22) and is critical when analyzing commemorative holidays in Israel. Rituals are often designated as an element of religious practice. However, researchers argue that public ceremonies can have similar characteristics of religious rituals, but without a transcendental reference. Social anthropologists Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff coined the term “secular ritual” for non-religious rituals which allows for the interpretation of secular social activities using ritual theories. (Moore and Myerhoff 1977: 3-24). In their discussion of secular rituals, Moore and Myerhoff proposed that the term “sacred” should be extended to cover more than religious elements of society. Moore and Myerhoff’s distinction between sacred and religious elements means that there exists a category of elements in secular rituals which can be both non-religious and sacred. This framework of the sacred within secular rituals is increasingly important to the analysis of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony and the ways in which it both challenges and accepts sacred Yom HaZikaron commemoration practices.

An “Alternate Path Forward”: The Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day Ceremony

Since 2006, Israeli and Palestinian members of the organizations Combatants for Peace and Parents Circle-Families Forum have worked to offer an alternative narrative to Israel’s hegemonic claim on grief surrounding the conflict through their Joint Memorial Day Ceremony. This ceremony works to foreground the notion that a binational grief is experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians as a result of the conflict. Organizers work annually to create a shared space of mourning that is accessible, in one way or another, to both Israelis and Palestinians. Notably, the joint ceremony works to reframe Yom HaZikaron as a day that encompasses and gives equal space to bereaved Palestinians. The concept of equal representation is integral to the

work of both CFP and Parents Circle- Families Forum yet becomes increasingly complex when discussing the possibility of equality when grieving and memorializing the conflict. According to the CFP website:

The Joint Memorial Day Ceremony offers a hopeful alternative: ending the occupation and creating a just and peaceful future for both peoples. At this ceremony, Israelis and Palestinians grieve *together* for the losses that all families have suffered. By acknowledging the pain of those living on the other side, we resolve to choose a new path of peace, justice, security, and dignity for all (Combatants for Peace 2021, original emphasis).

In this section, the positionality of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony will be examined, as well as the way in which it is viewed as fitting into the larger Memorial Day landscape in Israel. In particular, the 2017 joint ceremony will be discussed. The 2017 joint ceremony has been chosen for a number of reasons: first, and most simply, it was the first joint memorial day ceremony I attended; second, it was the first year Palestinians were barred from attending the ceremony and the very occurrence of the ceremony resulted in violent protests in Tel Aviv; and third, as a result of Palestinians being barred from attending the event in-person, the 2017 ceremony relied more than ever before on digitality and virtual components.

The virtual components of the ceremony were an integral part of the event; they created access, expanded participation and demonstrated how communities across the globe can find commonality in grief. However, for those participating online, in-person elements that also shaped the event were missing. Those online could not see the protestors or the police presence, nor could they feel what it was like to sit in silent commemoration with 4000 people surrounding them. The complexities of this dynamic, and the ways in which the ceremony existed both offline and online, will be further examined in the following sections. A recording of the 2017 ceremony is available on both the CFP website and Youtube channel (accessed March 2022). In writing this

section, I relied on field notes taken at the time of the event, as well as the digital recording. Additionally, experiencing this event in-person and then years later online, during a time of renewed violence, allowed me to reflect on the physical and temporal boundaries of memory and memorialization, which will be expanded using literature on postmemory, grievability and digital memorials.

Setting the Stage

The 2017 Joint Memorial Day Ceremony took place on April 30th at 9:30pm at the Shlomo Group Arena in Tel Aviv, at a simulcast event in Beit Jala, at “satellite ceremony” events across the United States, and via livestream for individuals anywhere to view online. The ceremony consisted of both an in-person and virtual audience, as well as in-person and digital testimonies of grief. Those attending the ceremony in-person gathered at the Shlomo Group Arena, a multipurpose sports center with a capacity of approximately 3500. While the ceremony had been livestreamed in years prior, the inaccessibility of the arena, which will be discussed shortly, made the digital components necessary to ceremony organizers; without the virtual participation and digital testimonies of Palestinian participants, the ceremony would not be seen as meeting its goal of creating an equitable space for shared grief (figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1 Promotional image for the 2017 Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, courtesy of Combatants for Peace



Figure 2 Event materials and pamphlets displayed at the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, courtesy of Tatyana Gitlits

The Shlomo Group Arena (figure 3) is located in North Tel Aviv, above Hayarkon Park and about 2 kilometers from Tel Aviv University. Tel Aviv-Yafo is generally known as one of the most liberal, secular cities in Israel based on aspects such as religious freedom; gender segregation; attitude towards LGBTQ community¹; freedom of trade and public transportation on Shabbat; and the possibility of civil marriage. The progressive nature of the city is why, in part, it was selected as the site of the joint memorial day ceremony. It is important to note, though, that the social geography of Tel Aviv-Yafo is often characterized by a divide between the north-south areas of the city, with the more affluent, less diverse, neighborhoods situated north of, or central to, the Yarkon River. Historically, Tel Aviv was established as a Jewish city in 1909 and was located above the Arab city of Yafa. While Yafa and its adjacent neighborhoods were eventually annexed by Tel Aviv, some argue that they were never equally integrated. The southern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv-Yafo carry a disproportionate load of the city's transportation infrastructure. They lack open spaces and tree cover, and they're extremely vulnerable to heat and related stresses. These same neighborhoods, home to some of the city's most vulnerable populations, host the largest concentration of migrant workers in Israel, as well as asylum seekers fleeing war, famine, and the climate crisis in their home countries of Sudan and Eritrea. The location of the Shlomo Group Arena, an area in which I lived for several months, feels far removed from many of the hardships facing Tel Aviv-Yafo, as well as devoid of the diversity of populations that inhabit the city.

