The JVC Palestine Portfolio

Journal of Visual Culture’s Editorial Collective has a longstanding commitment to tracking and analyzing critically the continued unfolding of racialist, colonialist, and jingoistic discourses. The journal often provides a critical space wherein these discourses can be researched and debated so as to redress the social, political, and ethical injustices that continue to plague the world we share. Everything we do in this journal exists under the sign of Stuart Hall’s vital challenge: ‘We must mobilise everything [we] can find in terms of intellectual [and other] resources in order to understand what keeps making the lives we live and the societies we live in profoundly and deeply antihumane in their capacity to live with difference’.

As a Collective, then, we stand in solidarity with Palestinians against Israeli settler colonialism and the Apartheid that results from it.

Compelled to respond to the urgency of the moment instigated by the Israeli regime’s actions in Gaza in May and June 2021, which we also acknowledge as a part of the ongoing Nakbah and an extension of official policies of displacement and erasure since 1948, we sent out an email with the subject line: ‘Journal of Visual Culture for Palestine: a call to [name of recipient]’, asking for a favour, for cooperation, for a contribution. The email in full is as follows:

Dear [name of recipient].

Standing in solidarity with Palestinians, as a Collective we know, provoked by the forced expulsions and dispossession in Jerusalem, the violence in al-Aqsa, and the attacks by the Israeli regime on Gaza earlier this month, that we need to act, and offer Journal of Visual Culture as an open and free platform for assembling, debating, and distributing.

What can we do? In addition to making (and signing) statements, demonstrating, and raising funds, this is something we as an academic journal can do.

So we ask you this favour: we would please like to enlist your cooperation, to make a modest contribution (a text of 1,000-1,500 words, a word/image contribution, an image or series of images) towards this section of the journal on the visual, material, and/or environmental cultures of Palestine 2021.
Contributions may be called forth from any of the following concerns (or anything else that’s concerning you about the occupation and its histories currently): settler colonialism; land, groundwork, dispossession, normalizing military occupation, and apartheid; homonationalism; protest and activism; asymmetric warfare; state-sanctioned violence/war crimes; Zionism and anti-Zionism; antisemitism and Islamophobia; resistance; conflict, fear and trauma; destruction and rebuilding; health, eco-social and education infrastructure; vaccine discrimination; technologies of memory; surveillance and cartography; flags and signs and posters; the call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions; the struggle for self-determination; the right of return; hope and speculative futures.

We will assemble a polyphony of thoughts and writings and images and provocations by scholars, artists, designers, architects, urban planners, visual activists, and culture workers that’ll come together to amplify internationally these serious, urgent matters by way of an academic journal. Serial periodicals are not exactly known for their speed. We do, though, have a small window that’ll enable us to organise this section in time for our forthcoming issue, which is due out in August. It’s an opportunity we feel we must seize.

In making a contribution, we’d hope you can share it with us by the end of June/early July, which we realise is ridiculously soon, but this will give us enough time to design/format them, publish them in August, and get them circulating as quickly and as widely as possible. Our publisher Sage has confirmed that this section of the August issue will be free to access. We intend, then, to ‘push’ it via the Sage site, our satellite site, social media, and to the c 90,000 members of the journal’s networks/extended communities of interest; and we’d certainly encourage you to do likewise.

(Note, we have over the last few years found ways to extend the form and the function of the academic periodical, by, for instance, crafting
free virtual issues of the journal; initiating Dispatches, our online open source initiative on 'Ecologies' and 'Social Unrest' (http://www.journalofvisualculture.org/), and instituting a recent collaboration with the Harun Farocki Institut on Covid-19 (https://www.harun-farocki-institut.org/en/category/rosa-mercedes-en/02-en/).

For your information, the names of those we're reaching out to are as follows: [and here we included a list of 66 individuals, collectives, groups, and cultural institutions]

Please do recommend to us friends or colleagues that you believe we should invite to contribute to this initiative, to also share their words and images, their words and images as actions.

Thank you.

With our best wishes, David Ayala-Alfonso, Manca Bajec, Jae Emerling, Irene Chien, Rahul Mukherjee, Marq Smith, and Øyvind Vågenes

As the journal’s Editorial Collective, we thus asked for voices to bear witness in some manner to the systemic racism, militarized destruction, and human rights abuses committed against the Palestinian people as it is occurring in the here-and-now. At stake here is nothing less than an attempt at solidarity, a global community insisting that to create and to share this world requires exposing the historical and contemporary discourses of colonialism, racialism - in fact any cultural, ethnic, or nationalistic claims of transcendence or superiority - and the neoliberal global capitalism that abets them.

It has long been the case that the discourse surrounding Palestine/Israel has wielded the illogic that any criticism of Israel is an antisemitic statement. Aside from the willful censorship implicit in this claim, we also know how and why it, in turn, renders us complicit with the Israeli regimes’ actual policies, behaviours, and actions in relation to the Palestinians. In the U.S. the media manages our ability to view and to comprehend the full effects of military strikes on housing complexes and the civilian deaths that result from them. In other countries, like Germany, there is total denial of such realities. Hence the complexity and contradictions of the media discourse around these events. In response we insist on foregrounding how and why critical and ethical discourse takes place across and between the sayable and the visible; and in so doing we are attempting to voice our refusal to remain silent, invisible, antihumane. Our labor is to foreground and to reframe this regime of visuality, one whose real world consequences are insupportable.
Within this portfolio connections are made between [a] the findings by the Israeli human rights organizations B’Tselem and Yesh Din, Palestinian groups such as Shabakah and al-Adalah, as well as Human Rights Watch, that Israel has long been enacting Apartheid (hafrada in Hebrew is the official term) policies against the indigenous Palestinian people, and [b] the issues central to the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition to these immanent connections, the Portfolio’s contributions traverse a historico-contemporary line of cultural supremacy and state violence that certainly will not end with the election of a new government led by a far-right, pro-settlement Israeli prime minister, Naftali Bennett, who categorically rules out a Palestinian state and reasserts Israel’s control over the lands it occupies. As Adam Shatz wrote in *The London Review of Books* (3 June 2021): the violence we are experiencing ‘grew out of conditions that Israel itself has created: the power and arrogance of the settler movement, and the alienation and rage of young Palestinian citizens who, like all Palestinians, simply want to be free... For Palestinians throughout the apartheid realm of Israel-Palestine, “quiet” is not the solution but the problem’. So it is to the disquiet of the past and to the singularities that shape a common shared world that we turn. Disquiet, resistance, singularities: the comments, positions, and creative work presented here comprise a performative theory of assembly, an alliance, an affiliative constructive-expressive polyphony of thoughts and writings - words and images as illuminations, as provocations, to amplify internationally these serious, urgent matters by way of an academic journal. Collectively they are akin to what Fred Moten has written in *The Universal Machine* (2018): as a ‘kind of uprising... and appeal, an eruptive performance of impossible translation and transportation best understood as the persistent insistence of a Palestinian everyday, of Palestinian social life.’

To insist on the actuality of Palestinian everyday social life is to read with care and understanding what Mohammed El-Kurd has shared about the here-and-now conditions of life in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in occupied Jerusalem. On 28 July 2021, he wrote in *The Guardian*:

> I am tired of reporting the same brutality every day, of thinking of new ways to describe the obvious. The situation in Sheikh Jarrah is not hard to understand: it is a perfect illustration of settler colonialism, a microcosm of the reality for Palestinians across 73 years of Zionist rule. This vocabulary is not theoretical. It is evident in the attempts to throw us out of our homes so that settlers can occupy them – with the backing of the regime, whose forces and policies provide violent support for the transfer of one population to install another. I do not care whom this terminology offends. Colonial is the correct way of referring to a state whose forces collude in the violence of settlers; whose government works with settler organisations; whose judicial system uses expansionist laws to claim our homes; whose nation-state law enshrines ‘Jewish settlement’ as a ‘national value ... to encourage and promote’. The appetite for Palestinian lands – without Palestinians – has not abated for over seven decades. I know because I live it.
The voices within this portfolio labor to unmask the myth of Israeli exceptionalism – while simultaneously vehemently objecting to this conflict and colonialism being an excuse for antisemitism – as a means to amplify the ongoing, shameful silencing of the Palestinian people. As a result of his close friendship with the Palestinian writer Elias Sanbar, who served as editor-in-chief of *Revue d’Etudes Palestiniennes* from its inception in 1981, Gilles Deleuze wrote in that journal: ‘Responding to Israel’s boastful statement: “We are not a people like any other”, the Palestinians have repeated their own cry, evoked in the first issue of *Revue d’Etudes Palestiniennes*: we are a people like any other, that is all we want to be’. To this we add our collective voicing of solidarity, of a belief in the world and, within it, events that render it re-imaginable, just, and, dare we say, deserving of Mahmoud Darwish’s words: ‘when you read something beautiful you find coexistence; it breaks walls down’.

Lastly, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the contributors for sharing their insights, creativity, and voices with us. The range of concerns articulated and visualized here is inspiring and humbling in its breadth, sincerity, and beauty. As an academic journal we adamantly insist upon and defend academic freedom of expression. Thus we imposed no requirements or stipulations for participation in this themed section of the journal. If nothing else – and what is affiliating here is so much more than that, but if nothing else – we are restating the position that being in solidarity with Palestine/Palestinians is not antisemitic, and neither for that matter is being critical of or challenging Israeli state policies and actions.

With our best wishes, the JVC Editorial Collective
Nation Estate – Olive Tree, C-print, 75x150cm, Larissa Sansour, 2012.

Larissa Sansour
London, UK (info@larissasansour.com)
Briefing to the 8782nd session of the Security Council, May 27, 2021

Mr. President, distinguished members of the Security Council:

I am deeply grateful to the Council and to the Chinese Presidency for the opportunity to brief you, particularly at what may be a new juncture in the evolution of the question of Palestine. Palestinians, wherever they are – in occupied Arab East Jerusalem, where the latest round of violence started a few weeks ago; in the occupied West Bank; in besieged Gaza; inside Israel; and in the vast Palestinian diaspora – have responded to the events of the past several weeks with an unprecedented degree of unity. These events, and this show of unity, have provoked a worldwide recognition of realities on the ground, realities of systemic discrimination, of oppression and of settler colonialism, that can no longer be brushed aside and hidden by stale clichés. Young people and people of conscience the world over have responded to the images that emerged from different parts of Palestine, and that were diffused by social media, and even by the mainstream media. Public discourse has begun to shift in consequence.

On June 9, 1967, at the height of the June 1967 war, as a college student, I sat in the Visitors’ Gallery of this very chamber watching as a permanent member ensured the impunity which allowed a member state to ignore Security Council cease fire resolutions and continue its offensive for another 24 hours. This action nearly 54 years ago exacerbated problems that this body is still wrestling with. The same pattern of guaranteeing impunity for violations of international law and Security Council resolutions has recurred repeatedly since then, most recently during this Council’s deliberations on events in Palestine earlier this month.

As you all know, since the founding of the United Nations, the Security Council has passed multiple resolutions on the Palestine problem and the Israeli-Arab conflict. These issues that have taken up more of the time and energy of this body than any other global problem. Most of these resolutions have not been implemented or respected. They are dead letters. This systematic disrespect for Security Council resolutions, encouraged by the impunity I have described, has left this Council, and the United Nations itself, in justifiable disrepute. More seriously, this impunity has been a major obstacle to establishing peace, justice and security for all who live in Palestine and Israel.

