UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Off the Script: Staging Palestinian Humanity

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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The Dissertation of Soraya J Abuelhiga is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2020

DEDICATION

Always for my father.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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The relationship between artistic practice and liberatory politics in Palestine is framed by two related and pervasive problems affecting both Palestinian lives on the ground and representations of the Palestinian people in media, politics, and intellectual discourses: Narrative disenfranchisement, or the enforced lack of discursive control and narrative agency stemming from the "shrinking" of Palestinian identity, culture, and history in dominant political discourse; and relative humanization as the sociopolitical and discursive practice of both differentially distributing and limiting the protections or applications of inalienable human rights for those

bodies and communities deemed not fully human. Palestinian displacement, oppression, collective criminalization, and death continues to exemplify and be informed by the discursive and actual dehumanization of Palestinian identities and bodies. Consequently, Palestinian cultural and artistic performances of nationalism and national identity involve an affirmation of or demand for human rights in the face of inhumane campaigns of violence and ongoing cultural erasure amid widespread international indifference and the geopolitical hegemony of human rights as both policy and industry in Palestine. I examine this interplay between humanization and narrativization as it is played out in the production and performance of Palestinian collective identity and cultural resistance through theatre, literature, and film as artistic and political practices of literary, performative, and visual storytelling. I broaden the term "texts" to include and accommodate informal, everyday, or marginalized storytelling practices so often central to the survival of persecuted communities, cultures, histories and narratives, and communal and collective memories. Combining onsite ethnographic observations from fieldwork with firsthand Palestinian narrations and artistic interventions, my aim is to paint a comprehensive portrait of the often underexplored quotidian and popular ways in which Palestinians confront and negotiate their misrepresentation in news media, their underrepresentation in historical and political narratives, their simplification in Euro-American politico-cultural imaginaries, and their ambivalent interactions with the global industrialization of human rights. The interdisciplinary nature of my study highlights the necessity of engaging with Palestinian popular culture and narrative practices through bottom-up cultural studies approaches and interventions invested in de-limiting and de-centering academic research practices on Palestine and Palestinians.

PROLOGUE

Nights in Jenin

As you express yourself in metaphor, think of others

(those who have lost the right to speak).

—Mahmoud Darwish, "Think of Others"

I was trying to change their mind about Kanye West.

There was no breeze.

The night, like all nights in Jenin during summer, was suffocating. It was incredibly humid, windless, hot, still. Apparently, the extreme heat that summer was rather unusual even for the infamously distressed northern West Bank city. Long considered by Israel to be one of the most dangerous locations in the Occupied Territories, Jenin has continuously been subjected to numerous military raids and blockades by Israel, as well as intense violence from both Israeli forces and Palestinian militant groups. Jenin is designated under the Oslo II Accord as an Area A city exclusively administered by the Palestinian Authority (PA), which has itself been widely criticized by Palestinians as incompetent and corrupt, abusive, a puppet regime on the globalized world stage with too many strings attached to all the moving hands from above. Entry into Area A cities is discouraged to tourists and is strictly forbidden to Israeli (Jewish) citizens.

Fig. 1. Area A road sign. (Photo: Monika Kunze, Creative Commons)

"Not since six years ago has it been this hot!" the locals would exclaim. Indeed, despite having just arrived, it already felt like it was going to be a long, hot summer.

Like many residents seeking nighttime relief from the never-ending heat, we all gathered on the rooftop of the family home in which I was staying. Sitting rather uncomfortably in the pitch blackness on cinder blocks and cheap plastic stools, or on the dusty stone ground littered with cigarette butts and miscellaneous wires, cable lines, or other random debris, we had formed a circle, rolled tobacco, swapped jokes and jabs, shared 500 ML cans of cold Carlsberg habitually smuggled in from the nearby Christian town of Al-Zababdeh (where, unlike in Jenin or other majority-Muslim cities, alcohol was sold), and complained of the poor WiFi signal.

"And *this* is the Israeli, controlling *everything* we do," one young man, a 28-year-old actor and professional clown named Faisal, exclaims only somewhat jokingly as he fiddles with my iPhone, waiting for YouTube to load an Arabic song he was eager to show me. "They make the WiFi bad on purpose so we can't do anything." A few minutes prior, I had no trouble pulling

up a live performance from one of Kanye's U.S. concerts on YouTube, sparking speculation among the group about whether technology or the content itself was to blame: Was it actually the WiFi signal? Or the fact that it was an Iraqi-Arabic song, as opposed to an American song, which was trying to be accessed?

Meanwhile, I was actively defending Kanye: "The man isn't a 'singer,' he's an artist!" Earlier, I had played for them his 2013 track, "Blood on the Leaves," and tried to explain the lyrics, which for me interrogates the paradoxes and demands of fame and celebrity as hip hop culture continues to be appropriated, commercialized, and capitalized at the expense of both the black artist and the black man in racist America. But my added context did little to aid comprehension. "I cannot understand the words! I can't understand what he's saying because of how he's saying it," another actor, 33-year-old Ahmed Tobasi (who goes by his surname), complains as Kanye spits frustrated rhymes punctuated by vulgarities and samples from Nina Simone's haunting 1965 rendition of "Strange Fruit," about lynching in the Jim Crow South. Amid reports and media and travel alerts circulating that summer—some within just days of my arrival—of increased extrajudicial violence against Palestinians from Jewish settlers backed by the Israeli army and against the backdrop of ongoing unrest in Jerusalem over increased Israeli security measures further restricting Palestinian Muslim access to Al-Aqsa Mosque, the call and response of Kanye's adamant defense and Miss Simone's brooding witness ran through my mind like subtitles in a film that is all too real.

[Strange fruit hanging

From the poplar trees.]

[Blood on the leaves]

I just need to clear my mind now

It's been racin' since the summertime

[Breeze]

Now I'm holdin' down the summer now

[Breeze]

And all I want is what I can't buy now

[Blood on the leaves]

Cause I ain't got the money on me right now

And I told you to wait

[Breeze]

Yeah I told you to wait

[Breeze]

These bitches surroundin' me

[Black bodies

Swinging in the Southern breeze]

Two Palestinian teenaged boys from Jenin had just been killed in Jenin Refugee Camp nearby. The report read: "Sa'ed Naser 'Abdel Fattah Salah (20), from al-Harah al-Sharqiyah in Jenin, was hit with two bullets to the head and left side of the chest and died on the spot. Aws Mohammed Yousif Salamah (17), from Jenin refugee camp, was hit with a bullet that entered his abdomen and exited from the chest. He was transferred to Martyr Dr. Khalil Soliman Governmental Hospital in Jenin, and doctors there tried for hours to save his life, but he died succumbing to his serious wounds."[1]

[1] Palestinian Center for Human Rights, "In New Crime of Excessive Use of Force, Israeli Forces Kill Two Palestinian Civilians from Jenin Refugee Camp, Northern West Bank," 12 July 2017 <http://pchrgaza.org/en/?p=9239>

[Strange fruit hanging

From the poplar trees,

From the poplar trees]

That summer night holdin' long and long

[Breeze]

din' long

[Blood on the leaves]

Now waitin' for the summer rose and…

[Breeze]

… and breathe

[Breeze]

And breathe and breathe

[Blood on the leaves]

And breathe and breathe

[Breeze]

[Breeze]

And breathe and breathe

The details that followed implicitly revealed the typical story pattern, what Mariam Barghouti aptly calls defensive discourse[2], of Israel's sometimes heroic but always obligatory defense against angry, violent, backwards Palestinians—"a population of poor, suffering, occasionally colorful peasants, unchanging and collective," which Edward Said had recognized as both a

[2] See Mariam Barghouti, "How Mainstream Media gets Palestine Wrong," *Al Jazeera* 30 December 2017 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/mainstream-media-palestine-wrong-171230101955202.html>

mythic and "(de)formed" perception[3]—and their (archetypal) aggression: "The Israeli forces claimed that the soldiers opened fire at 'two attackers' after 'Palestinian armed persons' opened fire at them and threw explosive devices at the forces stationed in the camp."

And then there's the collective witness, the more-than-one witnesses who will be referred to in the singular as some kind of entity or else a faceless (though not necessarily human) figure in the shadows of U.S. corporate media. They will either immediately or eventually be disregarded/discarded, and testimonies such as this will be written off, edited out, or otherwise made inaudible or illegible to international publics: "However, eyewitnesses said that the Israeli soldiers stationed near the camp buildings opened fire at a motorbike driving to the western side of the camp and traveled by the two killed persons, who were not involved in the clashes which broke out between the Palestinian civilians and Israeli soldiers." For the Israelis, Palestinian civilians (never mind teenagers) on a motorbike riding through Jenin Refugee Camp may as well be armed "attackers," given that the IDF considers all Palestinian males between the ages of 15 and 55 to be "militants," according to a 2002 Amnesty International report on IDF violations in Jenin and Nablus during the Second Intifada.[4]

[Black bodies

Swinging in the Southern breeze]

And live and learn

[Breeze]

And live and learn

[Strange fruit hanging…]

[3] Edward W. Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (NY: Pantheon, 1986), 88.
[4] See note 5 in Amnesty International report, Israel and the Occupied Territories: Shielded from Scrutiny: IDF Violations in Jenin and Nablus, 4 November 2002, 12.

And livin' and livin'

[…from the poplar trees]

And livin' all I have

And livin' all

[Breeze]

[Breeze]

and live

[Blood on the leaves]

and live

[Breeze]

[Breeze]

My mental soundtrack is interrupted by the sound of excited relief. Barely catching a signal on his own iPhone, Tobasi proceeds to play a song from an Afro-French rapper whose name escapes me now. "*This* I like!"

I jump at the chance to challenge him, immediately bothered by the fact that no one in this circle, including myself, speaks French and sensing, however prematurely or too generally, the pervasiveness of classism in the West Bank, right down to lyrical preferences in rap. "So, you don't like Kanye because you can't understand his English, but you *do* like *this* song, even though you can't understand French?" Perhaps I was starting to take things a little too personally, too quick to speak from my insecurities and experiences of being dismissed, of having my own legibility called into question because of where I come from, or of how I may come off as a

result of being from where I come from. For Palestinians especially, I imagine that such experiences are neither few nor exceptional.

"Maybe if I understood the slang more, I would like his music more," Tobasi ultimately concedes, though it's not clear if he's saying this out of politeness or a steadily increasing lack of interest in a moot debate with a very vocal opponent from Baltimore—another infamously distressed city which he hasn't heard of in a country that he can't visit, despite possessing a Norwegian passport and having traveled extensively throughout Europe as a professional theatre actor. "These fuckers don't want to give me the visa! If they give, I will go tomorrow. I am an actor, not a jihadist." Months prior, Tobasi's application for a U.S. visa had been rejected (again), prohibiting him from accompanying the Freedom Theatre—a Palestinian professional and community theatre, drama school, and cultural center located in Jenin Refugee Camp where both he and Faisal live—to New York, where they were scheduled to perform for one last time their 2015 play, *The Siege*, at NYU Skirball Center in October 2017.

Faisal finally catches a signal. Everyone falls silent as Kadem Al-Saher, the famous Iraqi singer endearingly hailed throughout the Arab world as "Caesar of Arabic Music," reaches out through my phone's speaker. The song is "*Mustakeel*," Arabic for "I resign," and it's one of Faisal's favorites. Released in 2000, about a decade after the official end of the Lebanese Civil War, the music video recounts a doomed love story set presumably during Michel Aoun's so-called Liberation War of 1990. During this time, Aoun's army (backed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq) further divided Beirut by declaring war on Syrian strongholds within the Lebanese capital city. The Syrians had been backed by the George H.W. Bush Administration in exchange for Syrian support against Hussein as the U.S. readied itself for the Gulf War.[5]

[5] Special thanks to Dr. Michael Provence in the Department of History at UC San Diego for providing background on the Lebanese Liberation War.

"He is singing for all the Arab countries, but really for Lebanon. Because there was a war in this time. Everybody was fighting each other. And they *really* divided the city like that," Faisal explains, referring to the blurred close-ups of barbed wire and cordoned-off areas filled with frustrated people inaudibly shouting in protest as the song silences the action, navigating and narrating the emotional toll of the commotion on the ground. The music video shows a man, played by Kadem himself, trapped behind a barbed wire fence, eager to be reunited with his smiling childhood love who is also behind a barbed wire fence, but on the opposing side. She would eventually be shot dead in front of him by faceless military forces in the near distance as she excitedly, if not also somewhat naively, runs to him from under the barbed wire to return a pearl necklace that she had stolen long ago, when they were children.

"I resign, I resign... my eyes are filled with tears and I go," Faisal half sings, half translates. He tells me that during the Iraq-Iran War, when Kadem was serving in the Iraqi army, the soldiers had "kept him in the back all the time to protect him, because of his voice. That's why even 'til now when he performs always he is singing for the soldiers, and he calls all of them his brothers."

About two minutes into the clip, the signal is lost at the moment that Kadem's love interest is killed, and the video freezes on Kadem's handsome but pained face now gaping in horror with his arm futilely outstretched towards the woman's dead or dying body offscreen.

Fig. 2. Frozen in Time: Mobile screenshot of Kadem Al-Saher's "*Mustakeel*," YouTube. (Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

Up until that moment, the group of seven—all Palestinian, ranging in age from 24 to 44, most working professionally in the arts in some form or another, and all currently living in Jenin—had been mumbling the lyrics or humming along casually with the melody. But once the signal dropped, the entire group had raised their voices in loud and melancholic jubilee, picking up where Kadem had left off—or where he was stuck, rather, like everything else under Israeli occupation. They sang in unison, arms raised, eyes half closed and staring longingly at one other, the variations in voice and singing capability obscured by collective wistfulness and those swaying but insistent hand gestures difficult to describe but so characteristically Palestinian—much like their histories of suffering and of *sumud*, or "steadfastness." Makers and markers of one's Palestinianness.

It was in Kadem's homeland, at the Arab Summit in Baghdad in 1978, where Palestinians who had remained in Palestine despite—or *to* spite, rather—Israel's rapidly expanding occupation were formally designated "the steadfast," evidenced by the establishment of Sumud, or the Steadfastness Aid Fund, which aimed to provide financial assistance to Palestinians living

under Israeli occupation.[6] Abeer Musleh emphasizes the significance of suffering and *sumud* in both Palestinian history and the formation of collective Palestinian identity. She explains,

> The story of the 1948 *Nakba* (Catastrophe)—the war that "led to the creation of the state of Israel and also resulted in the devastation of Palestinian society"—plays a major role in shaping the identities of Palestinians to this day. After the *Nakba*, the state of Israel was unilaterally created on 82 percent of historical Palestine and approximately 75 percent of the Palestinian population was displaced. […] 531 Palestinian villages were destroyed or resettled by Jewish settlers in 1948. Uprooted from their land, Palestinians were forced to flee either to refugee camps in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, or to camps in the West Bank and Gaza, or to remain as second-class citizens in the newly established state of Israel.[7]

If suffering defines what it means to be Palestinian, then withstanding suffering defines how to be Palestinian—in a way, how to *perform* Palestine. Palestinian actor and playwright George Ibrahim understood suffering itself as a tactic, a way for the Palestinian to be reunited with the land and, by extension, with his or her self. Through theatre especially, suffering could be embodied and enacted, used to mobilize reawakened selves into a united Palestinian front who could finally "take command of a state of affairs he is powerless to alter."[8] Ibrahim writes: "Suffering in the theatre is a reflection (*in'ikas*) of the suffering in the land, the suffering of conditional defeat. While the life of theatre is a reflection of the reality of our life, at the same

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[6] The Steadfastness Aid Fund was established by the Jordanian-PLO Joint Committee, which itself had been formed at the ninth Arab Summit in 1978 in opposition to the PLO's exclusion from the Camp David process. The Arab League held their ninth summit two months after the 1978 Camp David Accords in September, in which U.S. President Jimmy Carter oversaw almost two weeks of secret negotiations between Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The League contested the Accords, arguing that the agreement favored Israeli interests and objectives while harming the rights of the Palestinian people. The League urged Egypt not to ratify the agreements with Israel, and it froze all relations with the Egyptian government as an added pressure. A month later, Sadat and Begin were jointly awarded the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize. Egypt would be expelled from the Arab League the following year, after signing the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty on 26 March 1979. For information on the Steadfastness Aid Fund, refer to the entry, "Jordanian-PLO Joint Committee," in P.R. Kumaraswamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* 2nd ed. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 265. For a list of overviews of the Arab summits, see the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's Arab League Summit Conferences, 1964-2000 <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/arab-league-summit-conferences-19642000>

[7] Abeer Musleh, "Theatre, Resistance, and Peacebuilding in Palestine," in eds. Cynthia E. Cohen, et al., *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*, Vol. 1 (Oakland: New Village Press, 2011), 98-99. The quotation contained therein is from Ahmad H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory* (2007).

[8] Susan Slyomovics, "'To Put One's Fingers in the Bleeding Wound': Palestinian Theatre under Israeli Censorship," *The Drama Review* 35.2 (1991): 24.

time it strengthens mobilization, enlightenment and revolt against this reality, affirming the encounter of Palestinians with themselves."[9] *Sumud* can thus be understood as "a kind of patient strength, an active commitment to righteousness, a firm nonviolence. It means defying injustice by acting justly[, …] the act of carrying on despite suffering, of insisting upon your rights without hating your oppressor. This is empowerment. This is ethical action."[10]

Fig. 3. Mural in Jenin of a tree bearing leaves inscribed with the names of original Palestinian villages from which many of Jenin's residents were displaced. (Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

"Our options were to stand fast or die," says one of the armed Palestinian fighters, played by Faisal, in *The Siege*. "Surrender was not an option." In the same scene, another fighter (played by Tobasi in the original 2015 production and subsequent U.K. tour) exclaims to the audience, "It is

[9] George Ibrahim, "The Theatre and the Audience" (1988), qtd. in Ibid.
[10] Musleh, 98.

a life or death challenge between us and the occupation. You resist or end up a corpse. There is no other choice. But despite all this, we managed to sing."

Kadem's tale of romantic dispossession amid political upheaval, with all its divisive measures and fatal animosities, seemed to helplessly resonate with Palestinians' lived realities and cultural memory, at once sealing and reopening the wounds inherited from both. Much like the tales of generations of Arab storytellers before them, who commonly sang of unrequited or doomed love, of human desires ceaselessly interrupted or fatally complicated by imperial battles, tribal loyalties, familial strife and its ensuing blood feuds. Or so my father used to always remind me about ever since I was a child. "*Wallahee* [I swear], our songs are good. So many stories and stories. They keep continue and continue, night after night after night, never finish," he would say, with a mixture of pride and sadness. He was never a fan of American music, and instead preferred his old cassettes of Palestinian and Arabic music which he had hidden and smuggled over the years, risking imprisonment and abuse by Israeli authorities. But as an indifferent and unforgiving teenager, all I wanted was to listen to The Legendary 92Q Jams The Most Hip Hop And R&B In Baltimore! on the car ride home from school, without parental interruption or commentary. "What's he saying? I don't know what he's singing about!" he would often exclaim, referring to whatever track was on at the moment. "Because he's not singing, baba," I insisted impatiently, "he's rapping."

About a decade and a half later, and from a dusty rooftop 5,804 miles away, I could hear my father as if I was still riding in the front seat of the family Subaru: "You know, that's why the Israelis used to hate our guts even more back then. We used to drive all the taxicabs in them cities. We used to play Umm Kulthum[11] from morning until night. When they finished them jobs

[11] Internationally renowned Eqyptian singer Umm Kulthum (1898-1975) was famous for her remarkable performances which, by the 1960s, had ranged from 45 to 90 minutes for a single song. One of her most famous

and we go back to pick them up again, the same song was still going and going. Take all day to finish one cassette from her. *Yabayeeeeeeee* how much they used to cuss at us in them language and spit on us and keep beating us in the head, 'you can't change the goddamn song? Put in another cassette, or turn this shit off!' This way we used to make the Israelis crazy." My father's concluding defense had the same conviction then that it still does today: "You take *everything* from us, destroy us, then you act like you don't know about us? You think we will let you go easy? You think we can let you forget?"

I sat there on the rooftop, on a plastic bucket turned upside-down into a makeshift chair, watching all of them sing. I realized then that the song had long been committed to memory.

They all knew Kadem's mournful resignation by heart. They would continue singing until the song had been sung. Until they saw his story through.

They never stopped. They never lost the words. They never missed a beat.

Difficult to describe. But so characteristically Palestinian.

—July 2017

songs, "*Inta Omri* [You are my lifetime]," is about an hour long. She famously (and vehemently) pledged her support for Palestinians over the radio in Cairo and Damascus during Israel's Six-Day War in 1967.

CHAPTER 1

"We are the terrorists, we eat the humans" [audience laughs]: Rehearsing Palestinian Humanity on and off the Stage

Our lives are like two monologues, one official and oppressive,
and the other popular and oppressed.
—Sa'dallah Wannous

At that time he really didn't know much at all about Palestine.
As far as he was concerned, it was simply a stage suitable for an ancient story.
—Ghassan Kanafani, *Return to Haifa*

We just had dinner at KFC in Jenin, voted the best KFC in all of the West Bank last year (or so I was proudly told by excited locals and sarcastic friends). The three of us, after much debate, had decided to share the Family Meal instead of the Friends Meal, and made jokes about how the 150NIS we just spent at KFC went to America, who would then give it to Israel, who would then use it to ultimately fund what at the time had been almost 70 years of Israeli occupation and oppression of Palestinians. I was reminded of something that a friend of another friend from another summer had said while we gorged on fries at that same KFC, waiting for our friend's car in a nearby repair shop: "I don't support KFC or the occupation, but I support my stomach and the beautiful *hijabi* girls who work here. And I am hungry, *yalla* let's eat." For some reason, his words kept repeating in my head, a year later. Humor aside, the reality behind what we were eating, much like the greasy fried chicken and mountain of fries and puffy enriched dinner rolls themselves, was difficult to swallow, even more so to digest. But we were hungry. So we ate.

It was nearly ten at night when we finished, and the humidity was still suffocating. On the walk back towards our favorite late-night cafe where we had met up earlier that evening to do an interview, we were startled by the sound of high pitched screeching coming from somewhere close to us. Ghantus and Ameer stop and turn around while I follow them follow the screeching to under a nearby parked car. Ghantus is a tall, wild-haired, robust, 30-year-old Palestinian actor from Jerusalem staying in Jenin as rehearsals were beginning for *The Siege* at the Freedom Theatre, in which he had just recently been cast to replace yet another actor whose U.S. visa rejection prohibited him from performing in the play's upcoming two-week run in New York. He kneels down on the dusty curb and, on all fours, peers into the darkness under the car, where he gasps at the sight of a stray cat trying to eat a small bird.

Ghantus cusses at the cat in Arabic and then proceeds to make hissing noises to scare it away. Ameer, a tall and slim nineteen-year-old actor from a village just outside of Jenin, who was just slated to reprise his multiple roles in *Return to Palestine* and who also teaches in the Freedom Theatre youth outreach programs, rushes to turn on the flashlight on his mobile phone. He too kneels down and tries to scare the cat away by wildly waving his light until Ghantus, in a bit of a panic now, urgently tells Amir to "find me a stick or something, *anything*!" Ameer rushes back to give him a broken branch. It's too short to reach the cat. The bird is still screeching. "*Ya haraaaaaam* [what a pity; oh, poor thing]," exclaims Ghantus over and over again, in one of those distressed but sympathetic tones of voice that is at once meant to comfort the sufferer and to motivate or stimulate action to end their suffering.

A street cleaner passing by stops and asks us, "What's going on? Is there a problem with your tires? Is this your car?" We quickly say no, distracted by the situation at hand and with no time to waste. When Ghantus starts hissing at the cat again, it becomes clear to the man what's

going on and he exclaims regretfully how it's impossible to find the owner of the car at this time of night, because all we need is for him to move his car away from the curb "*bas shouei* [just a bit]" so that Ghantus could better reach under the car. It wasn't clear if he wanted to help or just to watch, but he soon walked away, slowly wheeling his trash bin behind him and repeatedly looking back at us over his shoulder, perhaps curious to know how this will turn out, before disappearing into the night.

Ameer suddenly finds a plastic cup from the garbage and debris that decorates the streets of Jenin. He gives it to Ghantus, who abruptly throws it at the cat who finally scurries away. The struggle is now to reach far enough under the car to catch the still screeching bird, but the space between the car and the high concrete sidewalk is minimal, especially for husky Ghantus, who strains all of his body and periodically lets out cries of exasperation as he keeps reaching for the bird. Finally, he manages to pull the panicked and fluttering bird towards him by the top of its partially shredded wing. He gently cradles the small, mangled bird in the palms of his hands while the bird is still struggling to lift itself up and fly away. It stops screeching momentarily as Ghantus continues to stroke it softly with both his thumbs, and asks us urgently, "Where should I put him?" "In one of the trees!" I quickly say, emphatically pointing to the front of a nearby building. He goes first to the nearest tree, anxious with this small helpless bird in his hands. "No! It's too short!" warns Ameer. Ghantus agrees, "He might fall from it and the cat will come back. For sure, it will come back."

Ameer points to a taller tree among a bunch of trees that lie further within the makeshift yard of the building, fenced in. Luckily, Ghantus is very tall, and he is able to place the bird up in the highest branch among the leaves, which he then meshes up to hide the bird further, protecting it from danger. As we slowly leave, the bird starts screeching again faintly.

"You will survive, don't worry," Ameer reassures the bird as we continue walking away, the few passersby staring at us in curiosity in the darkness of night before continuing on their ways.

"He will survive," says Ameer to us assuredly.

"This is Palestine," Ghantus says matter-of-factly as he rubs sanitizer on his hands and forearms to clean them. "He survives."

. . .

The title of this introduction comes from a charismatic presentation that Faisal gave at Mumbai Local, a monthly series of arts-related talks sponsored by Junoon Theatre in Mumbai, India, in January 2016 entitled, "Creation Under Occupation." In it, he recounts the history of the Freedom Theatre and its predecessor, the Stone Theatre. The history and ongoing struggles of the Freedom Theatre will be discussed later in this introduction, but for now I would like to quote at length Faisal's discussion of creative resistance in a Palestinian context, as well as his own personal connection to theatre work, a connection which is arguably reflective of a generation of Palestinian artists in the Occupied Territories who were born during the First Intifada, survived the Second Intifada as teenagers, and who are currently confronted with the difficult question of what does it mean to be Palestinian *now* and, relatedly, *how* to be Palestinian. That is, how can one be Palestinian without being consumed by the ongoing brutality of Israeli occupation and its temptations to violence which, given the ubiquity of both within the particular space of the refugee camps, have and continue to influence Palestinian identity and culture in ambivalent ways at the individual, local, and national levels. Faisal gives us a sense of this when he explains,

> "People in Palestine, especially in the camps, need a place to test their thoughts. We believe as artists, and as a guy born in Jenin Refugee Camp who knows Palestine, the occupation is not only the tanks and the [Apartheid] Wall and the prisons and the killings. The occupation also go deeper than this, to the mind. To the blood. To the thoughts, to

> the views. During the [Second] Intifada, especially in the camps, it was a black box. There was no views. The people cannot go in or out, they need a permit, it's a really complicated story. So you need a place for the people to imagine, to think. If you ask any child about his dream, for example, during that time especially, and even until now in some places, 'what is your dream?' It will be about death. About killing. Because *all* of the circumstances around it's pushing you to hold the gun and you go kill yourself. Because there's no choices. […] [There were] these young guys and suddenly they found themselves with Kalashnikovs in the middle of Jenin camp, they didn't choose this. They *forced* to be choose this. So Freedom Theatre work is to say 'no.' Palestine also need us—as Palestinians. So we wanted to keep our identity alive, through art. Through plays, through films."[12]

Faisal's point about being needed *as Palestinians* is suggestive of two things. First, and perhaps more explicit, is the logical consideration of how Palestinian death affects Palestinian resistance by virtue of reducing the presence of active Palestinian bodies and lives altogether. This could be situated within larger, ongoing philosophical and political debates about violence itself, specifically where armed liberation struggles are concerned, and will be revisited in this introduction and, more closely, in the following chapter on *The Siege*. Second, and perhaps in need of more explanation from the outset, is that while "being Palestinian" already entails a level of resistance (that is, *sumud*) against Israeli oppression and occupation, any act of resistance must also be invested in both constructing and protecting Palestinian identity, the latter of which has been historically and contemporarily unrepresented and misrepresented—with devastating effects on the ground.

It must be emphasized here that the very act of constructing and protecting Palestinian identity is a dangerous one, evidenced by Israeli censorship practices removing, filtering, manipulating, erasing all things Palestinian before the Oslo Accords. Israeli censorship was even more severe when it came to artistic production and materials, in particular theatre and theatrical

[12] Faisal Abu Alhayjaa, "Creation Under Occupation," YouTube, 8 January 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BZRMGuDflag&t=1103s> 16:47-18:22.

performance, as Susan Slyomovics explains in her seminal essay on Palestinian theatre during the First Intifada (1987-1993):

> Israeli censors treat films and plays differently from published written materials. Censors perceive any live performance in front of a public to be dangerous thanks to theatre's acknowledged capacity to incite audiences, while reading a book is deemed a private, solitary act. […] Censorship battles are waged over the symbolic value of anything that can be seen as part of the Palestinian cultural repertoire. A black and white cotton headdress (*kuffiya*) or the outlawed colors of the Palestinian flag become metonymic emblems of Palestinian identity, the existence of which is officially denied. […] Similarly, for reasons of semiotic allusion and symbolic resonance, censors are stricter with literature and poetry than with journalism: a news story about a young Palestinian rock-thrower was permitted, but a poem on the subject was banned. In weekly raids, hundreds of cassettes featuring Palestinian music are seized by the police who hear lyrics with an inflammatory message. At times, the songwriters […] are imprisoned.[13]

But even after Oslo, making Palestinian theatre—that is, constructing, performing, protecting, disseminating Palestinian history, culture, and identities—has not become less dangerous. Aside from the fact that Israeli censorship of scripts was no longer much of an obstacle in the Occupied Territories following the 1994 establishment of the PA under the Oslo Accords, "the Israeli occupation forces continue to arrest and imprison Palestinian performers and artists to this day, and theatre groups have to be very careful about the ways in which they present important issues."[14] The violent history and ongoing struggles of the Freedom Theatre, culminating in the 2011 assassination of one of its founders, Juliano Mer-Khamis, further testify to the dangerous reality of making theatre in, and performing, Palestine.

Consequently, Faisal's insistence on how "to keep our identity alive through plays" could very much be turned into a question, or a challenge. This has much to do with two related and pervasive problems affecting both Palestinian lives on the ground and the *representations* of such in media, politics, and academia—which in turn, affects the grounds on which Palestinians struggle to live under occupation: Narrative disenfranchisement and relative humanity.

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[13] Slyomovics, 27-28.
[14] Musleh, 103.

Throughout the course of fieldwork, which took place during two summer research trips in 2016 and 2017,[15] I was struck by the unprompted and continuously insistent affirmations of humanity from the Palestinians with whom I spoke. These affirmations were not just coming from the handful of theatre practitioners who I had the opportunity to befriend or interview, but also from local people at random locations: People dining in cafés eager to converse with foreigners and practice their English, occasional visitors to the homes I was staying in, owners of local hostels, children playing in the streets, and even a dentist. Facebook pages belonging to Palestinians of all ages and professional backgrounds are filled with posts and discussion threads about perceptions of humanity and normalcy and the (human) right to live. Even more interesting is that in the course of verbally affirming their humanity, Palestinians often placed themselves or their humanness, however explicitly or implicitly, in opposition to the "refugee" and "terrorist." While it is not too surprising that the human being is juxtaposed to the figure of the terrorist given the now common rhetoric of monstrosity internalized and normalized through public and political discourses on terroristic violence (again, an issue which will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter on *The Siege*), I was nevertheless struck by the juxtaposition of human being with refugee in light of two facts. First, that Palestinians still comprise the largest and longest-standing refugee population in the entire world, and second, the centrality of humanism and humanitarianism in refugee work and refugee studies. It seemed that within both the Palestinian imaginary and lived reality, labels of refugeeism/victimhood, like that of terrorist/perpetrator of violence, contributed less to Palestinian "human rights" and more to the relative humanization or, at times, outright dehumanization, of the Palestinian people.