¹ For more on homonationalism and the subject of pinkwashing, see Puar, Jasbir, 2013. "Rethinking homonationalism". *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 45(2), pp.336-339



Figure 3 The Shlomo Group Arena setup for the ceremony prior to attendees arrival courtesy of Tatyana Gitlits

Questions of accessibility of the site of the joint memorial ceremony came to the surface in the weeks leading up to the 2017 ceremony when approximately 200 Palestinian permits were revoked, barring Palestinian participants and organizers from traveling into Tel Aviv for the event. While the joint ceremony was a controversial event in years prior, this was the first year in which Palestinians living beyond the Green Line in the West Bank, or Occupied Territories, were either not granted permits to attend the ceremony in-person or had their existing permits revoked. The ceremony itself is planned over the course of the year by CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum; thousands of dollars are raised to cover the cost of the venue and technology, musicians and notable speakers are booked, organization members are selected to participate in the ceremony, etc. This last minute restriction of Palestinian ceremony participants and attendees would result in a huge shift in the ways in which Palestinians could participate in the event and demonstrates the differing sociopolitical realities facing Palestinian ceremony participants.

The restriction of Palestinian movement is a part of the larger “architecture of occupation” (Weizman 2007) employed by the Israeli government since its 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Material barriers, illegal Israeli settlements and an elaborate checkpoint system all work to create a complex landscape of enclosure aimed to limit the spaces accessible to Palestinians; additionally, the question of which Palestinians have access to which spaces is built upon a complex permit system which individuals must learn to navigate. The first important distinction within the permit system is whether or not the individual traveling and/or commuting requires a permit to pass a checkpoint, those who do not need a permit and those who are unable to get one. Individuals who do not need a permit are Palestinians with a foreign passport, an Israeli passport or Jerusalem ID card, foreign nationals and Jewish Israelis, including Jewish settlers. Palestinians with a West Bank ID card need a permit and a magnetic card, on which their biometric data is registered. Within the permit system, Palestinians are categorized by a number of different factors, including: ID Card status, gender, religion, hometown, occupation, and marital status (Berda 2017). The Palestinians who need a permit are further categorized according to the type of permit with which they are traveling. The last category is a group of Palestinians who are unable to get a permit or a magnetic card due to the fact that they have been “blacklisted” by Israeli authorities. According to Berda (2017), 200,000 residents of the West Bank have been blacklisted, which can occur for numerous reasons and often without any explanation or warning.

Despite longstanding public criticism from within Israel, the joint memorial ceremony took place in Tel Aviv with both Palestinians and Israelis in attendance from 2006-2016. Each year, organizers applied for and successfully received entry permits from the Israeli Ministry of Defense for its Palestinian members. In 2017, however, the Defense Ministry revoked the

already-issued permits as a “response to the stabbing attack that took place in Tel Aviv two weeks ago, carried out by a Palestinian who had used a permit to cross from the West Bank into Israel,” (Matar 2017). This collective punishment of Palestinians, where entire families, neighborhoods and cities are punished for the actions of one or a few, is a common, yet illegal tactic employed by the State of Israel to justify acts of subjugation and violence. While no CFP or Parents Circle-Families Forum members were involved in the stabbing attack described by the Defense Ministry, their access and permits were still revoked two weeks prior to the joint ceremony. CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum both launched legal petitions to get the decision overturned, however, these petitions failed and Palestinian organization members and bereaved families living beyond the Green Line remained barred from the event. This back and forth exchange between ceremony organizers and state officials would go on to shape the event itself by forcing Palestinians to participate in the event virtually, both in their testimonies and in their presence.

The Opening of the Ceremony

The 2017 Joint Memorial Day Ceremony began with the screening of pre-recorded messages from select Palestinian CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum organization members who were unable to attend the ceremony in person, immediately drawing attention to the barriers which restricted their attendance. In the days ahead of the ceremony, the potential lack of Palestinian participation left event organizers scrambling. Without Palestinian participation and attendance, the overarching goal of the ceremony– to create a shared space of remembrance for bereaved families– would be undermined; the slogan for CFP is “*together*, there is another way” (emphasis added). The solution that the event organizers decided on was two-fold. In order to address this issue of access, it was decided in the days leading up to the ceremony that a parallel

event, a livestream of the official joint memorial ceremony, would take in the Palestinian village of Beit Jala, north of Bethlehem and on the road to Jerusalem. Additionally, the testimony of bereaved Palestinian families would be prerecorded for its performative use throughout the ceremony. The ceremony opened with four of these prerecorded messages from Palestinian CFP members, notably all men, named Osama, Adam, Nidal and Ahmed:

We see a man in a yellow shirt sitting in front of a wooden room divider. He is speaking in English. My name is Osama. I am a member of the Jericho-Jerusalem group of Combatants for Peace. I really wanted to participate on this day, but unfortunately the situation with the checkpoints and the ongoing occupation prevented me, as well as many other Palestinians, from being here.

The screen cuts to another man seated in front of the same background, speaking in Hebrew. Hello everyone. My name is Adam from Ramallah. I wanted to be with you on this important day. I hope that next year we will be together, the occupation will have ended, and we will celebrate freedom and equality for both people. Thank you all.

The screen then cuts to another man, speaking in Arabic. Hello my name is Nidal from Nablus, and I am a member of Combatants For Peace. I regret not being able to be with you at the Memorial Day Ceremony. I hope I will be with you next year.

Cut to another man seated in front of the same background, speaking in Arabic. My name is Ahmed from Combatants for Peace. I wanted to be with you, but cannot because of the occupation. God willing, I hope that next year we can remember the fallen without ongoing occupation. Recorded messages fade to black as the live audience in Tel Aviv claps. The ceremony host enters the stage.

The recordings were played on multiple screens that filled the Shlomo Group Arena. The arena, filled with approximately 4000 attendees, quietly watched the recorded introductions (figure 4). Simultaneously, the recorded messages were being watched at a live screening in Beit Jala (figure 5), attended by about 600 Palestinians, as well as hundreds of attendees “present” at the ceremony via livestream at satellite events in Kiryat Tivon, Berlin, New York and London. In years past, the ceremony was always introduced by dual Israeli and Palestinian voices. The

immediacy of bringing Palestinian organizers digitally into the space, as none were physically attending, was an intentional compensation that speaks to the larger issue of Palestinian presence in Israeli spaces. While event organizers worked to rectify this absence with the dual Beit Jala event and pre-recorded testimony, it is important to contextualize this moment within the larger settler-colonial framework in which the ceremony exists.