I have not been asked to brief on the failings of the past, however. Instead I hope to offer suggestions based on my understanding of the history of this issue, to reinforce the efforts of this body to achieve lasting peace and security in Palestine and Israel in the future.
It is clear to me that whatever their merits, a number of palliatives currently under consideration are not by themselves going to produce a lasting solution for the problems of Palestine and Israel. They include rebuilding the degraded infrastructure of Gaza with no guarantee that it will not be destroyed for a fifth time; stressing quality of life for Palestinians without providing them with a clear and fixed political horizon; and yet again launching a meaningless ‘peace process’ that is structured by the most powerful actors to avoid all of the difficult core issues central to achieving a sustainable resolution of this issue.

Any effort to achieve real peace and lasting security must belatedly grapple with these painful core issues, issues that go back to the first efforts of the General Assembly and this Council to deal with the question of Palestine in the earliest years after the establishment of the United Nations.

What are these core issues? They are:

• The dispossession of the Palestinian people starting in 1948;

• The status of Jerusalem;

• The supposedly temporary military occupation that has endured since 1967; and

• Ensuring that any projected solution is grounded in international law, and in the resolutions of this Council, and is not based on what happens to be convenient for the most powerful actors that are involved in this issue.

I am a historian of the modern Middle East, and a longtime observer of the proceedings of this body. My father worked in this Council for nearly two decades as a member of the UN Secretariat. I understand perfectly that power relations structure what is possible and what is impossible. I understand perfectly how difficult it is to make national agendas coincide, such that collective action becomes possible.

However, if ever there were a moment to transcend these restraints, and for collective action to address a source of suffering that has endured for the better part of a century, this is it. The most recent upheaval in Palestine and Israel has sharpened contradictions, has aroused new passions, some of them ugly, and has awakened consciences. It has also pricked the bubble of cherished illusions, such as the illusion that no one in the Arab world or globally cares about Palestine. The solidarity marches, the social media explosion, the unprecedented nature of the mainstream media coverage of recent events, the massive wave of solidarity with the Palestinians the world over, all of these phenomena together show that however much some might wish that this were not the case, Palestine is important, and cannot be ignored. They show as well that the Palestinians will not give up their struggle to achieve their inalienable rights as a people. A problem that for decades many have hoped would disappear, has reappeared, in an even more intense and troubling form.
This is therefore the time to abandon the cruel false equivalence that ignores casualty ratios of from four or ten or twenty to one, that places the occupier on the same footing as the occupied, and that puts a nuclear-armed regional superpower on the same footing as a people that has never been allowed to enjoy self-determination. If this false equivalence is maintained, and if the lopsided balance of power between the two peoples is allowed to dictate outcomes, there can never be an end to this bloodletting and oppression, and the Security Council will continue to issue empty resolutions with no force for the rest of the 21st century, as it has done for the past many decades.

Mr. President, your Excellencies:

**How can the impunity which enormous power grants to one side be overcome?**

What are needed are both small steps and big ones. Small ones can include this body urgently demanding – not requesting from the blockading powers but demanding – under penalty of sanctions, that the humanitarian and medical and dietary and other basic needs of the people of Gaza be freed of cruel political considerations, and that the collective punishment of 2 million people be ended. Surely this small step is within the power of the Security Council. I think all can see how doing this, which requires forceful action, would ameliorate the situation in Palestine.

Small steps include the Security Council working to help cement the unity of the Palestinian people on a democratic basis, a unity that the colonial power has worked ceaselessly to undermine. This could include United Nations-mandated and -supervised elections that can be obstructed neither by the occupying power, nor by outside powers that cultivate proxies and meddle in Palestinian affairs.

Small steps include the demand that the status quo regarding the holy sites in Jerusalem, a status quo that has been systematically infringed upon, be strictly respected by all concerned. This status quo goes back not only to the many UN resolutions on Jerusalem, or to the British Mandate period: it is rooted in the era of Ottoman rule, and it was hammered out over many decades of war and diplomacy. As we have seen in recent weeks, it is playing with fire, an unholy fire, to allow this status quo to be trampled upon, as has been happening for all too many decades, in both the period of Jordanian rule of the eastern part of the city, and especially since the Israeli occupation and annexation of 1967.

Larger steps include reiterating forcefully the basic building blocks of the international order as far as Palestine is concerned, as these have been laid down in Security Council and other UN resolutions. These include the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force as laid out in UNSC 242, the illegality of the colonization of occupied territory by the occupier’s citizens as specified by the 4th Geneva Convention, the right of refugees to return and to compensation as confirmed by UNGA 181, and the necessity of
an international role in resolving the question of Jerusalem as specified in multiple UNSC resolutions. For the Council simply to reiterate clearly and explicitly that these building blocks, rooted all of them in international law and UN resolutions, are the only possible basis of a just and lasting solution would ameliorate the situation measurably, difficult though it may be to achieve unanimity today even on points every single one of which has been voted for unanimously or nearly unanimously by this Council or other UN bodies in the past.

Another larger step would be for the Council to assert its prerogatives and push forcefully for a more multilateral and less unilateral structure for resolution of the Palestine question. The unilateral approach, which has prevailed since the Gunnar Jarring mission was eclipsed toward the end of the 1960's, a half century ago, has manifestly failed to bring peace to Palestine, and it is time for it to be replaced by more multilateral and less biased efforts. Power has its prerogatives and cannot be ignored, but it is time to realize that a century of unmitigated failure should bring this body to search for a better, a more multilateral, way to structure a negotiation than the unilateral one that has been followed with no success until now.

A much bigger step, albeit one that should not be so hard for this body and the world community to accept, is the principle that in any projected solution in Palestine-Israel, all citizens of both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, and both collectivities, must enjoy rights and security on a basis of complete equality. Whatever rights one enjoys, the other must enjoy as well. These rights include the right of self-determination, and political, civil, human and religious rights.

This is not such a far-fetched notion. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly voted for the creation of two states in Palestine. One was eventually established, one was not. For all its many flaws, and the injustice to the overwhelming Arab majority of the population that it embodied, that resolution contained one kernel that we can look back on and build on: this is the indisputable principle that there are two peoples in Palestine/Israel. In whatever way these two peoples are to structure their relations in future – whether on a two state, or on some other basis – the weaker cannot be left to the mercies of the stronger, with its powerful ally putting its thumb on the already tilted scales. This is where the Security Council can and must play a role, by insisting that the principle of complete equality of rights and international law be the essential basis of any lasting solution.

Mr. President:

I know a little bit about the difficulties that your Excellencies, and the states you represent, must confront in dealing with this intractable issue, one that often has profound resonance within the internal politics of your countries, and provokes intense passions on all sides. This is the moment to grasp that
sharp nettle, to bring concepts of right, principle, justice and equality to bear, in order to overcome the decades of expediency that have given us the hollow shell of a ‘process’ but have manifestly not brought peace to Palestine or to the two peoples who live there. As I have recently written, rather than bringing lasting peace, the efforts of the United Nations and outside parties in Palestine have all too often failed to prevent further war, displacement and misery. May the opportunity presented by the most recent crisis in Palestine and Israel lead this Council to efforts that will break this pattern, and set their two peoples on the path towards a just, lasting and sustainable peace and real, equal security.

Thank you.

Rashid Khalidi
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It is going to be difficult to explain to future generations that it was in “Our Time” that Israel was doing what it is done.

Mazen Kerbaj
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Questions of Solidarity

In May 2021, as voices from across the world were raised against the violence perpetrated on Palestinians by Israeli police and the Israeli Army, the cultural world at first remained silent. Art institutions, artists and writers have shown in recent years that they are increasingly willing to speak out on the topics of colonialism and on racism, but as Israel threatened the people of Sheikh Jarrah with eviction from their homes, and then bombed Gaza, with violence affecting artists, writers and institutions too\textsuperscript{1}, there seemed to be a lack of willingness in the cultural world, particularly in Europe, to discuss let alone criticise any actions perpetrated by the Israeli state. As a team working in a gallery in London founded by a British-Palestinian charity, with colleagues in Ramallah and Gaza and a history of programming Palestinian artists within a progressive and internationalist framework, we asked ourselves how we could use our platform to support them at this time. Our ‘Call to Cultural Organisations, Artists, and Writers for Solidarity with Palestine’ was thus launched on 19 May 2021.

The call was made to demonstrate support, but also to rise above the dithering claims that the situation was too ‘complicated’ for one to take a stand. Such claims re-enforce the silence. We invited individuals and organisations to join and make visible their support for Palestinians, and to commit to a series of actions.

The seven actions cited were intended to be a starting point for wider practical action in the cultural field. These include a commitment to use specific language about Palestine, including the word ‘Palestine’ itself, ‘apartheid’ and ‘settler colonialism’, to address the common erasure of Palestinian experience that occurs through the use of euphemistic or misleading language. It calls for specific actions that cultural colleagues can take by programming artists, collectives and galleries, who are radical and dissenting, including Palestinian ones. It demands that signatories be prepared to see their funding impacted too by committing to refuse money from Israeli government sources and private funders who support it.

The call (reproduced below) was made at the same moment that other similar calls were issued, including by Against Apartheid, Musicians for Palestine and Visual Arts for Palestine, among others.\textsuperscript{2}

In total over 80 groups and organisations and over 500 individuals have signed up in support of our call.\textsuperscript{3}

Through our direct approaches we have learned more of the barriers that continue to distort debate about the Palestinian question. Some identify the question of Palestine as a ‘political’ issue, rather than a human rights one. This distinction is used to sideline discussion in a way that was once applied to issues of racism, but is thankfully less possible following the affirmative rise of the Black Lives Matter movement. There is a lack of knowledge about the history and context of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and its expulsion of
hundreds of thousands of its people. This often leads to a sense of insecurity and reluctance to take a position on it. This is then reinforced by the threat of being accused of anti-Semitism, and of public pursual from such organisations as the UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI). All of these issues are linked to the power of language and words, and how they can be understood or misconstrued.

People also feared losing audiences or funders by stating their support for Palestine. Public spaces have a genuine concern to ensure that they are encompassing and representative of the breadth of their audiences and are hesitant to take positions. However, we argue that if you are committed to ethical frameworks on matters of funding, as well as on diversity policies and decolonising agendas, you cannot then stand aside on an issue of ongoing and contemporary injustice such as Palestine.

Others, who may have been unable to sign the call institutionally, have nonetheless reasserted their commitment to make an impact by making the Palestinian experience visible in their programming and to encourage conversation and critical dialogue. However, there is a risk that institutional reticence can still be reflected in curatorial choices or texts and become subject to these same interests. If public spaces have these apprehensions already, does that inhibit them from programming Palestinian artists in the first place? What happens when a committed individual curator moves on?

For artists, it can be difficult as individuals to have these conversations with organisations, especially with the larger ones. They often find that these institutions cannot ensure support of their pro-Palestine positions and as such they can face difficult decisions and compromises in their professional opportunities. We have heard from artists who maintain the Palestinian narrative that they are often discriminated against by cultural spaces and media. How do we support them to be promoted and feel comfortable and enabled in the spaces they work with? How can we ensure a platform for marginalised and radical voices and challenge structures of censorship and self-censorship?

Other invitations to support or discuss the call have been rejected or simply ignored. However, we note with gratitude the efforts made by individuals to start conversations among peers, in their institutions and with their boards to try and move these discussions forward, even if they have not yet been able to sign the call.

We have tried to connect with voices from across the solidarity calls. Through ongoing conversations, we hope to collectively devise ways to ensure our solidarity moves beyond statements and into actions. We recognise that we must connect to other local and global struggles for justice and that Palestinian voices must be prominent as we move forward with this call.

What next then? We are continuing to speak with other appeals to create an active network for solidarity. We also hope that arts and cultural organisations will accept henceforth to be part of a wider discussion on how to create meaningful impact, how to structurally apply principles of ethical
and sustainable practices, and how to ensure our responsibility to artists and audiences to feel safe and welcomed in our spaces.

Working together, we can seek to address these issues collectively. We invite you to join us.