[15] Research and travel funding were generously provided by the Palestinian American Research Center (PARC), the A.M. Qattan Foundation Culture and Arts Program, the International Institute at UC San Diego, the Institute of Arts Humanities at UC San Diego, and the Literature Department at UC San Diego.

The act or process of humanization, especially once we take into account what Mark Goodale calls the "hegemonic geoethical presence" of human rights after the end of the Cold War,[16] is a complicated practice for Palestinians who are rightfully suspicious and skeptical of the industrialized practice of largely Western conceptions of "human rights" at the same time that they are reliant on this industry for resources, funding, and international exposure and support. To be sure, Palestinian performances of nationalism and national identity usually involve, to some degree, an affirmation of or demand for human rights in the face of an inhumane occupation. The connection between humanization and narrativization, between cultural and theatrical performance, is exemplified by Palestinian actor Radi Shehadeh's historical contextualization of Palestinian theatre:

> The storyteller [*el hakawati*] is an inseparable part of our Middle Eastern heritage. Being grateful grandchildren of his, we have not only adopted his beautiful name, but have attempted to breathe new life into him. We have put at his disposal all the modern technical conveniences thus strengthening the element of spectacle in visual theatre […]. [T]he reliance on tradition and folklore can trap one in imitation and repetition. Rather it was necessary to find the essential in folklore, to be inspired by its spirit and rhythm, molding it into a form appropriate to our modern age. Therefore while showing a continuity of our civilization, one must constantly deal with issues that are essential to the human experience in contemporary life, with day to day problems and concerns, and with restoring the balance between man and his environment. The challenge is to express the reality of a harsh and dangerous environment; to put one's fingers in the bleeding wound.[17]

Premising Shehadeh's excerpt, Slyomovics reminds us that "to praise or vilify a ruler has traditionally been the role of the Arab storyteller."[18] While the figure of the Arab storyteller and its heir, the Palestinian theatre, have their roots in questioning and challenging authority, the human side of this—that is, the act of constructing and performing particular representations of

[16] Mark Goodale, Foreword to Lori Allen, *The Rise and Fall of Human Rights: Cynicism and Politics in Occupied Palestine* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2013), xii.
[17] Radi Shehadeh, "The Theatre Movement in the Palestinian Occupied Territories: El-Hakawati" (1988), qtd. in Slyomovics, 23.
[18] Slyomovics, 22.

the human—while being interrogated in social science engagements with the Palestinian occupation, has somewhat been taken for granted in cultural studies on Palestine.

I situate my study at the intersection of these engagements, and consider the interplay between narrative disenfranchisement and relative humanity as it is played out in the production and performance of Palestinian collective identity through theatre. My study is concerned with examining how theatre allows Palestinians to reevaluate and challenge prevailing conceptions of the human while constructing conceptions of humanness which are better suited to and reflective of Palestinian history and lived contemporary realities. Furthermore, my study is concerned with how Palestinians affirmations and constructions of their own humanity confronts the global industrialization of human rights, and is reflective of Palestinians' ambivalent relationships to and interactions with the "human rights" world—a world which I argue insidiously contributes to the narrative disenfranchisement of Palestinians informing and facilitating the relative humanization of Palestinians, with dangerous and often fatal results on the ground.

Permission to Narrate: Telling Stories in/about Palestine

The continuous assault on Palestinian narratives, both historical and experiential, is wonderfully illustrated in the context of theatrical performance by Palestinian filmmaker Elia Suleiman in his first feature film, *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996). There is a fantastic sequence in the last part of the film in which the silent, Buster Keaton-esque protagonist E.S. (played by Suleiman himself) unwittingly walks into a mysterious, disheveled room filled with theatrical posters and image cut-outs plastered into collages on the walls. His interest is peaked at the sight of a small ladder. The sloping wall above the ladder is made of wooden slates, and he slides down one of these and peers into a dark tunnelway as we start to hear the sad melody of the *shibbabeh*, or Palestinian flute. E.S. then enters the dark, secret attic room, which resembles a

theatre with a stage. He takes a seat onstage in front of a small television set, in an office chair painted like the Palestinian flag and beside a mannequin dressed in traditional Palestinian garments, and watches a recording of what seems to be an underground performance from a Palestinian guerilla theatre group.

The film was released three years after the end of the First Intifada with the signing of the Oslo Accords. Thus, E.S.'s enduring silence and the illicitness of both the environment itself and the very experience of watching the performance together reflects the reality of being Palestinian during this time, whereby theatrical performances and their recordings, along with any other expressions or emblems of the existence of a Palestinian nation, culture, and people, were severely outlawed by Israeli authorities. Israeli policing of Palestinians through censorship of Palestinian narratives and culture—in other words, the Israeli role in the live theatre of Palestinian occupation and oppression—is made more explicit in the concluding scenes of the film. As it turns out, the "secret theatre" is actually a hideaway for a group of young Palestinian guerilla theatre-makers who we see earlier making firecrackers, though at first glance we are fooled into thinking (perhaps less by the filmmaker and more by our own stereotypical perceptions of Palestinians) that they are making bombs. Some scenes later, a young, Hebrew-speaking Palestinian woman named Adan, after a fruitless search for an apartment rental in Jerusalem, finds an Israeli police walkie-talkie and, as a frustrated prank, begins to sing over the air an incredibly haunting, sinister rendition of Israel's national anthem while the film cuts back to the recorded guerilla performance that E.S. had watched earlier. But this time, the Palestinian actors' lamentation is silenced by the Israeli anthem, and their mournful *dabka* (the Palestinian national dance) plays out in slow-motion to the point that their uniformity and collective movement almost resemble Muslims in prayer, a slow rising up. Adan is eventually tracked

down and arrested, while the Israeli police confiscate “weapons” (which, we know from earlier scenes, are actually props) and the mannequin dressed in traditional Palestinian garments is roughly shoved into the trunk of the police car as fireworks burst in the night sky above in celebration of Yom Kippur. Here, Palestinian culture is, literally and symbolically, arrested. The film ends with E.S. returning to his parents’ home late at night, barely visible in the dark background, watching his elderly parents napping while the Israeli flag and an orchestral, marching-song version of the national anthem plays loudly on the television.

Returning for a moment to the scene where Adan is about to be arrested, there is a Leonard Cohen song, “First We Take Manhattan,” playing in the background: “They sentenced me to 20 years of boredom/For trying to change the system from within/I’m coming now I’m coming to reward them/First we take Manhattan/Then we take Berlin.” When the police officers, who had briefly been looking up at the fireworks, look back down, Adan has vanished. Curiously, the officers seem neither alarmed nor afraid, and they casually re-search the premises before being called back to the station, or “the hive.” And it becomes unclear if Adan even existed—or if her disappearing act was the big finale she had been, consciously or perhaps subconsciously, plotting all along. Rather than being removed, she disappears. In this context, Leonard Cohen’s sentence of “20 years of boredom” is suggestive of both individual Palestinian imprisonment in Israeli facilities and communal Palestinian imprisonment by the never-ending Israeli assault and arrest of Palestinian culture that is the Israeli occupation itself. Adan’s disappearance, one of many Palestinian disappearances explicitly and implicitly chronicled in the film, as its very title suggests, is an ironic testament to the existences of lives hidden—or forcibly removed—from view.

"Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what *makes for a grievable life*?"[19] This trio of questions posed by Judith Butler makes an important connection between humanness and justice: If one's degree of humanity can be measured by its grievability, then to be fully human is to be mournable or, in terms of human rights and political justice, to have one's death contested. This is not dissimilar to writer Teju Cole's critical reflections on what he calls "the consensus about mournable bodies," a consensus which expresses itself through selective episodes of public outrage, solidarity, and discourse that ultimately function to differentiate between unjustified/able and justified/able acts of violence coinciding with a larger politics of de/humanization. Cole writes, "the consensus about mournable bodies […] often keeps us from paying proper attention to other, ongoing, instances of horrific carnage around the world: abductions and killings in Mexico, hundreds of children (and more than a dozen journalists) killed in Gaza by Israel last year, internecine massacres in the Central African Republic, and so on. […] We may not be able to attend to each outrage in every corner of the world, but we should at least pause to consider how it is that mainstream opinion so quickly decides that certain violent deaths are more meaningful, and more worthy of commemoration, than others."[20] To put it in another way, public discourse and opinion tends to mourn and contest only the loss of lives deemed human enough to mourn, juxtaposing the often complementary calls for retributive action against aggressors deemed less than human, sometimes even monstrous. Within this hierarchy of humanness separating and privileging the "complete" human from the subhuman or inhuman, humanity dangerously becomes less an existential condition and

[19] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 20. Emphasis in the original.
[20] Teju Cole, "Unmournable Bodies," *New Yorker* 9 January 2015 <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/unmournable-bodies>

more an ethical standard for any rights-based discourse or humanitarian action stemming from such discourse.

But the politics of de/humanization does not apply only to loss of life. It also applies to the very existence or *living* of life. One could even say that the right to have rights at all is a determinant of complete humanness or, rather, a privilege afforded to those fortunate enough to be deemed "fully" human or whose humanity is not otherwise questioned or questionable. As Elizabeth Anker points out, "'liberal' expectations about the human—in particular, that legal personhood depends upon a reasoning, autonomous, sovereign, integrated, self-determining subject," allows human rights standards to function "less as safeguards and more as benchmarks that must be attained before a subject is seen as deserving of rights."[21] Anker's argument and its ethico-legal implications rings especially true when considered alongside Omar Barghouti's definition of *relative humanity* as "the belief, and *relative-humanization* as the practice based on that belief, that certain human beings, who share a specific common religious, ethnic, cultural or other similarly substantial identity attribute, lack one or more of the necessary attributes of being human, and are therefore human only in the relative sense, not absolutely, and not unequivocally. Accordingly, such *relative humans* are entitled to only a subset of otherwise inalienable rights that are due to 'full' humans."[22] Relative humanization, I would argue, is naturalized and mobilized in the Palestinian context via contemporary news media and public and political discourses which function simultaneously at the levels of visualizing technologies, knowledge production, cultural practice, and cultural performance. The imposition of relative humanity as a

[21] Elizabeth S. Anker, "Embodiment and Immigrant Rights in Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Biutiful*," in eds. Susanne Kaul and David Kim, *Imagining Human Rights* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 190.
[22] Omar Barghouti, "Relative Humanity: The Fundamental Obstacle to a One-State Solution in Historic Palestine," *Electronic Intifada* 6 January 2004 <https://electronicintifada.net/content/relative-humanity-fundamental-obstacle-one-state-solution-historic-palestine-12/4939> Emphases in the original.

necropolitical strategy in neoliberal times of sustained crises forms the basis and practice of precarity. Butler argues that the "differential distribution of precarity is at once a material and a perceptual issue, since those whose lives are not 'regarded' as potentially grievable, and hence valuable, are made to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment, legal disenfranchisement, and differential exposure to violence and death."[23]

In the context of Palestine, it is important to note that relative humanization and differential distribution of precarity is neither one-sided nor one-directional. While Zionists or those otherwise opposing Palestine and who are engaged in both the actual and discursive violence threatening Palestinian lives and undermining Palestinian humanity, humanness, and human rights should continue to be exposed, analyzed and, where possible, resolved, lesser explored in Palestine Studies is the issue of how supporters of Palestine also contribute, however knowingly or unknowingly, to the dehumanization or relative humanization of Palestinians through narrative disenfranchisement. Narrative disenfranchisement refers additionally to the ways in which Palestinian stories, experiences, and voices are relegated by those who work on behalf of Palestinians, whether in the form of NGO's, journalists, or even scholars and activists of Palestinian heritage who are largely based outside of Occupied Palestine, namely in the West. These individuals and organizations filter and mediate what is heard, seen, or known about Palestinians—with very little input or intervention from the actual Palestinians they serve and support. In this way, Palestinian narratives are not only reduced, lessened, or shrunken, but they become an insidious method of distributing not only precarity, as Butler writes, but also of assigning humanity. As a result, the Palestinian becomes a figure rather than a person, whose unowned image oscillates between that of "fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariahs" wrapped in

[23] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 25.

keffiyahs, on the one hand, or the "miserable-looking refugee" on the other, but is very rarely portrayed or seen as human or, more specifically, as having the narrative, imaginary, and experiential diversity characteristic of the human.[24]

To this point, Jamil Hilal usefully argues that "the dominant political literature on the Palestinian question is permeated by misrepresentations of the history, geography and identity of the Palestinian people. These misrepresentations are taken for granted in the language used by international organizations, including those of the United Nations, political leaders, and the mass media both globally as well as some official Arab media. More disturbing is the fact that they have crept into the discourse of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the major political organizations."[25] Consequently, Palestinian geography, history, and people are virtually "shrunken." More alarmingly, Hilal exclaims that "some Palestinians have become the most ardent followers of this dangerous discourse."[26] I would extend Hilal's claim by arguing that some Palestinians even play into or *perform* the roles or character types implicitly and explicitly assigned to them, or expected of them, by those tasked with representing or "helping" them, an issue which will be revisited in greater depth in the next chapter on *The Siege*. This lends a sense of urgency to a pervasive, problematic, yet underexplored area of Palestine Studies which deals with Palestinian representation, narrative authority, discursive control and, ultimately, sovereignty and power. "The Palestinian" thus becomes lost at the same time that he or she is typified and, to return to Said's aforementioned point, it becomes problematically if not also dangerously apparent that Palestinians, in their roles as either *keffiyah*-wrapped terrorists or

[24] Said and Mohr, 4. See also Said's seminal essay on the subject of Palestinian narrative disenfranchisement, after which I titled this section, "Permission to Narrate," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13.3 (1984): 27-48.
[25] Jamil Hilal, "Reclaiming the Palestinian Narrative," *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 6 January 2013 <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/reclaiming-the-palestinian-narrative/>
[26] Ibid., n.p.

helpless refugees, elicit, need, or are deserving of only two responses: Discipline, in the form of military, police, and settler or extrajudicial violence, and charity, in the form of Western NGO's, humanitarian aid and development initiatives, and other forms of international intervention.

Exemplifying Hilal's criticism and my own points about de/humanization in regards to Palestinian lives, Helena Lindholm Schulz recounts how, during her fieldwork in the infamous Shatila Camp in Beirut (which has long been a popular site for researchers and socially conscious travelers alike), a Palestinian refugee became frustrated with what he felt was his dehumanization by sympathetically curious or intellectually inquisitive foreigners visiting the camp: "In his view, the camps have become like 'zoos' and the refugees like 'animals to stare at.' Some come for research and to write articles, but, he asked, have all these writings ever changed anything about the situation, have they brought help or at least some money into the camps? As researchers come to visit over and over again, the inner wounds of people are constantly reopened."[27] The Palestinian man's frustration with the dehumanizing but also psychologically triggering research practices compels me to reaffirm here the very palpable stakes of discursive issues and practices for Palestinians suffering from the on-the-ground realities of their relative, deferred, or denied humanity. Furthermore, Palestinian lives continue to be unevenly captured and condensed into an allegedly though already problematic "Palestinian" discourse from which Palestinians are still largely excluded, spoken for instead of speaking, and always in a position to prove their humanity and defend their worthiness for a livable life.

It is worth noting that Schulz discusses the aforementioned conversation in an introductory section meaningfully titled, "Telling other people's stories," in which she recounts another perspective, this time from a Palestinian filmmaker, who "explained how Western

[27] Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Palestinian Diaspora: Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland* (London: Routledge, 2003), 7.

representations and expectations of a 'particularly political Palestinian' have become like a cage, a frame to escape from. Must Palestinians constantly dwell on their identity and the politics of that identification with Westerners, be they researchers or journalists?" Schulz goes on to acknowledge the stakes and significance of these epistemological concerns for the people, the Palestinians, at the center of such research inquiries, adding, "Surely, this is something to take seriously. Do academic texts change anything for the people we claim to tell something about? Many refugees have called for us to write *their* story, to serve as intermediaries to the Western world, so that the West 'will know,' and then surely things must change."[28] This brings me to a question that Goodale raises in his foreword to Lori Allen's work on the limits and failures of the human rights industry in Palestine,

> Given that the Palestinians will not achieve some form of self-recognized emancipation without winning a struggle that they are still losing, and given that the concept of human rights as a factor in the conflict has risen among a stateless people whose ability to create a meaningful political community—and thus legitimately ground a "right to have rights"—is as restricted as the sealed and divisive borders that continue to trap Palestinians in a geopolitical cage, what then?[29]

Remapping and Rewriting the Landscape: States of Violence and Spaces of Exception/Exemption

In another work from Suleiman, this one a 1993 short film entitled, *Homage by Assassination,* E.S. (referred to as 'Elie' in this earlier work) is in the process of making a film about the Gulf War. He receives a phone call from his friend Samir, who "just made it through" to Nazareth (in reference to increased tensions and Israeli measures affecting Palestinian mobility on either side of the Green Line in the midst of the First Intifada) and leaves a message on Elie's answering machine with the latest joke:

> On Judgement Day, the Palestinians came before God.
> God says, "*Yalla yalla* [come now; get going; quickly], to Hell!"
> An angel comes forth and asks, "But why?"

[28] Ibid., 8. Emphasis mine.
[29] Goodale, xii.

> God says, "What do you mean 'why'? Terrorism, throwing stones, Arafat, killing innocent people… They're going to Hell. Get going!"
>
> The angel says, "Have pity on these people. Their whole lives they've been mistreated, dispossessed, massacred, they experienced Sabra and Shatila[30]…"
>
> God says, "*Tayb yalla* [well then], send them to Heaven."
>
> Another angel comes forth and says, "What do you mean 'to Heaven'? What about terrorism, Arafat, killing innocent people?"
>
> God says, "So build them a *mukhayam* [a camp]."[31]

In Giorgio Agamben's "What is a Camp?" he argues that the camp (refugee camp, concentration camp) embodies and symbolizes the "disparity" between birth (or "naked life") and the nation-state.[32] But the carceral space of the refugee camp is also, as the punchline of the joke suggests, a purgatorial one—with the Palestinians being judged at once as victims deserving of pity and entrance to Heaven, but also as perpetrators deserving of punishment and expulsion to Hell. But because the verdict ultimately falls on neither side of the ongoing debate between the two angels—who may as well be representative of the false and futile narrative binary regarding "the Palestinian question" in dominant Western media coverage of the ongoing occupation, to recall Said's earlier point about the Palestinian image being trapped between dangerous terrorist and pitiful refugee—the Palestinians in the joke (and in real life) are condemned to that liminal zone between living and dying, between justice and discipline, between a (stateless) people and the State, between citizen and human being, embodied by the refugee camp. The "death in life" which has come to define the figure of the refugee is, for Agamben, a reflection of a conceptual shift—and a paradox:

> [T]he refugee, formerly regarded as a marginal figure, […] has become now the decisive factor of the modern nation-state by breaking the nexus between human being and citizen.

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[30] Over the course of three days in September 1982, during the Lebanese Civil War, an estimated 3500 Palestinian civilians in both the Sabra neighborhood and nearby Shatila refugee camp in Beirut were slaughtered by a Lebanese Phalangist militia, allied with the IDF. The IDF had ordered the Phalangists to clear out Sabra and Shatila as part of Israel's brutal military campaign against the PLO in Beirut.

[31] Elia Suleiman, *Homage by Assassination* (1993), YouTube, 3 August 2012 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L25WlRh6OlI> 11:15-12:30.

[32] Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesar Casarino (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), 43.

> […]
> Here the paradox is that precisely the figure that should have embodied human rights more than any other—namely, the refugee—marked instead the radical crisis of the concept. The conception of human rights based on the supposed existence of a human being as such, [Hannah] Arendt tells us, proves to be untenable as soon as those who profess it find themselves confronted for the first time with people who have really lost every quality and every specific relation except for the pure fact of being a human being.[33]

Agamben's last point is not dissimilar to Goodale's concluding remark about the conditional applications of human rights in the Palestinian context, in which "the promises of human rights can appear to recede at the speed of light when they are taken seriously by those whose lived reality is defined by exclusion, deferred dreams, and […] the politics of 'as if.'"[34]

[33] Ibid., x, 18.
[34] Goodale, xiii.

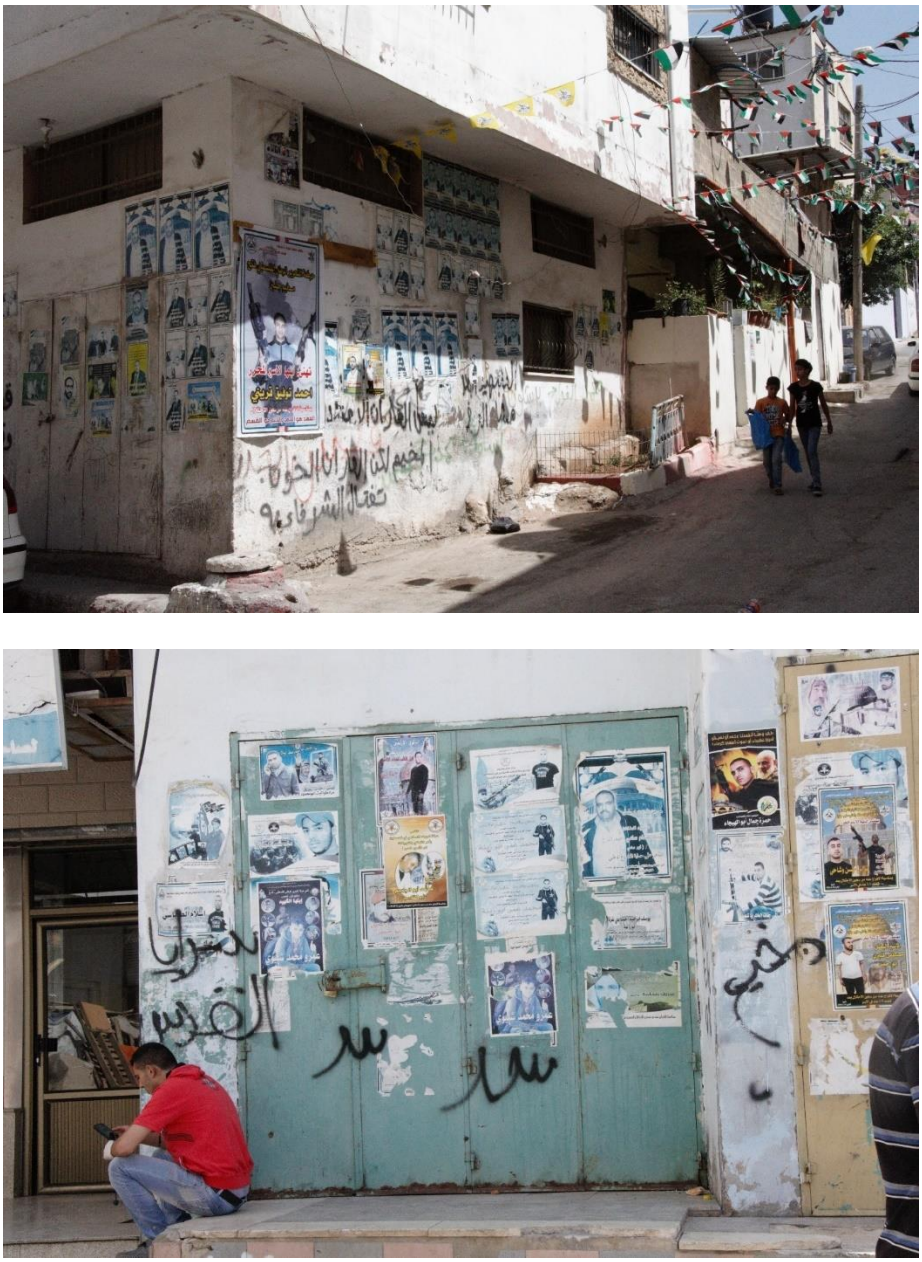

Fig. 4. “The Martyrs’ Capital”: Jenin Refugee Camp, 2016. The memorial posters plastered across walls, doorways, and public signs are ubiquitous throughout the camp and commemorate residents killed by Israel, or “martyred”—many during the Second Intifada. (Photos: Soraya Abuelhiga)

Palestinians collectively exemplify the conditionality and contradictions of a supposedly universal and inalienable set of rights. Indeed, Agamben is aware of Palestine’s particular currency within a regime of ideas and practices centering on a differential definition of “the human” that has contributed to the creation of such liminal spaces to begin with. The recognition of how this plays out in real-time across the “no-man’s-land” of liminality assigned to

Palestinians under Israeli occupation is especially significant in Agamben's emphasis on the particular interplay between Palestinians and the(ir) land or, more generally, between topology and topography. Agamben ends his chapter, tellingly titled "Beyond Human Rights," with a contemplation of Palestinian dispossession and expulsion:

> As I write this essay, 425 Palestinians expelled by the state of Israel find themselves in a sort of no-man's-land. These men certainly constitute, according to Hannah Arendt's suggestion, 'the vanguard of their people. But that is so not necessarily or not merely in the sense that they might form the originary nucleus of a future national state, or in the sense that they might solve the Palestinian question in a way just as insufficient as the way in which Israel has solved the Jewish question. Rather, the no-man's-land in which they are refugees has already started from this very moment to act back onto the territory of the state of Israel by perforating it and altering it in such a way that the image of that snowy mountain has become more internal to it than any other region of Eretz Israel.[35]

I would like to return to this "acting back," or the practice of altering the territory of the state, particularly in the context of theatre acting, towards the end of this introduction. But for now, it is important to draw a connection between space and narrative, bodies and rights—a connection which is central to Palestinian cultural and identity formation and, consequently, artistic production. If Agamben's consideration of human rights is concerned with language and, consequently, definition, particularly where the refugee is concerned, then Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics or necropower, as an extension of Michel Foucault's biopolitics and biopower, is concerned with the role of narrative in consolidating rights to exist—as well as the authority to assign such rights and strip those same rights from others. Thus, the differential definitions and applications of humanity and human rights, especially in the Palestinian case, translates into a type of (necro)power which outlines and selects, as Mbembe usefully puts it, "who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not."[36] He explains:

> The most accomplished form of necropower is the contemporary colonial occupation of Palestine.

[35] Agamben, 24-25.
[36] Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003), 27. Emphasis in the original.

> Here, the colonial state derives its fundamental claim of sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative of history and identity. This narrative is itself underpinned by the idea that the state has a divine right to exist; the narrative competes with another for the same sacred space. Because the two narratives are incompatible and the two populations are inextricably intertwined, any demarcation of the territory on the basis of pure identity is quasi-impossible. Violence and sovereignty, in this case, claim a divine foundation: peoplehood itself is forged by the worship of one deity, and national identity is imagined as an identity against the Other, other deities. History, geography, cartography, and archaeology are supposed to back these claims, thereby closely binding identity and topography. As a consequence, colonial violence and occupation are profoundly underwritten by the sacred terror of truth and exclusivity (mass expulsions, resettlement of stateless people in refugee camps, settlement of new colonies).[37]

The binding of identity and topography, which will be the focus of the chapter on *Return to Palestine* entitled, "Embodied Topographies and Deformed Topologies," is of particular concern here given that the space of the refugee camp is the ultimate marker of exclusivity—not only in a topographical sense, but also in the ontological sense, as Agamben had argued. That is, the space of the camp is a holding place for those who have been removed from the topography of the State and from "official" conceptions of humanity informing and enforcing "human rights." Such exclusivity is in itself a process of othering, which Said describes in *Orientalism* as "disregarding, essentializing, denuding the humanity of another culture, people or geographical region"[38] and which, once established, readies the ground "for any transgression: violent expulsion, land theft, occupation, invasion. Because the whole point of othering is that the other doesn't have the same rights, the same humanity, as those making the distinction."[39]

Once we factor in the epistemological tools which Mbembe lists as history, geography, cartography, and archaeology, the very act of knowledge production becomes a practice of dispossession. Naomi Klein gives a very eye-opening description of this problem in a Palestinian

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 108.
[39] Naomi Klein, "Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World," *London Review of Books* 38.11 (2 June 2016): 11-14. The version I accessed was published online and thus does not contain the original page numbers <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n11/naomi-klein/let-them-drown>.

context, particularly where the interplay between land and story, environment and experience, ultimately facilitates Palestinian estrangement from the land by forging Israeli "official" or "historical" narratives through the very altering of the landscape itself. Furthermore, such destruction of the landscape, alongside (or as a tactic of) othering bodies, continues with impunity, under the guise of environmentalism—what Klein aptly refers to as "green colonialism." She writes:

> The Israeli state has long coated its nation-building project in a green veneer—it was a key part of the Zionist "back to the land" pioneer ethos. And in this context trees, specifically, have been among the most potent weapons of land grabbing and occupation. It's not only the countless [Palestinian] olive and pistachio trees that have been uprooted to make way for [Jewish] settlements and Israeli-only roads. It's also the sprawling pine and eucalyptus forests that have been planted over those orchards, as well as over Palestinian villages, most notoriously by the Jewish National Fund, which, under its slogan 'Turning the Desert Green', boasts of having planted 250 million trees in Israel since 1901, many of them non-native to the region. In publicity materials, the JNF bills itself as just another green NGO, concerned with forest and water management, parks and recreation. It also happens to be the largest private landowner in the state of Israel, and despite a number of complicated legal challenges, it still refuses to lease or sell land to non-Jews.
>
> I grew up in a Jewish community where every occasion—births and deaths, Mother's Day, bar mitzvahs—was marked with the proud purchase of a JNF tree in the person's honour. It wasn't until adulthood that I began to understand that those feel-good faraway conifers, certificates for which papered the walls of my Montreal elementary school, were not benign—not just something to plant and later hug. In fact these trees are among the most glaring symbols of Israel's system of official discrimination—the one that must be dismantled if peaceful co-existence is to become possible.[40]

I discussed Klein's article, which had only just been published a couple of weeks before my research trip to Palestine in June 2016, over lunch with the Berlin-based Palestinian photographer Ahlam Shibli in her home in Haifa. I had gravitated towards (and, months prior, personally sought out) Ahlam because of her incredible 2012 photographic series *Death*[41], which depicts the (largely West Bank) Palestinian culture of martyrdom through her own re-presentations of Palestinian fighters killed or imprisoned (in other words, "martyred") by

[40] Ibid.
[41] Ahlam Shibli, *Death*, compiled in exhibition catalog *Phantom Home* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2013), 29-162.

Israel—including suicide bombers. Despite being just one of nine series featured in the first major retrospective of Ahlam's oeuvre spanning twelve years' worth of work, it was *Death* that was met with a storm of controversy and protest (and calls for vandalism and censorship) when it opened at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2013.[42] Returning now to our discussion, Ahlam began by commending Klein's "brave" work in general, before adding some interesting and important points.

Ahlam told me that the olive and pistachio trees which Klein references as being uprooted to clear space for Jewish settlements and Israeli roads are also motifs from Palestinian folklore. She tells me how, by uprooting these trees, the Israeli regime is also clearing space for Israeli narratives to replace Palestinian ones. Because Palestinian folklore (like the Palestinian people) predates the state of Israel, these stories carry and transmit cultural symbols that serve to historically and metaphorically bind Palestinian identity to the land. To remove such environmental signs of Palestinian existence—which the very state of Israel is built on denying—is to change the narrative of the past altogether. The logic is simple enough: Alter the landscape, alter the story. Or rather: Create the story, then alter the landscape to match, to "back the claim" as Mbembe had put it earlier. To this point, Ahlam suspects that the planting of eucalyptus trees, which Klein points out as non-native to the region, is a way to change climate conditions so as to ensure that the olive and pistachio trees of the Palestinian past would not be able to grow back, further estranging Palestinians from the land on which their collective and personal identities, like those of the Israelis, are formed, and thereby challenging any Palestinian claims of belonging and, relatedly, to rights of return—in the past, present, *and* future. The

[42] Barry Schwabsky, "Showing, Saying, Whistling: On Lorna Simpson and Ahlam Shibli," *The Nation* 13 August 2013 <http://www.thenation.com/article/175745/showing-saying-whistling-lorna-simpson-and-ahlam-shibli>

Palestinians themselves are very aware of what has by now become for them the normalized Israeli practice of altering landscapes and (or through) making stories. I am reminded now of a moment on a later research trip, during the summer of 2017 when, in my frustration with the unbearable heat of Jenin and yearning for the beautiful beaches that decorate Southern California where I attend graduate school, I complained about there being no beaches in the West Bank. 24-year-old actor Motaz, recently cast in *The Siege* and anxiously awaiting his U.S. visa approval, looked at me incredulously, exclaiming: "Who told you there were no beaches here? Google? We have many beaches. Only the Israelis swim in them now."