Figure 4 Audience members watching the opening remarks of the ceremony courtesy of Tatyana Gitlits



Figure 5 Audience members at the simulcast event in Beit Jala are shown on a screen in Shlomo Arena. courtesy of Tatyana Gitlits

As discussed by Aleida Assmann, there have been violent, repeated attempts to physically erase Palestinian presence since Israel's founding in 1948:

With 1948, a new chronology began for Israeli society. An empty and unshaped ground was needed on which to build a new future, transforming a virgin land and malleable landscape into a coherent space with new landmarks, new names, new designs, new opportunities. After the caesura of the war and the flight and expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from their homes, cities, villages and farms, however, a new starting point had to be constructed that cut off the earlier period of communal living in Palestine, which had to be abruptly and collectively forgotten. Forgetting in this case meant actively demolishing traces, erasing them from view and banning them from conversation. (2018, 290)

Assmann argues that this active process of erasure, including the demolition of property and the physical expulsion of people, was a critical element in early Israeli statebuilding which allowed the “Israeli state to transform a place into a new space for the beginning of a new history,” (2018, 291). Further, the erasure, both physically and narratively, of Palestinian presence has been an unending, intentional state practice that aims to disappear Palestinian history and allow for their remaining traces to be “ignored and neglected” (2018, 291).

Spatial control of Palestinians is built into the physical landscape of Israel-Palestine as “space is fundamental in any exercise of power” (Foucault 1980, 252). The Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, through its attempts at equal Israeli and Palestinian participation, works to center and normalize Palestinian presence within Israeli national spaces; however, the restriction of Palestinian presence in the 2017 ceremony is indicative of the larger sociopolitical realities facing Palestinians in their everyday existence. The ceremony itself had to be altered to bring Palestinian narratives and testimony into the ceremony space without allowing Palestinians themselves to be physically present.

The question of presence is increasingly complicated by the issue of language. The ceremony’s use of language, and its choices around language, is notable even from the first, scripted remarks made in the opening messages. Though the content of the remarks focuses on the uniquely Palestinian experience of being denied Israeli entry permits, the language of the opening statements spans English, Hebrew and Arabic. In years prior, the format of the ceremony gave equal space and time to Israeli and Palestinian participation; an Israeli speaker was followed by a Palestinian, who was then followed by an Israeli, and so on. Additionally, past ceremonies were hosted by two CFP members, one Israeli and one Palestinian. During the 2017

ceremony, however, a single Israeli member, a woman named Netta, was required to host the ceremony alone as her Palestinian counterpart had been barred entry.

This change to a single host shaped the ceremony and changed the main language of the ceremony to Hebrew. Arabic was still present in the recordings from Palestinian participants, as well as in the simultaneous translation provided throughout. However, Netta, effectively the narrator of the event, spoke predominantly in Hebrew as she provided introductions, transitions and opening and closing remarks. There were a handful of moments throughout the ceremony, however, where Netta translated her own words from Hebrew into Arabic. Such a moment took place in her opening remarks, which immediately followed the prerecorded messages from barred Palestinian members.

Netta, speaking Hebrew. Hello everyone. My name is Netta from Jerusalem, and I am a member of Combatants for Peace. I am honored to stand here this evening and to see the great number of people who are with us today.

This is the 12th year in which we gather together to remember the loved ones we have lost. We are also here to remember that war is not our fate and that we can change reality with our own hands. We are all victims of the conflict, of its pain and loss. But we are also its creators. I am standing here alone because my fellow moderator, my friend and sister, Kholod from Hebron, was not granted a permit to enter Israel and is therefore unable to be here with me. *Netta then repeats this paragraph in Arabic.*

Netta speaking again in Hebrew. We have learnt from our joint experience of human suffering that a partnership can be built even between enemies. This year it seems that trends of radicalization and intimidation are at their peak. The government created many obstacles for the Palestinians who wanted to be here tonight. All of our legal and political attempts to obtain permits were rejected. The mechanisms of separation and intimidation and hateful public discourse are strong, rejecting the hand reaching for peace from the other side. Nevertheless, attempts to intimidate, silence and separate us do not make us forget that change can be created when we stand together. The Palestinians are absent here tonight, but our collaborative work does and will go on. *Applause.*

Many Israelis and Palestinians, Kholod among them, have gathered in Beit Jala and are watching us live. Tonight, the entire ceremony will be simultaneously translated for our Arabic speaking viewers. *Addressing the camera.* Good evening, Kholod and everyone in Beit Jala.

(5:37) *Cut to a video of Kholod, speaking in Arabic.* Hello everyone. I am Kholod from Hebron. I was supposed to be there with you tonight at this important event. I wanted to stand there on the stage with my friend and sister, Netta, and facilitate this ceremony together; the way it's supposed to be, Israelis and Palestinians joining together to remember and grieve together in order to create a different reality. We have been separated physically, but we're here Israelis and Palestinians joining together and not giving up.

In these opening remarks, Netta follows a similar format as the prerecorded messages where she introduces herself and her organizational affiliation and then highlights the restriction of movement experiences by her Palestinian counterpart. The movement between Hebrew and Arabic performs and reflects the language symmetry that might have been present had Palestinian ceremony participants been allowed to attend in-person. It also demonstrated how the audience for ceremony organizers expanded beyond the walls of the Shlomo Group Arena.

While the arena itself echoed with Hebrew as ceremony attendees filed into the space and took their seats at the beginning of the event, those participating in the simulcast in Beit Jala as well as some groups livestreaming the event, were acknowledged via this language choice and meant to be performatively included in the space.

Netta and Kholod's introductory remarks also introduced a theme that continued to show up in the testimonies of the bereaved throughout the ceremony and is a foundational message of the ceremony itself: the collective commonality of "pain and loss" experienced by those present as a result of the conflict and the way in which "Israelis and Palestinians joining together to remember and grieve together... (can) create a different reality." The following sections will explore both the possibilities and limitations of this collective, binational notion of grief, as well as the performative and political aims of the ceremony. What does it mean to mourn Palestinian

and Israeli lives together, and in what ways does binational commemoration on Yom HaZikaron adhere to and implicate broader Israeli memory politics?