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Call to cultural organisations, artists, and writers for solidarity with Palestine

As we watch the continuing destruction and devastation occurring in Palestine, we cannot stand by in silence. We urge you to consider the values we cherish and how we can translate them into meaningful action.

The disproportionate violence that Israel is currently waging on Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel is indiscriminate, inhumane, and illegal. Israel is a nuclear superpower, with the fifth largest military in the world. Palestinians are a stateless, almost entirely unarmed, civilian population. We thus refuse to describe this situation as a ‘conflict’ between ‘two sides’, a language which obscures the grossly unequal death toll, destruction, and devastation that Palestinians are inevitably forced to endure.

We also call on you to take note of Human Rights Watch’s recent report which concluded that Israeli authorities ‘have dispossessed, confined, forcibly separated, and subjugated Palestinians by virtue of their identity to varying degrees of intensity’, such conduct amounting to crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.

As cultural institutions, we are deeply disturbed by the violent targeting of our Palestinian partners and colleagues who are critical of Israeli oppression and by the destruction of Palestinian schools in Gaza and the ransacking of cultural spaces, including the Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research in Bethlehem. Wala’ Sbeit, a musician, was beaten and put under house arrest in Haifa for taking part in a demonstration; Mohammad El-Kurd, a poet and resident of Sheikh Jarrah, detained for no other reason than speaking publicly against Israeli threats to his family home.

We also note the power of language, its ability to gloss over state-sanctioned violence, and its role in normalizing occupation, institutionalizing colonialism, and erasing history. A case in point is the use of ‘evictions’ in reference to the removal of Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem and how it deliberately misdirects from the reality of the Israeli occupation and the illegal displacement and dispossession of Palestinians from their homes.

As we have stood in solidarity with the protests for black lives over the past year, as we have called for the decolonisation of our institutions, we must surely now extend our struggle against racism and colonialism to the defense
of the Palestinians. It is morally incumbent upon us as artists and cultural workers to do so.

Now actions, as well as words, are needed. As an artist, writer, thinker or worker in an institution, you have the agency to share information and to implement change. We therefore ask you to commit to the following actions in support of the Palestinian people:

• Learn: read and share resources on Palestine. For example: Palestinian Centre for Human Rights Gaza (PCHR Gaza), Al Haq Palestinian human rights organisation based in Ramallah, Adalah legal centre for Arab minority rights in Israel, Diakonia International Humanitarian Law Centre.

• Refuse: funding from the Israeli government and from private funders who support its illegal occupation.

• Language: use terms which make visible the Palestinian experience, including Palestine, occupation, dispossession, ethnic cleansing, settler colonialism, and apartheid.

• Lobby your MP or local representatives to pressure and sanction Israel until it adheres to international law.

• Open: your programme and your collection to artists, collectives, initiatives and galleries who are led by non-mainstream or radical voices, including artists in Palestine, and fund and support their participation.

• Solidarity: share this letter and your public statement (personal and institutional) with your networks; if you are an artist, ask the institutions who hold your work or with whom you work to support it, and share it with your institution’s audiences as widely as possible.

• Write: cover work by marginalised or radical voices, including Palestinian ones.

Support this call: email info@mosaicrooms.org, confirming your name, title and organisation (if applicable) to the full list of signatories that is available on The Mosaic Rooms website: here: https://mosaicrooms.org/call-to-cultural-organisations-artists-writers-for-solidarity-with-palestine/
Notes:


2. Artists for Palestine reported on these initiatives [https://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/category/artists-boycott/](https://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/category/artists-boycott/)


The Mosaic Rooms
London (info@mosaicrooms.org)
Free Palestine/Strike MoMA: A Call to Action

Preface

This call to action was released on May 21, 2021 by the International Imagination of Anti-Imperialist Anti-National Feelings (IIAAF) in conjunction with the ongoing Strike MoMA initiative. Housed at the Strike MoMA website and the blog of Social Text, the call was signed by 250+ scholars, artists, and organizers, a full list of which can be found at strikemoma.org along with hyperlinked version of the text. This call should be understood within the context of the recent Unity Uprising in Palestine, which brought together Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, the refugee camps, in '48, and throughout the diaspora. The uprising challenged not only the Israeli occupation, but the PA's role in facilitating the apartheid system even while claiming to represent the Palestinian people. It also provided a catalyst for a renewed wave of anti-imperialist solidarity with other movements across the world, highlighting the interconnectedness of struggles and shared desires for self-determination. Citing the multiple connections between MoMA board members, Israeli settler-colonialism, and U.S. empire, the letter concludes with a call to assemble at MoMA as part of a ten week sequence of actions throughout the spring. That afternoon, hundreds of people from multiple movements showed up to blockade the entrance to MoMA, providing a springboard for a political imperative that has continued to emerge throughout the summer and is now set to escalate into the fall - Globalize The Intifada. A call has been released for a movement-wide convergence in NYC on September 17th to Globalize the Intifada, as elaborated in an organizing zine available here: https://rb.gy/xuerbq. Along with the museum, the university is among the other settler-colonial institutions that can be leveraged for globalizing the Intifada, building on generations of counter-imperial knowledges and interconnected struggles amongst workers, students, and faculty alike.

#globalizetheintifada #S17
Clockwise from bottom left:

Free Palestine/Strike MoMA blockade at MoMA, May 21, 2021 (photo: Hrag Vartanian for Hyperallergic);
Illuminator Projection on MoMA, June 11, 2021 (photo: Strike MoMA);
Interconnected Struggles march in front of MoMA, June 11, 2021 (photo: Valentina di Liscia for Hyperallergic);
Illuminator Projection on MoMA, June 11, 2021 (photo: Strike MoMA)
We the undersigned artists, critics, scholars, and organizers are writing to express our support for the Palestinian struggle against Israeli colonial rule and its apartheid system. We feel it is urgent to highlight the connections between the ongoing violence of Israel against the Palestinian people and a leading institution of the art system, namely the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). This letter aims to build decolonial solidarity across borders by drawing attention to MoMA’s entanglement with the mutually reinforcing projects of settler-colonialism, imperialism, and racial capitalism in Palestine, the U.S. and around the world. When we focus on the interlocking directorate of the MoMA board, the museum becomes visible as a shared site of action for our interconnected struggles. This works against the all-too-frequent isolation and exceptionalization of Palestine, and strengthens the bonds between Free Palestine, Indigenous sovereignty, Black Freedom Movements and all other movements for land, life, and liberation, from Puerto Rico to Kashmir and beyond.

Violence against Palestinians has intensified in recent weeks, first with the ongoing forcible displacement of families in Sheikh Jarrah, then with the violent incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, followed by the carpet-bombing of Gaza, and a series of organized settler attacks across occupied Palestine. This has included attacks on spaces for media, culture, and art, most recently Dar Yusuf Nasri Jacir for Art and Research in Bethlehem. At the same time, these attacks have united Palestinians both on the ground and in the diaspora, with resistance proliferating in a diversity of forms: yesterday, a General Strike shut down the entirety of historic Palestine, and massive marches have taken place in cities throughout the world, with #PalestineStrike as a shared declaration of agency, dignity, and solidarity.

Cultural institutions are part and parcel of struggles against settler-colonial violence. 600+ cultural workers have announced a boycott of Zabludowicz Art Trust in London on account of that organization’s ties to the Israeli military. The Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) movement is gaining momentum, including the affiliated Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel. As part of the Palestine mobilizations in New York last week, hundreds gathered at MoMA, where a young man was arrested and beaten by the NYPD. The police had been called to the scene by the museum, which on the same day announced that it would be permanently banning five organizers from stepping foot in the museum.

Why show up at MoMA? Why now? Because many members of the MoMA board are directly involved with support for Israel’s apartheid rule, artwashing not only the occupation of Palestine but also broader processes of dispossession and war around the world. Consider Steven Tananbaum, CEO of GoldenTree, a hedge fund known for profiteering from the Puerto Rico debt crisis. Tananbaum’s foundation donated 1.8 million dollars to ‘support Israel by sending young adults to Israel’ via the Art Institute of Chicago, dwarfing his $400,000 contribution to MoMA itself that year. Daniel Och, CEO of Och-Ziff Capital, also known for its plunder of Puerto Rico, is a current member and former chairman of the Birthright Foundation, which is
also partly funded by the Israeli state. Birthright tours aim to recruit Jewish youth from around the world, especially American Jews, to the Zionist cause while sanitizing the occupation and erasing Palestinians. Leon Black, best known for his connections with Jeffery Epstein, has donated more than 1 million to Birthright as well. Paula Crown’s wealth comes from her husband, James Crown’s armaments company General Dynamics, whose Land Systems division works closely with Israeli military technology companies, and the Israeli Occupation Forces themselves (General Dynamics products have also been used in the bombing of Yemen by the Saudi government). The MK-84 bombs being dropped on Gaza by the Israeli air force are made by General Dynamics. The Paula and James Crown Creativity Lab on the second floor of the museum stands while homes, schools, hospitals, and media offices in Gaza are flattened.

Finally, MoMA’s Honorary Chair Ronald Lauder is president of the World Jewish Congress, which has long campaigned in defense of Zionist policies, and, most recently, has lobbied numerous heads of state including those of Britain and Germany to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Association’s definition of anti-Semitism. This definition is widely used to conflate criticism of Israel with Anti-Semitism, and has resulted in the proscription and criminalization of speech in support of Palestinian liberation (including but not limited to BDS) as a nefarious form of racism – a development that should concern everyone in the arts. This definition of Anti-Semitism also serves to collapse a plurality of Jewish identities into one identity indissociable from the state of Israel, tacitly condoning the violence it perpetrates in their name. This is a form of psychological warfare that defines Jewish people who speak out against the occupation as ‘traitors’, ‘self-hating Jews’, or even unworthy of having their voices considered Jewish at all. With this in mind, it is also worth mentioning the fact that Lauder is a close friend and donor to Donald Trump, and is closely connected with the pro-Israel evangelical Right. This reliance on Trumpism and the Christian Right for Zionist support has ironically fuelled the growth of real movements for white supremacy and anti-Semitism in the U.S.

With figures like Lauder, Crown, and Tananbaum on its board, MoMA cannot pretend to stand apart from the attack on Gaza or the Occupation of the West Bank and Jerusalem more broadly. Because the corporate power and wealth that sits atop the museum suffuses all of its operations, there are no clean hands. Given these entanglements, we must understand the museum for what it is: not only a multi-purpose economic asset for billionaires, but also an expanded ideological battlefield through which those who fund apartheid and profit from war polish their reputations and normalize their violence. For MoMA’s board members, the trail of their malfeasance leads in many directions, from fueling climate crisis to support for the NYPD Foundation to the extractivist violence of the Cisneros empire. But there is no denying that Palestine is one of the crime scenes of the MoMA board. We do not expect, nor do we call for, any statement of concern from MoMA. Let us remember that a year ago after the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Aubery that museums issued statements of solidarity with Black Lives Matter, only to board up their windows as the rebellion unfolded.
For those who love Palestine, we have waited too long for this moment to not say what needs to be said despite the fear, the risk, the cost, of speaking out and naming things for what they are. We stand with Palestine, or we stand with silence, aiding and abetting the disaster. We unequivocally denounce the continuation of the Israeli settler colonial project, its apartheid regime, and the interlocking technologies of power and violence that enable it. We unequivocally support the right of return for all Palestinian refugees. We call upon our friends, colleagues, and communities to join the struggle for a free Palestine.

This Friday, May 21 at 4 PM Est. people will gather at MoMA. We call on the museum to respect people’s right to protest, and to refrain from involving the NYPD, which creates an unsafe environment for everyone involved. For those who are not in New York City or who otherwise cannot participate in person, an online assembly will also be held. We encourage and support autonomous parallel actions, wherever they may take place. To join the online assembly or to share information about parallel actions, write to freepalestine_strikemoma@protonmail.com.