For Palestinians, "official" stories and documentation of the state of Israel, built on the destruction and denial of the Palestinian people and culture while underpinning the continued dispossession of Palestinian landscapes—a reality filtered by popular internet search engines or, in a more general sense, by contemporary knowledge-producing technologies of "information"[43]—are far from reliable sources, inevitably compromised from the outset. Even birthdays, as official dates, are subject to doubt in Palestine. I remember overhearing a conversation between two young Palestinian men who, despite being friends since childhood, just discovered that they shared the same birthday. Sensing my confusion and perhaps also wanting to draw me into the conversation, one of the young men explained to me that he had two birthdays: One "official" (the date printed on his identification papers) and one unofficial (the day his mother claims she gave birth to him). When I jokingly asked him which date he went by, he said simply, "My mother. She knows me more than the Israeli."

[43] For more on the controversial politics and oppressive practices of internet content moderation and mediation, see Safiya Umoja Noble and Brendesha M. Tynes, eds., *The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016); see also Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2012). See also Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

"The Israeli doesn't just delete our existence. They also delete *the existence of* our existence," Ahlam emphatically exclaims towards the end of our lunch, "so always we have to create new documentations." While such new documentations are by no means limited to artistic forms, I would argue that Palestinian theatre, as a storytelling and story*performing* artistic practice, both embodies and creates these new documentations. In order to reinforce this connection between theatre and documentation, consider first Ahlam's response when I asked her, somewhat naively and perhaps partly in the interest of playing devil's advocate, why Palestinians will not—cannot—let go of Palestine at the continued expense of Palestinian lives, image, culture, land. She said, rather casually but with a serious tone, "I want to give Palestine away. But I have to have it first, it has to be mine, in order so I can let it go." While initially struck by the unexpectedness of her answer—which at first I thought ran counter to the nationalistic fervor of Palestinians in the West Bank *and* on the news, waving Palestinian flags, holding photos of Arafat, throwing stones, chanting about liberation and freedom and return—it wasn't until much later that I was able to properly contextualize the real complexity of her answer. I considered repossession as a condition for "letting go" alongside Musleh's consideration of *sumud*, theatre, the "official" story, and healing or closure in Palestine:

> Unfortunately, there has been no opportunity for Palestinians to heal from the trauma of 1948—of lost land, lost lives, and the forced division of the population—as there has never been any official acknowledgement of, or reparation for, all that was lost. In addition, dislocation, oppression, and violence have been ongoing ever since then.
>
> The noted international scholar Justice Richard Goldstone has eloquently articulated the relationship between the acknowledgement of harm and the healing of trauma: "The most important aspect of justice is healing wounded people. I make this point because justice is infrequently looked at as a form of healing—a form of therapy for victims who cannot begin their healing process until there is some public acknowledgement of what has befallen them." […]
>
> For Palestinians, as for many people involved in struggle, theatre and art […] has helped us transform our identities from that of the victim to that of the *samed*—one who practices and embodies *sumud*.[44]

[44] Musleh, 99-100.

In this sense, then, performing Palestine provides that public acknowledgement—historically and contemporarily deferred and denied by the regimes and industries of military occupation, human rights and humanitarian intervention, and knowledge production intent on wiping out any trace of a Palestinian person, much less nation. Consequently, theatre in Palestine, as a practice and process for embodying *sumud,* becomes critical to Palestinian recovery of land and body, of history and memory, of testimony and presence—of humanity and being.

"We are cultural terrorists": Jenin Refugee Camp, Juliano Mer-Khamis, and the Freedom Theatre

Fig. 5. "Alice is Alive": Entrance to the Freedom Theatre, Jenin Refugee Camp, 2016. The graffiti is in reference to the Freedom Theatre's February 2011 adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*, Juliano's last production before he was shot to death just outside of the theatre two months later. (Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

"We are not healers. We are not good Christians. We are freedom fighters," declares Juliano, in a quotation emboldened in red on the Freedom Theatre website. "What we do in the

theatre is not trying to be a substitute or an alternative to the Palestinian resistance in the struggle for liberation, just the opposite. This must be clear. […] We join, by all means, the Palestinian struggle for liberation, which is our liberation struggle." For Juliano, theatre was not an alternative to militancy—theatre *was* militancy, a "rehearsal of revolution" as Augusto Boal had professed in his seminal *Theatre of the Oppressed.* For Boal, the revolutionary potential of theatre lied in its capacity to turn spectator-witnesses into actor-participants who could use the stage as a social platform for the real-life act of *staging* social change on the ground:

> Maybe the theatre in itself is not revolutionary, but these theatrical forms are without a doubt a *rehearsal of revolution.* The truth of the matter is that the spectator-actor practices a real act even though he does it in a fictional manner. While he *rehearses* throwing a bomb onstage, he is concretely rehearsing the way a bomb is thrown; acting out his attempt to organize a strike, he is concretely organizing a strike. Within its fictitious limits, the experience is a concrete one.
>
> Here the cathartical effect is entirely avoided. […] Why make a revolution in reality if we have already made it in the theatre? But that does not happen here: the rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. […] [F]orms of a people's theatre, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theatre. The practice of these theatrical forms creates a sort of uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfillment through real action.[45]

For oppressed communities rendered silent and powerless by the economic and political mechanisms of their disenfranchisement, theatre could be more than a therapeutic practice providing emotional release and psychological relief from difficult lived realities. Theatre entailed a practical, both experimental and experiential, means of confronting and changing those lived realities, merging the space between onstage and off and blurring the line between theatricality and reality.

Distinguishing between theatre and revolution or otherwise separating theatre arts from militancy—or, more specifically for the context of my study, failing to recognize the role that

[45] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985), 141-2. Emphases in the original.

theatre plays in the larger legacy of Palestinian resistance in all its diverse forms, each accompanied by varying degrees of international approval—is often structured by the differential conceptions, discriminatory applications, and outside evaluations of Palestinian humanness previously discussed in this introduction, particularly when it comes to popular, post-9/11 allegations of Arab-Muslim propensity to violence. For example, in an August 2017 conversation with Mustafa Sheta in his office at the Freedom Theatre where he serves as General Secretary, Mustafa recounted how, on a recent trip to Berkeley where he was invited to speak about the Freedom Theatre and creative resistance, an American university student in the audience asked him, "What kind of resistance do you believe in?" When Mustafa replied that he believed in cultural resistance, she followed up with another question: "So does that mean that you don't believe in military resistance?" To which Mustafa replied, though it wasn't clear to me if he was recounting his actual reply to the young woman or if he was perhaps reflecting on and retrospectively reacting to the underlying presumption of her question: "Why have to be one or the other? I believe in all resistance, but…" His voice trailed off and he casually shrugged his shoulders, an indication of his belief, both at the time of the incident and during our conversation, that there was nothing more he could do to make her understand the faulty and oppressive logic of her thinking, of false binaries. For this reason, it seems that Juliano's oft-quoted prediction (or hope, even) for the third Intifada to be a cultural one seems less radical within the context of Palestinian cultural histories and ongoing realities of resistance and struggle. That is to say, there is nothing "soft" about making theatre in Palestine, as one of Juliano's former students, Eyad Hourani, says in a 2012 online newsmagazine article: "The stage

is our gun, and we have to fire specific shots. We have to tell people that they are responsible for what is happening onstage."[46]

The creation of this responsibility is at the center of the Freedom Theatre's liberation mission and creative methods. Through techniques such as improvisation, audience participation, community outreach and field research involving interviews and the collection of oral histories from residents of Jenin Refugee Camp in which the theatre is based, all Palestinians within and outside of the Theatre become parts of the story or, as Juliano would have it, parts of the revolution—on and offstage. "Sometimes the people can't talk about their story in direct way, so we deal with these in indirect way," Mustafa tells me about the importance and challenges of collecting oral histories as part of making Palestinian theatre and telling Palestinian stories. "It's not [about the] true issue, but the *expression of* the issue. It's two things: Dream and nostalgia. Stories need to be honest for [Palestinian] people." Sensing my confusion, he clarifies, "I give you an example. Someone he say, 'I punched an Israeli soldier in the face because I am under his occupation.' It didn't happen of course, but we [at the Theatre] present it exactly as it happened *in his mind* because it is what he wish he could do. What we present, then, is the people's lack of power and mobility." When I inquired as to the particular importance he seemed to have attached to the Palestinians' realization of their lack of power and mobility which leads to such wishful (or vengeful, depending on the vantage point) thinking, he tells me something interesting about the reality and consciousness of Palestinians in Jenin Refugee Camp, themselves a particular demographic of Palestinian: "We have a lot of heroes in the camp, the people all consider themselves heroes." As a sign of my understanding, I interjected for a moment by pointing out

[46] Olivia Stransky, "The Stage is My Gun: The Cultural Intifada of Juliano Mer-Khamis," *Sampsonia Way: An Online Magazine for Literature, Free Speech & Social Justice,* 7 January 2012 <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/bi-monthly/2012/01/07/the-stage-is-my-gun-the-cultural-intifada-of-juliano-mer-khamis/>

all the martyr memorial posters and graffiti I had seen throughout the camp. His eyes widened and he emphatically nodded his head in agreement before continuing. "But for us in the theatre, we try to provide a mirror to reveal weaknesses as reality. So we ask and ask and ask [questions] to get the people to look inside themselves. The story is important because it's coming from the reality, the field, the people, the stories are then their tools to talk about themselves and their experiences."

I think Faisal's story exemplifies Mustafa's point here. Returning now to his presentation in Mumbai, which was discussed at the beginning of this introduction, Faisal recounts his own beginnings as an actor with the Freedom Theatre:

> "Now, how I got involved in the Freedom Theatre? Because of *Arna's Children* the film. When I saw the film for first time, I realize one of my family he is in the film. I get so shock, I was like, 'Wow! Ashraf he is in the film!' because I know Ashraf, like, 'Oh wow! Abu Alhayjaa family, yeah!' So there is a scene in the film, when Juliano [Mer Khamis] is asking Ashraf, 'hey, hey, Ashraf, what is your dream?' and Ashraf said, 'My dream to be… the Palestinian Romeo!' Even he didn't say it right, he said my dream to be a 'Palestinian Rom*yo*.' So, in the second scene in the film, you will see Ashraf get killed in 2002 in Jenin Refugee Camp during the invasion. When I see this, when I saw this actually I thought, 'I want to be a Palestinian Romeo too. But I don't want to get killed.'"[47]

Faisal touches on a dilemma here, in which Palestinians in the years since the traumatic events of the Second Intifada—particularly brutal in Jenin Refugee Camp, which was targeted by the IDF in April 2002 as part of Israel's Operation Defensive Shield, what Palestinians now refer to as the "invasion of the camps" or the "Battle of Jenin"—struggle with how to resist, how to be steadfast, without losing their lives. Not only does this push against dehumanizing rhetoric and dominant/dominating narratives of Palestinians as being possessed by bloodlust and obsessed with terroristic violence, but I would also argue that such questions are central to contemporary Palestinian identity politics and nation formation, however real or imagined. What is the

[47] Abu Alhayjaa, 18:23-19:25.

relationship between resistance and militancy? Furthermore, must militancy entail violence? And according to who—by what (or whose) standards? And what does this have to do with Palestinian humanity and its representations on the globalized stage? "What the world understands about Palestine and what we want to present about ourselves… it's two different things," Mustafa reminds me during our conversation. "We want to practice diplomacy, but without losing our cause."

Fig. 6. Martyr memorial posters for two of Arna's children, Jenin Refugee Camp, 2016: Ashraf Abu Alhayjaa (above, left), killed by Israeli soldiers in April 2002 during the army's invasion of the camp, also referred to as the Battle of Jenin, during the Second Intifada. Ala' Sabbagh (bottom, left) was killed by Israeli helicopter gunship in November 2002. (Photos: Soraya Abuelhiga)

In many ways, this dilemma is built into the very history of the Freedom Theatre itself. What began as the Stone Theatre, founded in the wake of the First Intifada by Juliano's mother, Arna Mer-Khamis, and demolished by the IDF during the Battle of Jenin, would ultimately be resurrected and rebuilt into the Freedom Theatre in 2006 by Juliano, former acting student (of Arna's Stone Theatre) turned armed militant Zakaria Zubeidi, and Swedish activist Jonathan Stanczak. The story of the Stone Theatre and of Arna's students, one of whom Faisal mentions is his cousin Ashraf, is the subject of Juliano's 2004 documentary film, *Arna's Children*. Arna was an Israeli woman and former Zionist militant during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, what Palestinians refer to as the *Nakba.* After becoming disillusioned with the Israeli occupation and oppression of Palestinians and Bedouins in the Negev, Arna renounced Zionism, married a Palestinian Christian communist, and devoted her life to working closely with traumatized Palestinian children in Jenin Refugee Camp on how to practice resistance through theatre. She died in 1995, and within a decade of her death, many of her students would be killed during the Second Intifada. Of the several young men featured in the film, referred to endearingly as "Arna's children," only one (Zubeidi) would survive. Juliano was eventually gunned down in April 2011 while in his car and with his own infant children present, in front of the Freedom Theatre. His murder (or assassination, as some would say) remains unsolved to this day, and continues to be the subject of gossip and conspiracy theories among locals in Jenin.

In the Battle of Jenin, which lasted a little over ten days, at least 140 buildings (including the Stone Theatre) were completely destroyed, and 200 more marked unsafe and uninhabitable, according to a May 2002 report from Human Rights Watch.[48] Considering the density of the camp already, the damage and debris were remarkable, remnants of which are still visible in

[48] Human Rights Watch, Jenin: IDF Military Operations, *HRW* 14.3 (May 2002), PDF <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/israel3/israel0502.pdf>

Jenin camp today. Of the more than 50 Palestinians killed in those ten days, about half were designated as armed militants—though Israel's count would show that almost all of the 53 Palestinian victims were militants which, according to Amnesty International, is less reflective of "official counts" and more reflective of Israeli's liberal use of the term "militant." For the IDF, all Palestinian males between the ages of 15 and 55 are considered militants. Especially if they're from the refugee camps.

The definitions of militancy, of resistance, of terrorism and violence, have structured not only the defensive discourse of Israeli "official" narratives, but also the undocumented realities of Palestinians at the margins of these narratives. Furthermore, they continue to shape international narratives of Palestine, the Israeli occupation, and Palestinians—the last of who must also grapple with questions of how to construct and affirm a conception of humanity against the backdrop of ongoing inhumane violence and brutality, and indifferent or oppressive humanitarianism. Which brings me to something Mustafa brought up during our conversation, which I include here by way of introduction into the next chapter rather than as a concluding remark. In his discussion of what he calls Palestinian "occupied identity," he contemplates, "What is Palestinian identity? Our national identity comes from the occupation. But without occupation, then, what is the Palestinian if we are not under occupation? We are under occupation, we know this, but we are human." He then chuckles and asks me if I've seen the 2000 movie *What Women Want,* a Hollywood romantic comedy starring Mel Gibson and Helen Hunt. After expressing his fondness for the movie, he asks emphatically, a big grin on his face, "*What does the Palestinian want?* The Palestinian we don't know what we really want or what to do or how to be. *How can I be a Palestinian?* All the political organizations, the cultural centers, the universities strive to end occupation. But we also deal with the PA, Palestinian police,

capitalism, cultural capitalism, demands of being Muslim… To create awareness of how we can really be a Palestinian? It's *fouwda* [chaos]."

CHAPTER 2

Lost and Found, Again: Embodied Topographies, Deformed Topologies, and Performing Palestinian Presence

"I know it, this is Haifa, but it doesn't know me. […]
You don't see it, they see it for you."
—*Return to Haifa*

Thank God for the blessing of rain
Heavy rain in and of Haifa
That means a beautiful spring there.
And I'm from there.
—poem by Nidal Khatib Tantoura,
Palestinian puppeteer from Hebron

Here you know that Palestin[ian] is not only a name
when you find your roots in one place and
your branch in another place and
your leaves somewhere else.
—Dosouqi, photographer and filmmaker
from Jenin Refugee Camp

I needed a break from Jenin. Badly. So like many people, foreigners and locals alike, I went to Ramallah for the weekend, where the weather was much milder than in the north, and where alcohol, bars, and nightclubs were legal and the dress code less strict. The touristic appeal—modest in comparison to Haifa, Tel Aviv, and neighboring Jerusalem just on the other side of Qalandia checkpoint—and lauded cosmopolitanism of the de facto Palestinian capital of the two-state solution seems to be what many people, again foreigners and locals alike, feel distinguishes Ramallah from a city like Jenin, which Ramallah folks would sometimes

derogatorily refer to as *Thailandya* [Thailand] in reference to the cheap or illegal labor sourced to both West Bank and Israeli cities from Jenin. But I didn't exactly look like I "came from" Jenin, neither by origin or by *servees* (Palestinian shared taxi vans, the dominant mode of transportation within the West Bank). I was told that this was supposed to be a good thing in posh Ramallah. Repeatedly.

On my last night there, I went to have dinner with Ameer at a locally famous barbecue joint located on a side street in the Old City. No frills or fusses, just straight-up really good barbecue at an unbelievably low fixed price, despite the delectably high quality and large quantity of the meat served. I approached the small counter in the tiny, fluorescent-lit shopfront, asking for the owner because "he knows what I got the last time I was here, and I want the exact same thing again." Like most places in most cities throughout the West Bank at night, men of all ages and intentions were sitting everywhere: At the small tables near the counter, at the plastic tables outside of the shop, in the street along the curb. Always smoking, sometimes sipping tiny cups of mint tea or coffee or cans of Coca-Cola, watching fair-skinned and freckled parades of curious, presumably socially-conscious visitors, mostly European, who typically pass through Ramallah in the summer months armed with wide-eyed excitement, huge hiking backpacks and hiking sandals, white faces turning red with excitement and sunburn. A man seated by the counter, hefty and middle-aged and with a seemingly rough (or at least tired) demeanor, kept staring at me. I shot him back a look—an indication of my discontent, which was often adequate enough to shame the gawker into gawking elsewhere. Finally, he stopped staring, but offered a reason for his staring by pointing to the tattoos on my forearm and asking, "Why?" Still annoyed by his initial staring and assuming he was asking the same question about my tattoos that I had heard before from either innocently inquisitive or openly judgmental (sometimes religious-

minded) folks, I replied rather indifferently and with my usual answer, “Because I’m a bad Muslim. From America.”

He seemed disappointed, perhaps even annoyed, at my swift dismissal of him, and that’s when I realized that I had misunderstood his question. “No!” he insisted, now closely pointing specifically to my small, swirling single-line tattoo of a tornado. “Why *this*? Are you lost?” And he made a swirling motion with his hand, imitating a tornado spinning wildly. “I think you must be lost.” The explanation that followed was hard for me to understand—his Arabic moved too fast and came too naturally for my mediocre-at-best comprehension. Sensing my confusion and delighted by his commentary, Ameer smiles and translates: “He’s saying, ‘Only a person who is lost would have a picture like that on themselves.’” I paused and thought for a minute before responding, uncertain if this man was being really observant or really critical. But my trip was nearing its end and so I was feeling particularly exhausted and antisocial and just not in the mood for conversation, much less clarification. “Not really. Maybe. Who knows. Right now I’m hungry and I want to eat. *Salaam*.”

About ten or so minutes later, a car abruptly pulls up, engine still running. I happened to be sitting right by it at a small table just outside of the shopfront, sipping Fanta Orange, waiting for my barbecue and for Ameer to return from a nearby store with our much-needed L&M rolling tobacco (Ameer’s favorite). Soon enough, the same man who had asked about my tattoo hurried out of the shopfront where he had been sitting, and he was now jogging towards the waiting car. He swiftly tossed a balled-up Kleenex onto the plate of olives and pickled beets in front of me. Inside the Kleenex I discovered a tiny blackish-brown block of hash. I looked up at him wide-eyed as he was leaving. “Because you are lost. We’re all lost here,” he exclaimed,

somewhat cheerily but a bit slower this time so that I could understand, and he got into the passenger side of the waiting car.

I tried to mask my surprise and play it cool, for his sake and mine, since PA informants and local police in plainclothes were notorious for leisurely sitting or smoking in just such locales watching just such men make just such curious exchanges of words and other substances with just such strange "international girls" of either questionable mental stability or loose morals (and who, as was too often speculated but rarely ever confirmed, could also possibly be spies for the Israelis). But I was amused, even pleased by his illicit gift and implied trust, and I started to feel a little guilty for being so indifferent to him earlier. I asked him teasingly, balled-up Kleenex held tightly and discreetly in my fist, "and *this* is good for that, right?" I switched to English to create some distance and give the impression of female naiveté. I spoke casually and at a normal volume so as to avoid appearing secretive or suspicious. And I pretended not to notice the trio of men sitting nearby pretending not to notice me.

"This will help me find my way?" I ask again, though I wasn't sure if he understood me.

He replied anyway, a grave expression on his face. "*A la raasi* [on my head]," he swore seriously through the open passenger window as the car sped away.

. . .

"Excuse me, how can I get to Jenin?" asks Jad, the naïve but good-hearted Palestinian American protagonist of the Freedom Theatre's *Return to Palestine* upon his arrival in Tel Aviv as the passerby, an Israeli woman, instantly becomes panicked, shrieking at the mere mention of the northern West Bank city's name before fleeing from a confused Jad in fear. Written by Micaela Miranda, a highly-trained Portuguese theatre practitioner and skilled puppeteer with an affinity for working with masks and who, fluent in Palestinian Arabic, spent more than a decade

living in Palestine and working with the Freedom Theatre (both under Juliano's direction and in the years since his murder), *Return to Palestine* follows Jad as he navigates the land, tragic history, and violent contemporary reality of his family's homeland. Having toured internationally between 2016 and 2018[49] while also being performed in the streets throughout the West Bank, *Return to Palestine* offers both foreign and local audiences an alternative tour, which does more than reveal the imperial and violent history of a long sacred landscape as told from the perspective of the Palestinians, who have, were, or became lost following the establishment of the state of Israel. Like other Palestinian artistic texts, some of which will be discussed in this chapter alongside *Return to Palestine*, the play also reveals—to recall Mbembe's point from my introduction about "backing the claims" to land via the (re)creation of history, geography, cartography, and archaeology which epistemologically (if not also mythically) bind identity to topography—both the imperial functions of narrativity and the narrative impulses of imperial measures. As a lost Mahmoud Darwish, Palestine's quintessential Poet of Exile, mournfully declares in his *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* upon returning from Lebanon to find that his village had been razed to the ground and now belonged to Jewish farmers, "The moment they arrived on your land, they defined the parameters of their existence and those of their children. And at the same time they defined yours. The moment they became natives you became a refugee. Whereas their claim originated in tears and memories, it now became land and power. You, without power, lost history, land and claim."[50]

[49] My analyses are based on two particular performances of the play—one recorded, the other live. The 2016 videorecording of the play (originally directed by Miranda) was provided to me by the Freedom Theatre in Jenin Refugee Camp. The live version I attended, directed by Nabil Al-Raee, was performed at the Algerian Cultural Center in Paris, France, 16 November 2018.

[50] Mahmoud Darwish, *Journal of an Ordinary Grief,* trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Brooklyn: Archipelago, [1973] 2010), 54-56.

Despite its title, *Return to Palestine* is less about rights of return and more about the right to (re)claim. It is this claim to the land—and, as was discussed in the introduction, *the right* to make that claim—which grounds the play's production and performance. As a work of both playback theatre and street theatre, the body becomes necessarily central to the performance itself, not only methodologically but also epistemologically. In *Return to Palestine* and elsewhere in Palestinian artworks more generally, the corporeal and the visceral are interconnected with place in the displaced Palestinian body's recommunication of rightful claims to land (against Palestinian excommunication from their homeland) and in Palestinian humanization against Israeli and imperial narratives and corresponding acts of violence which continue to disappear, alienize, and alienate Palestinian bodies from and on their lands. For this reason, dialogue is secondary and supplementary in *Return to Palestine*, since it is not spoken language but the body which voices and testifies to an undeniable existence and presence under constant threat of erasure. While the significance of Palestinian Arabic in Palestinian cultural and political practices of identity-making cannot be undermined, in *Return to Palestine* it is the live Palestinian bodies of the actors which create a language of belonging, bear witness to historical and ongoing atrocities largely denied or ignored by international media, and which provide a literal and figurative body of evidence of a people vanished, dehumanized, and demonized by the language of imperial politics which conveniently and trivially attributes the Palestinian-Israeli "conflict" to a general lack of dialogue between "both sides." As Miranda explains in her essay about developing the play,

> The predominant image of the Israeli-Palestinian "conflict" is one in which two equal sides aren't to understand each other because of a lack of dialogue. Moreover, particularly in most of the media, the Palestinian side is represented as the more violent and is therefore the "terrorizing" part of the story. […]
> [Palestinians] have an urge to tell their stories. They somehow know and feel that their story is not being told correctly or fairly—and not consistent with the truth of what is happening on the ground. This deliberate mis-representation in the media is an important

> explanation for the current conditions and historical effects including: 68 years of the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people by the Zionist project with complete impunity, the domination of the West Bank and the growth of the cancer-like Israeli settlements, Jerusalem being taken house by house, and Gaza becoming a slow death camp. And the world is watching, silently and uninformed.[51]

Unlike its predecessor *The Siege* (the subject of Chapter 3), which is performed exclusively in the original Arabic and with televised English subtitles for non-Arabic speaking audiences, *Return to Palestine* is performed in Arabic for Palestinian and Arab audiences and in English for international audiences. But this linguistic decision serves more than a practical or utilitarian purpose. The very genre of the play informs and sustains the bodies of the actors as they exceed and move beyond the spoken word, certainly mobilizing against *official* words and dominant narratives. In the documentary theatre of *The Siege,* Arabic is prominent and spoken language central in reenacting and re-documenting the actual events of the siege of Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity and in reproducing the lived reality of the besieged Palestinian fighters for whom Arabic is central to the collective identity and political claims of belonging which they are fighting to salvage. The use of Arabic not only transports audiences to the scene of the event, it also (and perhaps more importantly) lends authenticity to the perspective at hand. In doing so, the Palestinian version of events becomes more conducive to empathy and credibility, central concerns for both *The Siege* and Palestinian representation at large, particularly in news media as will be examined in the next two chapters. But in the playback theatre of *Return to Palestine*, authenticity and credibility derive not from language, especially since Jad is, after all, born and raised in America and speaks only a little Arabic—not to mention the play's emphatic treatment of the role of Hebrew in the linguistic and cultural erasure of the Jewish state's Arab inhabitants, readily epitomized by Hebraic translations of once Arabic, Islamic, and Palestinian street and

[51] Micaela Miranda, "Developing *Return to Palestine*: Theatre as Cultural Resistance," 2016. Provided by the author.

city names. Rather, authenticity of history entails presence, undeniably undergirded and validated by smell, sight, sound, feeling, all of which are recreated on the stage through the bodies of the Palestinian actors.

"One of my first realizations about this work was that personal stories could completely challenge governmental narratives—putting human actions into context and therefore leading a theatrical or political audience to greater understanding and empathy," writes Miranda. She continues with a discussion of how playback theatre was used as a research tool to collect personal stories, which would subsequently be retold to Jad in the play, and as a means for personal and collective healing, community-building, and resistance-training:

> I had the privilege of being the only Arabic-speaking foreigner in the Playback Theatre troupe that has, since 2011, performed in several communities in Occupied Palestine, with an initiative called Freedom Bus. We would present ourselves to the community and ask them to tell their stories, playing them back through an improvised dramatization. When played back for the community, each personal story became a revivification of that allows the "teller" to renegotiate with themselves the nature of their own experience, and allows them to understand it more deeply. The process is also an effective opportunity to create a space of interpersonal dialogue where empathy can enter, and allow for learning and the development of greater resilience. […]
>
> After the performance, when gathering narratives, some of the members of the audience reported that they were thankful for seeing that story, so now, they knew that if it would happen to them, they should resist and not believe everything they would be told by Israeli interrogators. This was cultural resistance in it's pure form, happening through us, in a story-based manner.[52]

Miranda's account here exemplifies precisely what Boal had identified as the revolutionary capacity of the theatre earlier discussed in the previous chapter, whereby spectators were transformed into actors and witnesses into protagonists. Furthermore, at the center of this

[52] Miranda, n.p. For more on the history, practice, and development of playback theatre, see Playback Theatre founder Jonathan Fox's introduction to eds. Fox and Heinrich Dauber, *Gathering Voices: Essays on Playback Theatre* (New Paltz, NY: Tusitala Publishing, 1999), publicly available online through the Centre for Playback Theatre at http://www.playbacktheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Intro.pdf. See also Jonathan Fox, *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre* (New Paltz: Tusitala, 1994); Jo Salas, *Improvising Real Life: Personal Story in Playback Theatre* (New Paltz: Tusitala, 1993).

transformation lies the human body, "the first word of the theatrical vocabulary" and "the main source of sound and movement," according to Boal:

> [T]o control the means of theatrical production, man must, first of all, control his own body, know his own body, in order to be capable of making it more expressive. Then he will be able to practice theatrical forms in which by stages he frees himself from his condition of spectator and takes on that of actor, in which he ceases to be an object and becomes a subject, is changed from witness into protagonist.[53]

The body in (or *as*) theatrical space serves as the basis for both the storytelling and performance methodologies practiced by the Palestinian actors of *Return to Palestine*, who in their work *act out* conflicts and stories which they simultaneously *live through* in their daily lives prior to and beyond what is reenacted on the stage. When performed for Palestinian audiences, particularly in the Territories, this unspoken dynamic between performing Palestinian lives and living as Palestinians minimizes the distance separating the spectators in the audience from the actor-protagonists of the stage. In fact, the roles are somewhat reversed within the specific schema of playback theatre, as the actors themselves must become spectators bearing witness to the communal and personal stories collected, compiled, and then "played back" for the community, as Miranda had reflected. The lack of distance between spectator and actor, between real life and theatre, and the improvisational nature of *Return to Palestine* in both production and performance allowed the actors to deconstruct and restructure both the physical and imagined space of the theatre, accounting for the play's minimal stylization and simplified dramaturgy and aesthetic: "[B]ecause we were improvising, […] [t]he style of production was very minimal and required the audience to use their imagination. There would be no costume or set, so the 6 actors would have to establish *everything with their bodies*," Miranda tells us, describing the acting

[53] Boal, 125-6. See also Lorna Marshall, *The Body Speaks: Performance and Expression* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002).

space generally as "limited to a small 1x2 [meter] rectangle" which "connected the playing spirit among the actors to the psychological reality we have heard in every story we heard for years doing Playback Theatre in the Occupied Territories. The limited performance space became a metaphor for the tense tight space Palestinians live in every day."[54]

"I am a table. I am a car. I am the wind. I am the sea. I am many different things," Ameer Abu Al Rob from Qabatiya, a village just south of Jenin, proudly explains about his work in *Return to Palestine* to a curious and amiable Turkish visitor during a late-night conversation at our hostel in Ramallah, "There are no props. Only the body." In fact, all we have onstage are the bodies of the actors, six in total, barefoot and dressed entirely in simple black slacks and t-shirts. There is a platform but no stage, though in venues which do provide a stage, only a small portion is used as the actors are huddled together in movement or lined up together onstage silently awaiting their cue; there is no clear or definitive onstage or offstage, blurring the defining and dividing markers of the theatrical space. There are no sets, no props or costumes, and two musicians (a percussionist and an oud player) "offstage" but visible, whose interludes punctuate the otherwise indistinguishable transitions between time and place, past and present, historical memory and lived experience. All eyes are on the actors, and as a viewer it is difficult not to pay attention to the constant animation of the actors and their bodies as they embody their (imagined) physical environments and become inanimate objects or landscapes alongside their character roles. In *Return to Palestine*, the object—Palestinian land and Palestinian bodies—is the subject, as the dividing line between objectivity and subjectivity is blurred, and acting or "playing back" becomes a performative if not practical method for the recovery of, and from, historical and experiential realities on replay. Through theatre, objects are made into subjects in a reversal and

[54] Miranda, n.p. Emphasis mine.

rebuttal of colonial ideology and praxis which turns subjects into objects, what Aimé Césaire famously called "thingification."[55] That the colonial thingification of the landscape of Palestine parallels, or rather is intertwined with, that of the alienated Palestinian bodies still inhabiting the land is of central concern for both the Palestinian cast of the play and the Palestinian refugee community they collectively represent.

