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My Home is Not A Suitcase, Eric Norberg, Wadi Hilweh, Silwan, East Jerusalem. From 'Diary of a Palestinian Wound,' Mahmoud Darwish. Photo: Eric Norberg for Art Forces

Sahar Abassi, Deputy Director of Madaa Creative Center stated:

Whatever they do, we will stay here, because my home is not a suitcase and I am not a traveler.

References

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Two Red Poppies, Possibly More

On May 15, 2021, thousands of protesters gathered in the streets of San Francisco in response to the violent displacement of Palestinians from their homes by Israeli settlers in Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem. May 15 was also the 73rd anniversary of the Nakba, the mass displacement of Palestinians from their homeland due to Zionist colonization and the creation of the Israeli state in 1948. In other words, forced displacement and settler colonization continue in the ongoing Nakba in Palestine. What was different this spring was the heightened level of public outrage in the US at Israeli violence and deepened solidarity with Palestine, which was only amplified by the subsequent Israeli attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip, leading to the deaths of approximately 150 Palestinians, and the lynchings of Palestinians in Israel. As an organizer with the US Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (launched during an earlier massacre in Gaza in 2009), I was both heartened by the intensified solidarity with Palestinians and support for their call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and saddened that this shift in the tide of US public opinion had to take place at the expense of more Palestinian lives.



Design by Diyala Shihadih and Chris Ghazaleh, produced in collaboration with David Solnit. Photograph by Lewis Bernier.

What was especially inspiring to me about the Nakba Day protest in San Francisco was a community mural project led by the Palestinian Youth Movement that involved collective painting of a mural on Valencia Street in tandem with the painting of a mural on a Palestinian home in Silwan, East Jerusalem, sponsored by I Witness Silwan, Art Forces, and the Madaa-Silwan Creative Center.



Designed Chris Ghazaleh and Diayala Shihedah, USA, Painted by Jinan Masaweh, Palestine; Manar Sheatreh, Palestine; Laura Rosner, USA. Photo Jinan Masaweh.

A statement from this transnational art project notes, 'The importance of coordinating a joint mural, one in Palestine and one in diaspora, is in maintaining our connections to each other despite the Zionist project's attempts to fragment us as a society.' This cross-border collaboration reflected the remarkable uprising of Palestinians across the partitioned Palestinian national space during what was called the 'Unity Intifada' this spring, with protests in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and inside Israel. The mural painted on a home at risk of demolition in Silwan, East Jerusalem proclaimed in Arabic and English, 'We will remain', a testament to Palestinian steadfastness in the face of ongoing displacement. In the Mission district of San Francisco, the mural designed by young Palestinian American artists announces, 'We Will Return', highlighting the right of return of Palestinian refugees which has been denied by the Israeli state with US support and, according to the artists, also speaks to the displacement of local residents. The Mission is a hyper-gentrified neighborhood transformed by the crisis of affordable housing in San Francisco so the mural's slogan reverberates with local struggles against home evictions and the deportation of immigrants of color.

The public nature of the mural's creation also underscores creative organizing methods that attempt to politicize the public sphere through collective action in urban spaces and link nodes of the Palestinian diaspora, given the San Francisco Bay Area is home to a Palestinian community spanning at least three generations. It was heartening to think that the mural in the Mission would

remain after the protest was over, a tangible sign of persistent Palestinian resistance, including among a younger generation of Palestinians in the diaspora, and of struggles linking local and global politics.



Image courtesy of the author.

The visual imprint of Palestinian freedom struggles on the surface of the street itself is politically significant given the exceptional censorship of the Palestine Question in the US media, educational, and even liberal-left activist spheres, including censorship and vandalism of Palestine solidarity murals in the Mission. This literal erasure of visual solidarity is countered by transnational

and cross-racial solidarity linking different communities struggling with displacement, border violence, and policing, highlighted in recent years by Palestinian-Latinx protests of Trump's immigration policies and of US and Israeli border walls and the Black Lives Matter movement's solidarity with Palestinians resisting Israeli state violence and policing.

The red poppy painted in both murals is native to Palestine, and symbolizes the blood of Palestinians who have died due to Israeli violence and colonization. The black-and-white kaffiyeh is an iconic symbol of Palestinian resistance, and the faces swathed in scarves are painted on a backdrop of Palestinian homes, the poppy looming in the foreground and reaching for the sky. In the spring, the green hillsides in Palestine are draped in red poppies, sprouting next to stone walls that ribbon the slopes - a reminder of the will to return to the land, not just literally but through an emancipatory imaginary; the dream of freedom; and the determination to survive - against all the impossibles.

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