FREE PALESTINE/STRIKE MOMA

*Initiated by IIAAF
Abolish MoMA: The Case of Palestine

As we watch the violence organized and backed by the Zionist state against Palestinians all over occupied Palestine, reminders are not unnecessary.

‘We are not seeing a “civil war” inside Israel,’ writes Lana Tatour (Tatour, 2021), ‘but rather, the Israeli settler state declaring war on its colonized “citizens” and Palestinians fighting for their liberation.’

Settler-colonial geography is intentionally confusing. Let’s set the record straight once again. Palestine is there, where it always has been. It seems obvious, but imperial geography is deliberately confusing. Much violence is used to bend geography and also people’s perception of it.

First, a demographic war was waged, aiming to manufacture a new body politic. Palestinians were expelled and denied return, and millions of Jewish babies born in Palestine-turned-Israel were assigned an imperial identity that proclaimed that Palestine does not exist. Identity operates as a light weapon as it reflects the new colonial geography. These babies grew up to believe that they were ‘Israelis’. This identity was assigned to them as part of a broader transformation of ‘Israel’ from a contested fact into a fait accompli.
Art cleansing facilitated this imperial transition from Palestine to Israel. Once again, MoMA’s self-documentation of its crimes are our receipt: Strike MoMA.

In 1964, MoMA, together with its International Council and the American-Israel Foundation, whose aim is to ‘impact the way the world embraces Israel by creating the next generation of ambassadors for Israeli culture’, were determined to assist in this mission. MoMA organized an exhibition of Israeli Art that toured the US, ‘Art Israel’, reaffirming what the state of Israel sought to proclaim: that Palestine does not exist. A MoMA senior curator determined (Seitz, 1964), and I’m quoting: ‘The intensity of human compassion, pride, intellect, and creativity that gave form to the State of Israel itself is still the prime source of energy that activates Israeli art and gives it a distinctive aura, whatever the style.’

The partition of Palestine, the erasure of Palestine, was a Euro-Zionist plot. In opposition to the partition plan resolution, Palestinians took to the streets. Here, they are in a precious moment of potential reversibility. This is not the beginning of the so-called ‘Israeli War of Independence’, as the official caption indicates. This is a mass protest against the Euro-Zionist plot. We are attending a moment before the fabrication of the ‘two sides’. Palestinians are not protesting against Israel. They are rather opposing its creation against them.
Violence, borders, carceral spaces, babies branded with settlers’ identity, and a binding document were mobilized to expel Palestinians and force them to inhabit a position of externality toward their own homeland that was made into a settlers’ state.

Look at the document at the center of this frame, the ‘decisive moment’ of the Declaration of Independence, May 15th, 1948.
This kind of document was recognized by international law (and other imperial organizations created over centuries by imperial actors) and privileged over the pleas of indigenous peoples who were targeted by it. By declaring the establishment of the state of Israel, this document actually proclaimed that: Palestine no longer exists. Palestine never existed.

This was in 1948.

The Nakba.

But... none of it is history. This is the ongoing Nakba. This is a political regime led first by Zionists and European powers interested in finding a solution for the undesired ‘Jewish people’ of Europe and later backed by the U.S. and the international community. However, robbery of lands, expulsions of the land claimants, system of borders, and a declaration of sovereignty were not enough for this organized crime to perpetuate itself.

Carceral technologies known as cultural institutions were created, taking part in the normalization of this large-scale organized crime.

How do these institutions operate? These institutions are technologies. They turn imperial violence into discrete objects, photographs and documents included, and endow them with precious value and designate them for study, enjoyment, and display.

These are the major faculties of these ‘institutions’:

- Archives: producing, destroying, and preserving documents in service of legitimizing the robbery.
- Museums: handling discrete objects through which imperial temporality and spatiality are reaffirmed.
- Academic disciplines: maintaining a mandatory distance between scholars and ‘their’ objects of research in a way that relegates these objects to the ‘past’.

Imperialism operates through A Regime of Objects. Objects kept apart from people and handled by different experts. Objects used in and mobilized for the dispossession and weakening of the resistance of people who are directly or indirectly targeted by them.

This imperial regime of objects may not seem to enact violence. However, recall... without it, colonized people could have succeeded in preventing imperial regimes from materializing and reproducing themselves.

After 500 years of imperialism, after 73 years of colonization in Palestine, no one can continue to underestimate the role of the regime of objects (objects defined as private property for the benefit of the ‘public’) in imperialism’s crime.
We have already mentioned documents and archives. Let’s continue to photography and photographic archives. These Palestinians are not refugees. They are being expelled from their homes. The photographer is trained to capture history. Hence, for him, these Palestinians are already refugees. The archive, too, records them as refugees. The museum, too, shows them as refugees.

They are not refugees, but rather, peoples being expelled. They can still succeed in their refusal to be expelled. Those who expel them could still be incriminated and held accountable for their crimes. Under the regime of objects, the photographer is instructed to anticipate ‘history’ and capture them as already refugees.

The imperial origins of photography lure photographers to capture ‘what is’ in its historical grandeur. Photographers are guided by the assumption that nothing can stop history, including the opposition of those targeted by it.

The violence required to turn plunder and appropriation into ‘history’ was taken out of the photographers’ realm of expertise. If not, why already in 1948 would photographers have ‘documented’ Palestine and captioned it ‘Israel’?

History as an ideology, practice, and discipline played a major role in this organized international crime of destroying a place and substituting it with a manufactured colony.
Under the imperial regime of objects, every object in the settlers’ colony has its own history, a history that is coeval with the history of the colony. Histories that confirm that there is, for example, such a thing as ‘Israeli art’, an object that exists independently from its role in the plunder of Palestine.

In 1964, 16 years after the Nakba, during which Palestinian expellees were in refugee camps and denied return, MoMA organized ‘the first major exhibition of contemporary Israeli art’ in the U.S. Here is the press release for the book that was published by MoMA.

With the help of discrete art objects, this ‘major exhibition’ normalized the crime and provided the public a palpable narrative of the history of ‘Israeli art’ as a matter of fact. Alongside the reification of an ‘Israeli’ unique style, MoMA also approved the appropriation of the Palestinian landscape. As you can read here, he, the curator, relates these themes to the recent trials of the Jewish people and to a pervasive celebration of the Israeli landscape.
At the same time, MoMA also reified a construction of the ‘Jewish people’ at the expenses of a Jewish diversity that reflected its diverse histories and experiences, eclipsing those crimes that Zionists perpetrated against Jews in the Arab and Muslim world. But this will have to wait for another day…

Let’s conclude today with Salman Abu-Sitta (Abu-Sitta, 2021) on the lasting consequences of partaking in the erasure of Palestine and agreeing to its robbery by Israel, and I'm quoting from Salman Abu-Sitta:

To bombard two million people in 360 square kilometer by air, land, and sea is genocide. It will not, should not be forgotten. It must be accounted for.

As experts, you may know why two million people are packed in a huge concentration camp in Gaza Strip. But you may not if it has been hidden from you.

Those two million people are the victims of the original ethnic cleansing of 247 villages who lived in the southern half [50%] of Palestine in 1948. They were attacked and depopulated and pushed into Gaza Strip, a name that was coined for the remaining 1.3% of Palestine. That could not have happened without dozens of massacres of civilians, after occupation of the villages, in Bureir, Beit Daras, Simsim to mention a few. The massacres did not stop since.
For 70 years, those Palestinians were attacked in refugee camps. Many were killed on numerous occasions in 1953, 1956, 1967, 1971, not to mention constantly since 2006 till today.

Why?

Because their genocide in 1948 was not complete. The old did die but the young did not forget that they have a home and they demanded the right to return to it. Their mere survival is anathema to Israel. So, their genocide must be complete. That is what Israel was and is doing.

This is, however, also a moment of potential reversibility. Palestine is there, where it always has been.

Free Palestine.

Notes:

1. This is a transcript of a spoken presentation by Ariella Aisha Azoulay, presentation design by Jina Alhenawi. The presentation was prepared as part of Week 10 of Strike MoMA (www.strikemoma.org). To see full presentation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F-9palGTsCKI

References:


Tatour, Lana (2021) This isn’t a civil war, it is settler-colonial brutality. Mondoweiss. May 13.

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Melancholy and a Palestinian Sadness

I could not remember the last time I was at a Palestine protest. I have attended protests since I was 14 and a few years back, I had sworn them as ineffective events lacking in strategy. When the situation in Sheikh Jarrah kicked off towards the last week of Ramadan in May 2021, a protest was planned at 10 Downing Street on a sunny Sunday. It was the 9th of May. The city was slowly opening up from lockdown and I was restless. The protest was small and I saw people I had not seen in some time. I then remembered it must have been close to four years since I was last here protesting.

The following Tuesday (12 May), the protest was bigger. I ran over to Downing Street after work to find the streets buzzing with flags, whistles, drums, those stinky coloured smoke bombs, and teenage boys climbing buses. I ran into many people I had not seen since before Covid and I felt alive for the first time in a long time.

While I was an undergraduate student at the University of Ottawa, I was President of Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights (SPHR), a student group with chapters across the country. Back then, circa 2006–2008, I would have never envisioned the type of support Palestine is receiving in 2021. During my time in SPHR, we were organising in a hostile environment. Protests were attended by the usual supporters, people rarely engaged with content unless they had some familiarity with the situation (or a Palestinian boyfriend/girlfriend), and Zionist groups were constantly trying to shut us down. Crackdowns on Boycott, Divest and Sanction (BDS) across campuses were common. Fast forward 15 years, the movement is slowly winning. Blame it on Instagram, or the Hadid siblings or more ‘wokeness’. The latter however proved a depressing point for me. I work at a university working towards anti-racism. Unfortunately, it was clear that anti-racism agendas fall under the Progressive Except Palestine category. This meant I was nothing more than an opinion.

I began to imagine that maybe Barclays bank would have the Palestine flag colours as a background during the month of May in 30–40 years’ time, just like the Pride flag, which would have been unimaginable 30 years ago. Or in the background in a scene of a blockbuster film, in the same way a sticker with the words ‘Free South Africa End Apartheid’ appears on Roger Murtaugh’s fridge in the movie Lethal Weapon (1987). During the height of Black Lives Matters (BLM) in 2020, brands rushed to claim their solidarity. I expected no such gestures around Palestine – I don’t care for performativity, nor do I want anyone to co-opt Palestine like they do decolonisation. I did not however expect such a lack of knowledge and support from friends or those making careers out of being experts in decoloniality (Israel is the acid test of one’s decolonial convictions).
After the 12 May protest, a few of us, keeping to the outdoor rule of six, headed to the Southbank to have iftar. Discussing the situation surrounded by like-minded people, I felt energised to do more. The ideas that rushed through my head, some that have sat dormant for ages, were many. I wanted to connect with people and see what we could do collectively. Eager to organise, I was invited to join WhatsApp groups that migrated to Telegram and then to Signal and where notifications were going off every few minutes. People who were not affiliated with any groups wanted to organise, especially after one London march (15 May) attracted over 100,000 people.

The Signal group began an interest in organising direct action events. One was in solidarity with the strike called by Palestinians on 18 May. Since my SPHR days, I preferred to work behind the scenes and in the background. I never picked up a microphone or made speeches. For this action, my task was to make the flyer and bring banner-making equipment. After a long day at work – running between a design sprint students were conducting for a research project I am running, Zoom calls about Strike organising, helping a member of BLM design a flyer, to dinner with a friend – I arrived home at 9pm and hopped on a call with another member of the Signal group. Together we drafted the text for the flyer and then I spent a few hours designing it. I created a couple of versions, sent it to the group, and since I don’t believe in design by committee, informed them I was sending it to print at 9am. At the strike action, the flyers were gone within minutes (Figure 1).