That the land itself is both actually and metaphorically foundational to Palestinian being and consciousness, identity-making and liberation practices, is aptly expressed in the play's anthropomorphism, by which the actors perform natural environments (such as the sea) by embodying their defining characteristics (wind, waves, seagulls). The actors' animation of the inanimate speaks to both the centrality of the land in Palestinian culture and Palestinians' deep, thorough knowledge of and feeling for the land, rooted in and built on their long emotional involvement with their surroundings. Furthermore, these anthropomorphic performances serve to demonstrate an innately Palestinian affinity for and intimacy with the land in order to authenticate Palestinian indigeneity and enduring presence on the land, in direct contrast to Israel's arguably superficial, manufactured claims to the land which downplay and forcefully disappear Palestinian history and geography. This brings to mind Darwish's criticism of Israel's "need to demonstrate the history of stones" to gain "prior membership over [the Palestinian] who knows the time of the rain from the smell of the stone."[56] More generally, the interconnectedness between body and land is a definitive feature of Palestinian nationalist rhetoric, cultural politics, human rights demands, and literature and poetics (where it is metaphorized by sexual or romantic love, as will be discussed later in this chapter). To get a better sense of the land's

[55] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, [1972] 2000), 62.
[56] Darwish, *Journal*, 64.

embeddedness in Palestinian historical, national, and personal consciousness and its longings, consider Haitian-born Palestinian American poet and playwright Nathalie Handal's description of the *keffiyeh*, the preeminent symbol of Palestinian nationalism: "Seeing the machine weave the black and white pattern was like witnessing a village being painted on a scarf. […] And as I placed the keffiyahs on the shelf, I thought of how ironic it was that the patterns were modeled after ears of grain and fishing nets, and we couldn't get to the sea anymore."[57]

Fig. 7. To the Sea, Inevitably: Mural in Jenin Refugee Camp depicting a young boy steering a ship towards the Palestinian past, symbolized by the ship's deck resembling traditional village homes. The masts of the ship are comprised of keys—a popular symbol of Palestinian rights of return—while the sail reads "absolutely" or "inevitably." At the bow of the ship are the Arabic numerals 64, which may serve as an homage to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was founded in 1964 and itself became a controversial symbol of Palestinian resistance through armed struggle. (Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

[57] Nathalie Handal, "Men in Verse," in the Bush Theatre's *Sixty-Six Books: 21st Century Writers Speak to the King James Bible* (London: Oberon Books, 2011), 509.

Thus, Palestinian "landhood," as Fawaz Turki called it, becomes inseparable from Palestinian statehood, selfhood, personhood. According to Turki, the Palestinians have long been a peasant community and, as such, their entire human and social systems were built on and formed within a reciprocal, interactive relationship with their land:

> A Palestinian's whole mythology of hope, and the vivid immediacies of his daily life, were forever rooted in the land. His metaphoric and pragmatic meditations on meaning—and his place in that meaning—came from the land. At every point of his development, from childhood to old age, this Palestinian lived on the land. He lived with it. He lived off it. He acquired his memories, and made his original leap to a maturing consciousness, on the land. In it was always to be found the actuality of his past and the potentiality of his future, and hence the intimate center of his present. […]
>
> In short, a Palestinian's relatedness to the land has to do with his ego ideal and ego involvement, with the core concept of his place in existence and with his major assumptions about the self. Without his land, very simply, the Palestinian could not establish his identity.
>
> The foundation of the Palestinian struggle, whose ideals miraculously derive from the shared inner life of four million Palestinians scattered over the entire globe, is rooted in this perceptual world view of man and land as two components of the same system, expressing the life process. In this world view, man and his environment are two interdependent subsystems, never separable in their functions. They make up a unified system of life- facts that can be separated only by abstraction. *A Palestinian estranged from his land is, in effect, repudiated as a human being*.[58]

Furthermore, Turki's argument here, particularly his last few points, attests to another painful dimension of Palestinian displacement and removal, by which Palestinians must grapple with their alienation from their lands *and* with the alienization of those landscapes due to Israel's ongoing settlement of the West Bank and Israeli "development" projects taking place on either side of the Green Line. In this way, Israeli imperialism and occupation—epitomized by the seizure, remaking, and demarcating of Palestinian lands and accompanied by arrests, incarcerations, and killings of Palestinian bodies—can also be viewed as a totalizing campaign of forced estrangement and dehumanization. Severing the physical (environmental), visual (evidential), narrative (experiential), and historical (epistemological) ties binding Palestinian

[58] Fawaz Turki, "Meaning in Palestinian History: Text and Context," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3.4 (1981): 373. Emphasis mine.

bodies to the land uproots and estranges Palestinians not only from the actual and imagined place of historical or future Palestine but also, even more troublingly and most especially for Palestinians (like the actors of the Freedom Theatre) who reside in the Occupied Territories, from the basis of their own humanity.

Making Land and Body Speak: A Tour of Alien/ating Geographies and Estranged Bodies

"What do you think about a trip? Through all the West Bank? *Yalla*, let's go!" Mahmoud (played interchangeably by Alaa Shehada and Ahmed Tobasi, both from Jenin Camp) excitedly but consolingly exclaims to a frightened Jad (played by Ihab Talahmeh from Dura in Hebron) when Jad is suddenly awakened in the middle of the night, unable to sleep and terrified by the sound of relentless gunshots from nearby Jenin Camp. Loosely inspired by Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Return to Haifa,* the historical memories and contemporary experiences dramatized in the play are based on personal stories and recollections of residents from Jenin, Jenin Camp, Fasayel village near Jericho in the Jordan Valley, Dheisheh Refugee Camp in Bethlehem, Al-Mufaqara in south Hebron, and Gaza. These stories from within and throughout the Territories are what distinguishes the "return" of *Return to Palestine* from that of Kanafani: Here, the Palestinian protagonist returns not to his ancestral lands in historic Palestine (now Israel), but to the militarized, makeshift, carceral landscapes of occupied Palestine. In fact, aside from his arrival in Tel Aviv and the ride to the checkpoint, Jad does not see or experience much of historic Palestine. Not to mention that it is in Occupied Palestine where Jad learns about the Nakba for the second time (the first being in the United States, while reading *Return to Haifa*) and himself experiences the daily, violent realities of being a Palestinian under occupation. Rather than privilege and *reach back* to the site of historic Palestine as archive, Miranda and the actors of the Freedom Theatre *reach out* to their surrounding communities to locate and construct

a new Palestinian archive, bringing to the foreground and making visible the Palestinians of the Territories who, with their own particularly expressive (and at times militant) brand of nationalist fervor, are specifically targeted for removal by Israeli state and extrajudicial violence. Yet the play is careful to situate West Bank Palestinians and Gazans within the larger legacy of Palestinian resistance within and beyond historic Palestine, attempting to unify various demographics of Palestinians—namely, Palestinians of the Territories, Palestinians in the diaspora, and the so-called "Arab-Israelis," or Palestinians residing in Israel—into one collective national body defending against cultural erasure. For Miranda, the play "manifested as an active artistic resistance. Stories travelling from community to community were facilitating learning but also promoted this unifying idea that there was one people under several forms of occupation."[59]

The occupied Palestinians onstage and off, whose compiled stories collectively comprise the narrative of the play and who indeed embody the very real histories of the landscape alienated and replaced by Israel's competing narratives and development projects, serve as our primary (albeit unofficial) tour guides. Indeed, the tour and the tour guide have become somewhat of a trope in Palestinian literary works, arguably because it is the medium of the tour which reveals not only the physical transformation of Palestine into Israel, but also the historical narratives which supplant those of the land's native inhabitants while propagandizing settler-colonial interests and claims to land and belonging.[60] As Barbara McKean Parmenter similarly notes, "Palestinian writers clearly perceive and react against Israeli attempts to expropriate the land's history as solely their own and to market that history at home and abroad."[61] Additionally,

[59] Miranda, n.p.
[60] While my analysis here focuses on the tour/guide in literary and other artistic texts, it is important to note the significance of actual tourism in and about Palestine. For more on the practice and performance of solidarity tourism in the Occupied Territories, see Jennifer L. Kelly, "Asymmetrical Itineraries: Militarism, Tourism, and Solidarity in Occupied Palestine," *American Quarterly* 68.3 (September 2016): 723-45.
[61] Barbara McKean Parmenter, *Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1994), 91.

the tour is also where geography, archaeology, and narrativity converge in "the Israeli presentation of history both to themselves and the outside world," which Palestinians largely read as "an attempt to establish Israel's roots while at the same time denying the link between Palestinians and their homeland."[62] In the Freedom Theatre plays, the guide also serves as the narrator, transporting the audience back and forth between the present and the past, between Israeli propaganda and Palestinian history. In *The Siege,* for example, we have the character of Isa, a Palestinian Christian tour guide who introduces us, his (imagined) audience of "tourists," to the "real" story of what happened inside the Church of the Nativity in besieged Bethlehem and, by extension, to the *other(ed)* history behind, underneath, and at the margins of both the church and the city as otherwise widely recognized historical and religious landmarks. But in *Return to Palestine,* "the real story" is revealed to us through the exploration of non-historic, non-landmarked places of Palestinian military occupation, situated within the larger colonial legacy of Palestinian removal and displacement from historic Palestine epitomized first by the Nakba (The Catastrophe) and later, in 1967 after Israel's victory in the Six-Day War, the Naksa (The Setback).

Because there are no official tour guides or landmarks dedicated to unofficial narratives and peripheral histories of an occupied people, the play's "tour guides" are the everyday Palestinians from (and still on) the margins, through whom Jad and the audience learn about "the real" Palestine from the inside, behind Israel's Hebraicized transformations and translations wonderfully illustrated in the scene of Jad's arrival at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. After stating his Muslim name, which the Israeli airport authorities mockingly mispronounce to suit

[62] Ibid., 92.

the Hebrew alphabet, Jad is met with even more suspicious hostility when he unknowingly uses Arabic pronunciations of now Israeli cities:

> Israeli: Could you say your full name please?
> Jad: Yes, sure. Jad Mohammad.
> Israeli: *Mow-Khmat?* Do you speak Arabic?
> Jad: [naively replying in Arabic] I speak a little Arabic.
> Israeli: [in a raised voice] *Where* are you going?
> Jad: I'm going to Akka
> [entire cast, in character as Israelis and steadily closing in on Jad, angrily shouts AK-*KO*!]
> I'm going to Jaffa
> [*YAFO*!]
> And Al-Quds[63]
> [*YERUSHALAYIM*!]

As the scene shifts, we soon learn that Jad was ultimately interrogated for five hours before finally gaining entry into Israel. Not yet understanding the separation of the West Bank from Israel and after unsuccessfully asking for directions, Jad telephones Mahmoud in Jenin. When Mahmoud says he cannot cross into Israel to pick up Jad from Tel Aviv, Jad asks how he can get to Jenin. The rest of the cast, now in character as Mahmoud's boisterous family huddled around him trying to listen in on the conversation, begin shouting, "Settlement!" "Checkpoint!" "The Wall!" Finally, Mahmoud explains to a very confused Jad that he must take a taxi to the checkpoint and cross over into the West Bank, where Mahmoud will be waiting on the other side to retrieve him. After wandering the streets of Tel Aviv trying to hail a ride from Israeli taxis, all of whom refuse his requests, Jad is relieved to meet a mysterious stranger—a Palestinian—who secretly agrees to give him a ride to the West Bank, along with an impromptu tour of Palestinian history.

"To the West Bank?" asks the man, played interchangeably by Ibrahim Moqbel from Jenin Camp and Motaz Malhees from Jenin, followed by a ululation from another actor in the

[63] In English-language performances, the name Jerusalem is used instead of Al-Quds.

background. Jad rejoices, and a trio of actors forms the car carrying Jad and his illicit guide. The actors make engine noises to signify a car in motion while the two musicians off to the side of the stage score the scene with traditional Arabic instrumental music, and as the audience we get a sense of being on a road trip. On the way to Jalama checkpoint into Jenin, when Jad dreamily and admiringly remarks on the beauty of the Israeli landscape which he compares to that of the United States, the stranger tells him, "You don't understand," before narrating the events of the Nakba and the Naksa. As the music echoes and slowly quiets into silence, the stranger suddenly addresses the audience directly and assumes the role of the storyteller, while another actor mimics the gathering of olives in a reenactment and reimagining of the Palestinian past prior to the Nakba. "Palestine was *our* land, *our* holy land," he tells us emphatically. Once he discusses the Zionist invasions of 1948 and 1967, the rest of the actors move in on the olive-gathering Palestinian woman, linking arms and forming a tight circle around her to cage her in, all while seeming to rejoice in her captivity. "Then, they presented us with the Wall," narrates the stranger as the circle of actors begin dancing around the woman, singing in a language meant to audibly resemble Hebrew and to the instantly recognizable tune of *Havah Nagilah*. The actors then grow silent and line up with their arms in the air, leaning over, embodying trees falling (or being cut) down, as the actors re-form the car and we are seamlessly transported back to real-time with Jad and his unnamed guide. The latter's emphatic use of "our" in his narration of the Palestinian past is more than a mere declaration of possession and environmental belonging to contrast Israeli dispossession and ownership-occupation. Rather, the use of "*our* land, *our* holy land" distinguishes Palestinians' existential, if not also inherent, intimacy with their natural environment from the titular Holy Land by which the rest of the world superficially comprehends historic Palestine/contemporary Israel.

This intimacy is what Turki romanticizes in his reminiscing about the Palestinian peasant, who neither works nor tills the land but "mak[es] love to it, possessed of it, possessed by it, in a sensual absorption at once erotic and spiritual."[64] Palestinians' long-held devotion, reverence, and affinity for the land as expressed in their environmental and cultural practices (exemplified here in the play by the quintessential Palestinian tradition of olive gathering, with olive and olive oil being staples of Palestinian diets and commerce[65]), not to mention their enduring albeit endangered presence on that land, runs counter to Israeli narratives professing and attempting to historicize Palestinian absence or nonexistence. The Palestinian landscape, as Parmenter argues, was and continues to be intertwined with "the material and spiritual lives of the people […] in the most intimate and fundamental ways."[66] Furthermore, while the Palestinian landscape "was alive with meaning and value" for the world's Christians and Jews, for Palestinians "these meanings and values arose from daily personal and communal interactions of people with their environment. Theirs was the landscape of home, not of biblical history, romantic adventure, or prophetic fulfillment."[67] By performing Palestinians' "lost" history and using their physical bodies to give form and meaning to Palestine's lost landscapes, the actors of *Return to Palestine* are acting on behalf of the Palestinian people they are and represent, reestablishing and

[64] Turki, 373.
[65] According to Gary Fields, "Because olive cultivation occupies over 50% of the agricultural land area, olives and olive trees permeate the economic and cultural life of Palestinians and have a symbolic meaning as metaphors of the roots attaching Palestinians to landscape," in Gary Fields, "'This is *our* land': Collective Violence, Property Law, and Imagining the Geography of Palestine," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 29.3 (October 2012): 281. Parmenter notes, "The olive tree provided a particularly apt example of the practical, spiritual, and emotional significance which various environmental features held for the Palestinian peasantry. Peasants and townspeople alike depended on olive oil for cooking and lighting before the introduction of kerosene. It was also the basis of a thriving soap-making industry, Palestine's primary export throughout the nineteenth century. Beyond its value for subsistence, however, the villager viewed its fertility as a symbol of prosperity and good fortune. Although peasants did not own the land they tilled, they did own their individual olive trees. These trees often lived for hundreds of years, their fruits sustaining generations of the same family. Today, the olive tree is a potent symbol of Palestinian nationalism and resistance" (23).
[66] Parmenter, 26.
[67] Ibid., 25-6.

legitimating Palestinians' environmental and historical ties to places that are now either part of or occupied by the state of Israel. By also embodying and anthropomorphizing other features of their environment, to reiterate my point from earlier, the actors are demonstrating—proving—an intimate, personal connection to their stolen homeland, while testifying to the wholeness of Palestinian presence. In other words, Palestinians are ever present not only in the souls or essences of things, but also as the human offspring of those "houses, villages, crops, trees, springs, and even rocks" which for Palestinians "possessed distinctive associations which made them special places and features in the experiential landscape of the individual and of the community."[68] Throughout the play, the actors embody the olive trees, the sea of Haifa, the winds whipping by the car as Jad rides through the West Bank. The theatrical practice of embodying landscapes and histories both destroyed and denied by Israeli statehood is reflective of the larger cultural and political practices by which Palestinians nationalize and authenticate their collective identity, sense of belonging, anti-imperial resistance, communal sovereignty and, as Turki and Parmenter have argued, their own sense of humanity—all of which are grounded in Palestinian claims to land and in Israeli rejections of (and assaults against) those claims.

To embody and perform the pastoral landscapes of the Palestinian past and the militarized landscapes of the occupied Palestinian present is to authenticate Palestinian existential and experiential realities devalued and denied by dominant historical and political narratives which postulate the Palestinian body as out of sight and out of place. It is worth considering here how embodiment can entail the opposite of estrangement and alienation for a people who are consistently put in a position to perform, in various senses of the word, for the world their rights to exist and persist—at times validated by humanitarian calls for action (should

[68] Ibid., 26.

the Palestinian assume the role of "miserable refugee") and at others called into question (should the Palestinian assume the role of the resistor too often labeled a "terrorist"), as will be analyzed in the next chapter. Bodily violence against Palestinians, then, has everything to do with severing Palestinian ties to and claims on the land—now forged and inauthenticated by Israel's "development" of that land. Largely perceived by Palestinians as a Western imitation, arguably an American one (as Jad had suggested) "blatantly maladapted to the *true* Palestinian environment," the colonial landscape of Israel is defamiliarized and delegitimated by Palestinians as "simple, homogenized, mechanized, and prefabricated, imposed on the land rather than harmonizing with it," further estranging and alienating Palestinians from both the land itself and the narratives which it communicates.[69] As a settler colony[70], Zionistic interpretations of land and land use are informed by larger Western imperial legacies of territorial possession and industrial capitalism and development as legitimating statehood *and claims to* statehood. Conveniently enough for early Zionists and modern Israel, such an interpretation also rendered the Palestinians nonexistent in dominant, Western political and historical imaginings; as a largely peasant people of a rural landscape whose economic and social environments and daily interactions were grounded in agriculture and village life[71]—and whose claims to national belonging were not bound up in expansion projects, formal land tenure, and property ownership—there was "no Palestinian people in the Western sense of a national group taking explicit possession of and improving its national territory."[72] Consequently, the language of "improvement" and property law often masked or euphemized the imperial motivations and

[69] Ibid., 89. Emphasis mine.
[70] See Lorenzo Veracini, *Israel and Settler Society* (London: Pluto Press, 2006). See also Gary Fields, *Enclosure: Palestinian Landscapes in a Historical Mirror* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2017).
[71] See Rochelle A. Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2010); see also Sarah Graham-Brown, *Palestinians and their Society: 1880-1946* (London: Quartet Books, 1980).
[72] Parmenter, 21.

violent practices of early Zionists and later agents of Israeli statehood, who perceived and portrayed themselves as heroic pioneers and whose claims to the land as such were rooted in and mobilized by notions of either "progress" or "protection." As Gary Fields argues,

> From this improvement-driven, territorially-based, and God-sanctified notion of property rights, Zionists, in the spirit of English estate owners and Anglo-American colonists influenced by legal notions of *terra nullius*, uncovered arguments for staking claims on, and remaking seemingly unimproved, "empty" territorial landscapes. Indeed, early Zionists referred to Palestine as a barren land destined to be improved not just by labor, but by *Jewish labor* […].[73]

Israel, as both a miracle-product of and testament to this Jewish labor, articulates and sublimates its claims of land ownership and use rights along the lines of land "improvement" and active development as evidenced by its Westernized look and appeal. These have become distinctive features in Israeli national identity and politics as well as in Western images and imaginings of Israel as a modern democracy—currently the only in the Middle East, at least according to the British Economist Intelligence Unit's (EIU) 2016 Democracy Index and as regularly attested by major U.S. media outlets. By contrast, the claims and contributions of Palestinian peasant-farmers could neither measure up nor catch up to the industrial capitalism and imperial expansions of their Israeli counterparts, whose highly visible development continues to alienate and estrange Palestinians from and within what was once their land:

> Israelis take enormous pride in these accomplishments and use them as a justification for their possession of the land. That Palestinians did not create similar "miracles" when the land was theirs constitutes in Israeli eyes a forfeiture of ownership. Palestinians, on the other hand, view this Israeli "miracle" with deep suspicion and hostility. Mechanized irrigation on Jewish land has caused many springs and wells on Arab land to dry up. Urban and suburban expansion have swallowed up Arab villages and lands. New buildings in suburbs and in Jewish settlements whose residents commute to work in the city are, as Palestinians picture them, faceless white blocks strangely devoid of life. Their bright reflective whiteness by day and well-lighted aspect at night contrast with the more muted tones of traditional Arab towns and villages.[74]

[73] Fields, "'This is *our* land'," 270-71. Emphasis in the original.
[74] Parmenter, 89-90.

"Improving" the Israeli landscape by removing evidence of its Palestinian past constituted not just ownership but also *the right* to claim ownership and proclaim sovereignty for the new dominant (and dominating) settler population.

"The moment they arrived on your land, they defined the parameters of their existence and those of their children," to reiterate Darwish's lines from earlier, "You, without power, lost history, land and claim."[75] For the Jewish pioneers and heroes of Israeli historical imaginings, the unsecure and not yet territorialized Palestinian landscape, along with its inhuman native inhabitants[76], were in need of development and containment. Thus, Israeli development (industrialization and urbanization) readily went hand-in-hand with Israeli security (militarization). This is evidenced in the play by the actors' portrayals of Israelis, whose monotonous and repetitive chanting "*shalom, shalom, shalom*" as they continuously bow forward, palms open in Jewish prayer, give way to—are molded into—Israeli soldiers. The Israelis in *Return to Palestine* are robotic, machinized and weaponized, acting always in organized unison. When Mahmoud and Jad are stopped at a security checkpoint on their way to Fasayel, for example, three of the actors assume their positions as Israeli soldiers by again bowing and chanting "*shalom*" only this time, instead of empty palms open in prayer, the actors mime cocking rifles as they demand Mahmoud's identification papers. The actors also gesture a yarmulke and *payot* (sidelocks of hair in front of the ears customarily worn by Orthodox Jews and which is a defining physical feature of Jewish settlers) by cupping their palms over the tops of their heads and twirling their fingers down the sides of their faces. As Palestinians know firsthand, extrajudicial violence and state or military violence in the Territories are one and the same; both occur frequently and with impunity. In this sense, there is little distinguishing the

[75] Darwish, *Journal*, 56.
[76] See my discussion of Israel's dehumanizing rhetoric and references to Palestinians as animals in Chapter 3.

armed Jewish settler from the Israeli soldier in the Palestinian experience, and the actors' seamless transformation from one into the other is reflective of that. In an inversion of the colonial gaze, it is the Israelis who are essentialized, stripped down and reduced, visualized and made recognizable by characteristic (and militaristic) gestures and mannerisms that contribute to a language of oppression and administrative authority in which Palestinians are more than well-versed. Within and beyond the play, Palestinians' articulation of both their rightful place in and claim on the lands seized and consumed by the Israeli state have been muted by the latter's forced disappearances of Palestinian natural and experiential landscapes undergirding Israeli developments and legitimated by the language of law. In addition to Israel's growing military body, it was also the law which "performed violently" as Fields observes in his analysis of how property law enacted discriminatory land use rights against Palestinians and legitimated Israeli colonial land confiscation:

> Following creation of Israel in 1948, Zionists used the law, both inside the new state and later in the Occupied Territories, to reclassify and transfer landed property from Palestinian to Jewish owners enabling the landscape to conform to their vision of it as *Hebrew* land. […]
> The aim of this violence is to reorganize the patterns of Palestinian presence and mobility on the landscape by seeking to convince the Palestinian cultivator and the Palestinian homeowner that their tenure on the landscape through the planting of crops and the construction of homes is untenable.[77]

The legal language of property and ownership, coupled with industrial capitalism's twin values of progress and (imperial) expansion, indeed functions as a form of violence against Palestinians, facilitating and subjecting their lives and livelihoods to vulnerability, precarity (to recall Judith Butler's explication of the term in my introductory chapter[78]) and, ultimately, disposability. In

[77] Fields, "'This is *our* land'," 268, 271. Emphasis in the original. For more on Israel's reinterpretation and adaptations of imperial Ottoman land laws in the formation of its military legal system in the Occupied Territories, see Ra'anan Alexandrowicz's brilliant 2011 documentary, *The Law in These Parts.*
[78] See Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

the Israeli schema of national development by which land becomes synonymous with power and power with ownership, Palestinian lives, ways of life, and means of living are devalued.

The violent link between Israel's imperial values (arguably inherited from, mirrored after, and sustained by U.S. capitalistic and corporate enterprises) and Palestinian dispossession and oppression is called into question from the very outset of the play, which opens with the actors singing a warped rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner," the lyrics for which have been replaced by identifiable, if not also contemptible, features and figures of American national identity and nationalism: "Mcdonald's, KFC/Starbucks, Macintosh/Clinton, Obama/Kerry, Bush, Donald Trump/CIA, FBI/F-16, Hiroshima/Iraq and Afghanistan/Syria and Palestine (*Shhhhhhhh!*)." The actors then envelop Ameer, who stands tall holding his imaginary torch, and together they form the base and gown while another actor wraps his hands around Ameer's head, forming the crown in an obvious imitation of the Statue of Liberty. For many peoples in the Global South, including the Palestinians, who have witnessed and been victimized by the imperialism of American national interests as readily defined by the unaccountability of U.S. political leaders, uneven political alliances framing supposedly apolitical "humanitarian" interventions, and the ubiquity of both American corporations and militarism throughout the world, conceptions and practices of "development" are synonymous with dispossession, oppression, and violence. Not to mention the concomitant practice of silencing endangered peoples—exemplified by the actors hushing one another at the mention of Palestine, situated among other countries destroyed by American-led, Western "interventions"—whose existence, much less resistance, contradicts dominant narratives and images celebrating Western progress in spite of the damages and (human) costs accrued in the name of such progress. The play's use of the national anthem not only reinforces the "unifying idea" of "one people under several forms

of occupation" that Miranda had mentioned earlier, but also that there are several different occupations under which other(ed) peoples have historically and contemporarily been subjugated. This is similarly exemplified by Palestinian American slam poet Suheir Hammad in her poem, "we spent the fourth of july in bed." Only instead of the national anthem it is Independence Day, as another overt expression of American nationalism, which is distorted and disorienting in the poet's mind, sleepless and troubled by "exploding legs" of Iraqi girls, by "ants crawl[ing] out of somali eyes," by "puerto rican women" and "young philipinas" who "go blind constructing computer discs/poems like this are saved on."[79] Like the actors in *Return to Palestine*, Hammad historicizes and parallels contemporary Palestinian dehumanization and death by Israel with American-committed atrocities, still most epitomized in contemporary imaginations by the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki:

> to our generation violence
> isn't a phase it's the day to day
> and though my head is filled
> with your sweetness now
> this same head knows
> nagasaki girls picked maggots out of stomach sores with chopsticks
> and hiroshima mothers rocked headless babies to sleep
> this head knows
> *phalestini*[80] youth maimed absorbing rubber bullets[81]
> homes demolished trees uprooted roots dispersed

While Hammad indeed attempts to connect struggle with struggle in service of transnational solidarity,[82] her poem more readily reminds us of what the play is trying to dramatize and show

[79] Suheir Hammad, "we spent the fourth of july in bed," in *Born Palestinian Born Black & The Gaza Suite* (Brooklyn: UpSet P, [1996] 2010), 78.
[80] Arabic for "Palestinian."
[81] Hammad, "we spent the fourth of july in bed," 78-9.
[82] I have previously written on intersectional oppression, oppositional consciousness, and transnational solidarity in Hammad's oeuvre in my Master's thesis, *Dislocating Culture, Relocating Identity: Literary Formations of the Multipled Self,* Towson University, 2013. The respective chapter on Hammad's poetry, "Woman Walking Heavy/Brown Worlds in Her Face: Global(ized) Identities and Universal Patriotism in the Poetry of Suheir Hammad," is available online at www.postcolonialist.com

us: For Palestinians under occupation, the recurring violence against both Palestinian bodies *and* lands is not "a phase." It is the "the day to day," legitimated and normalized by the expansiveness and expansions of imperial domination historically contextualizing Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinians today.

"I love this play," Ameer exclaims, "because we show you all the West Bank. But without moving." Considering the actors' limited mobility onstage as a reflection of Palestinians' lack of freedom of movement offstage, I asked him if he thought that theatre more generally could serve as a medium for Palestinians to overcome their own immobility, in their imaginations and in real life. Ameer shrugged nonchalantly. He recounted how, at a 2017 performance at the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) International Theatre and Music Festival in Karachi, Pakistani audiences began crying during the opening scenes of the play when Jad, immersed in Kanafani's novella, is transported back to the time of the Nakba, the violence of which is collectively reenacted onstage by the other actors. Jolted back to the present and now haunted by a past he did not know before, by the end of the scene Jad declares his decision to go to Palestine, for he "must know what's going on there!"

Ameer was not surprised by their reaction. Long accustomed to tearful sympathies of outside audiences to Palestinian suffering, Ameer declares, "I'm not a victim. Always we are seen as victims. It's not for me. For the Palestinian it's a different feeling for us. When we make a show for Palestinians it's more fun, like, our life is really funny. But when I'm outside, in Portugal and in Pakistan [where the show was performed in 2016 and 2017, respectively], I got this feeling like 'ohhhhh, you are under occupation' and all these things about the occupation, the occupation. But this is our lives." Ameer sighs, exhausted by never-ending talk of the occupation and conveying an unfortunate sense of normalcy about Palestinians' daily struggles

so often expressed to me by everyday Palestinians in my travels throughout the West Bank. "*Habibti* [my dear], I am just showing you how we live. From Jenin to Hebron. And there's many checkpoints in between," he concludes matter-of-factly.