Testimonies of Shared Grief

As the introductory remarks of the ceremony come to a close, there is a notable shift in tone throughout the arena. While the experiences of ceremony organizers was initially foregrounded, the focus moves quickly to the experiences and testimonies of the bereaved family members participating in the event. These testimonies are inherently private, representing great suffering and loss, yet ceremony participants choose to make their experiences public and collective by highlighting the commonality in their grief. The audience members, both in person and those participating virtually in Beit Jala, have their own experiences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For the Israelis participating and attending, the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony may be the first of several memorial day ceremonies they will attend during this Yom HaZikaron. The testimonies shared are deeply sad, yet appear relatable to those sitting around me in the arena; they don't aim to highlight the uniqueness of their experience, but rather to display the various traumas of a shared experience.

The structure of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony is built on displaying the symmetry between Israeli and Palestinian deaths; one Israeli shares their experience of loss, followed by one Palestinian. Beyond the equality that is created by the structure of the ceremony, the content of the bereaved family members' traumatic testimonies focuses on suffering as a unifying human experience (Robbins 2013). This section will look at the ways the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony aims to utilize testimonies of violence and collective grief to mobilize political action, and the limitations therein. This language of collective grief appears throughout testimony given at the

2017 Joint Memorial Day Ceremony by both Palestinians and Israelis. One such testimony was given by a young Palestinian woman named Marian via a prerecorded message.

I am Marian from Bethlehem, and I would like to thank you for being with us today. March 25, 2003 was the beginning of a cruel psychological and physical journey to hell. It was a journey that I did not choose; a journey that has since been justified as a combat error during an assassination attempt of Hamas militants. On that ominous day, life turned completely black, more than it already had been in the years before. Fear and loss had already started to creep into our lives after the partial demolition of our house and new, recurring curfews. I thought that the end of 2002 would bring a gleam of hope after harsh years of Intifada. I thought there might be a new blossoming that would be born from the womb of war ashes. The evening of March 25th, I understood how mistaken I was.

14 years have passed as if they were now. My sister and I saw the army patrol vehicles entering the city from its northern entrance at such a speed that it made us stop playing our game outside. We were terrified and said to ourselves: "May God have mercy on those who will get caught under their grip." That night our souls were plucked out and we were left as bodies trying to survive what remained of life. That night, the Israeli Special Forces shot gunfire nonstop at my family's car from all directions. All my family members were wounded. My father, George, and I were seriously wounded, my mother Najwa suffered moderate wounds, but the three of us miraculously survived. After a long time in which the Israeli Army denied the Palestinian medical teams from accessing the area, our fourth and youngest family member, a child aged 12, my sister Christine, saw no other option but to depart from the cruelty of the occupation. Yet as Gibran Khalil Gibran says: "the sad and sorrowful soul finds comfort by joining another which expresses similar feelings and accompanies it in its mood. For the connection of sorrow is more powerful to the souls than that of happiness and glee."

When we were approached by the Parents Circle-Family Forum a month after the event which tore my family apart, despite the pain, my mother and father did not hesitate in agreeing to join the forum. Pain and loss are the same, no matter the cause. Moreover, the cause of the Forum is noble: to stop the streams of blood on both sides and to search for a path to restore freedom, honor, hope and equality for both peoples. I thank its members and my mother and father who have taught me love and tolerance. I stand here hoping that each one of you will stand with us in support of our struggle to end the occupation and work towards a future of living in peace and equality. Do not allow new victims to be added. Do not wait to experience this pain in order for you to join us. In spite of the politicians' failure, I strongly hope and believe that the two nations can steer themselves

toward a complete victory by coexisting in equality and justice. I leave you with love and I am grateful for your attention. Thank you.

In Marian's testimony, she emphasized how experiences of trauma had taken place throughout her life under occupation, culminating in the tragic loss of her younger sister. Simultaneously, she spoke about the "connection of sorrow" and stated that "pain and loss are the same, no matter the cause." Marian's testimony spoke about the ways in which she used her experience of grief to learn "love and tolerance."

The political potentials of collective grief lie at the heart of the joint memorial day ceremony. While the memorial ceremony works to commemorate lives lost to the conflict, it simultaneously works to utilize the testimonies of the bereaved to advance a political agenda: to end the Israeli occupation. As Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman write, "trauma constructs a different landscape where we see neither martyr nor combatant, nor even ordinary people, but rather the intimate suffering of victims. This is an interior landscape, but through it... see the external landscape, the reality of the occupation," (2009, 198). In the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, ending the occupation is framed as the solution to ending the cycle of both Israeli and Palestinian suffering. During the ceremony, an Israeli man named Roni discussed the death of his two sons: one, a paratrooper, who died in Beit Lid in January 1995 and the other who died by suicide shortly after the loss of his brother. In discussing the loss of his two sons, Roni gave the following testimony:

Why were my sons, and many others—Palestinians and Israelis, killed at all? It is clear to me that this death is arbitrary, meaningless, unnecessary, and that we are all responsible because we have not ended the conflict with the Palestinians. The killing continues for the simple and basic reason: because there is no peace. You have to love this land and love people in order to see that between the sea and Jordan there is space for two nations. "The space is in the heart." I learned that saying from my Palestinian brothers. The day we can trust each other completely, peace will come to us and our neighbors. In order to reach that day, we, Palestinians and Israelis who have lost family in this bitter and violent

conflict, are doing the right thing to change our reality and prove that reconciliation is possible. The most difficult task we can have as human beings is to love the other despite all the circumstances that make it difficult for us to do so. The true sign of staying sane is to keep on trying. A person who can do that has a great deal of hope to look forward to. Those who cannot will experience grief, hate and despair. I never thought to use bereavement and grief as a basis for hate and revenge. Hatred is the path to disaster. Respect for and love of the other builds the path that leads to empowerment. Joy and hope continue to exist in the absence of hate. Here today, we mark Yom Hazikaron. For me, this is a day of hope. Hope for peace and fellowship between the children of this land, Palestinians and Israelis. Thank you very much.