![Figure 1 – Strike flyer, photograph courtesy of Mira Mattar.](image-url)
The strike action was successful and the experience invigorated me. With a massive workload in my day job, my mind was anywhere but work. Unable to focus, the barrage of information coming through Instagram was not helping either, but I also needed to utilise this medium to raise awareness because as a design academic, Palestine seldom enters that space. It was my duty to make Palestine visible, so I posted constantly. The views dropped (due to the algorithm), but some people noticed and thanked me for educating them, and it felt good. Instagram however is ephemeral – fleeting – like a protest. There must be more effective, strategic and long-term ways of creating awareness and I tried to share ideas with whoever would listen. I quickly realised, when sharing these ideas, the power of movement consensus and of how things should be done, and the fear people have of going against these ideas (White, 2020).

Alongside the Signal groups, I joined a collective of creatives working to organise events within cultural institutions – most of which, unsurprisingly – were silent. We had Zoom calls, we shared the issues we faced, resources, toolkits, ideas. The energy was great, but the aims, goals and objectives remained unclear.

For the last action I helped organise, we worked with Colombian groups who were protesting the tax reforms and which quickly escalated into larger scale demonstrations across the country. For me, international solidarity and connecting with like-minded groups for organising is important. It enables more strategic thinking, which I feel Palestinian groups often lack.

Figure 2 – Fight like Colombia, Resist like Palestine. Photograph courtesy of the author.
We created yet another Signal group where a mix of Colombians and Palestinians got together, including student groups, and began planning an action for the next march (Figure 2). Since the Colombian chants were largely in Spanish, we collectively decided that the flyer would feature chants and the translations to enable people to follow them. I designed a black and white A5 flyer, with the quote ‘Our struggles are connected. Our resistance is collective. No one is free until we’re all free!’ (figure 3, 4, 5) on the front and the chants inside. I printed it on copier paper, and dragged 300 copies in the rain to a friend’s house where we folded them in his living room the night before the protest.
Being a full time academic, I rarely design anymore. I forgot how quickly I can churn out something decent. I began thinking of the necessity of a database of flyers, posters, banners, and other pieces of design people could easily print, Extinction Rebellion style.

I learned a few lessons organising with this group: the older you get, the less energy you have for weekly protests but rather you want to participate in more tangible actions. While student groups were mostly interested in organising protests (different to our approach at SPHR), their involvement did lead to the establishment of a chapter on one of the campuses where I work (to my knowledge, the university has no active Palestine solidarity groups) when I stumbled on their poster and a Free Palestine illustration near the library (Figure 6). These brighten up my day and I have more faith in art and design students because of it.

The moment when I stopped organising came at the end of May. I attended a Palestine fundraiser, and it reminded me of an anecdote about Edward Said recounted by Timothy Brennan in *Places of Mind*, where Said felt ‘the movement needed more intellectuals and few activist types ... whose “radical” meetings were essentially social gatherings’ (Brennan, 2021, 157). This is what I always felt about protests and fundraisers. We were preaching to the same people and raising money from those that do not have any. The whole event was about socialising, egos, and photo opportunities for the ‘gram.
Just as quickly as the protests faded with the ceasefire, the fatigue kicked in and everyone moved on with their lives. The calls and the messages ceased. As the rain dropped heavily in Hyde Park at the last big march where over 180,000 people attended, it signalled the beginning of the end. London opened up, protests and Palestine were no longer the only socialisation option, and once again, we faded, until Israel decides to bomb Gaza again.

Living through a year and some of lockdowns, I have not felt like myself. I often wondered who was this person inhabiting this body. But for two weeks in May, I felt like myself again; with a social life and a sense of purpose. Feeling as though I was living in a perpetual state of March 2020, May 2021 gave me moments in which to mark time; an ability stolen from me due to Covid. Not to consume Covid news for a short while was a relief – a reminder that other things exist.

By 31 May, I was mentally and emotionally exhausted. June crepted in and left an incredible void. I decided I could no longer deal with Instagram and disconnected from it. It is almost predictable to associate negative feelings emerging from the black hole that is Instagram and how much of your headspace and conversations revolve around what you saw on it.
Despite my exhaustion with organising, I attempted to fill the void I was feeling, spurred by the beautiful weather (short-lived) that finally arrived, by participating in Palestine-related events I did not necessarily feel did very much. Palestine is as much about actions as it is about socialising – or for brief moments, being surrounded by people whose presence meant you did not need to explain yourself or your politics. Within these brief moments, there is comfort. When you step outside of them, a dreadful loneliness engulfs you. At times though, even when you are surrounded by supposed solidarity folk, there’s a sense of being not quite right.

The group rarely messages anymore. I sometimes long for the sound of 100 messages going off all at once, signalling a sense of urgency. It represented a community that also met in person within this world of endless online calls. As I write this, the group notification goes off: a message about a petition to allow imprisoned Palestinian politician Khalida Jarrar to bury her daughter Suha, who died in July 2021. But the feeling is not the same.

References:


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Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian: The Decolonization of Language, the Decolonization of Palestine

In 2014, a group of Palestinians from the Popular Roots Foundation in Jerusalem and the Palestinian Vision Foundation under the direction and supervision of the Arab Center Campaign initiated a widespread social media campaign entitled ‘Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian’. The aim of this initiative was to raise awareness over incorrect usage of terminology when referring to the Palestinian cause and to provide the ‘right’ – i.e. the Palestinian – way of saying it (see Appendix 1) that illustrate key phrases which they argue should be narrated ‘correctly’ – that is, as accurately representing Palestinians daily realities. For example, the group argues that while Zionists, international institutions (such as the United Nations), and political actors describe checkpoints as ‘crossings’, a more appropriate term which reflects the actual
lived reality of Palestinians is ‘occupation barrier’. The word ‘crossing’ entails a sanitized description of a ‘normal’ (i.e. non-military, safe) crossing between two points, whereas in actuality it is a destructive barricade, or ‘death trap’ (as labeled by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, 2020) whose primary goal is the demolition of Palestinian lives and livelihoods as it physically separates one Palestinian city from another, one Palestinian house from the other and one Palestinian person from another. In Gaza and the West Bank, brave Palestinian photojournalists, medics, activists and ordinary citizens such as Joe Gaza, Ahmed Hijazee, Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd, Mariam Barghouti, Ramzi Anas, Adnan Barq, among many others, brought home to people all over the world the historical origins and lived reality behind decontextualized sanitized headlines such as ‘Israeli-Palestinian clashes’, as they witnessed the daily brutality, racism (‘death to Arabs’), harassment, and humiliation Palestinians have lived with since 1948.

This contribution intends to reaffirm and reignite Julie Peteet’s (2016) call to shift the discursive framework on Palestine through the decolonization of language. The underlying narrative that Zionists have focused on since 1948 which has ensured their colonial authority and legitimacy in their linguistic repertoires is a ‘politics of nonrecognition’ of Palestinians which has long cast Palestinians as irrational aggressors and blamed them for compelling the violence inflicted upon them (ibid.), as well as a ‘politics of the present’ (Peteet, 2016: 31) which Peteet argues is a strategy which focuses on the immediate situation to not only erase the historical origins of the present violence, which is European Zionist colonialism, but allows for a ‘state of perpetual beginnings’ (ibid.), where critical and longstanding issues (from refugees, to checkpoints, and violence), remain deferred indefinitely (ibid.). However, this is no longer the case since May 2021, when video footage of forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and the fourth war on Gaza since 2008 catapulted the Palestinian narrative at the forefront in order to do just that. For over seven decades Zionists have maintained dominance over the narrative through the repetition of certain terms and categories which render ‘domination natural, and part of the ‘taken-for-granted’ because as the colonial dominant group, their narratives have long been accepted as ‘objective and legitimate’, while those of the colonized, the marginalized group, are ‘derided as crudely fashioned
propaganda and thus met with contempt’ (Peteet, 2005: 154-155). We watched in awe as a Zionist colonizer named Jacob Fauci from New York brazenly told Muna El-Kurd, whose home he is forcefully squatting in, that ‘if he does not steal it, someone else will’, outlining in the simplest of ways the rudimentary dynamics of settler-colonialism in action.

Thus, a call to use the ‘right’ terminology – and by right, I mean historically and descriptively accurate – requires a permanent shift to change the way we talk about Palestine. Academics such as Edward Said, Julie Peteet and Hamid Dabashi, journalists such as Megan Hanna, and authors such as Susan Abulhawa, have lamented over the ‘lost’, marginalized, or weak Palestinian narratives in the public sphere, buried amidst a sea of fabricated Zionist discourses which seeks to dehumanize, decontextualize, and dehistoricize Palestinians and their current predicament, all while fashioning themselves as benevolent colonialists.3 These scholars and authors have argued that narrative frameworks and language matters, and that in order to shift the discourse in regard to Palestine we must decolonize its language first and foremost to constantly disclose its colonial labels and rehistoricize the origins of the present day turmoil. Scholars (this is not an exhaustive list), such as Ilan Pappe, Edward Said, Ghada Karmi, Rashid Khalidi, Nur Masalha, Fayez Sayegh, Dina Matar, Hamid Dabashi, Cornel West, Joseph Masaad, Steve Salaita, Julie Peteet, and Mark Muhannad Ayyash, have described ‘Israel’ as a settler colony. I propose a slight extension to this definition, to a European Zionist settler-colony (hereinafter EZSC), in order to emphasize its colonial and political (versus religious) origins and its continuation as an active European settler colonial entity in the 21st century, which is still committing war crimes and ethnic cleansing against indigenous Palestinians. Palestine should be referred to as colonized Palestine, and not the occupied territories, as all of 1948 Palestine has been colonized. ‘Israelis’ and ‘Israeli settlers’ should all be referred to as Zionist colonizers,4 as all ‘Israelis’ are colonizers who have established colonies – as a result of mass ethnic cleansing and massacre of Palestinians – atop demolished Palestinian towns, cities, and villages.5 The Zionist ‘army’ and ‘police’ are an extension of the colonial entity and are created in order to ensure the maintenance of colonial authority and perpetuate its violence – not ensure the safety or security of indigenous Palestinians. On the contrary, they are the primary enablers of violence towards Palestinians.
One of the primary reasons that we do not see this terminology in the mainstream – which is also in large part why the Palestinian narrative is marginalized - is because the ‘settler colonial analysis has largely fallen into disuse in Palestine studies’ (Salamanca, et.al, 2011: 3), in order to avoid bringing ‘Israel’ into comparison with cases such as South Africa, Rhodesia and French-Algeria, and earlier settler colonial formations such as the United States, Canada or Australia, rather than the contemporary European democracies to which Israel seeks comparison’ (ibid.). That was then, this is now. For Palestine, an application of the settler-colonial analysis by labelling ‘Israel’ as ‘colonized Palestine’ means reaffirming Palestinians as a (colonized) indigenous people, thus framing their resistance against Zionist colonizers as an anti-colonial struggle enshrined in international law (Cohen, 2017). This is significant not only in absolving Zionist propaganda that Palestine was a ‘land without a people for a people without a land’, but also in framing their resistance as an anti-colonial struggle. Zionists habitually frame Palestinians as terrorists and ‘irrational aggressors’ (Peteet, 2016: 25) in order to ‘deflect questions and analysis around the causes of the conflict’ (Peteet, 2016: 30), and the term ‘conflict itself glosses over a history of a displacing settler-colonial movement’ (Peteet, 2016: 29). The focus on the colonized’s resistance as the inherent source of violence while deflecting away from the colonizer’s brutal oppression reinforces this falsified narrative.
Peteet contends that ‘applying indigeneity to Palestinians opens space for transgressive thinking about Zionism, space, and [collective] rights’ (Peteet, 2016: 36) and ‘compel[s] a serious rethinking of indigeneity and colonialism in the late modern world as it would link them to others in the global movements of the indigenous and strengthen their claims’ (ibid.). Pre-existing global transnational solidarity environmental, indigenous, and anti-racist (such as Black Lives Matters) movements have created an intersectional alliance which has elevated the Palestinian narrative and directly challenged the bounded perceptions of the Zionist linguistic repertoire which uses false binaries such as ‘Jews vs. Arabs’ and ‘Israel vs. Muslim Terrorists’ (which, according to Peteet, was amplified by Zionists in a post 9/11 linguistic landscape) to a renewed understanding that Palestinians are indigenous people of the land, and from the land – not foreigners, not terrorists (which, according to Edward Said, is a ubiquitous term used to dehumanize the ‘Other’ and create false binaries, usually to the benefit of the oppressor and to the detriment of the oppressed and marginalized to justify their dehumanization and use of large-scale violence against them⁶), not irrational aggressors – who have a particular cause to liberate⁷ their homeland and defend their homes as they resist white supremacist European Zionist colonial domination and violence.
The significance of the May 2011 social media storm and the amplification of the Palestinian narrative allowed for Palestinians to finally take control of a narrative that has been dominated and historically rewritten to legitimize the European Zionist colonization of Palestine. Besides addressing their decades long dehumanization by deconstructing false narratives that they are ‘terrorists’ and ‘aggressors,’ Palestinians rehistorized and contextualized the European Zionist colonial origins of the conflict to Al Nakba of 1948 (and prior to that when Zionists began their plan to colonize Palestine in the late 1800s) with Sheikh Jarrah and other West Bank towns such as Beita and Silwan; that these are not separate and disconnected realities but part of the EZSC’s continual project of colonial expansion and domination for over seven decades is important in situating ‘Israel in a wider panoply of 19th century colonial (-nationalist) movements and thus provides a means to de-exceptionalize Israel-Palestine as somehow unique and beyond comparison’ (Peteet, 2016: 32). Furthermore, an emphasis on the terms ‘European Zionist colonial entity’ reaffirms not only the historical origins of Palestine’s colonization but also implies ‘a territory elsewhere and the movement of the home country’s population’, which means that the solution to such a predicament is not a ‘withdrawal’ of ‘occupied’ territories (i.e. what is referred to as the West Bank and Gaza), but complete decolonization, from the river to the sea. Palestine in its entirety, within the 1948 British mandate borders, has been colonized, ethnically cleansed, with the massacre and destruction of hundreds of Palestinians towns, cities, and villages destroyed, all of which were renamed in Hebrew in an attempt to ‘nativize’ the European colonizers and legitimize their colonial project (Peteet, 2016). The oft-used motto online and offline which has gained traction, ‘Every Israeli city was one Sheikh Jarrah’, serves as a significant reminder that Palestine is ensconced within a settler-colonial context and that the events of 2021 are not isolated, but part of the continual process of ethnic cleansing which began over 73 years ago.