From Jenin to Dheisheh: A Note on Camps in (Re)Placing and Rema(r)king the Palestinian

Israel's manufacturing of Palestinian land also extends to the displaced Palestinian (refugee) body, captured in a series of canvases and public murals titled *The Path of the Fish* by painter Alaa Albaba from Al-Amari refugee camp in Ramallah. The grandson of a fisherman, Albaba shifts the focus of Palestinian displacement and refugeeism from the land to the sea, painting fish to symbolize the refugees in the camp who, having been cut off from the sea, have become like fish out of water: "The idea of a person once living on the coast before 1948, this person has a very direct connection to the sea. To him, the sea was a source of income and a source of life. Then suddenly after the war, he was moved and caged in a camp and his relation with the sea became limited and forbidden. It's like when you take a fish out of water and take it someplace else. The fish then feels throttled and about to die the whole time."[83] Fish tightly packed into cans of sardine also feature in his work, symbolizing not only the poor, cramped living conditions of densely populated, overcrowded camps, but also of the refugee's dependence on manufactured food items distributed in the camps by relief agencies.[84] Thus, the camp figures as a space manufacturing Palestinian captivity and death, a desert prison caging Palestinian

[83] Qtd. from an interview with the artist in Linda Paganelli's and Gianmarco Marzola's short documentary about Albaba and his work, *Painting in a Refugee Camp, Dreaming of the Sea*, for the *Electronic Intifada* 13 June 2016, available at https://electronicintifada.net/content/painting-refugee-camp-dreaming-sea/17041

[84] See Daniel Monterescu, "The Palestinian Trail of Fish: Artist's Graffiti Dives into Heart of Refugee Struggle," *Haaretz* 30 November 2017, https://www.haaretz.com/life/.premium.MAGAZINE-trail-of-fish-graffiti-dives-into-heart-of-palestinian-struggle-1.5627199

bodies and forming part—albeit a removed, peripheral part—of the Israeli state's modernized, militarized landscape and its concomitant security regime.[85]

Fig. 8. A handcrafted ship made by a Palestinian man from Askar Refugee Camp in Nablus (who asked to remain anonymous) during his years-long confinement in an Israeli prison. Just prior to his arrest, he was severely wounded and his teenaged brother shot dead by Israeli soldiers. (Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

For Palestinian refugees denied access to the sea and coasts of their family origins, the desert landscapes of the camps only exacerbate the dire conditions of their ongoing segregation and incarceration. "*Desert* becomes more than a word," writes Palestinian poet and essayist Fawaz Turki in his *Soul in Exile*, "and acquires the added mystical significance […] of a whole world of ennui, intense heat, aloneness […]. *Desert*, like *gendarmes*, like the *Aliens Department*, like *work permits*, were entities that had an element of terror to them that was your lot because you had nowhere else to go."[86] While Turki is referencing Palestinian migrant and illegal labor to the Gulf—also the subject of Ghassan Kanafani's 1962 novel *Men in the Sun,* which follows three Palestinian refugees from the camps in Iraq as they are smuggled across the sweltering desert to Kuwait where they hope to find work in the oil rigs—his reflection here can also be

[85] For more on the relationship between architecture and occupation, see Eyal Weizman, "The Politics of Verticality," in *openDemocracy* 23 April 2002, www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_801jsp/

[86] Fawaz Turki, *Soul in Exile: Lives of a Palestinian Revolutionary* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1988), 11. Emphases in the original.

applied to the vast, disciplinary desert landscapes of the West Bank and Gaza. Punctuated by checkpoints and camps as two defining markers (in addition to the so-called Separation Wall and Jewish settlements) of Palestinian incarceration, captivity, and containment, the Occupied Territories is also synonymous with Palestinian resistance and nationalist fervor. For this reason, checkpoints have become political sites of confrontation and protest between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers or settlers, while refugee camps have become regular targets for the Israeli army.

The checkpoint is central to Israel's division of and from the Palestinian Territories and to their installment of a permit regime which, according to the BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights in Bethlehem, "infiltrates all aspects of Palestinians' lives" with hundreds of different types of permits that "regulate and interfere with various facets" of Palestinian life.[87] Not only do these permits—and the checkpoints that enforce them—regulate and restrict Palestinians' freedom of movement within and out of the Territories, but they also allow for the "complete denial of access to land, work, worship, health facilities and so on" maintaining Israel's discriminatory policies in land planning and zoning.[88] Because many Palestinians have been violently victimized or killed at the checkpoints by Israeli soldiers and settlers, the checkpoints themselves are considered by Palestinians to be "places of humiliation and also potential danger."[89] As of April 2015, there were 96 fixed checkpoints in the West Bank and almost 400 "flying" checkpoints temporarily set up to impose closure on or besiege entire communities for periods of time as an act of collective punishment.[90] We are shown in the play the extent to which the checkpoints disrupt Palestinian lives when an old man from Fasayel,

[87] BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, *Forced Population Transfer: The Case of Palestine: Installment of a Permit Regime,* December 2015, 9.
[88] Ibid. See also BADIL's December 2014 working paper, *Discriminatory Zoning and Planning*.
[89] Ibid., 27.
[90] Ibid.

played brilliantly by Ameer, attempts to procure a traditional Palestinian wedding dress—itself a proud, enduring symbol of Palestinian culture and embroidery tradition—for his son's new bride. He attempts to go first to Nablus, where he is turned away by Israeli soldiers at one of the checkpoints, then to Jericho and Jenin, where he is turned away again and again. (At one point when he asks the soldiers why he is being turned away, they immediately draw their rifles and take aim.) But the wedding, we soon learn, goes on. The old man, addressing both Jad and the audience, declares: "When they destroyed our houses, we built new houses. When they kill our children, we will bring new children. And if we can't make a wedding *there* [in historic Palestine], then we will make the wedding *here*!" The music resumes. The actors chant and clap and dance in celebration. And Jad experiences a true Palestinian wedding before making his way with Mahmoud to Dheisheh Camp.

As its own form of resistance and performance of Palestinian nationalism, the Palestinian wedding[91] preceding Jad's trip to Dheisheh Camp in Bethlehem serves as a particularly potent introduction to the steadfastness and resistance symbolized by the camps. At once "the most squalid of all exile environments," a "living symbol of struggle," and a "center of meaning,"[92] the political and cultural significance of the space of the Palestinian refugee camp, as well as Israel's violent countermeasures routinely waged against such highly nationalized spaces and nationalistic residents, figures prominently in the latter half of the play. The camps bookend the play, beginning with Jenin Camp and ending with Dheisheh: It is the shooting in Jenin Camp which leaves a newly arrived Jad sleepless and fearful, desperate to leave, prompting his road

[91] For more on the political and cultural significance of the Palestinian wedding, see Nizar Younes' documentary film for *Al Jazeera World, Palestinian Wedding* 31 August 2016 available online at https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/aljazeeraworld/2016/08/palestinian-wedding-160830122422677.html. See also Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri, "The Palestinian Wedding: Major Themes of Contemporary Palestinian Resistance Poetry," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 10.3 (1981): 77-99.
[92] Parmenter, 63, 66, 67.

trip throughout the West Bank. And a shooting in Dheisheh Camp which leaves a new friend dead, compelling Jad to stay in Palestine in lieu of returning to America.

In the introduction, I addressed the space of the refugee camp as captive and exceptional, exempt from the protections and privileges afforded and administered by national citizenship and statehood. Here, I would like to consider the camp also as a space for national mobilization in the face of Palestinians' literal immobilization signified and enacted by Israel's carceral geography and permit regime further restricting Palestinians' ability to move about and live freely. Though the camp represents displacement and placelessness, a site of Israel's various attempts to unmake the Palestinian, the camp is also where—as a testament to *sumud*—Palestinians are re-placed and remade. In this sense, the camp is simultaneously a place of Palestinian life in its cultivation of history and *sumud,* and of Palestinian death as a consequence of this reputation. Turki, whose birthplace is now part of Occupied Palestine and who grew up in a refugee camp in Beirut, gives us a sense of this ambivalence in his description of the camp as both a manifestation or sign of Palestinian dehumanization and an assertion or reminder of Palestinian humanity:

> Man adapts. We adapted, the first few months, to life in a refugee camp. In the adaptation we were also reduced as men, as women, as children, as human beings. At times we dreamed. Reduced dreams. Distorted ambitions. […] One day soon, we argued, we would be back in our homeland.
>
> […] The moths would gather around the kerosene lamps and the men would mumble between verses "Ya leil, ya aein" (my night, my mind—they have fused). It is a typical Palestinian night, Palestinian mind. And we would know we were together in a transplanted village that once was on the road to Jaffa, that once was to the north of Haifa, that once was close to Lydda.
>
> For if we had indeed acquired that "hate and bitterness" that the Western world claimed we were reputed for, we also danced the dabke, played the oud, and the women worked their embroidery. And those people outside the camp (not to mention those Western "tourists" with their blessed sympathy, their cameras, their sociology degrees, and their methodological and statistical charts), seeing our tattered rags hanging on us like white flags of surrender but not hearing our "ya leil, ya aein," did not know what we had. A feeling within us. Growing. A hope.[93]

[93] Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 45-46.

There are a few things to note in the above passage. First, the binding of Palestinian body with environment as discussed earlier, metonymized here by the common Palestinian melodic expression *ya leil, ya aein.* Second, that it is in the camp where one learns of and reimagines the original Palestinian village, an environment central to Palestinian national consciousness and poetics of resistance, "that once was on the road to Jaffa, that once was to the north of Haifa, that once was close to Lydda." And finally, that the Palestinian past is kept alive and endlessly reproduced in the camp through storytelling, whether from the camp elders in Turki's memories who function as living repositories of information about the old villages of their pre-Nakba childhoods, from the practice and passing down of old cultural traditions maintained by camp residents, or through artistic practices such as songwriting and street murals. Like theatre, the camp is a site and sight of steadfast resistance, a rehearsal space for revolution.

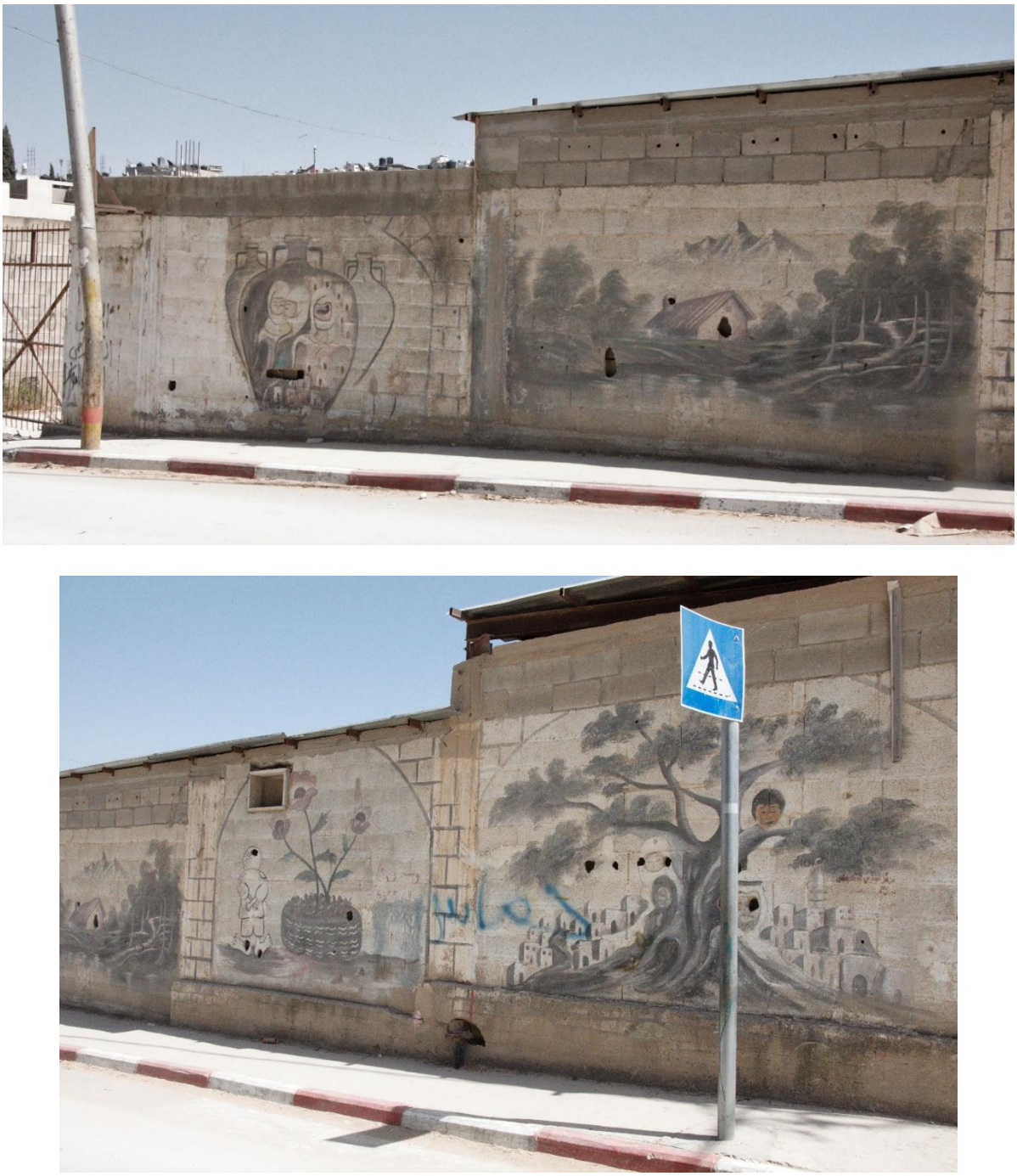

Fig. 9. Row of murals in Jenin Camp symbolically depicting Palestinian village life, such as women inside of water well jugs, which allude to either the villages' proximity to the sea or abundant olive oil production, and a pastoral landscape (top). The olive tree whose roots are personified by faces of Palestinian elders and a child (bottom) represent the past and the future, against a backdrop of stone structures representing traditional Arab village landscapes. The image beside it, of a barefoot boy dressed in rags standing near larger-than-life flowers, is Handala, Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali's iconic refugee child and enduring symbol of Palestinian defiance. Handala perpetually stands with his back to the world to signify his own rejection of the outside world's rejection of Palestinians. (Photos: Soraya Abuelhiga)

A place of both despair and defiance, the latter which is indicated by Turki's melancholic mention of a growing feeling of hope, the camp as an environmental and experiential reality for the more than 1.5 million Palestinian refugees—of which almost 200,000 reside in 19 camps across the West Bank alone[94]—who inhabit them provides further evidence of Palestinian presence and place. In the camp, "some sense of place is maintained by the presence of a community living together. […] It is not a homogenous space, alien and meaningless like the desert and the city. The Palestinians who live in the camps have shaped them into their own places. […] Re-creating certain aspects of home [the village] imbues the camp with form and meaning otherwise absent in exile."[95] In many ways, the camp can be considered a marker and maker of Palestinian authenticity, particularly where acts of resistance and steadfastness are concerned, such as during the First Intifada, when "residents of the camps were better organized to deal with curfews, blockades, and other Israeli countermeasures than were their counterparts in towns and villages."[96] This became apparent to me during a visit to Balata Camp in Nablus, where my guide and I spent the afternoon squeezing and wriggling our way between the impossibly tight stone walls which make up the mazes of makeshift homes in the largest, most densely populated camp in the West Bank. As my guide proudly explained to me, neither the Israeli army tanks nor the soldiers on foot could ever quite catch up to their Palestinian targets during the Second Intifada, who dodged in and out of sight between walls and down narrow alleyways as they fled for their lives. Heavily outfitted, heavily geared, and heavily armed, the soldiers simply could not fit through or navigate Balata's endless maze of tight spaces and

[94] According to UNRWA, "Palestine Refugees" and "Where We Work—West Bank" at https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees and https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/west-bank
[95] Parmenter, 65, 66, 67.
[96] Ibid., 67.

corners so familiar to the Palestinians in the camp. (What my guide did not mention, however, is how the Israeli Army eventually overcame this obstacle: With bulldozers).

The question of authenticity as it relates to Palestinian (re)constructions and recoveries of presence and place inform the ethos of both the play itself and the larger national body it represents as the actors stage their historical and geographical interventions in order to make their case for Palestine. Earlier in this chapter I had argued that by setting the play in Occupied Palestine rather than historic Palestine, Jad would be able to get a sense of "the real" Palestine. Nowhere is this more possible, more evident, than in the scenes in Dheisheh Camp, where Jad comes into being as a Palestinian—where he becomes nationalized, so to speak, evidenced by his decision at the end of the play to remain in Palestine with "no regrets" so that, as he tells the audience, "this small feeling you had as you left Palestine can grow inside you." In Dheisheh, Jad befriends a young man named Malik who helps him in his search for Reema, an old childhood friend of Jad's sister who we eventually learn lives in Gaza. When Jad naively asks Malik and locals in the camp how he can get to Gaza, they all shrug and silence befalls the cast. Jad then turns to address the audience: "How can I go there?" As Jad slowly puts his hands around his throat, gesturing choking or suffocation, we are suddenly transported to Gaza by the fast, chaotic pounding of percussion instruments mimicking gunshots as the actors begin contorting and convulsing their bodies. Both Jad and the audience are then jolted back from imagined Gaza to the present moment in Dheisheh by the sound of Malik screaming "*Allahu akbar*!" and throwing stones. Jad quickly realizes that the army is in the camp, and while he is frantically trying to reach his friend we witness behind Malik an actor standing atop the other actors, either in character as an Israeli soldier taking aim from a high vantage point or taking on the form of an Israeli tank (it was unclear to me which, but both seemed equally plausible). And

it is in this moment, in the refugee camp, where Jad experiences Palestinian death firsthand and for the first time, as Malik is shot in the chest and dies in Jad's arms.

Jad never does make it to Gaza. Nor does he ever find Reema. "No one seems to know exactly how to get there," Jad sadly writes to his sister in a letter, alluding to the impossibility of travel to Gaza as a result of Israel's ongoing blockade and decade-long U.S.-led international sanctions against Hamas in Gaza following the party's victory in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. (The growing humanitarian crisis resulting from the blockades most recently prompted a series of protests along the Gaza border with Israel in 2018, collectively referred to by Palestinians as the March of Return, which will be discussed in the next chapter). Yet it is from and within the place of the camp, marked by violence and death, that Jad comes to identify the camp as synonymous with resistance and revolution—in essence, with Palestinianness. He reveals that after Malik's burial, "suddenly the camp seemed to me like something new. I imagined that the main street in the camp was only the beginning of a long, long road. Malik had lost his life when he threw himself into the frontline, fighting guns with a stone." When he poignantly exclaims that Malik "could have stayed home. He could have saved himself," I could not help but be reminded of how often I have heard these words before—uttered on numerous occasions by Israeli authorities, American newscasters, international political commentators and analysts, and even students in a classroom—in defense of or as justification for ongoing killings of "violent" and "hateful" Palestinians who would otherwise be alive if they had just "stayed home." These words and the sentiments which inform them are also aptly captured in the lyrics of a popular 2001 song by Palestinian hip hop group DAM, whose music is in fact introduced to Jad by Malik in an earlier scene: "When I remind you it was you who attacked me/You silence me and shout/'But you let small children throw stones!/Don't they have parents to keep them at

home?'/*What!?*/You must have forgotten you buried our parents under the rubble of our homes."[97] Jad, too, realizes this, mournfully but proudly acknowledging that Malik "did not [stay home]. *Why?* No. I'm not coming back to America. And I have no regrets." Having seen and at last become acquainted with what is for him the *real* Palestine, Jad now understands "why a boy called Malik" from Dheisheh Camp could never stay home: He was never home to begin with.

"Come back to learn through Malik's eyes what life is, and what existence is worth," Jad beckons his sister towards the end of his letter. The question of existence and worth is also a question of appearance, in the sense of presence and representation, and hierarchy. Human value and personal visibility (that is, the way one is seen and shown) is measured and assigned according to "who's better than who," as the Freedom Theatre's Artistic Director Nabil Al-Raee (himself from a refugee camp, Arroub, in Hebron) had phrased it during a discussion of his latest work-in-progress—a play about the refugee experience, in which the refugee characters would be marked with a stamp on their heads to both separate and distinguish them from their more human counterparts. Consequently, refugee bodies are categorized, to recall my arguments from the introduction, as unmournable, ungrievable, and disposable. For Nabil, refugeeism is less about an absence of nationality and more about existences made absent, about persons made into things: "Nowadays the refugees appear [more] because of the Syrian problem, the African problem, because of the Iraqi problem. So many different refugees are trying to find their lives. Shall we take them or shall we throw them away? *Do they have the right to exist or not?* This is a whole question about existence. Not *who* is the refugee, [but] *what* is a refugee?" Palestinian existence, as much as it is defined by refugeeism and exile, is premised upon a return—to land, to body, and to the consciousness that is formed in the interplay between both, as the cast of

[97] DAM, "*Meen Irhabi* [Who's the Terrorist?]" Digital music recording, 2001. A music video by Jackie Salloum with lyrics subtitled in English can be found on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2Bzd bnRG1w

Return to Palestine demonstrates on the stage. Their bodily narration of Jad's story binds land with body and geography with identity in the retelling of Palestinian histories of existence and stories of resistance, countering official narratives of denial and absence and, more importantly, articulating and legitimating Palestinians' sense of place and rightful belonging amid the experiential and very visible realities of their expulsion. Perhaps this is why, upon meeting Jad for the first time, Malik's first question to him is: "Do you read books, stories?" His second: "Do you know Ghassan Kanafani?"

On (Dis)Embodying "Home"

"I think Ghassan Kanafani is a visionary," Nabil tells me about the exiled Palestinian literary figure and liberationist who was assassinated in 1972 by the Israeli Mossad in a car bomb that also killed his teenaged niece. He was discussing why he had his students at the Freedom Theatre acting school produce and perform a play about Kanafani's life and work in 2015-16, which they later titled, *Images from the Life of Ghassan Kanafani*. "He knew how to write and read the future. So he wrote *to* the Palestinians. And actually he [predicted] the future, way before it happened!" Nabil explained that the aim of the students' production was to "go through his writing and present different pieces as images" of what Palestinians are experiencing today. "This is why it's important to go back to Ghassan Kanafani."

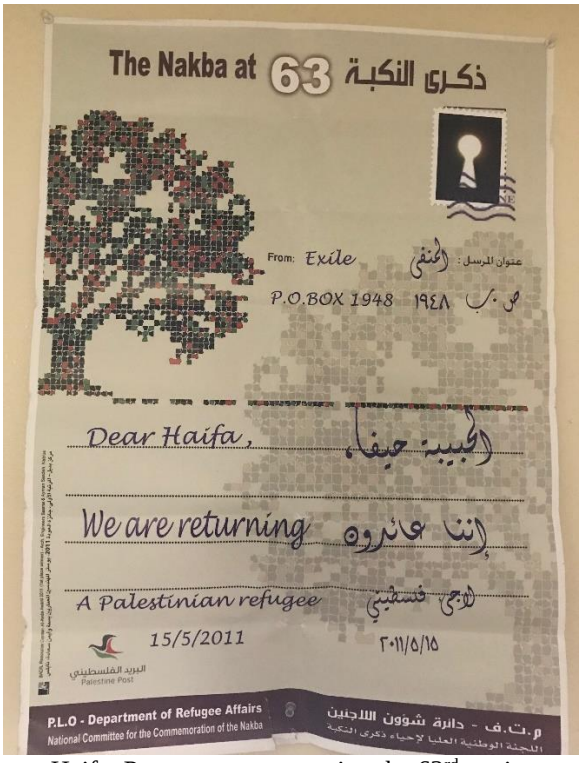

Fig. 10. Writing home: A letter to Haifa. Poster commemorating the 63rd anniversary of the Nakba, acquired from the BADIL Resource Center in Bethlehem. (Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

A highly-skilled oud player, Nabil serves as one of two musicians scoring and accompanying performances of *Return to Palestine*. (He would ultimately also assume the role of director for the 2018 European tour.) While the play was written by Miranda, I learned earlier from some of the actors that Nabil had written the play's ending scene: A monologue, in the form of a letter, written by Jad to his sister in America (the imagined audience) but directed at and delivered to the actual audience in the theatre. "I *re*-wrote a letter from Ghassan Kanafani," he corrected me, "He's an amazing man who actually was one of the people who changed the perspective and opinions, especially of international audiences, towards Palestine through his writings. So he wrote different letters to one person, Ghada al-Samman, and this letter was part of it but I rewrote that so we could use it in the play because it was really fitting in with the letter written by Jad to his sister, telling her about his experiences, what he went through, what he learned, what he wants, what he discovered. It fits *a lot* with the play itself and our message."

These letters were, in fact, love letters written from Kanafani to Syrian journalist and writer al-Samman during his exile in Beirut.[98] Though Nabil does not directly reference their illicit love affair, his adaptation of Kanafani's letter within the context of Jad's journey through the West Bank in *Return to Palestine* exemplifies a well-noted narrative trope in Palestinian literature further binding Palestinian body and land: Romantic love or sexual desire, whereby the will to return to the homeland is metaphorized as the intense desire to be reunited with a long-lost or forbidden lover.[99]

In the same vein but from a different vantage point, sexual desire also figures as the colonial rape or penetration of the native land and/as body, such as that conveyed in Palestinian writer and human rights lawyer Raja Shehadeh's reflections on Israel's daily land expropriations as an "invasion" or "molestation" of Palestine's "natural pleasure," of its lost "virginal" land:

> I feel deep, deep resentment against this invasion of my innermost imagery and consciousness by the Israelis. […] [S]ince the occupation I have begun to think of our hills as "virginal," "molested" by the Israeli bulldozers—the bulldozers that have become for me the symbol of Israeli power over us. […] I can thank our occupiers, then, among other things, for instilling in me a political pornographer's eye for this land.[100]

Within the context of Israeli occupation, Palestinian lands are feminized, sexually violated by Israel's phallic bulldozer. But within the context of Palestinian statehood, the sexual-political metaphor is also applied to the Palestinian body (albeit male body),[101] by which the occupied

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[98] Ghada al-Samman stirred much controversy when she published Kanafani's letters in 1992, under the title *Ghassan Kanafani's Letters to Ghada al-Samman* (Beirut: Dar al-Taliya, 1992).

[99] See, for example, Darwish's "Leaves of Olives" (1964), "A Lover from Palestine" (1966), and "The Most Beautiful Love" (1996). For a discussion of Palestinian love poetry as literature of resistance, see Ahmed Masoud, "Remembering Mahmoud Darwish: How the Revolution was Written," in *Ceasefire Magazine* 9 August 2010, https://ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/remembering-mahmoud-darwish-how-the-revolution-was-written/. See also Diana Alghoul, "For the Love of Palestine: On Ghassan Kanafani's 'Literature of Resistance'," in *The New Arab* 8 July 2017, https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/7/8/for-the-love-of-palestine-on-ghassan-kanafanis-resistance. It should also be mentioned that metaphorizing national love as romantic or sexual love in Palestinian writing also served a more practical function, especially prior to Oslo, by presenting seemingly de-politicized texts more conducive to passing Israeli censors for publication.

[100] Shehadeh, *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank*, 88-9.

[101] See Amy Zalman, "Gender and the Palestinian Narrative of Return in Two Novels by Ghassan Kanafani," *Arab Studies Journal* 10.2 (2002): 17-43.

Palestinian, stripped of land and history, is castrated, emasculated and impotent, as is the case of Abul Khaizuran, the truck driver-smuggler who offers to transport Kanafani's doomed men in the sun to Kuwait. Having suffered a penile injury in 1948 while fighting Zionist militias who would soon enough officially become Israelis, Abul Khaizuran is both literally and figuratively emasculated by the creation of the state of Israel, lamenting that he "lost his manhood" at the same time that he lost his country.[102] But sexual-political imagery and sexual or romantic metaphors as they relate to and characterize Palestinians' intimate, entrenched relationship with the land are not only about communicating feelings of loss and violation and hopes for reunification. The persistent, passionate, sometimes pathological intensity of bodily desires and romantic yearnings—indeed melancholic, in the Freudian sense of mourning in the unconscious mind a loss which one is unable to fully comprehend[103]—also characterizes Palestinians' love for their land as doomed, ill-fated, unrequited, jeopardized by Israel's ongoing occupation and imperial reshaping of Palestinian land and narrative. In this case, the incomprehensible loss is attributed to the trauma of the Nakba and its ongoing aftermath still suffered by Palestinians today, most especially by those in the camps and cities of the Occupied Territories.

The narrative and artistic expression of Palestinian loss is not limited to romantic, sexual, and bodily metaphor. Palestinian nationalism, love for the land, and intense desire for reunification with home/land is also narrativized within the context of familial love. In some

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[102] Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (London: Heinemann, 1978).

[103] In his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud defines melancholia as a "pathological disposition," differentiating it from its more regular (and regulatory) counterpart, mourning; see *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* vol. XIV, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth P, [1917] 1999), esp. 243, 252. For David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, the pathology Freud attaches to melancholic loss becomes the very source of its creative potential, thereby redefining loss as "productive rather than pathological, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary" (ix). Reconfiguring absence "as a potential presence" and a "counterintuitive understanding of lost bodies, spaces, and ideals" (ix) makes possible a broader and more constructive understanding of loss. See eds. Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2003).

instances, both within and beyond the literary or textual, familial love is synonymous with national or cultural love as being bound to the land through roots. I got a closer sense of how embedded this thought-practice was in the Palestinian imaginary during my interview about *The Siege* with one of its actors, a Palestinian from Jerusalem named Ghantus, who affectionately explained how "the land is my grandmother. My grandmother she *is* the land. She is what is connecting me to this place." Whereas romantic love conveys intense desire for reconnecting with Palestine as a lost loved one, familial love conveys a sense of the land as a lost home; home is more than a geographical or physical place, but "your life and your cause bound up together. […], it's the essence of who you are," according to Darwish, "The map is not the answer."[104] Home (as actual and imagined space), family, and personal and national identity are inseparable from one another, so much so that Darwish compares Palestinians' insufferable loss of country with that of a mother losing her child as he contemplates the answer to his opening question, "what is homeland?":

> On this hill not long ago you were born. Your childhood is still close to everything—the hill, the plain, the blacktop road, and the first gunshots. If it were not for the moon that night, they would have lost you forever, as happened with a mother from Haifa when there was no moon. The guns attacked her home, and she grabbed something she thought was her baby and rushed into the nearest boat in terror. While on the sea to Acre she discovered that the baby was only a pillow, and from that day she lost her mind. How many infants became pillows? And how many pillows were [mis]taken for infants? So, what is a homeland? The homeland of a mother is her child, and the homeland of a child is the mother.[105]

Interestingly, the scenario Darwish portrays here is precisely that of Said and Safiya in Kanafani's *Return to Haifa* (1970), the book Jad's sister gives him to read at the beginning of the play, and whose haunting story compels Jad to visit Palestine for the first time. Originally published three or four years prior to Darwish's *Journal of an Ordinary Grief* from which the

[104] Darwish, "Homeland: Between Memory and a Suitcase," in *Journal,* 51.
[105] Ibid.

passage above stems, *Return to Haifa* exemplifies the uneasy, ill-fated reunion between Palestinians and their homeland as it plays out for an aging Palestinian couple who travel back to their original hometown of Haifa from the West Bank, where they now live. Hoping to visit their original house, now inhabited by an elderly Polish Jewish couple who had survived the Holocaust, Said and Safiya discover that Khaldun, the infant son they had reluctantly abandoned long ago in the outbreak of violence and chaos during the Nakba, had in fact survived. Renamed Dov, he had been raised as an Israeli Jew by the new, childless foreign owners of the house. Not only that, but their son was now an Israeli soldier in the reserves, who angrily resents and rejects both his Palestinian parents and his original (now past) heritage.

"It's impossible to deny the appeal of flesh and blood," a sad but hopeful Safiya tells her husband, agreeing with Miriam (the new homeowner and Dov's mother) that Khaldun/Dov should be given the choice of who he wants to consider his "real" father. Said, distressed and utterly defeated, exclaims, "What flesh and blood are you talking about? […] Khaldun, or Dov, or whatever the devil wants, doesn't know us! Do you want my opinion? We should leave here and go back to the past. The whole thing is finished. They've stolen him. […] [T]he crime began twenty years ago and the price must be paid… it began the day we left him here."[106] Strangely enough, the "here" of which Said speaks has not changed all that much in the years since their expulsion, and this only exacerbates Said's and Safiya's disorientation marking their return to Haifa:

> Suddenly he saw the house, his house, the house he had once lived in, and then lived in his mind for so long. […] It seemed so very natural, just as if the twenty intervening years had been put between two giant presses and crushed until there was nothing left but a transparent sheet which you could barely see. […] There were many things associated with that day [when they fled] that he could see, things that even now were special and intimate and which he always imagined as a sacred secret possession which no one knew about or could really touch or see. The picture of Jerusalem which he remembered so

[106] Kanafani, *Return to Haifa*, trans. Barbara Harlow (London: Heinemann, [1970] 1984), 122-23.