As Roni discussed, and other event participants echoed, the responsibility of ending the conflict is viewed as the responsibility of both the Israeli and Palestinian citizenry. The joint memorial day ceremony in this context is positioned as both a model and path for “reconciliation.” As one side bears witness to the other’s experience of suffering, the ceremony works to demonstrate the collective damage of the occupation. Questions, though, about the politics of asking Palestinians to bear witness to or find commonality in the death of Israeli soldiers are overlooked.

This thesis draws on Judith Butler’s work on a grievable life (2009), as well as Adila Laïdi-Hanieh’s work on the political claims of grievability (2010) to examine the positionality of Palestinian grief within the larger landscape of Israeli mourning. Additionally, the role of gendered grief will be discussed. In a 2009 talk titled “Palestine and Nationhood After the Subject”, Butler claims that “rarely are the names of the thousands of Palestinians who have died by the Israeli military with United States support heard” (2009). In this speech, she asks whether “they have names and faces, personal histories, family, favorite hobbies” and further suggests that this invisibility is due to Arabs’ falling outside of the naturalized, Western bounds of humanity. This talk is analyzed by Laïdi-Hanieh, who further wonders about what happens when a person who falls outside these bounds of humanity dies, writing; “if that person is not someone, then what and where is the loss, and how does mourning take place?” (2010: 66). She continues:

“acts of mourning enable politics rather than immobilize society in endless grief; they reinvent the political life of a community after letting go of the dead.” (2010, 64). The invisibility of Palestinian grief within Israeli society is indicative of the larger project of Palestinian erasure, as well as the stripping of Palestinian humanity from Israeli collective memory. The space provided to bereaved Palestinian families in the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony is critical to countering that erasure, yet that space is conditional on equal visibility and time being given to Israeli grief. At the heart of both the structure and the content of the ceremony is the idea that Palestinians and Israelis are all victims of the conflict and that Israeli and Palestinian bereaved families should have equal space to share their stories of grief. This grief, as stated throughout the ceremony by both Israelis and Palestinians, is shared; both groups mourn their loved ones and live in the pain of their loss.

The role of women’s grief, particularly the grief of mothers, is referenced several times throughout the ceremony. Even if the speaker wasn’t a bereaved mother themselves, the testimonies of a number of ceremony participants referenced the unique pain felt by their spouse or parent, the mother of the deceased. When speaking about the shooting of his 17 year-old son during the ceremony, See’am from Ramallah, almost immediately mentioned his wife’s experience of grief, stating: “My wife’s tears would not dry. She had become a lifeless body because, simply put, she is a mother.” As Maram Masarwi discusses in *The Bereavement of Martyred Palestinian*

Children:

Gender is a significant variable in the way people cope with bereavement and must be adequately considered in this kind of dialectic. Gender helps not only to shape the patterns of behavior and social structures of mourning, but also has an impact on the subjective experiences of mourners on the cognitive level in daily life. Gender, moreover, may well be a factor in determining whether someone is or is not accorded the right to mourn at all. (2019, 21)

Masarwi further argues that “while women are more identified with the image of the term mourning, they are less identified with its actual content” (2019, 31). This phenomenon appears to be reflected in the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony where two of the four participants giving bereaved testimony were women, while only one out of the six deceased individuals referenced were women/girls.

Women, however, played an important role throughout the ceremony (figure 6). Both of the cohosts were women, half of the speakers were women and the majority of the musical performances were also female-led groups. Additionally, the ceremony itself closed with a song from the Arab-Jewish women’s choir, Rana (figure7).



Figure 6 Two women CFP event organizers discuss their role in planning the ceremony, courtesy of Tatyana Gitlits



Figure 7 Rana, the Arab-Jewish women's choir, performs on stage, courtesy of Tatyana Gitlits

The CFP website states: “Since its inception, women have been an integral part of Combatants for Peace and the movement’s ongoing activities,” (accessed February 2022). In 2016, CFP formed their first Women’s Group which consisted of “twenty Israeli and Palestinian women who declared that women needed a separate, unique space, in order to address issues of gender, which all too often get ignored in the conflict,” (CFP, accessed February 2022). The group was referenced during host Netta’s closing remarks. She stated:

Together we realized that our voice as women is silenced and tends to disappear into the background of the ongoing noise and violence. This is one of the reasons we took part in founding the Combatants for Peace Women’s Group. We women are committed to and can create a different, nonviolent and safe reality by taking our place in a binational dialogue.

Both CFP’s website and Netta’s discussion of the women’s group focused on the unique and overlooked experience women face as a result of the conflict. While an expansive discussion of the gendered experience of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is relevant to note the many layers of oppression that exist within the conflict and the ways in

which women's experience of war is often relegated to expressions of grief and mourning, as well as the ways in which expressions of grief can in no way match the depth of Palestinian women's suffering (Buch Segal 2013). It is also argued (Gabriel 1992), though, that political power emerges for Israeli and Palestinian women through a collective expression of grief and that as a group they can "create a non-military space from which they reclaim their fight to share in major political decisions" (1992, 324).

It is important to examine how these politics of reconciliation, the politics that lay the foundation for groups such as CFP and Parents Circle - Families Forum, rely on a shared experience of loss, silencing discussions of origins and questions of historical presence in favor of an affective connection of mourning. Scholar Fiona Wright (2016) discusses the ways in which the affective politics of Jewish reconciliation organizations work to "bind solidarity activists to Israeli state violence and sovereignty in various ways, entangling them in the very forms of power they aim to challenge," (130). She continues:

As Ronit Lentin (2010) has argued about Zochrot specifically, such activism, radical and challenging though it is, may reflect Jewish Israelis' obsessive focus on the memory of past violence and its moral implications, rather than an understanding of the Nakba as a form of dispossession and colonialism that for Palestinians is far from over (Lentin 2010; cf. Slyomovics 1998 and Stein 2010)... In this sense, relating to Others through mourning them may remain tightly intertwined with the violence that harms or kills people in the first place (2016, 136)

Despite various mentions of the occupation throughout the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, the language of settler-colonialism does not emerge nor is *al-nakba* as a historic event ever explicitly mentioned. The ethno-political realities that complicate binational grief require us to consider the alterity of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony. In what ways does this shared testimony push back against the hegemonic Israeli narrative and in what ways does it reinforce it? As Wright writes,

“there is a limit, in other words, to the activist ethics of loving and mourning, a limit to its capacity to recognize (the loss of) Others, because it implicates a broader politics in which both the state and its activist opponents claim Palestinians as objects,” (138). Moreover, as the following section will discuss, Palestinian participation and expressions of grief in the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony are subject to being framed by segments of the Israeli population as misplaced, deserved or untrue.