Source: @rounwh, Instagram. Link: https://www.instagram.com/rounwh/?hl=en
"RELEARNING THE ORIGINAL NAMES OF PALESTINIAN CITIES"

Here is what you need to know.

"HEBRAIZATION" OF PALESTINIAN CITY NAMES

The original names of Palestinian cities were replaced with Hebrew-language names throughout different periods in time.

A 1992 study counted 2,780 historical locations whose names were Hebraized, including 340 villages and towns, 1,000 khurbatums, 560 wads and rivers, 380 springs, 198 mountains and hills, 50 caves, 28 castles and palaces, and 14 pools and lakes.

THE ERASURE OF PALESTINIAN GEOGRAPHY IS STILL ON GOING TODAY.

Source: @rounwah, Instagram. Link: https://www.instagram.com/rounwah/?hl=en
The outpouring of Palestinian resistance both on the ground in Palestine and online as a ‘Unity Intifada’, highlights the interconnectedness of Palestinians within the 1948 colonized Palestinian borders and the diaspora. Zionists have typically represented ‘[d]ifferent Palestinian populations ... as isolated, analytically separate, pieces of an impossible puzzle’ (Salamanca, et.al, 2011: 4). The message now is clear to the world - we are all Palestinians fighting European settler colonialism either physically, symbolically, online, offline, or both, and our unity is strength, wherever we may be. Furthermore, the most recent hashtag, #27027km, emphasizes that the decolonial struggle extends ‘from the river to the sea’, and not only what Zionists and Western media label as the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. All of Palestine is colonized – all must be decolonized.

We won’t forget Beita and we won’t let our people fight settler-colonialism alone.

This is the Unity Intifada and unity is the first thing on our agenda.

From Beita to Sheikh Jarrah to Deir al-Assad: Free Palestine.

Source: @rounwah, Instagram. Link: https://www.instagram.com/rounwah/?hl=en
Conclusion

This is a critical moment for Palestinians, as, for arguably the first time since the ethnic cleansing and loss of their homeland in 1948, they no longer require ‘permission to narrate’, but are setting the terms for the narrative themselves and directly challenging dominant Zionist discourse which had – for decades – dehumanized them into non-actors, non-humans. Indeed, ‘for natives, the issue is that, at the hands of the settlers, they face [physical and symbolic] elimination’ (Wolfe, quoted in Salamanca, et.al, 2011: 4). The response to this threat is, according to Salamanca et. al, to ‘develop a praxis that brings back decolonisation and liberation as the imperative goal’ (ibid). Enveloping Palestinians resistance – be it waving flags, holding balloons with the colours of the Palestinian flag, rocks, rudimentary rockets – within a discourse of anti-colonial struggle is significant in shifting the narrative away from the oft used rhetoric of terrorism to discredit their resistance of brutal colonial violence (see Peteet, 2016). Connecting the over seven decades long struggle of Palestinians in the face of this continued violence to a process of decolonization legitimizes Palestinians rightful struggle against their erasure.9 Decolonization, according to James Clifford, is ‘an unfinished, excessive historical process... a recurring agency, a blocked, diverted, continually reinvented historical force’ (Clifford, 2013: 7) which, according to Peteet, ‘underscores a temporally drawn-out, messy, and nonlinear process’ (2016: 32). We are watching the very real, the very material, messy, violent, creative, collective acts of resistance from Gazan sweeping the rubble from their streets and holding concerts on the rubble of their demolished homes, to Palestinians in the West Bank boycotting Zionist produce and goods and creating a ‘Palestine Economic Week’ to defending their homes and towns from Silwan to Beita to Sheikh Jarrah with firecrackers, peaceful sit-ins, and sheer determination. We are watching the material unraveling of decolonization, live, on a daily basis.

The very nature of settler-colonialism is the erasure and extermination of the indigenous population, and it is this logic that will always govern Zionist’s approach towards Palestinians at all levels - political, economic, legislative, social and cultural. There is no peace without justice, no justice without peace, which refers to the complete decolonization (see, for example, Halper 2021; Salaita, 2016) and the dismantling of the apartheid regime and the Zionist framework which upholds it. The material process of decolonization on the ground necessarily requires us to decolonize our language in order to challenge Zionists' ‘tightly scripted’ (Peteet, 2016: 30) dominant discourse – one which has been seen as the legitimate and credible voice, while the Palestinians narrative is entirely disregarded or labeled as ‘propaganda’ (Peteet, 2016: 29). The decolonization of our language necessarily means challenging the authority and power dynamics imbued within the terminology and linguistic repertoire of the colonizers discourse to one which accurately reflects the material realities on the ground for Palestinians, and places their cause firmly within an anti-colonial framework. This will amplify, legitimize, and re-center indigenous Palestinians (the colonized's) narrative and in doing so, flip the ‘topsy-turvy’ world Peteet described, in which 'language collides
with lived realities’ (Peteet, 2016: 24). We must decolonize our language in order to provide principled solidarity with the Palestinian people, who are (and have been for over 73 years) in the material process of decolonization as they actively resist – and die – for their liberation, as I write this.

Source: @rounwah, Instagram. Link: https://www.instagram.com/rounwah/?hl=en

Source: @rounwah, Instagram. Link: https://www.instagram.com/rounwah/?hl=en
Notes

1. The 2021 Oscar nominated short film by Palestinian-British film maker Farah Nabulsi, entitled ‘The Present’, has received accolades for its portrayal of the dangers and trials of Palestinians as they cross these checkpoints. Not only are checkpoints a manifestation of the system of apartheid that physically seeks to separate Jews from non-Jews, but they are also sites of daily humiliation, harassment, physical harm, and murder.

2. Checkpoints are places where Palestinians – on a daily basis – are humiliated, strip-searched, harassed, beaten, forced to give birth, and indiscriminately killed in what many human rights groups have labeled as extrajudicial executions, according to such groups as Forensic Architecture, a London-based group specialising in the investigation of violations of human rights (Al Jazeera, 2021).

3. ‘One example is well-known Republican pollster and media consultant Frank Luntz authoring ‘The Israel Project’s 2009 Global Language Dictionary’ (henceforth ‘TIP Dictionary’). The compilation offers 116 pages of argumentative strategies for containing and responding to the Palestinian narrative, addressing critiques of Israel, promoting an Israeli perspective, and convincing Americans to support continued military aid and loan guarantees. It argues that a U.S. audience considers SECURITY (all capitals in original text) to be central and suggests that users of “TIP Dictionary” speak of peace, empathy, children, and their recognition of Palestinian suffering’ (Peteet, 2016: 27).

4. ‘…that settler colonialism is a fairly standard term of reference on Palestine, it is time for a shift in terminology from settlements to colonies and from settlers to colonists, which includes those immigrants who settled in Palestinian territory that became Israel in 1948–49. Indeed, some early Zionists did refer to the Palestinians as natives and to themselves as colonists. The terms colonies and colonists rather than settlements, settlers, and immigrants draw attention to the continuity of colonialism as well as colonists’ sense of entitlement to indigenous resources. Most importantly, such a lexicon situates Israel in a wider panoply of 19th century colonial (=nationalist) movements and thus provides a means to de-exceptionalize Israel–Palestine as somehow unique and beyond comparison. Settlements imply population inroads in one’s own territory to an as-yet uninhabited frontier, and the maintenance of ties of support and identity with the state. Colony implies a territory elsewhere and the movement of the home country’s population. Predictably, violence is heavily implicated in the latter. Following this thread, the discource should shift from a call for withdrawal from the occupied territories to a call for decolonization’ (Peteet, 2016: 32).

5. This is the historical reality of the origins of their existence in the land of Palestine. Since Zionist began their European colonial project in the 1880s (see, for example, Khalidi, 2020; Masalha, 2018; Pappe, 2006), well before the Al Nakba (the Catastrophe, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine) of 1948.

6. See, for example, Ryannon MacLeod’s 2010 essay, The Use of Dehumanizing Rhetoric in the War on Terror. Available at: https://www.e-ir.info/2010/05/03/the-use-of-dehumanizing-rhetoric-in-the-war-on-terror/

7. ‘Adopting a settler-colonial framework opens space for challenging other linguistic practices. For example, it opens discursive space to drop the term “facts on the ground” to refer to colonies as irreversible, as phenomena so taken for granted that nothing can dislodge them. If we use this language, are we not accepting and legitimizing the permanence of the colonies and casting the Palestinian as a material nonpresence? In that normalizing catchphrase with distinct spatial dimensions, permanency is granted to the colonists and not the displaced. This permanency irrevocably transforms the meaning of space and confirms [the falsified Zionist narrative] the Palestinians as interlopers, foreigners, and infiltrators. This catch phrase serves
to normalize Israeli colonies. Its selective application to the colonies but not to Palestinian towns and villages renders Palestinians moveable, and their presence on the landscape historically irrelevant and imminently reversible. A term of privilege and power, it signals an ability to impose an illegal presence and have it accepted in the international arena’ (Peteet, 2016: 37).