> well was still hanging where it had been when he lived there. The small Persian carpet was still there on the front wall too. He began to walk about, looking around him and discovering things little by little or all at once, like someone who has just awoken from a long period of unconsciousness.[107]

Though they exclaim to each other that "this is our house," Said and Safiya have repeatedly reassured Miriam (and later Dov) that they have not returned to "take back" their house or the things inside of it—including their own son, who arrives home in uniform that evening and is both surprised by his biological parents' impromptu visit and fearful that they have come to take him back. Rather, like Darwish from earlier, Said has come in search of the answer to "what is the homeland?" a question he poses to Dov, who angrily replies: "You didn't have to leave Haifa. And even if this weren't possible and you had to leave, you didn't have to leave your infant son in his bed. […] You're weak! Weak! Shackled by the heavy chains of backwardness and paralysis! […] You've spent twenty years crying… Is that what you have to say to me now? Is that your pathetic broken-down weapon?"[108]

That Dov refers to what Said had earlier described as "a long period of unconsciousness" as cowardice—as "backwardness," "paralysis," a "pathetic broken-down weapon"—aligns with Israeli narratives which reimagine Palestinian expulsion and exile as a choice or a sign of collective weakness, a point which I relate to the recurring question of victimhood and to which I will return at the end of the chapter. But for now, it is important to consider how Said's and Safiya's return to their house entails not a confrontation with the past, but rather a grappling with the im/possibility of a Palestinian future, where the "choices" that Palestinians make regarding their own liberation are governed by necessity and, at times, urgency rather than agency. Said tells us this when he explains to Dov and Miriam that Khaldun's/Dov's younger (biological)

[107] Ibid., 111-12.
[108] Ibid., 135.

brother Khalid, born after their expulsion in what would later become the Occupied Territories, has joined the *fedayeen* and will inevitably come face to face with Khaldun/Dov as a soldier in the Israeli army:

> "I was searching for the true Palestine. The Palestine which is more than a memory, more than a peacock feather, more than a child, more than penciled graffiti on the staircase wall. I said to myself: What is Palestine for Khalid? He doesn't know about the vase, or the picture, or the stairs, or al-Halisa, or Khaldun. And yet for him Palestine is worth a man carrying a gun and dying for her sake. For us, for you and me, she's nothing but the search for something under the dust of memories. Look at what we found under all that dust… more new dust! We were wrong to expect the nation to honor only the past. For Khalid the nation is the future. That's why there is this division. That's why Khalid wants to carry a gun. Tens of thousands like Khalid will not be stopped by broken tears of men looking in the depths of their defeat for the rubble of tears and the spittle of flowers. They are looking to the future and they will correct our mistakes and the mistakes of the whole world… Dov is our flaw, but Khalid, he is the honor that is left to us."[109]

Said's explanation here is prefaced by a description of the house, a metonym for the larger concept of home/land which, as was examined throughout this chapter, is strongly embedded in Palestinian consciousness and national imaginaries. Palestinian intimacy and emotional involvement with their home exceeds Israeli underestimations of Palestinian agency at the same that this agency is purported (in the Israeli national imaginary) to be among the reasons for the loss of that home to begin with. Furthermore, if Darwish had argued that the relationship between Palestinians and their homeland was akin to that between a parent and their children, then the loss of Khaldun entails not a loss of home/land but more so a surrendering of the past and its history in favor of the high-priced (if not also violent) demands of a future history and home/land yet to be realized but nonetheless constantly present in Palestinian imaginations and longings, embodied and characterized here by Khalid, now a guerilla fighter. "For you," Said tells Dov and Miriam at the end of the story, "perhaps the whole affair is an unfortunate occurrence. But history isn't like that. When we came here, we were going against history. And

[109] Ibid., 137.

also, I admit to you, when we left Haifa. But all of this is temporary. […] It seems to me that every Palestinian will pay a price. I know many who have paid with their sons. I know because I too in a strange way paid with my son. But I paid with him at a cost."[110] As he and Safiya leave their house for a second time, decades later, neither seem too reluctant. Instead, Said resigns from the past, and his surrender or choice to leave once again—this time not so much a sign of weakness or "backwardness," as Dov had accusingly put it earlier—is accompanied by a permission (albeit only a rhetorical one) which he was unable to give in 1948, having been swept up by the sudden chaos of war and wound up on the losing side. As he exits through the front door, he calmly addresses Dov one last time: "You can stay for a while in our house. That's something you don't need a war for."

Soraya (played by Suheir Hammad) grants the same permission to the new Israeli resident of her family's original house in Jaffa in Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir's 2008 film, *Salt of This Sea*.[111] Like Jad in *Return to Palestine*, Soraya is a Palestinian American who also "returns" to Palestine for the first time, but with the purpose of reclaiming her grandfather's modest life savings which were frozen in a British Mandatory bank account following his exile in 1948 and which, as she soon learns from the banker, does not exist anymore. Fed up, she and two friends from Ramallah decide to rob the bank and illegally cross into Israel, where Soraya then goes to Jaffa to visit her grandfather's house. This house is somewhat personified for and by Soraya—indeed, the house provides a spiritual link between Soraya and her grandfather (and, by extension, the Palestinian past inaccessible to her in the U.S.)—as we see Soraya gently touching and caressing the stones forming the house while kissing her hands, as if she were being reunited with a lost loved one. At one point, she even becomes sick and vomits outside; the experience of

[110] Ibid., 137-8.
[111] Annemarie Jacir, *Salt of this Sea*, Lorber Films, 2008. DVD.

finally being present in her family's past, of being embedded in and embodying a sense of place and history symbolized by the still-standing house, is so profound as to have a bodily effect on her. In a way, the house (or rather the fact that her family was denied ownership of a home that they had originally built) is proof of the former lives of a people whose existence has now been formally denied, and perhaps her sudden illness marks her own awakening from that long and tormented period of unconsciousness of which Said had spoken earlier upon his long-awaited (but ill-fated) arrival at his house in Haifa. While inside of the house, she meets the friendly young Israeli woman who now lives in it and allows them to stay, but her detached hospitality rubs Soraya the wrong way. She demands to buy back the house; when she is refused, as the house is not allowed to be sold to non-Jews, Soraya declares, "This is my home. It was stolen from my family. So it's for *me* to decide if *you* can stay. And you can. My father should have been raised in *this* house, not in a fucking camp." When the Israeli woman resolves to leave history in the past, Soraya angrily confronts her and repeats her permission, except, unlike Said, Soraya's permission comes with a condition: An admission of wrongdoing: "Your past is my *every* day. My right now. This is not your home. You can stay. If you admit that *all* of this is stolen." After the woman attempts to defend herself by exclaiming, as Dov had, that her grandfather had left his house presumably of his own will, Soraya emphatically corrects her, demonstrating an intimacy and personal connection with the house that its new inhabitant could never claim by virtue of Soraya's familial connection to the Palestinian hands which built the house, but who could no longer own or live in it: "*They were forced to!* My grandfather *laid down this floor*, what does that mean to you?! *Our* windows, *our* doors, *our fucking house!* Admit it!" When she's asked to leave, and in a final act to prove what she sees as her true

ownership of the house despite her failure to regain or retain it, Soraya grabs a vase of flowers from the table and smashes it on the ground. "*Recognize it!*" she screams at the Israeli woman.

Unlike Soraya, Said and Safiya, Jad never visits his ancestral house. As a Palestinian in the West Bank, he is cut off from it; it is made unreachable by checkpoints and permits, among other features of Israel's security regime. But by the end of the play, as Jad expresses in his letter to his sister and despite being in Palestine for the first time, Jad nonetheless feels that he has returned. His newfound sense of place despite the reality of Palestinian displacement is premised upon his ability to go to the place and experience for himself what it means to be a Palestinian under occupation, even if this ability is an illicit one, given that foreign travel to the Occupied Territories is technically forbidden by Israel. But for the unnamed protagonist of *Your father was born 100 years old and so was the Nakba,*[112] who can neither enter her house nor Ben Gurion Airport, there is no newfound sense of place and resolve to stay. Created by filmmaker and media artist Razan AlSalah, a Palestinian refugee from Beirut who is now based in Montreal, the haunting short film imagines the artist's grandmother visiting her home in Haifa via the only way that a Palestinian refugee from Lebanon can: Through Google Street View. Here, the Palestinian, far and long removed from her place of birth, history, and identity, is present only in spirit. She is a wandering ghost, disembodied from having been disconnected, estranged, and barred from the land. Her loss of self is attributed to her perpetual homelessness, and she calls herself Anonymous X. The narrating voice is that of the artist herself, who embodies her grandmother's soul or ghost in order to give voice to her. It is this disembodied voice which guides us through Google Street View's contemporary Haifa, now unrecognizable to her grandmother's ghost as she searches for her son Ameen who, to her, is still a child riding his bicycle and looking towards

[112] Razan AlSalah, *Your father was born 100 years old and so was the Nakba,* 2017, short film, 7 min. Provided by the artist.

the sea. As we the viewers are zoomed in and out of Google Street View's Haifa, we catch glimpses of ghostly reflections barely visible but haunting the contemporary urban landscape. To achieve this effect, AlSalah superimposes archival photographs of "old" Haifa atop Google's Haifa as she explores both the strength and imposed limits of familial ties and memories connecting exiled Palestinians to their home and across multiple temporalities. In fact, neither we the viewers nor the ghost of her grandmother can distinguish time; for AlSalah, as for Soraya, the past is very much present as her grandmother's search for Ameen becomes more and more frantic despite the relative calmness—or static, rather—of the Street View images of present-day Haifa. Given its premise of a mother in search of her lost son, the film is a response to, a reimagining of, Said's and Safiya's loss of Khaldun in *Return to Haifa*. At one point in the film, as the computer mouse-clicking and image transitions and zooming speeds up rapidly, creating a frenzied sense of chaos or panic, the narrating voice exclaims, "Why did you bring me back here, when I can't feel this place! I can't even see it! They are showing it to me," in an adaptation of a conversation between Said and Safiya on their drive to Haifa in which Said argues that Israelis can "see" the Haifa that Palestinians can barely detect, alluding to Israel's reconstruction of both land and narrative in their reimaging of the cityscape following statehood.[113] As was the case in *Salt of This Sea* with Soraya's grandfather's house, the construction of home and memory go hand-in-hand, and Israel's distortion of one (the homeland), demonstrated by the superimposed images of the past atop Google's present, leaves Palestinians disembodied and disorientated, having to navigate their displacement by memory instead of maps.

[113] The artist discussed these lines in her presentation of the film at a conference I had attended at Duke University. Razan AlSalah, "Memory Construction and Google Street View: Experimental Filmmaking and the Nakba," *Documentary and Palestine*, Duke University Center for Documentary Studies, 1 December 2017.

"This is it," declares the voice of AlSalah's grandmother, as the camera (or screen-view) pans around the area, zooming in on street and traffic signs in Hebrew and asphalted streets painted with road lines where there once used to be a large water well. The viewer is then transported down a street ironically called Shivat Tsiyon—"Liberation Street" in Hebrew—as the grandmother wonders aloud, "What liberation?" Upon arriving at her house, the voice now exclaims, "We can't go inside either?" conveying not only the technical and affective limits of Google Street View but also the denial of reentry and return for Palestinian refugees in Arab countries who are barred from entering Israel. The grandmother's repeated calling out for Ameen is superimposed with emphatic pronunciations of the Arabic *Ha,* the twenty-sixth letter of the Arabic alphabet articulated by a breathy guttural pronunciation of the letter "h" and transliterated in English by the number 7, as in the phonetic spelling for Haifa, *7ayfa,* now replaced by the Hebraic pharyngeal "h," as in *Khaifa* (to recall from *Return to Palestine,* such linguistic distinctions are precisely what prompts Jad's trouble with Israeli airport authorities upon his arrival). The restless ghost or spirit of AlSalah's grandmother is distressed by these distinctions and her inability to both enter her house and find Ameen. At one point, she sees two men (whose image happened to be captured in Street View) with a ladder, and she asks them if she can borrow it to climb up to her home. Unsuccessful in her attempts, she makes her way for the sea—Ameen's only memory of Haifa, as we are told, and the object of yearning and mourning for many Palestinian refugees trapped in the Occupied Territories, as was conveyed in Albaba's paintings which I had earlier discussed. Having made it to the sea (that is, by transitioning to the Street View's port of Haifa, now a famous tourist attraction), the grandmother, still trapped in the past temporality and memories of her expulsion, identifies a docked cruise ship with the British boat that took her to Beirut during the Nakba, and we catch a faded glimpse of a superimposed

black-and-white image of the forced transfer of Palestinians which juxtaposes the colorful present-day image of happy summer tourists entering the cruise ship and taking pictures. The grandmother, still seeing the site of her past trauma, criticizes the indifference of the tourists, alluding to the international community's indifference towards the Palestinian plight during and after the Nakba, but also the voyeuristic and emotionally removed nature of spectatorship when it comes to Palestinian suffering, "What's wrong with these people? Are we on vacation? We're being killed and displaced and you're taking pictures?" Believing she has finally found Ameen—a blurred image of a little boy on a bicycle along the docks who, like the two men with the ladder from earlier, happened to be captured in the Street View image—she is transported to the seashores. The view of the sea is disjointed, evidenced by a crooked line joining what appear to be two different images of the same sea. The grandmother resolves, "Even the sea is broken. There is no escape. I must return. Before the heavens take me. There is no escape," and the screen abruptly fades to black. "All the tears in the world couldn't carry a little boat just big enough for two parents looking for their lost child," Dov had angrily spat at his (biological, Palestinian) father Said. For AlSalah's grandmother, neither the tears of the sea nor the larger-than-life cruise ship filled with naïve and happy tourists could ever alleviate her loss of home, summarized if not symbolized by a Google Street View image of a broken sea.

As the collection of artistic and cultural texts discussed in this chapter reveal, this brokenness is what characterizes Palestinian displacement and refugeeism in tandem with Israel's continued expropriation of land comprising both the corporeal and visceral dimensions of Palestinians' imagined and actual relationships with their disappearing home/land as a condition of their en/forced absence. Paradoxically, then, vanishing the body is a way to make visible and present the invisible and absent, thereby extending the role and function of image, in

both the visual and performative senses, as a construction premised upon looking and preoccupied with being seen. Vanishing the image through erasure is precisely the artistic technique of Palestinian visual artist Taysir Batniji, evidenced by *To My Brother* (2012), his nearly invisible series of 60 etchings from photographs on white paper. At first glance, the white sheets appear blank and the "images" absent. But upon a much closer look, the delicately carved outlines materialize into images which are themselves reproductions of actual images from a Palestinian past—in this case, photographs from his brother Mayssara's wedding, two years before he was killed by an Israeli sniper on the ninth day of the First Intifada. In an article from the *Los Angeles Times* about Taysir Batniji's "ghostly carvings," Carolina Miranda praises the work as "melancholic without being melodramatic," observing how "you'll find yourself staring at the ghosts of smiling faces—all of whom are staring back at you."[114] Batniji's inkless traces were made by applying only pressure to blank white paper, recalling how just hours before Mayssara was shot, "'he had drawn an Israeli soldier shooting someone in [Batniji's] sketchbook,'" a drawing which the artist and another brother ended up erasing, although "'the traces remained visible on the paper.'"[115] In this case, to lose is to materialize rather than dematerialize, to transcend rather than trap, as Batniji proposes in his artist statement about *To My Brother*:

> How can personal loss be represented? Is it possible to render something absent tangible, to materialize a memory? How can we trace the porousness between the personal and the collective—especially in the case of Palestine—when speaking of memory and of things lost? […] *To My Brother* is a fragile and poetic work which requires an intimate relationship with the viewer: stand too far away and the drawings appear as blank sheets of paper; stand closer and you will be able to trace the contours of the human shapes inhabiting these drawings, the artist's memories, and the thin lines between an ephemeral presence and a permanent absence. […] This very personal history ties into a wider political context of strife in the Middle East, and it shows how personal experiences

[114] Carolina A. Miranda, "Taysir Batniji's ghostly carvings at Barnsdall recall fallen brother," *Los Angeles Times* 27 October 2014, http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-taysir-batniji-ghostly-renderings-barnsdall-20141027-column.html

[115] The artist in an interview with arts publication *Ibraaz*, qtd. in Ibid.

> ultimately, in some way or other, become part of a collective narrative. The tragic bereavement of a loved one transcends strict geographical boundaries and political discourses.[116]

Interestingly, *To My Brother* was included as part of a larger exhibition about (imagined) space, titled *Shangri-La: Imagined Cities*, curated by the L.A. Islam Arts Initiative in 2014. The conflation of body and space, particularly as it relates to absence and imagination, is an especially potent feature in Palestinian art, in which the forced disappearances of bodies, from violence that is both physical and psychological, coincides with the forced disappearance of Palestinian land to Jewish settlers and an increasingly militarized Israeli statehood.

Such disjunctions further translate into questions about Palestinian identity and humanity which Mustafa Sheta had posed at the end of the introduction about how best to *be* a Palestinian and *resist* occupation. As Nabil put it, the rest of the world "doesn't know how to support a refugee and stand for them. Because they don't defend them as a human being. [Victimhood] is one of the things we are also fighting here in Palestine, how not to victimize ourselves more and more. […] Continuing to play this role [of victim] without taking responsibility *to change* what is happening is a problem. I don't really agree, as a Palestinian, that we need to wait for America to change our situation. *We* can be the people who change our situation." As we will see later in *The Siege*, the act of changing the situation and resisting occupation can and does entail violence, a problem that will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter, where I examine how the Freedom Theatre's performance of *The Siege* represents a culmination of Palestinian responses to their ongoing repression by Israel and the representation of Palestinian armed resistance in U.S. and Western media. While physical violence is usually overused to define and demonize Palestinians as monsters, thereby justifying the relativization of their humanity, violence must

[116] To view Batniji, *To My Brother, 2012*, visit the artist's website http://www.taysirbatniji.com/en/paintings/E10302013061804

also be recognized as a reality of resistance, the use of which Palestinians defend as necessary at the same time that they are critical of diplomacy as a means of resolving the injustices waged against and daily faced by Palestinians. Palestinian resistance then, both creative and armed, entails imagining the inevitability of a return home amidst the expanding impossibility of its realization. As Faris, Said's and Safiya's neighbor in Ramallah who, upon his return from Kuwait, decides to visit his home in the al-Ajami neighborhood in Jaffa, exclaims to the inhabitants of his house, "Your presence here is just a sad comedy which is going to come to an end some day, *even if it means using force*. If you want you can open fire on me this instant, but it's my house."[117] Initially and mistakenly assuming that the new inhabitants of his house were Israelis when they are, in fact, Arabs from Jaffa who recognize and welcome him, Faris' own brokenness is revealed when he is returned a photo of his dead brother still left hanging in the house, one of the first guerilla fighters whose "rifle had been broken to pieces, along with his body, when he was struck by a shell."[118] When he leaves, he takes the photo with him, only to go back and return it soon after. And we learn from Said that Faris, who had returned to Ramallah alone without his brother—neither in flesh nor photo—is "carrying a gun now."[119]

[117] Kanafani, *Return to Haifa*, 124. Emphasis mine.
[118] Ibid., 125.
[119] Ibid., 128.

CHAPTER 3

"Flying Palestinians" and Falling Fighters: (Re)Documenting and Personifying Palestinian Resistance and its Dilemmas

So if violence is out, boycott movements are out, and now peaceful marches are out, is there a safe way for Palestinians to resist occupation?

—Facebook post from Ashraf, Palestinian activist in Haifa, on the IDF assault on Return March protestors in Gaza on 30 March 2018

I'm not against peace/Peace is against me
It's going to destroy me/Erase my culture
You don't listen to our voices/You silence us and degrade us
And who are you?

—DAM, "*Meen Erhabe* [Who's the Terrorist]?"

Fig. 11. #Angels_In_Jaffa (Source: Facebook/Ghantus Wael)

We had a skype meeting with a professor from [a university in the U.S.][120]*. I told her I had a story that I wanted to share with her. From my childhood. I told her that when I was a small boy, we lived in a house with two rooms. One for sleeping and one to raise chickens. One night, my parents went to a party and left me home alone. I was mad, and so for revenge, I went into the room with the chickens and I snapped the necks of five chicks. The professor said, "You are a killer." I asked her why. She said, "because you killed the chicks on purpose." I said to her, "but I was very small. I didn't understand what I was doing."*

She was very bothered by my story. But then she said that she also wanted to share a story from when she was little. She said there was a birdhouse and it was filled with dirty feathers. She wanted to clean the birdhouse so she put it in water. She didn't know that there were small birds still inside. They drowned.

So I asked her, "does that make you a killer?" She said no, because she didn't know that there were birds inside. She didn't mean to kill them. So I asked her, "but you know that there are children in Iraq? And women, and innocent people. But your government kills them anyway. So why am I a killer, and you are not? Why do the chicks matter more than the people in Iraq, in Palestine? All the Arab countries is having the same problems. Why are the animals more human than us?"

She didn't answer. Finally she said, "I'm not very political."

And this is the "human rights," right? Fuck your human rights. Fuck your visas, and fuck your human rights.

. . .

[120] Name of the university has been omitted.

In the most climactic scene of *The Siege*, following the death of one of the fighters (played by Hassan Taha in both versions)[121] killed by an Israeli sniper bullet, the remaining fighters engage in a heated debate among themselves about whether to admit defeat (via suicide-by-army), or stay and finish a fight for which there is still no end in sight, no tangible resolution. Parts of the debate are excerpted below, with each line corresponding to an individual fighter:

> "Either way we are dead. It's over. We're dead."
>
> "If you think it ends here, that's your opinion. But we choose to live. To live and resist. Or die honorably. Suicide is not an option!"
>
> "I'm scared and I'm not ashamed to admit it."
>
> "We are stuck here doing nothing! What's the point? Everyday someone is hurt! *Everyday!* People are dying in our arms and we are helpless! We are not challenging anyone."
>
> "I don't blame anyone for being sad or angry. But suicidal confrontation is not the answer! The situation was imposed on us and *here* we are! We are not a proper army with tanks and planes. We are just people. *We are people before we are fighters.* We are all human beings. And we are all scared."
>
> "We should have never taken up arms. But we all knew the risks."
> "We wouldn't be here if it weren't for the occupation outside! Talking is useless, we must decide what to do."
>
> "But we started something knowing how it will end! The occupation will not end if we stay here. We are just one of *many* ongoing stories. Had we been in a mosque or an Assyrian church, they would have obliterated us *a thousand times over!* I'm afraid to starve like a cat! With no food or water! And all we talk about is patience and *sumud!* And then we ask ourselves what are were doing here? *What are we doing here! What are we doing here!"*

Contrary to the maniacal, tireless, antagonizing figure of the merciless "terrorist," these fighters are humanized—personified—by their admitted weaknesses, their fears and uncertainties, their feelings of guilt, exhaustion, hopelessness. What is most moving about the fighters of *The Siege*

[121] I oscillate between the 2015 recorded version and the 2017 live version which I had attended at NYU Skirball. My analysis is not concerned with comparing the two productions; rather I'm concerned with examining how the productions collectively narrativize and interrogate Palestinian militant resistance.

is their constant affirmation of Palestinian humanity, their insistence on seeing and showing Palestinians—especially armed ones—as people with few options who are driven to desperate acts, rather than as immeasurable monsters intent on destroying the West. "Of course the Palestinians know the story of occupation, but the point is *how* to fight, and *which way* to fight is a big issue for us," Nabil tells me. "What many people don't really understand is that the refugee is a *terrorized* person."

The title of this chapter alludes to a morbid Israeli joke-riddle upon which Palestinian writer and actor Ibrahim Khlayleh had based his 1988 allegorical play, *The Birds*: "How do we know that Palestinians can fly? Because so many die when the Israeli army shoots warning shots into the air."[122] In her writing on the play, Susan Slyomovics asks, does the Israeli occupation "desire the death of Palestinians, or their submission? If you cannot break the hand, kiss it—or curse it, and become a 'flying Palestinian.'"[123] The decision to kiss (and survive) or curse (and be eliminated by) the Israeli hand of occupation, I would argue, is at the crux of Palestinian resistance, of how to fight for Palestine as Palestinians (to recall Faisal's question from earlier). The answer to Khlayleh's question, however much it is influenced by external forces and representations, is explored in all its contradictions and consequences in *The Siege*, which not only reframes the conversation on Palestinian resistance but also compels its audience—its witnesses, perhaps—to question the very terms and conditions (many of which have been examined throughout this chapter) which predetermine how we see and, indeed, respond to Palestinians' imbalanced relationship, to put it mildly, against a sprawling, expanding Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, body, story, humanity. "We need to understand who are these fighters, who are these people? Why did they pick up a gun? Who are they fighting? Why are

[122] In Slyomovics, 20.
[123] Ibid., 22.

they fighting?" Nabil says of the actual men of the siege, though I get the impression he is speaking about Palestinian resistance more generally as well. "Because every one of them had a story and still has a story about why he joined the resistance. That doesn't mean we presented all the fighters in amazing romantic way. There was a lot of criticism as well, from the perspective of the Palestinian fighter, in order for us to evaluate and look deeply at these people. So we wanted to show also their humanity, because a lot of people still don't understand who we are and what we are fighting for. As *Palestinians*."

The story which opens this chapter, translated with the help of Habeeb (a former stage manager with the Freedom Theatre), was shared with me by Bilal, a close friend of the late Juliano and current chairperson of the Freedom Theatre's Board of Directors. Not only does he raise the issue of double standards when it comes to the question of which violence (or rather, *whose* violence) counts as justifiable or unjustifiable, but also, his story illustrates precisely the problem on which my study centers and to which I, along with the Palestinians at the heart of my research, attempt to respond, albeit within the specific context of theatre, storytelling, and performance. Of particular significance is his last point, and it's important that I clarify from the outset his seemingly unambiguous dismissal of human rights. That is, it is not universal human rights itself which Bilal is doubting and ultimately shrugging off. Rather, and as indicated by his specific use of "your," it is a particular conception of human rights, practiced in particular settings, assigned to particular groups of people and protected by other particular groups of people from oftentimes more privileged places and positionalities—namely, the human rights *industry*. His distinction between human rights and *your* human rights reflects the sentiments of many Palestinians like Bilal who, through his regular interactions with international NGOs via his work with the Freedom Theatre, which receives 65-80% of its funding from donor

agencies[124]—not to mention his lived experience as a Palestinian from Jenin Refugee Camp, itself funded by UNRWA—are most certainly familiar with and directly affected by the burgeoning industrial complex of human rights in Palestine. His association of visas (*your* visas) with human rights, at the same time that many of the actors and theatre staff with whom he works were anxiously awaiting visa application approvals (and rejections) in preparation for the New York run of *The Siege,* exposes another dimension of the problem of current conceptions and applications of human rights. The word "application" is fairly useful here: Like visas, human rights for Palestinians are selective, conditional, unpredictable, and never guaranteed.

Fig. 12. Gorillas and guerillas: A pun on Palestinian resistance. Framed poster depicting slain Freedom Theatre co-founder Juliano Mer-Khamis, hung in the home of Nabil Al-Raee, Jenin, 2017.
(Photo: Soraya Abuelhiga)

[124] According to the Freedom Theatre's Organizational Overview and Annual Report 2016, print version 2017, p. 4.

Though he does not use the term animal rights himself, Bilal's perception of animal life mattering more than Palestinian or Arab human life, much less rights, corresponds with Klein's argument about the dehumanizing logic of environmental ("green") colonialism. Quoting Omar Barghouti, Klein notes that in 2002, during the Second Intifada,

> Israel's so-called "separation barrier" was going up, seizing huge swathes of the West Bank, cutting Palestinian workers off from their jobs, farmers from their fields, patients from hospitals—and brutally dividing families. There was no shortage of reasons to oppose the wall on human rights grounds. Yet at the time, some of the loudest dissenting voices among Israeli Jews were not focused on any of that. Yehudit Naot, Israel's then environment minister, was more worried about a report informing her that "The separation fence … is harmful to the landscape, the flora and fauna, the ecological corridors and the drainage of the creeks." "I certainly don't want to stop or delay the building of the fence," she said, but "I am disturbed by the environmental damage involved." As the Palestinian activist Omar Barghouti later observed, Naot's "ministry and the National Parks Protection Authority mounted diligent rescue efforts to save an affected reserve of irises by moving it to an alternative reserve. They've also created tiny passages [through the wall] for animals."
>
> Perhaps this puts the cynicism about the green movement in context. People do tend to get cynical when their lives are treated as less important than flowers and reptiles.[125]

It is important to note how Klein's last point about cynicism, by which the green movement becomes reconsidered as a detached practice of oppositional consciousness driven, however insidiously, by imperial impulses, lends itself to a critical reconsideration of human rights: "People do tend to get cynical when their lives are treated as less important than flowers and reptiles."

Palestinians' distrust of dominant human rights as often expressed in the language, policy, and practice of "peace" and "peace talks" is concomitant with a distrust of Western (especially corporate American) media. The media's discursive subjugation (itself made real through policy and military enforcement) of Palestinians through limited representations and skewed narrativizations of Palestinian violence reinforce the common colonialist trope of

[125] Klein, n.p.

describing Palestinians—most especially Palestinian armed resistors—as less than human, as animals and, at times, as even less than animals. Indeed, Palestinian children have been described as "little snakes" by Israeli Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked; Deputy Defense Minister Rabbi Eli Ben-Dahan famously asserted that Palestinians were "human animals"; former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir called Palestinians "grasshoppers." Another former Israeli prime minister, Menachem Begin (who was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978 for his part in the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty[126]), referred to Palestinians as "two-legged beasts." David Ben-Gurion, the Israeli state's first prime minister (for whom Israel's international airport was renamed in 1973), compared Palestinians to "cattle at best." Even before the establishment of the state of Israel, Sir Winston Churchill, speaking at the Peel Commission in 1937, compared Palestinians (along with other indigenous peoples) to a "dog in the manger" that does not have "the final right to the manger, even though he may have lain there for a very long time."[127]

The use of such rhetoric only increased during the armed uprisings of the Second Intifada, captured in some of the lyrics to "*Meen Erhabe?* [Who's the Terrorist?]," also discussed in the previous chapter, by DAM, the Palestinian hip-hop trio based in Lydd (now known as the Israeli city Lod), southeast of Tel Aviv. Written in 2001 in response to the stoning of mosques by Israeli civilians chanting, "Death to the terrorists!" following a Palestinian suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, DAM issued this lyrical diatribe against the Israeli occupation:

> "And you the terrorist call me a terrorist?
> […]
> You oppress, you kill, we bury
> We'll remain patient
> We'll suppress our pain
> Most importantly you feel secure

[126] See note 6.
[127] The Palestine Royal Commission, also called the Peel Commission after its head, the Earl William Peel, was a British investigative commission charged with addressing the Arab general strike and increasing Palestinian uprisings against British Mandatory Palestine beginning in 1936. The Palestinian uprisings of 1936-1939 would become collectively known as the Great Arab Revolt in Palestine.

Just relax, and leave us all the pain
You see, our blood is like that of dogs
Not even! When dogs die they receive sympathy
So our blood is not as valuable as a dog's?"[128]

The reference to Palestinians being seen and treated as less than dogs is far from metaphorical. At the height of the Second Intifada, the Israeli army increased its use of their canine unit, the Oketz, now ubiquitous in Israeli military operations throughout the occupied territories: "Today almost every arrest operation is led by an Oketz handler and his four-legged companion," bragged an article in the *Jerusalem Post* entitled, "The IDF's Best Friend."[129] In fact, in early July 2017, just weeks prior to my arrival in Palestine on a second research trip, it was reported that Israel's Public Security Ministry had opened a retirement home for security dogs who, due to old age or injury and illness, were no longer able to perform their duties. Even more revealing is that the inaugural boarding house, intended for the most dangerous and aggressive of the retired dogs, was established in Damon Prison—the infamous northern Israeli prison located in Haifa and originally opened in 1953 as a Palestinian detainment camp, before being shut down and reopened during the Second Intifada. What has since been described by Palestinian (women) prisoners as "being inside a grave" where they were "humiliated greatly" and faced "degradation, suppression and harassment,"[130] Damon Prison would now be providing "training and health services" to the "'dogs that many people in the State of Israel owe their lives to'" in order to "'help them to respectfully finish their lives.'"[131] Hardly metaphorical, to be sure, DAM's lyrics

[128] A music video with English subtitles, created by Palestinian American filmmaker Jackie Salloum, can be found on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PhNHBibMKQ>. The video is a series of images depicting various acts of Israeli violence and injustices committed against Palestinians.
[129] Yaakov Katz, "The IDF's Best Friend," *Jerusalem Post* 20 December 2007 <https://www.jpost.com/Magazine/Features/The-IDFs-best-friend>
[130] See Zena Tahhan, "Israeli Prison 'Like Being Inside a Grave'," *Al Jazeera* 14 August 2016 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/israeli-prison-grave-160812185323768.html>
[131] Eliyahu Kamisher, "Life After Work: Israel Opens Retirement Home for Security Dogs," *Jerusalem Post* 10 July 2017 <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Life-after-work-Retirement-home-opens-for-security-dogs-499294>. The quotation contained therein is from Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan's speech at the canine retirement home's inauguration on 4 July 2017.

are referential, grounded in unsettling realities and painful realizations of Palestinian human worth within the scheme of Israeli occupation.