Situating the Ceremony within Israeli Memory Politics

At the same time, the concept of shared Israeli-Palestinian grief that is promoted throughout the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony is also deeply controversial amongst segments of the larger Israeli population. On the day of the ceremony, a group of approximately 50 Israeli protestors gathered outside the Shlomo Group Arena to make their discontent around the event known (Figure X). These groups, draped in Israeli flags and holding signs of protest, felt an outrage toward the ceremony and ceremony attendees, particularly in light of the recent stabbings. Ceremony attendees were met with shouting and heckling from the protestors as they arrived at the arena (figures 8 and 9); the presence of the protestors also required an increase of police presence, adding additional layers of emotion to an already somber event.



Figures 8 and 9 Israeli protestors gather outside of Shlomo Group Arena, courtesy of Tatyana Gitlit

Israeli critics argue that the ceremony fails to distinguish between Palestinian “terrorists” and their victims by equally commemorating casualties on both sides of the conflict. Further, critics claim that the joint memorial day ceremony is in fact not a memorial day ceremony at all, but instead is a political protest. The most common criticism of the ceremony, however, is that it “contaminates” Memorial Day with left-wing politics and is insensitive to the bereaved families who oppose it. This idea of contamination helps to better situate Yom HaZikaron rituals as sacred in Israeli society, with the sacred/profane framework offered by Mary Douglas as an additional entrypoint:

The ideal order of society is guarded by dangers which threaten transgressors. These danger- beliefs are as much threats which one man uses to coerce another as dangers which he himself fears to incur by his own lapses from righteousness. They are a strong language of mutual exhortation... The whole universe is harnessed to men’s attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion, as when the glance or touch of an adulterer is held to bring illness to his neighbors or his children (3)

Furthering the point that the Joint Israeli-Palestinian Memorial Day ceremony contaminates state commemoration practices, some suggest that the joint ceremony should be held, but it should fall

on a different day. This paper argues that the decision on the part of CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum to hold the joint ceremony on Yom HaZikaron is indicative of the performativity of the event. Additionally, it reflects a decision amongst organizers to participate in Yom HaZikaron and position Palestinian grief within an Israeli national holiday.

The joint ceremony, while countering official state narrative in specific ways, relies on familiar tropes of Israeli memorialization practice, including song, poetry and storytelling. Throughout the ceremony, five songs were performed on stage by notable Israeli artists that detail the experience of war from their Israeli perspective. The performances were staggered throughout the ceremony, allowing for reflection between bereaved testimonies. The use of music and poetry for reflection is a common occurrence on Yom HaZikaron, as it is often incorporated in school and state ceremonies. Further, in testimony given by bereaved Israeli family members, the significance of Yom HaZikaron is discussed, as well as the act of visiting the graves of the deceased. In the testimony of an Israeli woman named Meital, she discusses how the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony is a part of, not an alternative to, her Yom HaZikaron remembrance practices.

Hello, my name is Meital. I am the daughter of Esti and Yaya. The second of five children. And the mother of Tamar and Hillel. I was born into a bereaved family. My father's brother, Bambi, was killed in the Yom Kippur War when his aircraft was shot down over the Golan Heights on October 11, 1973. Although I never knew him, his absence was very present in my life. It accompanied the family on every occasion, even during everyday experiences. My father described the grief and loss as if part of his body had been amputated. I was raised on a Moshav, in a Zionist household where I was taught to love people and the land. My father was a man defined as salt of the earth. He was loved by all, exceptionally strong, and an esteemed officer who commanded over elite army units. Through my father's eyes I learned to love the desert and godforsaken corners throughout the country. He was a man everyone looked up to; he was the one who led, he was the one who knew, he was the one with complicated answers to complicated questions.

After he left the army, he went into business. During his conscription service, he had fallen in love with the Jordan Rift Valley and one of his projects was the construction of the Brosh HaBik'-- a holiday village in the north of the valley in the late 1990s. Ten years ago he decided to settle in the Rift Valley and make it his home. On the morning of Friday, October 11, 2013, I woke up and saw many missed calls from my mother. I called home and my mother said the four worst words into the phone: "They murdered Dad overnight." I didn't understand and she had to repeat her words. Two Palestinians, 19 and 21 years old, murdered my beloved, strong, handsome father with 41 axe-strikes. They murdered him outside his house as a gift to the Hamas prisoners for Eid al-Adha, the Sacrifice Feast. They murdered him because he was a colonel in the reserves. They murdered him without knowing him at all; without knowing what a rare man he was, how much people loved him; how unique he was. They felt his breath, they smelled his blood. They overpowered him exactly 40 years after his brother Bambi fell from the sky over the Golan Heights. This is a very difficult day for me. Tomorrow we will go up to the cemetery in Kiryat Shaul to visit Bambi's grave, and then we will go to Kfar Vitkin to visit my father's. At the sight of these graves, I want to promise my children a future in this place; a future of a good, co-existent life. I want to give them hope-- not as a slogan, but as a real thing. Despite the distrust between the opposite sides, despite the long years of hatred, I truly believe things can change. Not at the End of Days and not with the help of a god that we have to pray to, but with the help of people. People created the horror that occurs here every day and people need to heal their wounds. I hope that I will live to see a change in our existence and my children will grow up in another reality. Thank you.

As discussed prior, visiting the graves of deceased loved ones is a traditional practice for individuals to take part in during the day of Yom HaZikaron. After the second siren is sounded at 11:00am, hundreds of ceremonies traditionally take place in military cemeteries, memorials for the fallen, educational institutes, military bases and public institutions across the country. The act of visiting her father's and uncle's graves described by Meital is an act familiar to all Israelis present at the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony. As it is an element of observing Yom HaZikaron, however, the temporality of the reference is not shared by Palestinian participants.