8. ‘In the Zionist mythicohistory formula, there can be only one native with rightful claims to the land. Therefore, the power of naming was recognized early on by Zionist leaders. They formed the Committee on Names in 1930 (later the Place Names Committee), tasked with changing Palestine’s place names to either biblical or nationalist/Zionist names. More recently, imposing Hebrew signage in the West Bank and removing Arabic signs continue the inscription of colonialism on the ground. Erasing Arabic place names effaces the presence of an indigenous/native population and their memories of place. It also bolsters the mythicohistory of a Jewish claim to Palestine that outweighs any other claims. If a non-Jewish group were to be recognized as the indigenous, what would that imply about Zionist claims?’ (Peteet, 2016: 36).

9. ‘It’s time for Israel to accept that as an occupied people, Palestinians have a right to resist – in every way possible’ (Cohen, 2017).

10. ‘Language sets up frameworks that filter perceptions of empirical reality; in the process, the deployment of certain terms serves as a point of departure that stymies alternative forms of understanding. As critical building blocks in the linguistic repertoire, the words that are used to refer to people, places, events, actions, and things form part of the cultural systems that structure and nuance the way we see, understand, and imagine the world. As such, they are always more than simple reflections of reality, referencing moral and political grammars tasked with underwriting and reproducing power. Those who work in Palestinian studies know that each term or concept they use is closely scrutinized and an extra burden of proof is required... The ability to prevail in this contentious linguistic field is a register of power, on one hand, and a manifestation of the will to persevere on the other’ (Peteet, 2016: 27-28).

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Appendix 1
Campaign Photos from ‘Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian’ (2014)

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
My name is Palestinian, not Dafhawi (from the West Bank) or Gazawi (from Gaza)

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called Occupied Jerusalem, Not West or East Jerusalem

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
They are called Arab Palestinians, not Arab Israelis
Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called Palestinian rights, not Palestinian demands

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called the Occupying Army, not Israeli Defense Forces

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
They are called Prisoners of War Not detainees

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called a barrier, not a crossing

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called the Zionist Entity, not Israel

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called the Annexation and Displacement Wall, not the Separation Wall

Say it Right, Say it in Palestinian,
It is called the Al Buraq Wall¹ the Wailing (referring to the Western Wall surrounding the Temple Mount in Old Jerusalem) Wall

¹ In Islam, the wall, which lies on the western border of Al-Haram Al-Sharif (or Temple Mount, which is a site holy to Christians, Muslims, and Jews), is referred to as Al-Buraq wall because it is believed that the Prophet Muhammad tied his winged steed, Al-Buraq (Buraq means lightning, and refers to the swift speed in which he traveled on his journey), on this site during his holy journey, known as the Isra’ and Mi’raj (Night of Ascension, which is considered a holy day for Muslims and a miracle only second to the revelation of the Holy Quran), which took him from the Al Haram Mosque in Mecca to Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, where he then ascended to paradise.
Pity the Nation

For a long time I was of the conviction that one of the fiercest battles that will have to be fought to win the struggle against the carefully designed Israeli system of legalized, institutionalized and normalized violent discriminatory rule over Palestinians will be in Germany. I assumed that because of its historical intimacy to the Jewish Israelis of European descent that it strategically protects, and to the Palestinians whose history it vehemently denies being intermeshed in, that for Palestinian freedom to be achieved, Germany would have to first come to terms with the contemporary manifestations of its past in non-European contexts in order to begin the long road toward ending its unconditional support to Israel.

This changed in May 2021.

It dawned on me when I first heard the chants of freedom for Palestine thunderously echoing along the streets of Berlin and glimpsed the blunt green, red, black and white lines of the Palestinian flag fluttering in the distance - as I turned the corner of a small street with my family and friends to join a demonstration of an estimated 15,000 that was planned by an intersecting group of organizations and activists to commemorate Nakba Day and protest Israel’s latest onslaught of Gaza - that Palestine really will be free one day (Figure 1-3). Palestine will not only be free, but Germany’s destructive desire to stand in its place, crying ‘anti-Semitism’ at any real attempt at a sincere - even if sometimes unsettling - conversation that could lead to a lesser loss of lives and human rights for all will mean that on Palestine - at the very least - the country will be on the wrong side of history. That’s a very empowering realization, even if also a disconcerting one.

Figure 1: Courtesy of Fadi Elias.
Palestinian liberation is not contingent on Germany's moral stance. If anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles have taught us anything it is that those oppressed in these unequal relationships tend to attain their liberation sooner than is ever imagined. Accordingly, Germany matters not because it will make a difference in whether justice will be attained in Palestine, because that will happen. It matters because its moral compass acts today as a gauge for global solidarity activists on just how intricately tied up its racialized policies and practices on migration have become, not just to right wing politics but equally to mainstream cultural politics in Europe. Liberal German sensibilities and research in that direction have tended to highlight the legacy of the nationalist socialist past which is understood as having nurtured authoritarianism in its citizens and therefore a rise in anti-Muslim racism within the context of the politics of citizenship in post Unification Germany. Of course within this framework, it is Germany's underclass and not its educated elite that is responsible for the renewed image of Germany as a hotbed of racism and xenophobia. Racism is regarded as related to the past. It is neither cyclical nor endemic to its own longer history of violence against ‘others’, whether in the form of the Shoah or German colonies in Africa (Lewiski, 2018).

Yet the May 15th Nakba Day demonstration in Berlin, predictably ignored and/or smeared by mainstream German media and one amongst a wave of many others that erupted in Germany and globally that month, spoke volumes about how race, racism and racialization is manufactured by the media and political elite landscape. By extension, it brilliantly accentuated the realities and the change underway in the country’s notorious conviction to repudiate Palestinian history for the sake of redressing its own Anti-Semitic realities.
That gloriously giddy day on May 15, 2021, a speaker got on the platform and eloquently explained through her microphone that Palestinians and their supporters are not asking Germans to fight with them, nor do they expect them to, but they sure as hell demand that they stop arming Israel. The message was clear: from the perspective of Palestinians, of fighters for freedom, immigrants, people of color and generally people with a sense of justice, there is no expectation of German generosity, nor do these communities think the German political and cultural elite are particularly capable of righting historical injustice and suffering outside of its Eurocentric narrow scope of vision. But there is an expectation that the very least the country can do, as it continues to redeem itself from its own unspeakable crimes, is to muster the grace to stand aside and refrain from adding fuel to Israeli fire targeting Palestinian lives.

Germany is known to be one of Israel’s second-largest supplier of weapons (Campaign Against Arms Trade, 2021), even though historically and still today it remains secretive about its strategic and military relationship to the country. This military relationship involves multi-lateral training operations and joint military exercises in addition to the arms sales to Israel worth €862 million that Germany has admitted issuing licenses for (ibid.).

I do not bring up Germany’s global arms trade record to expose the country’s complicity in the crimes against humanity committed by Israel any more than it is already exposed; at least amongst those communities with, to use the political establishment’s favorite term, a ‘migration background’, and also
amongst the growing and already large number of political and social justice movements for which equality and equity is paramount. The point is however that for all the German political and media establishment’s introspective reflection on the genocidal violence it showed itself capable of as a nation in the 1930s and 1940s, it remains a parochial power with the military capability to partake in making the lives of those it deems threatening to the cultural vision it paints of itself, utterly painful.

This also matters.

It matters not only because of all the bodies this self-referential worldview physically mutilates and the lives it continuously breaks in the wake of its complicity, but also because of the many Palestinians and other people of color facing the lived realities of life in Europe today. These lived realities entail normalization of the everyday hatreds enveloped in the prevalent white European culture of Anti-Jewish, Anti-Muslim and Anti-Black racism. It matters because the remembrance culture that the German elite uses as a site to think through what it has done refuses to be inclusive enough to encompass the memory and realities of migrant communities today. Instead, a stark line is drawn to separate the two memories of violence, one European and one ‘other’. Yet, as US based Holocaust researchers Michael Rothberg (2007) has been compellingly arguing for years now, Germany needs to begin to recognize the multitudes of memories it houses today as part of its healing process.

As is stands, the country’s Eurocentric self-constructed image of itself as a liberal defender of plurality, freedom, and equality not only doesn’t match the multitudes of experiences and identities that constitute it today, but it also, more ominously, determines the contours of visibility and the racialized subjectivities it has historically shaped through the process. The implications of this for the right of Germans and non-Germans alike to organize against the interconnectedness of racism, colonialism, and Apartheid in the case of Palestine in Germany are tremendous.

Even as cultural and governmental institutions and initiatives invest heavily in supposedly decolonizing their spaces of production and knowledge dissemination by hiring people of color, investing in years long projects like ‘Berlin Dekolonial’ dedicated to addressing the country’s colonial past and its postcolonial present, and addressing restitution claims by returning looted art such as the Benin Bronzes and other Nazi-era thefts, the Palestinian experience as the very embodiment of some of the hottest topics such as colonial cultural appropriation, migration, exile, borders and walls, surveillance, mass incarceration and police violence that circulate in activist and scholarly sites that self-define as critical and radical, is almost entirely invisible (Figure 4).

For a long time the world, including a large chunk of the Arabic speaking world, was ready to believe that Germany’s experience was exceptional. They were content to tread gently as Germany healed from its self-inflicted wounds and focus instead on the US as the main military and financial
supplier of the Israeli Occupation, by refraining from holding Germans accountable to being equally complicit in Israeli crimes. But that false premise - that German national healing be inextricably tied to supporting systemic Israeli violence - is now increasingly under attack (Figure 5). The criticism is not coming from Palestinian voices alone. It is being vocalized by Jews of all nationalities, including Jewish Israeli and many Jewish and non-Jewish scholars of genocide (Jaddaliyya Reports, 2021, Michaeli, 2021). A rising number of Jewish voices in especially the US today do not see Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East but a brutal and racist ethnocracy (Shatz, 2021). Such voices insist, as progressive Palestinian voices have long done, on delinking Judaism, Jewish people, and Jewish culture from the discriminatory enthno-nationalist ideology of Zionism, which emerged against the backdrop of a specifically racist European context around what became termed ‘the Jewish Question’ in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries. Today, critics of Zionism ask that the ideology upon which systematic state-led violence and racial discrimination are founded be honestly rethought not only from its European perspective but also from the standpoint of its non-European victims (Said, 1979). Such critics essentially ask that we not fear probing the indirect consequences of one painful event in history having the effect of obliterating another people’s bodies, desires and dreams, in a context of historical intimacy between both events. Just as such voices probe us at the same time to re-question all other forms of constructed nationalisms and the state security apparatuses that defend them.

For those acquainted with the German capital’s cultural and activist scene, it is a known fact that when progressive Jews, whether German or not, and
activists for Palestine, whether Palestinian and/or Arab or not, come together, it is the voice of the former that is most likely to be heard. This is the case even if there is at the same time an increasing systematic effort to silence and slander that Jewish voice for its supposed Anti-Semitism. That voice which chimes with Jewish groups especially in the US like Jewish Voice for Peace and magazines like Jewish Currents that have joined the condemnations of Israeli Apartheid policies by Israeli human rights organizations B’Tselem and Yesh Din as well as Human Rights Watch is accused by Zionist apologists that are given visibility in mainstream German media of having lost its way. That critical voice is attacked for being too influenced by a presumed ahistoricity and short-sightedness informed by intersectional and postcolonial experiences that feeds in to a relativization of German history (Freie, 2021, Funk, 2021). The derogatory assumption here is that communities of color and the progressives that work in solidarity with them are unable to identify objective cases of oppression when they do see them because of the colonial baggage that they carry. Needless to say the propagated ideas that accompanies these false presumptions fits squarely in to the logic of the attacks made recently by some European and especially French politicians and prominent intellectuals on social theories of race, gender and postcolonialism which they regard as a threat to the values of their European identity and values (Muriem Haleh Davis 2018, Delaport, 2021; Yeung 2021).