"'And here you are calling us terrorists,'" raps DAM member Tamer Nafar. As English journalist and longtime Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk laments, within the first month of the Second Intifada,

> a hundred Palestinians, including twenty-seven children, were killed by Israeli soldiers and border police. But the most alarming statistic is the contrast between the losses of the two sides. By 2002, 1,450 Palestinians will have been killed in the al-Aqsa [Second] Intifada. Israel will have lost 525 lives, just over a third of the Palestinian death toll. And the Palestinians are the aggressors.[132]

Ashrawi also argues about the relationship between terrorism and the news, particularly in regards to the dehumanizing representation of the iconic Palestinian stone-throwing boys:

> "When newspapers ask if Palestinians deliberately sacrifice their children, it's an incredibly racist thing to do. They are dehumanizing the Palestinians. The press and the Israelis have rid us of the most elemental human feelings in a very cynical, racist discourse that blames the victims. Of course we love our children. *Even animals care about their children.* […] We are not fond of mass suicide, but we want the right to resist occupation and injustice. *Then the moment we say 'resist,' the Israelis pull out the word 'terrorist'—so a child with a stone becomes the 'legitimate' target for Israeli sniper fire and a high-velocity bullet.*"[133]

Relatedly, it was Kanafani who, according to Barbara Harlow, had warned Palestinians not to "underestimate the substantial resources and rhetorical power of the bourgeois media abroad and their control of the means of communication to manipulate any messages or transmissions that they might still pretend to mediate."[134] After all, the news "as opposed to art or film or novels or cookbooks" is the "predominant mode of representing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the United States and indeed of representing the Palestinians as a people."[135]

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[132] Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London: Fourth Estate, 2005), 520.
[133] Ashrawi, qtd. in Fisk, 519-20. Emphases mine.
[134] Harlow, 72.
[135] Bishara, 65.

The question of Palestinian lives and human worth amid international inaction and indifference was more recently brought up in the context of the 2018 IDF assault on thousands of unarmed Palestinian civilians who took part in the Gaza border protests, referred to by Palestinians as the Great Return March or the March of Return.[136] For example, this headline from the politically independent *Times of Israel*, about Palestinian preparations for the April 6th "Day of the Tire" or "Tire Friday" demonstrations: "Israel Warns of Dire Pollution as Gazans Amass Tires to Torch at Protest."[137] A week after the Israeli army shot thousands of unarmed Palestinian protestors with impunity (and, it should also be noted, without any international intervention), Palestinians gathered thousands of tires to burn in a desperate effort to create makeshift smokescreens with which to protect themselves against Israeli snipers. But in a letter to the director-general of the World Health Organization, IDF Major General and Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories Yoav Mordechai instead expressed his grave concern for "unprecedented air pollution" and for the harmful potential of environmental disaster.[138] This calls into question the imperial language of necessity and security and functioning to obscure *imbalances* of power and human subjectivity amid ongoing campaigns of Palestinian dehumanization, disenfranchisement, and forced disappearance practiced by Israel almost daily and supported, defended, or excused by the U.S. and other countries. As Haifa-based, Palestinian freelance journalist and activist Rami Younis summed up in a Facebook post about the pollution generated by the burning tires: "When people are under unbearable siege, the ozone layer can go fuck itself."

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[136] See Mehdi Hasan, "Israel Kills Palestinians and Western Liberals Shrug. Their Humanitarianism is a Sham," *The Intercept* 2 April 2018 <https://theintercept.com/2018/04/02/israel-killing-palestine-civilian-liberal-humanitarian/>
[137] Jacob Magid, "Israel Warns of Dire Pollution as Gazans Amass Tires to Torch at Protest," *The Times of Israel* 5 April 2018 <https://www.timesofisrael.com/cogat-warns-of-unprecedented-pollution-as-gazans-amass-tires-to-torch-at-protest/>
[138] From Maj. Gen. Mordechai's letter to WHO, qtd. in Ibid.

(Un)Balancing Acts: Terms of Conflict / Conflicting Terms

When the Portuguese writer and director of *Return to Palestine* Micaela Miranda arrived in the West Bank for the first time, she remembers how she "quickly realized that I have been fed propaganda since my childhood regarding the occupation. The geography of the West Bank is startling—with settlements on top of the hills threatening over Palestinian villages, the 'apartheid wall' and innumerable checkpoints that control all Palestinian movement and allow for 'settler only roads'."[139] Further illustrating this disjunction is Raja Shehadeh, who had written to his imagined Jewish neighbor a response to Israeli journalist and author Yossi Klein Halevi's 2018 semi-autobiographical, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor*. Assuming the role of the imagined Palestinian audience, Shehadeh counters Halevi's "balanced" histories by pointing out their inherent antagonization of the Palestinians and their implied subscription to Israeli historical propaganda:

> Though you do at least acknowledge that there is a Palestinian "counterstory," one of "invasion, occupation and expulsion," a history of "dislocation" and "humiliating defeats," the sentiment you most express, again and again in your letters, is how deeply we, the Palestinians, misunderstand *you.* It is our ignorance of your history and religion and attachment to the land that you seek to correct here. […] It also doesn't help that while claiming a new understanding of and sensitivity to our plight, you rehearse old and discredited narratives, like the suggestion that the land of Palestine was empty before Zionists arrived or the notion that it was Israel that has constantly offered peace, which the Palestinians have persisted in rejecting.[140]

Shehadeh's critical review of Halevi's work is more largely concerned with the limits, at times the impossibility, of balanced dialogue, neutral diplomacy, and so-called "peace talks" amid the imbalances of power and narrative continuously stifling the Palestinian of the other side. And while he agrees with Halevi that only justice and fairness can bring about peace, Shehadeh ultimately contends that "the problem with your letters is that they don't read as if they are

[139] Miranda, n.p.
[140] Shehadeh, "Letter," n.p. Quotations contained therein are from Yossi Klein Halevi, *Letters to My Palestinian Neighbor* (New York: HarperCollins, 2018).

seeking an answer, hoping for that Palestinian neighbor—me—to respond, but instead seem like lectures, half a conversation with a partner who is expected to stay quiet and listen."[141]

"Why not just talk?" Australian news reporter Richard Carleton asks Ghassan Kanafani about the refusal of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)[142] to engage in so-called "peace talks" with Israeli leaders. "You don't mean exactly 'peace talks,' you mean capitulation, surrender. […] That's a kind of conversation between the sword and the neck, you mean," replies Kanafani. Carleton misses the metaphor, "Well, if there were no swords and no guns in the room, you could still talk." "No," Kanafani disagrees, "I have never seen any talk between a colonialist case and a national liberation movement." Carleton: "But despite this, why not *talk*?" A brief pause from Kanafani: "Talk about what?" Carleton: "Talk about the possibility of not fighting." Kanafani: "Not fighting for what? […] *For what?* Or, talk about 'stop fighting,' why?" Carleton: "Talk to stop fighting to stop the death and the misery and the destruction and the pain…" "The misery and the destruction and the pain and the death of *whom*?" asks Kanafani. "Of Palestinians, of Israelis, of Arabs…" replies Carleton. Kanafani continues with his point: "… Of the Palestinian people who are uprooted, thrown in the camps, living in starvation, killed for 20 years and forbidden to use even the name Palestinians?" "Better that way than dead, though," Carleton concludes, without much pause or thought. "Maybe to you," says Kanafani,

[141] Ibid.

[142] Emerging out of pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism of the 1940s and 50s, the PFLP is a secular, socialist revolutionary organization founded by Palestinian Christian communist political thinker George Habash in 1967, immediately following Israel's second devastation of Palestine during the Six-Day War (referred to by Palestinians as the *Naksa*, "the setback"). The PFLP does not recognize Israel as a legitimate state nor does it support the arguably one-sided "two-state solution," and currently does not back either Fatah in the West Bank or Hamas in Gaza. Because of its hardline stance on Israel, the PFLP has been designated a "terrorist organization" by the U.S. and the EU.

"but to *us*, it's not. To *us*, to liberate our country, to have dignity, to have respect, to have our mere human rights is something as essential as life itself."[143]

Fig. 13. Ahmed Tobasi with Ghassan Kanafani in Nablus. (Source: Facebook/Ahmed Tobasi Tobasi)

"If we look at the political structure in the world nowadays, I don't think the world is really fair to Palestine," *The Siege* director, Nabil Al-Raee, exclaimed about mainstream and dominant news coverage of Palestine, which he thought was "serving an agenda." Problematizing the oft-used term "conflict" to describe (if not also minimize) Israeli occupation and oppression of Palestinians, Nabil explains,

> "This story existed for 69 years. 69 years under occupation, and no one, *no one* I think, wants to address the story the way it's supposed to be addressed. […] And I think people are looking at the Palestinian-Israeli story as a conflict, and it's supposed to be addressed as an occupation, colonization. It's a *big* difference. If you are colonized or occupied, then that means that there is one side actually controlling everything, taking the rights of other people who already existed in this land and now they presume or they pretend that it is their land. And this is where the problem started."

[143] From Richard Carleton's interview with Ghassan Kanafani, 1970, YouTube, 23 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=oHgZdCJOUAk>

Listening to Nabil in Jenin in 2017, first in person during the actual interview and again later when I play back the audio recording, I cannot help but hear Kanafani in Beirut in 1970, whose own responses resembled that of Nabil. In a clip from an incredible, rare television interview from which the above exchange was excerpted, Carleton says, "It does seem that the war, the civil war, has been quite fruitless…". Kanafani candidly interjects, "It's not a civil war. It's a people defending themselves against a fascist government which you are defending [...]. It's *not* a civil war." Carleton attempts to correct himself, or to perhaps appease Kanafani, by adding, "… or a conflict," only to be interrupted by Kanafani again, "It's not a conflict. It's a liberation movement fighting for justice." In what then seems to be an attempt to move the interview forward, Carleton concedes, rather dismissively, "Well, whatever it might be best called…" before a now visibly frustrated Kanafani rebukes him, calling out Carleton's cynically prejudicial questions and declaring:

> "It's not 'whatever.' Because this is where the problem starts. Because this is what makes you ask all your questions. This is exactly where the problem starts. This is a people who is discriminated [against], is fighting for his rights. *This* is the story. If you will say it's a civil war, then your questions will be justified. If you will say it's a conflict, then of course it's a surprise to know what's happening."[144]

The moral debate surrounding which violence—or, rather, *whose* violence—constitutes terrorism continues to shape political sensibilities and policies in ways that are unfairly critical of Palestinians at the same time that Palestinian death continues and Palestinian voices are pushed still further to the peripheries. Terrorism and its representation, as I will argue in the next section, has complicated Palestinian humanity and human rights because rhetoric and images dominating discussions on terrorism, much like "conflict," "ecological catastrophe" or "civil war," is the result of the same epistemological processes and imbalanced narrations which continue to

[144] From Richard Carleton's interview with Ghassan Kanafani, 1970, YouTube, 23 October 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/ watch?v=rmmTdGl_ofU>

nuance Palestinian oppression and invalidate Palestinian resistance, all while justifying as necessary or even moral the inhumanity of the Israeli occupation.

"I fucking hate nationalism. So much," Nabil tells me one cool night as we sit together and chain-smoke through his last pack of Marlboro Mediums on his balcony to escape the heat of the day still trapped indoors. "Borders and passports and nationalities—they've killed a great part of our humanity. I'm not fighting for Palestine because of nationalism. I'm fighting for Palestine because I believe it's a fair cause." The contradictions inherent in Palestinian nationalism and statehood reminded me of Said's troubling monologue, both haunting in its despondency and futile determination, which reads more as surrender than a declaration:

> "My wife is asking if our cowardice gives you the right to be like this. As you see, she freely admits that we are cowards, and here you are right. But this does not absolve you of anything, and two wrongs don't make a right. […] But when you no longer respect the weakness of others and their mistakes, who is there to protect your own rights? These worn-out clichés have been torn to shreds, all these pious, swindling, calculating equivocations… Sometimes you say that our mistakes absolve you of yours, and then other times you say that one oppression does not justify another oppression. The first logic you use to exonerate your own existence here and the second logic you use in order to avoid the punishment which follows from the first. It occurs to me that you are getting as much enjoyment as possible out of this strange game. You're trying once again to turn our weakness into a great fine hunting stallion for you to ride… No, I'm not talking to you to insist on your being an Arab. Now I more than anyone know that man is the issue. There is no flesh and blood which gets passed on from generation to generation the way the merchant and his customer exchange cans of dried meat. But I am talking to you and insisting that, when all is said and done, you are a man. Jewish. Or whatever you like. But there are things you have to understand. It's necessary… And I know that one day you will understand these things. You'll understand that the greatest crime any man, whoever he is, can commit is to think, even for a moment, that the weakness of others and their mistakes give him the right to exist at their expense and that this absolves him of all his own mistakes and crimes. […] Do you think we will go on making mistakes? What if one day we stop making mistakes, what will you do then? […] This is the nation. Do you know what the nation is, Safiya? It's so that all of this won't happen."[145]

Earlier in our conversation, Nabil had recounted to me his most recent experience abroad, leading an informative workshop on refugeeism with teenagers at a school in Portugal. Passing

[145] Kanafani, *Return to Haifa*, 136-7.

for Portuguese by virtue of his olive skin and dark features similar to those of the Iberians, Nabil had introduced himself as Antonio, and he began by posing the question, "Have you met a refugee?" When his question was met with a unanimous "no" from the group of Portuguese teenagers, Nabil followed up with the seminal question of the workshop: "What is a refugee?" According to Nabil, "Some of them said a refugee is broke and poor. Some of them said the refugee is a terrorist. Some said they are dirty. And I said, 'Do I look like a refugee?' They said, 'no!' Then I presented myself: 'My name is Nabil and I am a refugee from Palestine. And I live in a refugee camp in Palestine.' I think it was a little bit shocking for them, and they wanted to be polite so they said, 'Oh no, you don't look like a refugee.'" One of the boys in the workshop was particularly brash, so Nabil singled him out for an impromptu activity:

> "He was trying to show off, like 'oh yeah, yeah' and he was asking, 'Why are you giving us this workshop?' I said okay. Let's play. 'This is your area.' I gave him his own space—a table, chair, some water. And then I said, 'That is your area. And all this is my area. But even so, I'm coming to your area.' So I pushed him, and I took more space and I took the table and I pushed him against the wall and I took the chair and I forced him [to the wall] more and more and more and I took some of his stuff away from him and I pushed him [in the chair] and I came and also sat on his lap and I said, 'Can we share?' And he was really stressed. I said, 'We need to share,' and I kept pushing him and pushing him more and more and he became *very* angry. And when he was angry, I asked him, 'Okay, so you're angry, what do you want to do now?' He said, 'I want to beat you up!' I said, 'Okay, so do it!' And he came and he hit me really hard, he was so angry with me. And I started to scream, 'He's a terrorist! He's attacking me! A terrorist is attacking me!' And then he burst into tears, poor guy, he cried so hard. Then I had to take him and explain to him, 'I'm sorry to put you in this experience, but can you understand the anger of people when they live in injustice? So do you understand now what is a refugee?'"

It is worth noting that the encroachment of the refugee's space in Nabil's demonstration is couched in the language of "sharing," which functions here as a necessary imperative, a collective demand, "We need to share." To recall from earlier, this is not only consistent with "neutral" or "balanced" media representations of the "conflict" between Israelis and Palestinians, but such rhetoric and representation together create a predicament for the disempowered refugee, now forced into a position of antagonism, by which they are stripped of their agency and

compelled to comply with the demand at hand or be shown and seen as uncooperative, rebellious, reactionary, radical, problematic—ripe for disciplinary action or outright removal. "The point was this is what it feels like to be a refugee," Nabil concluded, "I want *you* to feel *that*. Either you become so angry that you break down and hit back. Or you are a victim." This was very much the dilemma facing the dozens of Palestinian armed fighters holed up, along with about 200 civilians, inside the Church of the Nativity—one of Christianity's holiest sites, believed to be the birthplace of Jesus—for 39 days (April 2-May 10, 2002), surrounded by Israeli forces in besieged Bethlehem at the height of the Second Intifada. For these fighters and the handful of Palestinian actors casted to resurrect them on the stage, what counts (and is *represented*) as "just cause" was much cause for (moral) debate.

Darwish once aptly described the paradox of Palestinian violence, in particular suicide bombing, for occupied Palestinians: "We have to understand—not justify—what gives rise to this tragedy. It's not because they're looking for beautiful virgins in heaven, as Orientalists portray it. Palestinian people are in love with life. If we give them hope—a political solution—they'll stop killing themselves.""[146] This paradox is at the center of Ahlam Shibli's 2011-2012 series *Death* which, like Batniji's series, was part of a larger exhibition that also examined the elusiveness of space for Palestinians. While the 2013 retrospective at Paris' Jeu de Paume, titled *Phantom Home*, included five other series produced by the artist within the last decade, *Death* was the only series conceived especially for this exhibition and was the largest on view.[147] A

[146] John Lundberg, "Why you should read Mahmoud Darwish" *HuffPost* 17 November 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-you-should-read-mahmo_n_120470

[147] See Ahlam Shibli, *Death*, in *Phantom Home.* For more on Palestinian suicide bombers, see Ghassan Hage, "Comes a Time We are All Enthusiasm: Understanding Palestinian Suicide Bombing in Times of Exighophobia," *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 65-89; Matthew Abraham, "The Fanonian Specter in Palestine: Suicide Bombing and the Final Colonial War *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112.1 (2013): 99-114. Nasser Abufarha's study focuses substantially on Jenin, *The Making of a Human Bomb: An Ethnography of Palestinian Resistance* (Durham: Duke UP, 2009).

series of "images about images" as one critic put it, *Death* depicts the depictions of Palestinians that Shibli refers to as "martyrs"—typically young men, both militant and civilian alike, killed by Israeli violence or whose deaths were necessitated by the Israeli occupation, as in the case of suicide bombers (a feature of the series which generated a firestorm of controversy in Paris surrounding the exhibition).[148] These highly ornate images imbue the public streets and private homes of several refugee camps in Nablus, where the photographs were taken. The portraits of the dead, embellished both within (with lyrical Arabic text and colorful graphics) and without (sometimes placed in decorative frames and hung high on walls accompanied by flowers, flags, or other symbols of Palestinian nationalism), are visually akin to the *Fayyum* funerary portraits of Ptolemaic Egypt. Yet these portraits, and the makeshift shrines in which they are displayed, represent an overtly political and increasingly cultural engagement with death and loss, which ultimately shape conceptions and uses of space itself, namely the home. As the museum's advertisement for the exhibition tells us, "The photographic work of Ahlam Shibli addresses the contradictory implications of the notion of home. The work deals with the loss of home and the fight against that loss, but also with restrictions and limitations that the idea of home imposes on the individuals."[149]

Palestinian human subjectivity and human rights have long been their own sets of double standards, supplementing and validating existing cultural and political representations of Palestinian armed resistors as "terrorists" who are in/subhuman in their alleged propensity for violence, particularly against Western powers. Additionally, it is worth recalling from both the Prologue and the end of the first chapter that the Israeli government routinely dehumanizes and

[148] Barry Schwabsky, n.p.
[149] See the ad for "Ahlam Shibli: *Phantom Home* from 28 May 2013 until 01 September 2013" at http://www.jeudepaume.org/index.php?page=article&idArt=1837

minimizes Palestinian civilian death in official death tolls by indiscriminately categorizing as "combatants" many Palestinian male victims.[150] In the 2014 Gaza assault, the Palestinian Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip and the investigatory UN Human Rights Committee both reported that 65-70% of the Palestinians killed by Israeli military operations were civilian.[151] The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, reported only 36% were civilian, while 44% were combatants—and another 20%, neither civilian nor combatant, were without status or identity, ambiguously grouped into the obscure tertiary category of "uncategorized males aged 16-50."[152] (The Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center estimated a higher percentage of combatants, closer to 50%.[153]) Not to mention that summary executions of alleged traitors and dissidents by Hamas, estimated by Amnesty International to account for 23 of the more than 2,000 Palestinians killed in total, became a central, popular focus—and, strategically and conveniently enough, the primary subject of public condemnation and calls for international prosecution of "Palestinian war crimes"—of both Israeli and international media, further redirecting criticism away from the larger, more blatant issue of the Israeli occupation itself.[154]

Indeed, the siege of the Church of the Nativity resonated with the experiences of Palestinians in Jenin and Jenin Camp, where some of the actors are from, who around the same

[150] See note 4.
[151] See the UN HRC Report of the Detailed Findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, 24 June 2015. Print.
[152] See the Israel MFA report, The 2014 Gaza Conflict: Factual and Legal Aspects, 14 June 2015. PDF.
[153] See the ITIC report, Examination of the Names of Palestinians Killed in Operation Protective Edge," 29 December 2014. PDF.
[154] See for example Sudarsan Raghavan, "As War with Israel Shatters Lives, More Gazans Question Hamas Decisions," *Washington Post* 12 August 2014; Asa Fitch and Joshua Mitnick, "Alleged Collaborators with Israel Killed in Gaza," *Wall Street Journal* 22 August 2014; "Hamas Suppressing Wartime Dissent, Shooting to Kill Palestinian Protestors," *World Tribune* 31 July 2014; Aaron J. Klein and Mitch Ginsburg, "None of Alleged Gaza Collaborators were Israeli Assets, Intel Official Says," *Times of Israel* 23 September 2014; Yonah Jeremy Bob, "NGO Asks ICC to Indict Hamas Leader Khaled Mashaal on War Crimes Charges," *Jerusalem Post* 3 September 2014; Isabel Kershner, "Amnesty International Sees Evidence of Palestinian War Crimes in '14 Gaza Conflict," *New York Times* 25 March 2015; Mark Weiss, "Hamas Condemned over Killing of 21 Suspected Informants," *Irish Times* 23 August 2014.

time were also under Israeli siege during the April 2002 invasion of Jenin Camp, referred to by Palestinians as the Battle of Jenin and earlier recounted by Faisal in the first chapter.[155] As the constant target of the Israeli army, Palestinian *sumud* [resistance] was ongoing and became synonymous with the Camp's identity, reputation, and legacy throughout and beyond the West Bank. With the Battle of Jenin, Jenin Camp was proudly referred to as "Jeningrad" (after Stalingrad) by Arafat. As Alaa Tartir writes, Palestinians in both Jenin Camp and Balata Camp (the largest refugee camp in the West Bank) in Nablus,

> have suffered continuous repression and persecution by the Israeli army over the years, including brutal raids and security crackdowns/sweeps. These camps were particularly targeted by Israel because of their active role in armed resistance and in nurturing the emergence of armed groups. The camps also played a major and pioneering role during the popular protests and civil disobedience of the first intifada (1987-93). During the second intifada (2000-2005), when Israel overran the West Bank, Jenin was the site of an eponymous battle in April 2002 during which, according to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) committed war crimes. In addition to human losses, major parts of the camp were completely destroyed and more than one-quarter of the population rendered homeless.
>
> […] Jenin camp was and remains a major source of pride to both its leaders and inhabitaints, and it has been central in shaping the refugee population's collective identity.[156]

Yet the image and representation of Jenin and Jenin Camp, constructed and disseminated by popular Israeli and American media outlets,[157] is less consistent with the realities described in Tartir's description above and more aligned with the stances of the Israeli army, with the *New York Post*, the *Arutz Sheva* (*Israel National News*), and the *Haaretz* all referring to Jenin as the

[155] The famous Palestinian stage and film actor Mohammad Bakri wrote and directed a documentary film in 2002 about the Battle of Jenin called *Jenin, Jenin*, drawing from firsthand accounts and witness testimonies from Palestinian survivors. Unsurprisingly, his film was widely criticized as "controversial" and "propagandistic" by Israeli media and the government, was temporarily banned in Israel, and even led to lawsuits from soldiers (who had been stationed in Jenin) against Bakri and movie theatres in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem for screening the film.
[156] Alaa Tartir, "Criminalizing Resistance: The Cases of Balata and Jenin Refugee Camps," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46.2 (2017): 9.
[157] For more on the relationship between imperialism and cinema/Hollywood film industry, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, "The Imperial Imaginary" in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 100-36. For more on the relationship between news media and U.S. (humanitarian) militarism as it relates to multiculturalism, contemporary imperial politics, and state violence, see Neda Atanasoski, *Humanitarian Violence: The U.S. Deployment of Diversity* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013), esp. Chapters 2-4.

same "hotbed of terrorism" as revealed by a simple Google search of "terrorism jenin" and "jenin terror." The same *Haaretz* article also cited Jenin as a "major source of suicide bombers." The hunting down of "terrorists," and especially the crackdown on Palestinian suicide operations during the Second Intifada, was precisely the reason (or, in cases of war crimes allegations, the defense) provided by the IDF and the Israeli government for their brutal military campaign, Operation Defensive Shield.[158] The partnership and collaboration, intentionally or unintentionally, publicly or covertly, between the military and the media is not lost on Palestinians, who regularly feel that their stories, experiences, and voices are being usurped and manipulated, neither heard nor captured properly in news media on either end of the political spectrum. In my interview with Nabil, after discussing with me how Palestinian testimonies are a "threat to the narrative that the Israelis are trying to present all the time about the Palestinians—who they [Palestinians] are and what they're fighting for," he explains how he came to learn of the Israeli army's involvement in a BBC news documentary about the siege of the Church of the Nativity:

> "During the time of the siege, the only two TV channels that were allowed to be there was Fox News and the BBC. I think Fox News did the [live] reportage, like, covering what was happening. I don't think they did a documentary about it. But the BBC did a documentary, and the strange thing is that you can't find it anymore. It disappeared. If you look you can't find it anywhere. We tried to find it and it was gone, it's not there anymore. The story appeared in a certain time, served one side, and then it went away. It was telling the story from the perspective of the Israeli army—how good they were saving the Church of the Nativity and saving the 'hostages' that the 'terrorists' were taking inside the Church, how the army dealt with the situation was, like, in a very good way, very polite, and so on. […] Al Jazeera did a film [about the siege], and it's still there. You can look for it, you can watch it, I'm not sure if it's translated or not, but they made a film. And during their investigation they were looking for films [about the siege] that were produced by other news agencies, and they saw the BBC did one so they went and contacted the BBC and the BBC said, 'No, we don't have the rights. It belongs to this other company.' So they searched for the other company and then the last thing they find was that they [Israeli army] were giving fake names for a company that doesn't exist.

[158] See Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Jenin's Terrorist Infrastructure," 4 April 2002 <https://web.archive.org/web/20090218182029/http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2002/4/Jenin-s%20Terrorist%20Infrastructure%20-%204-Apr-2002>

> And that [raises] a very important question. That actually *the army* made this film, and they understood the importance of telling *this* story to the world from their own perspective, to say 'we came to protect the civilians, monks, nuns, and *especially*, Christians.'"

The significance of Christianity in media representations of Palestinian armed resistors will be examined in a moment. Here, it is important to note the role that media plays not just in covering a story as it happens, but in *reconstructing* the event itself, thereby structuring the memory of that event as well. Though it is now somewhat unclear to me from his response whether the Israeli army had confiscated or participated in the making of the BBC documentary itself, the more cynical functions of the media in covering the siege nonetheless exemplifies the sensibilities of, and limitations imposed by, Western news' narrativization and mediation of Palestinian historical and contemporary realities. To turn to Nabil again,

> "The media is playing an important role—not necessarily a positive role—towards big cases like Palestine, for example. When it comes to Palestine, I think the joke is that 'everything becomes complicated.' They told the story from their own perspective and also the perspective of Israel and the Israeli army. This is what they wanted to tell the world: 'We went there because there were terrorists taking hostages in the church.' And so you ask yourself a question: Bethlehem is a *Palestinian* city. This is not happening in Tel Aviv or anywhere else, so why the army came into the West Bank? Because there was a huge invasion in *all* of West bank and Gaza, and Bethlehem is one of these cities. And these fighters were fighting back the occupation that comes to their cities."

Nabil's frustrations with the media's one-sidedness and neglect of Palestinian perspectives and experiences informed his research methods in the writing of the play. Nabil and his British co-director, Zoe Lafferty, teamed up with journalist Ismael Jabarine and spent a year conducting extensive interviews with several of the fighters now in exile in Gaza and across Europe. Each of the six fighters in the play is unnamed, and each is a different composite of all of the actual fighters interviewed.

Fig. 14. "I am a Threat": Ahmed Tobasi in London in May 2017, where he was working on his autobiographical one-man play, *And Here I Am*. (Source: Facebook/Ahmed Tobasi Tobasi)

The relationship between Palestinians and the media also informed the very structure and documentary genre of the play. In fact, the media is "built into" the world of the play through set design. Archival news media footage of the siege, mostly from Al Jazeera, bookend and punctate the play, showing us (the audience seated in the theatre) the chaos just outside of the Church (the stage) as we see news footage of Israeli army soldiers surrounding the Church and hear loud gunfire in the theatre. In this way, the media functions almost as an external narrator, juxtaposed to the play's internal narrator, the endearingly comedic Palestinian tour guide named Isa, Arabic for Jesus (played by Ahmed Tobasi in the original 2015 production and Alaa Abu Gharbieh in the 2017 production), who communicates directly to the audience as if giving us a tour of the inside of the Church of the Nativity. Part of his tour, we learn, involves learning about the story of the siege "from the people who built Bethlehem!" Isa (Abu Gharbieh) enthusiastically declares in the opening scene of the U.S. tour version of the play that I saw at NYU in October

2017.[159] In the Directors' Notes contained in the playbill, Nabil and Lafferty assert that, "With *The Siege* we aim to tell the story behind the western propaganda, upending the dominant narrative of the time: 'the terrorists have entered a holy place and have taken the priest and nuns hostage.' It is not a story of victimization but one of resistance in a situation of complete power imbalance." The play, then—and theatre more generally—is a living performance, a live response, to a history of misrepresentation of Palestinians that, in the guise and under the premise of balance and objectivity as well as humanitarianism and human rights, has strategically obscured the injustices of the Israeli occupation. That, coupled with the rhetorical and actual ongoing dehumanization of Palestinians as discussed earlier, allows *The Siege* to not only criticize the media and critique its enduring representations of Palestinians as "terrorists," but to also humanize—by personalizing, rather than heroizing—the armed Palestinian fighters caught up in determination and desperation, revolutionary ambition and moral ambivalence, as they evaluate their decisions while we witness their consequences onstage. The fighters of *The Siege* are far from the glorified, murderous terrorists of Israeli political rhetoric and Western cultural imaginary, informed by and informing international media coverage of Palestinian resistance against Israel. As one of the fighters says in *The Siege* (and as Kanafani was trying to make Carleton understand earlier), "You have to look at how it all began to understand how we ended up here."