The positionality of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony as an element of larger Israeli observance of Yom HaZikaron was additionally echoed by Roni during his testimony when he stated:

The many thousands gathered around you this evening are proof that your voice has not been lost in the darkness of your personal sorrow. There is an echo to your whisper, and tomorrow when these thousands visit the graves of their friends and family, they will stand before the silent tombstones and tell the departed that their wish has been heard. There is someone who will go from house to house and from heart to heart, and pass on their bequest of life, and your lone voice becomes a great march spreading the message of peace. Tomorrow morning I will also visit my friends' graves and tell them of the new voices that (are) breaking the seclusion and are offering an option of recognition and benevolence. And when these have spread, the great energies hidden in both nations will us to a new and joint creation, and that will be the triumphant roar of the end.

Discussions such as these bring forward questions about the extent to which the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony runs counter to hegemonic Yom HaZikaron ceremonies. Additionally, with Yom HaZikaron as a decidedly Israeli commemoration day, it is questionable whether expressions of Palestinian grief can be considered equitable within the space. Further, the larger implications of a binational imaginary of shared grief are undermined by sociopolitical, inherently asymmetric (Fassin and Rechtman 2009) realities of the conflict.

Digital Components of the Ceremony

As the 2017 Joint memorial Day Ceremony came to a close, Netta returned to the stage to give thanks to event sponsors and to give her closing remarks. Notably, Netta at one moment switched to English and directly addressed the camera, stating:

We would like to thank our supporters around the world who are watching us online tonight. Thank you for reminding us that we are not alone and that we are all part of one community.

While I attended the 2017 ceremony in person, there were hundreds of others across the world who watched the ceremony online. In this moment spoken by Netta, it was acknowledged that those participating virtually were a part of the “community” created by the ceremony. Moreover, in writing this thesis, I was able to return to an archived recording of the ceremony which CFP

houses on their YouTube channel. This video, according to YouTube's algorithm, has been viewed 6,163 times (accessed April 2022), creating an even larger, unbounded space of memorialization. For these reasons, it is necessary to examine the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony as a type of virtual memorial, analyzing both the virtual components of the ceremony as well as the ways in which digitality intersects with memorialization and contributes to postmemory.

Virtual memorials are defined here as online spaces dedicated to memorializing the life of a deceased individual. The Joint Memorial Day Ceremony operates as both a live event to commemorate lives lost in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it also is rendered a memorial site as viewers across space and time are able to "visit" the ceremony on CFP's website and YouTube page. In the weeks leading up to the memorial day ceremony, the option to livestream the event was advertised on CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum Facebook pages, as well as via email communication to the organizations listserv. "Satellite Ceremony Events" (American Friends of the Parents Circle-Families Forum website, accessed March 2022) were organized in New York City, NY; Washington D.C.; Oakland, CA; Seattle, WA; Fort Collins, CO; Orange, CA; and Medford, MA. These events, primarily held at college campuses or Jewish community centers, were organized by the "American Friends" of both Combatants for Peace and Parents Circle-Families Forum. These two affiliate organizations work primarily to support their respective organizations by raising public awareness, constituency building and fundraising in the United States. The Satellite Ceremony Events worked to support all three of these goals as individuals in the U.S., some of whom had participated in the Joint Memorial Day online fundraising campaign, were invited to show their solidarity by virtually attending the event. Further, aspects of the memorial day ceremony were catered to reaching this international audience. The livestream contained simultaneous English captioning for viewers, additionally

English was interspersed throughout the ceremony when addressing livestream viewers and thanking sponsors.

For those attending the event, the presence of the expanded community attending the event was made known primarily via the strategic use deployment of English, as well as through the technology that filled the space (Figures 10 and 11). While the Beit Jala simulcast event was shown on screens in the Shlomo Group Arena, no visual elements from the satellite ceremonies or unofficial watch parties were brought into the ceremony space. Additionally important, though, are the ways in which in-person aspects of the ceremony could not be translated or transmitted to those participating in the event virtually. The atmosphere of the in-person ceremony, the construction of the space, the use of sound and silence throughout the ceremony, lighting choices were lost, or at least diminished, for those attending virtually. The experience of the ceremony “it is not a purely visual experience, but rather one that recruits from other senses and sensations and eventually makes the synaesthetic vision merge with an affective landscape of the place” (Golańska 2015: 778). It is necessary, though, to also consider how the presence of the virtual audience changed the atmosphere of the ceremony and expanded the boundaries of the ceremony itself.



Figures 10 and 11 Ceremony organizers capture the event for virtual attendees to view via livestream and recording. Photographs courtesy of Tatyana Gitlit

The question of audience in online spaces has been taken up by numerous scholars (Carrol and Landry 2010; Arnold et al 2017), and it becomes increasingly complex when thinking through mourning in an online space. Who participates in a virtual memorial and how does that change the process of memorialization? Luke Van Ryn et al in *Researching Death Online*, write:

While digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube extend the possibilities for memorialization through multimedia compositions, graphing social relationships and cloud storage, they simultaneously challenge that commemoration: through dispersing authorship among myriad users, through ranking contributions according to opaque algorithms, and through their mapping of social connections in a much more explicit way than has historically been possible. (2017, 12)

Rather than looking at the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony as a static event, I instead propose it to be an ever-changing and expanding space of engagement. The participants at the Satellite Ceremony Events, as well as their attitudes and impulses, are themselves a part of the site of memory. This consideration of the virtual components of the site suggests that embodied interactions that take place online might be felt individually but are also constructed, shared and transmitted within the space at-large (Brennan 2014). In other words, the embodied and felt experiences of individuals virtually participating in the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony work to co-construct the memorial itself. Through this work, the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony is positioned as an intrinsically modifiable site, not restricted by physical space or typical bereavement patterns that offline memorials must navigate (Arnold et al 2017). As a virtual memorial, the space of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony recedes and expands simultaneously.