For one, as is revealed in the course of the play, the reason that the fighters had sought refuge in the Church of the Nativity was not because they were intent on taking (Christian) hostages, but rather because they had (mistakenly) assumed that the Israeli army respected Christian sites of worship enough to deter them from violently pursuing the fighters or otherwise

[159] While the 2017 U.S. tour production was not recorded, a video-recording of the 2015 UK tour production was provided to me by the Freedom Theatre.

running the risk of desecrating one of Christianity's most sacred sites. In one of the opening scenes, after the fighters lock themselves in the Church for safety, the actors line up under the spotlights, in front of the audience, each recounting their experiences inside of the Church. These monologue scenes that punctuate the play are important because they provide more explicit insights into the motivations of the fighters—a perspective largely absent from media coverage of both the siege and of the Israeli occupation. These first few scenes alone push against dominant narratives and (racist, Islamophobic) assumptions about Palestinian resistance in two major ways: First, that the "militants" "stormed" into the church with a disregard for civilian life and the sanctity of Christianity's holiest site, which supports the Israeli and Western narrative of Arab Muslim hostility towards Arab Christians that is often used as a way to legitimize the Israeli occupation and oppression of Palestinians, who are largely Muslim. Second, that the "problem" began when the "militants" "stormed" the church when, in fact, the real problem—the Israeli occupation of Palestine—has been ongoing for decades before the siege, thereby necessitating these uprisings in the first place. Similar to what DAM had earlier rapped about in "*Meen Erhabe*?" the play points to the irony that it is the Israeli occupation, and not Muslim "bloodlust" (in general) or Palestinian anti-Semitism or hostility towards Christians (in particular), which creates these fighters, who are then singled out and referred to (and pursued and punished by the IDF) as "terrorists." From the outset, *The Siege* shatters any illusion of neutrality, and instead actively refuses to comply with the standards and expectations of a "balanced" narrative—in other words, of engaging "all sides" and "both perspectives" to provide an "even" account of an uneven occupation. As Palestinian theatre historian Samer Al-Saber noted in a published 2014 conversation with Australian dramaturg Yana Taylor: "The attempt at journalistic balance, so-called balance, has manifested throughout the history of the

Israeli/Palestine conflict. When an Israeli story is told, it's usually a story of victory and alignment with the 'western way of life.' If the Palestinian story were to be told it always was balanced with an Israeli one thus negating it. But never was the Palestinian story told on its own."[160] Similarly, as a Palestinian math teacher named Zayd told Bishara, who had shown him a June 2007 article from former Jerusalem bureau chief Scott Wilson's *Washington Post* series "Two Peoples, Divided," "'The American people relate more to Israelis than to Palestinians. The average American thinks of Israel as having a rightful presence, and that's it, no discussion. And that [Israel's separation] wall is there because of Palestinian aggression. […] They might think, this small group of Israelis, these respectable, clean people, sat down with those primitive, barbaric Palestinians in their own houses, and tried to help them.'"[161]

Indeed, as we learn from the Directors' Notes, such conscientious acts of objection (as opposed to objectivity) are not without risk, since anything that refuses, confronts, or unsubscribes from dominant, "balanced" narratives is deemed controversial, and their (Palestinian) dissidents are removed even further from humanity and humanness as they become accused of being "propaganda machines" invested in promoting terror, anti-Semitism, or undemocratic values. The UK production was met with death threats, protests, and media backlash, as well as postponements and cancellations from venues under financial and political pressure. In 2016, fearful of unwanted controversy and public outcry, New York's Public Theatre had cancelled a planned run of the play after intense pressure from the theatre's board of directors—a decade after the New York Theatre Workshop had cancelled another "pro-Palestinian" play, *My Name is Rachel Corrie,* based on the diary entries of the young American

[160] Samer Al-Saber and Yana Taylor, "Reflecting on Palestinian Theatre: A Resilient Theatre of Resistance," *Performance Paradigm* 10 (2014): 99.
[161] Qtd. in Bishara, 232.

activist from Evergreen State College who was crushed to death by an IDF bulldozer in 2003 while protesting Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes.[162] Against the backdrop of such political realities and harsh consequences, then, the presence of Christians in the play (and the media's focus on Christians in news coverage of the actual siege) functions visually and rhetorically to showcase the "truly innocent victims" of "the conflict" between Palestinian terrorism and the so-called democratic Israeli army in the world's only Jewish state. The focus on Christians also reinforces an affectionate point of contact and affiliation with the West, whose publics detach and separate Christians from Palestinians in order to better sympathize with the former (and justify Israeli military actions to "protect" the world's Christians) while criticizing the latter as the "primitive, barbaric" contemporary (Islamic) persecutor of Judeo-Christians as two allied, historically persecuted religious groups. In a conversation with Ghantus (himself a Palestinian Christian from the Galilee, living in Jerusalem) about the differences between the 2017 and 2015 versions of the play, Ghantus, fresh from rehearsal, was excitedly boasting about the recently approved addition of a song from Fairouz (the legendary Lebanese Christian singer) and two Byzantine chants in Arabic, which his character was set to sing[163]: "The change is because of me. *I* brought that to the character. *'The soil is calling me back'*," Ghantus sings from Fairouz, first in Arabic then in English. "As a Palestinian Christian, these songs connect me, connect *us*, to *this* land. When the tourists come to Bethlehem the guide will say 'oh this is Bethlehem, Israel.' The people don't know that Bethlehem is in the West Bank! It's in Palestine! All the tours say the same, 'It's Israel'" he mimics sarcastically. I nod in agreement, "And

[162] See Philip Weiss, "NY's Public Theatre cancels Palestinian production, *The Siege,* it agreed to stage in May," *Mondoweiss* 10 February 2016 <https://mondoweiss.net/2016/02/nys-public-theater-cancels-palestinian-production-the-siege-it-was-to-stage-for-may/>

[163] During the performance that I attended at NYU Skirball, Ghantus had been unable to perform the songs due to partial loss of voice from illness.

everyone forgets that Bethlehem is in Palestine. And that there's Christians in Palestine. And that Palestinians can be Christian, not always Muslim." Ghantus shakes his head, "No, they don't forget. They are *pretending* to forget. They are *acting* like they don't know. So they can say, 'oh the Christians are in Israel and Israel is protecting all the Christians from the terrorist Muslims!' *Who's acting now?"* he enunciates. "Now we have a joke among the players in *The Siege, "I am a Christian terrorist!"* he exclaims, laughing, his face glowing from heat and pride.

To relate this to the question—the dilemma—of Palestinian victimhood versus resistance, it is important to note the shift in how international audiences view and "read" Palestinian resistance during and in the wake of the Second Intifada, distinguished from the nonviolence and civil disobedience of the First Intifada through Palestinian uses of rifles and suicide operations. As Bishara points out,

> While youths throwing stones were a key positive image of Palestinians in Western news during the first Intifada, during the second Intifada and the War on Terror, images of youths throwing stones, even against soldiers in armed and armored jeeps, have generated less sympathy. These acts were not exactly regarded as militant or terrorist during the War on Terror, but they did not exactly qualify as "nonviolent" either. […] These young men could have told compelling stories of activism as refugees. Yet, they did not consider it prudent to narrate that story for an international audience they perceived to be important, that of the U.S. and European mainstream media. *If Christians were associated with peaceful protests and nonviolence, they knew that they, young male refugees [from the camps], were associated with chaos and violence.* these preconceptions were powerful both locally within Bethlehem and internationally.[164]

The potential for self-censorship as a result of Palestinians' awareness of their likelihood to be misread and misunderstood in American and European media representations in light of existing cultural frameworks and political imaginaries not favorable to Palestinian identity or nationalist cause also has much to do with the human rights industry's own frameworks for visualizing Palestinians. Because Palestinians can no longer "find a way to communicate effectively with outsiders except as victims of Israeli oppression, a stance connected to human rights arguments

[164] Bishara, 190. Emphasis mine.

that centered on the individual rather than one connected to collective political rights,"[165] the question of Palestinian resistance remains, for Western audiences, a "controversial" or "complicated" topic. This is particularly significant in the context of the Freedom Theatre, largely funded by NGOs and donor agencies whose own preferences, priorities, and agendas can conflict with, if not outright determine, which stories—*which* Palestinian voices and images—get brought to the stage. Speaking on this rather imbalanced relationship between primarily North American and European NGOs and theatre in occupied Palestine, between international funding and Palestinian theatre-making or storytelling—*and* the role both play in undergirding the larger issue of Western liberal humanitarianism and political preoccupations with so-called "peace in the Middle East" and "peace process"—Al-Saber argues,

> *There is constant effort to neutralize Palestine and Palestinians through activities of "peaceful resistance,"* but the reality is, it is not neutralizing them. On the contrary, culture and cultural production are, in fact, the counter-culture to a neoliberal economy, which is designed to create docile bodies. So culture is the resistant front to a heavily controlled time in the modern history of Palestine.[166]

Not only is Al-Saber's argument consistent with the "cultural militancy" of making theatre and telling stories in Palestine, discussed in the previous chapter, but it brings to mind something Mustafa Sheta brought up in our conversation at his office in the Freedom Theatre: "Stories from the people have to be interactive. We present issues that matter to the people and community. For example, we sometimes do collaborations with Danish theatre groups or American theatre groups, and they say 'we want to make work about the issue of women's empowerment.' This is good, but if this is not the issue for the Palestinian people here in Jenin Camp, then what?" If maintaining neutrality, then, could also be thought of, indeed practiced, as a way to *neutralize* Palestinians, then the stories comprising *The Siege* function to resist that neutralization—by

[165] Ibid.
[166] Al-Saber, 96, 101. Emphasis mine.

bringing in the fighters themselves, as Tobasi says in a 2015 interview for *Middle East Eye*: "That's what the Israelis do all the time in the media—they bring the children, the women, 'they kill us, we are the innocent people, ahhhhh! Palestinians!' Okay. We're gonna go with that picture, and we're gonna bring you the fighters themselves."[167]

"I think *The Siege* is one of *thousands* of stories that exist in Palestine. We have *thousands* of different stories. From the time of the occupation until today," Nabil tells me emphatically. "I think daily we face a different story. I think to present the siege as an example of one of these stories is important because we want to tell the people, okay, you heard *that* narrative and this story was told in *this* way, but *we* are the people who's still *living* this story." Thus, the act of demonstrating a *Palestinian* humanity which collectively trespasses and transgresses its misrepresentations in the discourses of Western media power and its disappearances at the hands of Israeli military power is, to the Palestinians struggling through both, its own form of a liberation "operation, from inside Palestine, not through the NGOs who play nicely," as Nabil put it. The appeal of representing, in dehumanizing ways, the armed Palestinian fighter as either a violent animal or a propaganda machine is that the fighter readily conjures up and plays into an image of Palestinians (and of armed anti-imperial resistors in general) already ingrained in public imaginaries and political semantics and preoccupations with terrorism. That is, the terrorist could easily be juxtaposed visually to "peace," with "peace" being misconceived as an absence of violence and a restoration of balance consistent with Western semiotic values that have contemporarily been translated, transcribed, transplanted through journalism and mass media. Fisk's argument about media treatment—in moral/izing terminology—of Palestinians is especially useful here:

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[167] Ahmed Tobasi, in Middle East Eye, "MEE Speaks to the Cast of *The Siege* Play," YouTube, 2 June 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZs5Atc9X6E&feature=youtu.be>

> When Palestinians massacre Israelis, we regard them as evil men. When Israelis slaughter Palestinians, America and other Western nations find it expedient to regard these crimes as tragedies, misunderstandings, or the work of individual madmen. Palestinians—in the generic, all-embracing sense of the word—are held to account for these terrible deeds. Israel is not. […] [W]hen Israel as a state was clearly involved in the taking of innocent Arab life […] moral guilt was also avoided. These were not "terrorist" actions; they were military operations against "terrorist targets."[168]

Theatre in Palestine is a call and response of Palestinians, on the stage and in the streets, in Israeli prisons and early graves, to confront the limits and limitations of the media head-on, to narrate without permission. Though I have not given adequate attention to the genre of documentary theatre, which is beyond the scope of my study and tangential to my interests in conducting this research—I think it is useful to turn to Al-Saher's comments in the post-performance talk at NYU: "'It's not a political event, it's a human event that we are witnessing. Documentary theatre is a way into an event that we otherwise would not have had access to, it humanizes the event. It's not verbatim theatre. We see and witness in body form in a way that media can't show. But theatre [in Palestine] is also a victim, under siege. When military fails, when government fails, theatre steps in to tell a story that cannot otherwise be told.'"

The fighters in *The Siege* pose the same questions, force the audience to confront the reality that to be a terrorist or a victim is not a Palestinian choice, but an Israeli ultimatum. In a situation where, as Said says, the oppressor "convinces the world and themselves" (through many channels, the media being one of them) that they are the ones being victimized by those that are being oppressed, what does that mean for Palestinian agency—and Israeli accountability? How does this frame the dilemmas Palestinians face, on an individual and collective level, about modes and meanings of resistance? And what complications does this pose as Palestinians not only fight to improve their humanity, but must also fight to *prove* their

[168] Fisk, 476.

humanity against the backdrop of a dehumanizing occupation and monstrous representations of their resistance? In the arithmetic of the occupation, Palestinians exist only in—and *as*—numbers. But as one of the fighters in *The Siege* (played by Hanani, in both versions) painfully contemplates to himself following the death of Taha's fighter, "The names on their list are being killed one by one. They just disappear. The names of friends. Of personalities. Of smiles."

POST-SCRIPT(S)

Sock and Buskin, or "Danza Kuduro" in Ramallah

"The world has visited many terrible things on the Palestinian people,
none more shameful than robbing them of their basic humanity."
—Anthony Bourdain (1956-2018)

"My point is not to die again. My point is to tell my story."
—Ahmed Tobasi (1984?-), Palestinian actor
from Jenin Refugee Camp,
in an interview with BBC Radio 4[169]

A close friend of mine from a village just outside of Jenin shared a very personal story with me about his family. It had been a particularly brutal winter during the First Intifada, I'm told, when my friend's sister was an infant only a few months old and had become ill with a very high fever. Around the same time, the Israelis had enforced a curfew and placed all Palestinians under house arrest, by which no Palestinian was permitted to leave their home for any reason for three consecutive days or they would run the risk of being shot and killed by the Israeli army that stood guard around-the-clock. For this reason, my friend's mother was unable to seek the proper medical attention her baby had urgently needed. By the time the baby had reached childhood, she had already had a number of health problems and developmental delays. She lost her hearing and the ability to speak. My friend tells me, quite proudly, about how his sister later became a rebellious and unruly teenager who shaved off all of her hair, sometimes identified herself as a man, smoked a lot, and refused to wear *hijab* like the other girls her age. "Abeer was her name.

[169] Ahmed Tobasi, interviewed by Errollyn Wallen, "Dangerous Places," *The Art of Now,* BBC Radio 4, London, UK, 15 March 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b09v6zv3 (accessed 15 March 2018).

Do you know what *Abeer* means? It means 'aroma.' Like, from the jasmine. Aroma. That's what her name means."

My friend remembered how Abeer would lock herself in her room for days on end, sleeping or painting, to avoid the criticisms, inquiries, and mockeries of other people for whom her disabilities (or, perhaps more so, her defiant personality) were an enigma. "Because she never have chance to talk or to hear, she was a crazy, incredible painter. Anything she sees, she would paint. She never studied it in the school or nothing. She just paints what she sees." One day, as the family was gathered to celebrate the birthday of another sister, his mother knocked on Abeer's door. There was no answer. While the rest of the family had assumed she was sleeping ("she loved to sleep all day," my friend exclaims about his sister with fondness), their mother suspected otherwise: "Something in her heart told her she lost her daughter." As she tried to break down the door, against the complaints and confused objections of the rest of family, she called out for one of the neighbor's sons to climb up the wall of the building from the outside and enter Abeer's room through the window. But before anyone could come help, his mother had broken through the door. Abeer had passed away in her sleep. "Her heart stopped," my friend tells me, "Never I will forget that day, because it was my other sister's birthday. But also because two months before she died, Abeer she wrote the date of her death on the bathroom wall. We find it two weeks after she passed. I think something already told her, something inside her. And because she can't talk, she never say it to anyone, and also because who would believe her? So she write it on the wall instead." Abeer died on the sixth of February. She was seventeen years-old.

"You know, now I think it was better for her. To get out of this life and this fucking system." But his mother thought otherwise. After Abeer's sudden death, she went into mourning,

and she was never able to escape nor recover from her grief. “She used to be the prettiest woman in all the village. Everybody used to say it. All the time,” my friend says of his mother. “But after Abeer died, she became different. Something changed in her mind.”

One evening, Abeer’s mother went out by herself. She poured kerosene all over her body. She lit a match.

. . .

“You have to feel bad for the Israelis. They’ve tried everything to get rid of us. But we just won’t die,” writes Amer Zahr, a Palestinian American lawyer and stand-up comedian, in a May 2019 blogpost, “Don’t Mess with Palestinians!”. While all of the Palestinians introduced in this study would undoubtedly agree with Amer, there are also those who are less concerned with the strength of Palestinian immortality in favor of the vulnerability of Palestinian humanity. Not to mention the troubling effects of “normal” on Palestinians lives and livelihood, as Palestinians knowingly and unknowingly continue to surrender to the pervasive normality of the Israeli occupation, as Berlin-based Palestinian artist Steve Sabella had observed: “I had the impression that a sense of surrender pervaded the lives of Palestinians. They seemed to perceive life under occupation as normal. Improving traffic at checkpoints, for example, appeared to be of greater urgency than ending the occupation itself.”[170]

But for Ghantus, this is beside the point. For him, Palestinian humanity by contrast is in some way synonymous with heroism, the latter being especially contingent upon remaking (and, indeed, updating) the image of the Palestinian fighter: “There’s so much fighting going on,” he tells me over coffee one evening after rehearsals. “All the world is going crazy for the fighters

[170] Steve Sabella, “Disturbia and Metamorphosis,” in *Keep Your Eye on the Wall: Palestinian Landscapes*, eds. Mitchell Albert and Olivia Snaije (London: Saqi, 2013), n.p.

right now. That's what people want. They are looking for a new kind of fighter. Someone who is more human than big, tough hero. I want a hero who is a fighter and a *sharmut* [derogatory term for a promiscuous male] who can dance salsa with a long beard and man-bun!" During the siege of the Church of the Nativity, *Time* magazine ran an "inside" news story accompanied by images from Carolyn Cole, "the only photographer to get inside" the magazine boasted at the time.[171] So it seemed strange to me, then as a bored fifteen year-old flipping through magazines in some waiting room and now as I write this, that none of these photos were on the cover. Instead, the cover featured Spider Man along with the clever headline: "It's shaping up to be a Blockbuster Movie Summer as Hollywood learns to play by… Spider-Man Rules!" Fifteen years after the start of the *Spider-Man* superhero franchise films and a year before *Black Panther* dominated box offices worldwide, it was Warner Brothers' *Wonder Woman*—brought to life on the big screen by Israeli actress and former IDF soldier Gal Gadot—that had been the fifth highest-grossing film of 2017, the seventeenth highest-grossing film franchise of all time, and was even speculated at the time to be the first superhero franchise film ever to be nominated for the Best Picture Oscar[172]. Meanwhile, Palestinians' struggle for human rights and human recognition was set against the backdrop of the crisis in Syria and the ensuing refugee crisis in Europe, the election of U.S. President Donald Trump and his Muslim ban, the alarming rise of xenophobic and Islamophobic far-right groups in the U.S. and Europe, the 40-day Palestinian prisoners' hunger strike in April-May 2017, continued media fixation on ISIS-committed atrocities in Western metropolises and elsewhere, and reignited violence in Jerusalem (sparking rumors and fears of a Third Intifada) centered once again on controversial Israeli security measures at Al-

[171] See "Close by the Manger" and "The Saga of the Siege" in *Time Magazine,* vol. 159, no. 20 (20 May 2002).
[172] This honor went instead to *Black Panther* in 2019.

Aqsa Mosque just two days before my arrival in mid-July 2017.[173] As Ashraf, a Palestinian activist in Haifa, puts it in a March 2018 Facebook post:

> Suppose [Palestinian] kids were comic book heroes, and the reason they are being arrested and brutalized is their superpower. Ahd [Ahed Tamimi, aged 17 at the time of her arrest in the Nabi Salih village northwest of Ramallah in December 2017] put in jail because her fists form energy fields, and Fauzi [al-Junaidi, 16 at the time of his arrest in Hebron also in December 2017] was blindfolded because his eyes see visions of the future and shoot lasers, and the girl in Gaza who's name I don't know was not holding stones, she was bending matter to her own will and was in fact holding the world itself. Suppose that was the case, would their story be better told then? Or do they too have to wait 200 years for their own Black Panther Hollywood production? To Ahd, Fauzi and the countless superheroes sitting in prisons and showing up in my dreams, your story is being written.

The criminalization of Palestinian identities and resistance, part and parcel of the larger dehumanization of Palestinians, is undergirded by cynical Western politics and humanitarianism, and the political function of "peace" itself, whereby Palestinians are placed and imagined in opposition to imperial conceptualizations of peace and its romanticized connotations of neutrality and moral purity so central to imperial human rights discourse. Indeed, when it comes to discussing and understanding violence—in particular, terrorism—Palestinians become subject to and subjugated by the double standards of representation and interpretation discussed throughout this study. And these double standards extend far beyond the image or narrative itself to the level of ideology, specifically that of human rights, by and against which Palestinian humanity continues to be minimized and denied. For example, on the cover of a September 1993 *Newsweek* Special Report about the First Intifada and the Oslo Accords is a grainy, sepia-toned photograph of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat wrapped in his signature *keffiyah,* lurking just

[173] See op-eds by Susan Abualhawa, "The wonder of imperial feminism, or how Wonder Woman turned from a hero to a war crimes supporter," *Al Jazeera* 14 June 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/06/imperial-feminism-woman-170613101125222.html; Hamid Dabashi, "Watching *Wonder Woman* in Gaza," *Al Jazeera* 10 June 2017, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/06/watching-woman-gaza-170610082618366.html. See also Tufayel Ahmed, "Ahed Tamimi, the Real Wonder Woman? Artist Behind Historic Che Guevara Poster Turns his Brush to Palestinian Teen Jailed by Israel," *Newsweek* 13 February 2018, https://www.newsweek.com/ahed-tamimi-wonder-woman-che-guevara-artist-805403

behind the issue's doubtful title, *The Face of Peace?* As I flipped through the partially torn and dog-eared pages of an old copy long ago pulled from a classroom pile of magazines salvaged by us art students for various projects, I remember being immediately drawn to the title of the blurb contained therein, "How the Ruled Would Become the Rulers." Oddly enough, the title is referencing the Palestinians, even as the accompanying photographs—of Israeli forces beating Palestinians, of Palestinians in bright blue denim slinging stones versus the photos of heavily armed Israeli soldiers in full uniform and gear—suggest otherwise. At the end of the blurb, Israeli author David Grossman has the final word, talking about the Palestinians: "'These people will find any means to be a victim—even in the best possible situation. Now they are 'victims' of peace.'" As the *Newsweek* writers ultimately conclude, "In the tumultuous Mideast, that could yet make peace itself the victim—again."[174]

It is not inconsequential, then, that the images and rhetoric of the Old Testament, particularly the story of Exodus, were central to the reimagination and "reclamation" of historic Palestine, over and against the contemporary reality of what would become another military occupation, but this one surpassing in sheer brutality that of the Ottomans and the British Mandate. Relatedly, the allusion to the Book of Genesis in codename "Operation Brother's Keeper," the 2014 predecessor to Operation Protective Edge and the Israeli military's collective punishment against Palestinians mostly in Gaza, was in response to the as yet unsolved murders of three Israeli teenagers. Brother's Keeper was initiated by the Israel Defense Forces and would result in the arrest of more than 300 Palestinians during its eleven-day search. Israeli state violence as symptom and method of Israeli settler colonialism is characterized, made functional, and legitimized through a visual narrative which aestheticizes military violence by representing it

[174] Christoper Dickey and Jeffrey Bartholet, "How the Ruled Become the Rulers," *Newsweek* 13 September 1993, 24.

as sexual (desirable) and as quotidian (normal). At the height of the campaign, so-called "sexy selfies" were posted as part of the "I <3 IDF" social media campaign, launched by a young man from Tel Aviv, Gavriel Beyo, and depicting scantily clad women with pro-IDF messages written on their cleavage, breasts, torsos, navels, thighs, and buttocks.[175] The Facebook page to which some of these images were posted, "Standing with IDF," received more than 15,000 likes on Facebook in just the first 2 days. Beyo, who "remember[ed] historic pictures showing soldiers looking at pinup girls before battle" and who happened to find himself "'blessed with a lot of great looking female friends,'" decided to start the Facebook page in order to "celebrate Israel's freedom and those who fight for it."[176] Thus, the body of the (civilian) woman in these pictures is literally and visually militarized by commemorating the men and women serving in the IDF, as its young organizer from Tel Aviv admits: "'I was trying to romanticize IDF and Israel. Everything related to Israel lately is labeled very grim … [these pictures] can serve as an ease.'"[177] In this regard, not only do the images militarize sex and sexualize the military, but it also romanticizes and "eases" the otherwise "grim" reality of state violence, a violence which disavows more than 2,100 Palestinian deaths (the vast majority of being civilians, according to the UN), and fixates instead on the nobility of the combat casualties which included the deaths 66 Israeli soldiers.

As with the smiling, carefree tourists aboard the cruise ship in Razan AlSalah's *Your father was born 100 years ago and so was the Nakba*, whose vacation went on uninconvenienced and uninterrupted by the systematic murders and displacement of Palestinians, the deaths of 800

[175] The Facebook page "Standing with IDF" was created on 23 July 2014.
[176] Tim Mak, "A New Facebook Page Dedicated to the IDF is being Flooded with Sexy Selfies," *The Daily Beast* 25 July 2014), http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/07/25/a-new-facebook-page-dedicated-to-the-idf-is-being-flooded-with-sexy-selfies.html
[177] Beyo, qtd. in Mak.

Palestinians in 18 days is a "feast [that] goes on," as Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano sorrowfully notes in his July 2014 article aptly titled "If I Were a Palestinian."[178] But it is the dominant contemporary narrative which prevails, exemplified and reinforced by images allowing the viewer to empathize with what it is like to be an Israeli—normal, freedom-loving, democratic citizens who value peace and justice so much that they (must) resort to violence to maintain it. Thus, to recognize the comedy and the tragedy of Palestinian daily life occupies in its own space in my engagement with Palestinian theatremakers alongside the art/ists produced by such an incredible diaspora. At the risk of sounding self-deprecating, it would be pretentious to claim and promote this study as a largely academic one. While the ethics and demands of humanities-based academia, more specifically in relation to ethnographic and sociological field research, are indeed necessary to maintain the integrity of intellectual work produced and disseminated, these are not without their conflicts and limitations.[179] I was not only a silent observer "in the field," but an active participant and, at times, an accomplice. This was not by choice; rather, I found myself frustrated and confined by the borders and boundaries of conventional, sometimes elitist, academic research, in which I had already felt like a forged or "unfit" intellectual. To conduct research in occupied Palestine meant that I already had enough borders and boundaries to mitigate. In whichever direction.

While this kind of methodology is not exclusive to myself or my research practices, it is significant to mention that I do not aspire to nor claim objectivity. If I learned anything from my studies, objectivity is nonexistent, and what it exists in is not to be trusted. Neither am I claiming

[178] Eduardo Galeano, "If I were a Palestinian…," 11 July 2014, ed. Walter Lippmann, http://www.walterlippmann.com/docs4113.html

[179] The scholarship on this issue is extensive, some of which I discussed in Ch. 1. See most notably Anaheed Al-Hardan, "Decolonizing Research on Palestinians: Towards Critical Epistemologies and Research Practices," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20.1 (16 December 2013): 61-71; Dwight Conquergood, "Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics," *Communication Monographs* 58 (June 1991): 179-94; Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *The Drama Review* 46.2 (2002): 145-56.

historical or academic accuracy, for these in many respects are also non-objective. Therefore, the research compiled is not limited to fieldwork and literary review; it is gathered from lived experiences and, dare I say it explicitly, feeling. It is comprised of memories both complete and incomplete, sloppy notes, diaries, pamphlets, posters, fragments of conversations had or overheard, songs, various messaging apps. From friends and colleagues in various parts of the world, from pseudo-families, individuals gone or still here or only in photographs, others' memories of those individuals, alternative and dominated histories, both the he saids/she saids and recorded interviews. Some in original form, some not. Almost all translated (and not by me). Not just as these existed or were presented to me, but also how I remembered and recalled them, how others remembered them, how they were seen and experienced, how I heard them and felt them. How others felt and still feel them. Either retrieved or recreated or both, with little attention to sequence or order, except where required and necessary.

I would like to end where I began, not so much with the problem of rights but with the question of justice, which is the cause and effect of any struggle for rights or that which is right. While teaching a Palestinian cinema course earlier this month, titled "'We are Thousands of Stories': The Palestinian Experience on Film," I asked my students to discuss the question: What is justice? One them responded that justice was like in the superhero movies, where humans are protected from invasion or destruction. After challenging the presumptions inherent in such popular representations conflating justice with either discipline (punishment) or humanitarianism (charity, being saved), my students asked me what justice means for me. I answered them in the best way I knew how, in the way my father taught me: I told them a story. When my father and mother took their U.S. citizenship test together years ago, only my mother had passed. Even worse than failing, my father was disqualified—when asked to write a complete sentence in

English stating where he was from, he wrote: “My name is Hosni. I come from Palestine.” The exam proctor told my father that Palestine was not a country, and to come back in a month to re-take the test. He would ultimately pass the next time, but not without amending his original statement: “My name is Hosni. I come from Israel.” Decades later, my father’s daughter would wind up teaching a whole class at a prestigious American university, precisely about a place and a people who he was told didn’t exist. *This,* I explained to my students, is justice.

“Shall we write a play about justice?” asks Mahmoud Darwish to an unnamed Israeli counterpart. “In exile, my father didn’t teach me despair or suicide, and he didn’t teach me to give up my Palestinian identity. He brought me up to believe I was born to be pursued. Yet, even so, he did teach me life.”[180] Perhaps this is why my most distinct but slowly fading memory is of a little salsa club in Ramallah, where more than two dozen Palestinians crowded onto the dancefloor in some Palestinian variation of every dance which never existed. Especially burned into my memory is the epic grand finale, Don Omar’s “Danza Kuduro,” which had everyone sardined into a slick Arabicized Cha Cha Slide. All while the only three people sitting down in the club besides me excitedly exclaimed, “If Israel drop the bombs on us right this minute, still we be dancing.”

[180] Darwish, *Journal,* 62.

EPILOGUE

On my last night in Jenin and two days before my departure from Palestine, one of the guys I had befriended from my favorite café spot named Hamoodi invited me for a late-night drive along with his cousin, Ma'an. Ma'an was an engineering student who had recently returned from his studies in Romania and was unsure of what to do next. Like other young Palestinians who return to the West Bank at the expiration of their foreign visas and who tasted daily life abroad free from the Israeli occupation, Ma'an was torn between staying in Palestine, where there were few opportunities for young engineers educated abroad, or to apply for a new visa to return to Europe. (Neither option has proven to be easy, and last I heard two years later, Ma'an was still in Jenin.)

Hamoodi was a different story. He had no desire to leave Jenin, "as long as my grandmother is still living and my sister is still small," he would say. "I can't leave my sister." Indeed, his youngest sister was still a child, under ten years-old if I remember correctly, and Hamoodi was already in his mid-late twenties. *Oh lord,* I lamented to myself, *he's never gonna get out of here.*

Blaring Lil Jon and one of the gazillion remixes of the ever-inescapable song of summer "Despacito" on his car's new speaker system, we pulled over along an Area B road to partake in a bottle of Chilean red wine they had smuggled earlier from Al-Zababdeh—a modest farewell gift. Despite the music, I could still periodically hear the deep hum of Israeli military artillery in the near distance. Unlike Jenin and other Area A cities, administered exclusively by the PA, Area B fell under the administrative authority of both the PA and Israel. As Ma'an explained it, where Israel and the PA have "joint" control, the Israeli law always trumps Palestinian civil codes. "We don't have to listen to them [the PA] here. Here, the Palestinians have to shut up," he exclaimed

somewhat triumphantly. In other words, Area B is what made it possible for an unmarried foreign girl to travel late at night unchaperoned, with two unmarried local men, alcohol, and loud dance music, all of which are outlawed or socially frowned upon in Jenin. This is also why that particular stretch of Area B road was a favorite late-night drinking hangout/hideout spot for Hamoodi and his restless friends from Jenin. But that's material for another story.

Hamoodi suddenly turns down the music. He wants to show me something. "Sometimes I like to do this," he says. Grinning mischievously, he stands in the middle of the empty street, pitch black except for his car's headlights on the side of the road. With all his might, he screams into the dark nothingness of the night until his breath and voice run out, "*WHO AM I!?!?*"

Ma'an pours the wine and chuckles, jokingly shouting back in response, "A refugee from Palestine!"

Hamoodi hovers into himself in silence for a moment, head bowed down and with his hands on his knees. He then turns around grimacing, letting out a heavy sigh.

"Oh fuck! *Still*?"

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