The unbounded nature of the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony is made further apparent when visiting the archived recording of the ceremony. Unlike exclusively offline memorials,

which are erected at a specific point of time, the interactive and communicative nature of digitality allows the ceremony recording to be amended and added to in subsequent periods of memorialization; additional reflection and content can be added to create an enduring and expanding space for the deceased. Through this discussion of temporality, the language of affect and potentialities (Mankekar 2021) becomes increasingly important. As Mankekar writes: “affect inheres in the durational movement of subjects from one state to another; it refers to the unfolding capacity of agentive subjects to affect and be affected and is, hence, indexical of potentiality” (2021: 28). While those who attended the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony in real time were able to shape and co-construct the event as it took place, virtual visitors continue to interact with the space through their views, shares, comments and likes. The testimonies of the bereaved family members participating in the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony are made accessible to an ever-growing audience of viewers, acting also as an archived cultural artifact for future Israelis, Palestinians and Palestinians in diaspora. Further, this archived video contributes to a much larger collection of postmemory accounts of the Nakba.

There is “a long history of Palestinian audio and videotaped oral testimonies by living, named interviewees about the events of 1948. These projects are produced by activists, artists, and academics in a wide variety of forms, including videos and films (many posted on Youtube), archives of audiotapes and transcriptions, exhibitions, and scholarly analyses, drawn primarily from Palestinian citizens of Israel and diasporic refugees,” (Slyomovics 2013, 597). The Palestinian testimonies archived by CFP and Parents Circle - Families Forum contribute to a contemporary understanding of the Nakba as an ongoing event. While Hirsch’s work on postmemory focused primarily on cultural artifacts produced following the Holocaust, where there was a temporal distinction between the work and the historic event represented,

postmemory in the Palestinian context refers to a trauma not confined to the past. According to Rosemary Sayigh, “the Nakba is not merely a traumatic memory, but continually generates new disasters, voiding the present of any sense of security, and blacking out the future altogether,” (2013, 12). The Joint Memorial Day Ceremony, as an archived virtual memorial, contributes to a larger “imaginative investment” (Hirsch 1997, 22) of the Palestinian experience under occupation.

Throughout the ceremony, the testimonies from bereaved Palestinian families focused on stories of children and siblings killed, seemingly without provocation, by IDF. For See’am from Ramallah the testimony revolved around losing his 17 year-old son; for Marian from Bethlehem the testimony focused on the death of her 12 year-old sister. These testimonies represent their personal and familial trauma, as well as the communal and transnational trauma experienced during life under occupation. While the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony works to create symmetry between the trauma experienced by both Israelis and Palestinians as a result of the ongoing conflict, the Palestinian narratives can also be situated within a Palestinian national history of Nakba oral testimonies. These digital testimonies, through the inflections of postmemory, are not only a reinforcement of Palestinian collective identity, but also an opportunity for those who view the archived video to bear witness to the collective trauma of the Nakba. In addition to witnessing a moment or trauma of the past, viewers of the joint memorial day ceremony are also bearing witness to the emotional significance of that past event, placing the digital visitor with all the moral, social and political obligation that comes with bearing witness to traumatic testimony (Felman and Laub 1992).

Through examining the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony as a virtual memorial, a number of questions emerge around the larger implications of digital memorialization that are outside the

scope of this thesis. For future consideration, a discussion of the public/private boundaries of mourning in an online space should be examined, as well as the differences between practices of mourning and displays of grief must be established. To whom do memories of the deceased belong? How might we attend to power asymmetries within digital spaces? Where do we place ownership, autonomy and subjectivity within virtual memorials? Additionally, questions of privacy and power when grieving online become increasingly complex when situated within the settler-colonial frame.

Conclusion

Both the 2020 and 2021 Joint Memorial Day Ceremony took place entirely online. Instead of having a live audience, the ceremony was exclusively livestreamed to a global audience. While an in-person audience was not allowed under Israel's COVID-19 restrictions in either 2020 or 2021, thousands of individuals joined the event live, with thousands more viewing the ceremony recordings later on. It is estimated by CFP that the 2020 ceremony eventually reached over 200,000 people (CFP website accessed March 2022). The 2022 Joint Memorial Day Ceremony also took place exclusively online. In these online ceremonies, audience members were encouraged to stay online after the official event ended for smaller group discussions on the impact of the conflict. Rather than only interacting with selected ceremony participants, virtual attendees could also interact with each other in a way that mirrored and formalized the in-person mingling and socializing that ordinarily would take place following the end of the in-person ceremony. This expanded use of digital tools, and what types of interactions the tools allow for, calls for additional research on the future of virtual memorialization and mourning practices.

By focusing on the intersections between online and in-person commemoration, this thesis looked specifically at the way Israeli and Palestinian organizers used digital components and the notion of collective suffering to construct the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony. In order to achieve this, I worked to contextualize the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony within the larger landscape of both Israeli and Palestinian memory politics, as well as within the settler-colonial framework that frames the conflict. The ceremony itself remains highly controversial amongst both Israelis and Palestinians, as a contamination of the collective narrative; for attempting to balance asymmetrical atrocities; and for disrupting hegemonic mourning practices. Simultaneously, the ceremony grows in attendees and donations each year and is now one of the best attended Yom Hazikaron events within Israel. Additionally, with CFP winning Nobel Peace Prizes in both 2017 and 2019, the ceremony is now internationally lauded as an example of nonviolent activism.

As I finish writing this thesis, violence has reemerged during the 2022 celebrations of Passover and Ramadan. Questions about the possibilities and limitations of a binational, Israeli-Palestinian grief continue to be complicated by the ongoing violence. While the dual experiences of this conflict are inextricably linked to the ethno-political realities of occupation, the political potentialities of collective grief and outrage are foregrounded by CFP and Parents Circle-Families Forum organizers. Through an examination of language, gender, grievability and access, this thesis worked to attend to the various ways power exists within the Joint Memorial Day Ceremony. Additionally important are the ways in which power exists in the digital components of the ceremony, through questions of authorship, heritage and, again, access. Virtual memorialization and public mourning in the Israeli-Palestinian context are

ever-embedded within dual, collective state memories and present-day politics as the conflict persists.

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