In the past 2 years alone, Germany has witnessed the resignation of the Director of the Jewish Museum in light of malicious accusations deeming him Anti-Semitic after he re-tweeted an article that questioned the resolution passed by the German Bundestag in May last year, which condemned the
movement for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel (Stephens, 2019). It has also withheld awards from some of the most well-respected public intellectuals, philosophers and social activists of our times, such as the writers Kamila Shamsie and Achille Mbembe, because of their support for BDS as a peaceful means of resistance, disinvented well-respected artists and musicians from cultural festivals, withdrawn funding from anti-racist educational platforms run by women of color like ‘Dear White People’ for their inclusion of Palästina Spricht (Palestine Speaks) a coalition of activists working for Palestinian human rights that are accused of Anti-Semitism for supporting BDS, and also attempted rescinding awards from well-known artists for failing to condemn BDS (Bishara, 2019). This is all amongst a host of other formal interventions that have censored, most remarkably, critical German Jewish and Israeli voices that are too many to recount here (Mashiach, 2020). As one prominent German Jewish media critic recently observed (Wolff, 2021), Jewish plurality and values are under relentless attack from the very same people who claim the protection of Jewish life is a tenant of German culture.

It must be said that this tendency to visibly place the critical Jewish voice of conscience on the frontlines of the fight for justice in Palestine in Germany is a strategic tactic that is well aware of the limitations of German mainstream discourse. According to one well-respected scholar of genocide, that discourse and what he calls the ‘instrumentalization of remembrance’ by the political and media establishment (Moses, 2021 a) is given a visible platform within the framework of a set of post-2000 constructed catechisms that make Israel Germany’s raison d’être, and anti-Zionism paramount to anti-Semitism (Moses, 2021 b). Yet, the relative visibility given to the critical Jewish voice over the Palestinian one does not supplant, nor lead alone in the struggle to end Israeli Apartheid. Rather it works hand in hand with Palestinian and other intersectional activists for justice in Palestine who need to be shielded from a psychologically violent media effort to discredit them and glibly locate their cause within the terrorism and Islamic culture debate that the European nativist discourse has zealously embraced.

Germany’s complex relationship to Palestinian liberation is often framed in terms of the country’s recent racist past and its consequent proximity to Israel as the homeland of the Holocaust survivors whose lives it wrecked and whose pasts it seeks to correct today. At the same time official media discourse has squarely placed blame on new immigrants supposedly bringing with them the Anti-Semitic traditions which Germany has worked hard to eradicate. This scapegoating continues even as it is clear that most Anti-Jewish hate crimes are, according to police records, being carried out by right wing white nationalist groups (Schaer, 2021) According to this callous logic the current political class’s zealous attacks occur by placing the figure of the Anti-Semitic Muslim within the site of the Israeli–Palestinian ‘conflict’ that propels Anti-Semitism in Europe. (Younes, 2020). This logic also allows Israel to fashion itself as a global crusader against the ‘Islamic jihad’ on the ‘western way of life’.
The beauty of May 2021, if one could speak of anything positive that came out of charred bodies and fear that the Israeli military apparatus once again inculcated, is that it has turned conventional wisdom about how we understand Israeli state violence on its head. Instead of calling it a conflict, it is increasingly the more contextually accurate terms of ‘occupation’, ‘Apartheid’ and even ‘racism’ and ‘persecution’ that are being employed by scholars, activists, and also mainstream media, outside of Germany, to frame the violence imposed on all Palestinians living under Israeli rule, regardless of geographical location. Instead of ‘terrorists’ it is now not uncommon to hear Palestinians framed as a people fighting for freedom against an illegal military occupation; temporary ‘clashes’ between Israel and the Palestinians, supposedly ‘two equal sides’, were more than ever before reported as part of a longer history of war crimes and an imbalance between two sides; ‘evictions’ of Palestinians in the Jerusalem neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan are not a real-estate problems but explicit acts of historical dispossession and ethnic cleansing, and so on and so forth. To be sure, there is a worthwhile conversation taking place and being led by an exponentially growing group of people who genuinely want to see an end to the extensive human rights abuses occurring in the name of ‘security’.

In Germany, the nation that is to be pitied these days for the historical blind spot it continues to nurture, what’s been exposed, this time with gusto, is not the country’s complicity in the Israel war-machine. That’s already known. It’s how difficult this relationship and the embarrassing justification for the Palestinian body pile-up will increasingly get in the future. I would venture to say that in ordinary German society, amongst neighbors, friends and acquaintances, there is no outward defiance, like that of the media, to defend the establishment’s support of Israeli State-led violence. What I see and hear are hushed voices, shameful gazes, shrugged shoulders, and quiet apologies. For they know full well what is happening, but feel utterly helpless about how to address it. And what all this reflects is a nation very much in turmoil.

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Visual Cultures of Solidarity with Palestine: a historical perspective

Over the past couple of months, social media platforms have seen an extraordinary effervescence of expressions of solidarity with Palestine. A string of hashtags, from #SaveSheikhJarrah and #GazaUnderAttack to #FreePalestine #FromTheRiverToTheSea, have lent support to Palestinians resisting their forced displacements; denounced Israeli Apartheid and the racism of Zionist settlers; and condemned the brutality of the ongoing siege and assault on Gaza. Despite initial censorship, many tweets, memes and images have circulated widely and connected Palestinian activists in occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and inside Israel with many of those in the diaspora, as well as with a growing number of international supporters. Powerful statements of international academic and artistic solidarity have quickly ensued and have been signed en masse with endorsements proudly announced on social media. The hashtags were creatively amplified in turn on placards and loudly echoed in marches of solidarity that took to the streets of major cities around the world. Suddenly the silence was broken. Brave Palestinian voices who had long been campaigning for freedom and justice got a hearing and inspired many to lift the veil of fear for speaking truth to power. How did this happen?

It is certainly no thanks to social media alone. Doubtless such platforms facilitate networking between, and with, Palestinians in geographically fragmented and diasporic conditions of activism and provide a much-needed alternative to the broad Western media blackout and all too often blatant misrepresentation of Palestinians and their rightful struggle. Nonetheless social media do not create social movements. Rather, there’s an underlying political question about the ways in which transnational solidarity takes shape in and through communicative actions. Here it concerns how the Palestinian struggle is rendered intelligible by way of discursive and visual activist practices. Over the past few years, we have been witnessing the build-up of a counter-hegemonic discursive field, linking the historical injustice underlying the Palestinian struggle to other decolonial indigenous movements and to that of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, increasing in momentum in both academic and public spaces of contestation (eg. Jabary Salamanca et al. 2012; Erakat & Lamont Hill 2019; Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns). Centred on nodal themes, such as Zionist supremacy, structural and systemic racism, settler colonialism and apartheid, a lexicon of inter-related concepts - with a whole theoretical and empirical literature to back them - has shifted the epistemic frame of the Palestinian historical struggle since 1948, changing how it can be meaningfully described, understood and fought. This has pushed against the obfuscating frame of a ‘conflict’ based on religion, largely misconstrued as an asymmetrical war between an allegedly ‘legitimate state’ and so-called ‘terrorists’. Crucially, this counterhegemonic discourse has also broken the tactic of silencing criticism of Israel with the customary unfounded charges of antisemitism. Alongside this shift in
Figure 1: Poster ‘Palestine’, designed by Rafael Enriquez for the Organisation of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), Cuba, undated. Collection of the author.
discursive framework is the important imaginative and affective dimension in and through which transnational solidarity with Palestine is being articulated and mobilised. Key here is the way in which the visual and cultural politics of solidarity impart a sense of agency and an aesthetics of hope.

Today’s electronic mediascapes of solidarity with Palestine are, however, not entirely new. They were foreshadowed by the visual cultures and printscapes of the global sixties. Transnational solidarity then was central to the radical imagination that connected the new left and civil rights movements in the Global North with anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles across the South (Maasri et al. forthcoming). A heady Palestine liberation movement was interconnected with global anticolonial revolutionary ferment. But it had since been excluded from histories of this tumultuous period to the point of silence. Yet in the global sixties, mobile print media lent visibility to the Palestinian cause and articulated the aesthetics of revolutionary anti-imperialism across national borders and through travelling cultures of solidarity (see Figures 1, 2 & 4). The politicization of the role of the artist in society at this radical historical juncture produced new aesthetic sensibilities that were carried in and through the reproducibility of printed media, such as posters, cards, stamps, leaflets, periodicals and illustrated books (Maasri 2020). In particular, Arab artistic expressions of solidarity with Palestine were reconceived along revolutionary lines that radically shifted artmaking from the painting to the surface of the reproducible print, displacing practices of exhibiting from the gallery to the public space of the street, refugee camps and guerrilla bases (Boullata 1970).

Thematically, the quintessential trope of the Palestinian revolutionary struggle during the long 1960s was conjured in the translocal figure of the *fida’i* (referring literally to a selfless struggle in pursuit of the greater good). The Palestinian *fida’i* gained particular credence with the rise of a guerrilla-modelled liberation movement in the aftermath of the devastating Arab–Israeli war in 1967. This symbolic figure thus came to represent a rupture in the representation of Palestinian subjectivity from passive refugee to heroic revolutionary freedom fighter (see Figure 3). The Arabic linguistic sign was displaced by visual representations of the *fida’i*, which situated the Palestinian national liberation within broader transnational imaginaries of anticolonial and anti–imperialist revolutionary struggles. It is this kind of slippage that lent the *fida’i* its translocality. The locally grounded kufiya, the traditional Levantine peasant headscarf subverted for guerrilla anonymity by the the *fida’i*, now acts as a Palestinian national signifier. It constitutes a site of symbolic resistance to the specific form of Israeli settler colonialism, as the peasant symbol provides organic historical links to land (Swedenburg 2003). But the peasant turned anticolonial freedom fighter was also the new revolutionary subject emerging from China, Cuba and Vietnam, in methods of guerrilla warfare and revolutionary thought. As Fredric Jameson has noted, the figure of the mobile guerrilla prefigures the utopian space of revolutionary transformation outside ‘real’ politics, geography, historical social classes and division of revolutionary labour (peasant, soldier, worker, vanguard intellectual); it ‘is in and of itself a
Figure 2: Poster ‘Long Live the International Solidarity Against Imperialism and Zionism’, designed by Palestinian artist Ismail Shammout, Palestinian National Committee for the 10th World Festival of Youth and Students Berlin (GDR), PLO, 1973. Collection of the author.
figure for the transformed, revolutionary society to come’ (Jameson 1984: 202). It was a quintessential trope that crossed borders, traversed imaginations and inspired agency as it became aestheticized in films, on posters and in periodicals. The visual malleability and portability of such mediascapes extended the revolutionary imagination across national borders and language barriers and helped define conceptions — as well as aesthetic sensibilities — of transnational solidarity among readers and viewers. Imagination was thus at the core of a meaningful transnational solidarity outside the immediately experiential (Maasri et al. forthcoming). It is here that the translocal role of visuality as a key site for imaginative identification and transformation is so central to solidarity.

If the broadly male-gendered, kufiya-clad, armed figure of the fida’i rendered the Palestinian liberation struggle intelligible across borders in the revolutionary long sixties, another dent in the horizon of intelligibility seems to be opening up today. It is one that situates Palestine in decolonial praxis and links its struggle for freedom to ongoing resistance against racism, colonial subjugation and intersectional forms of oppression. If we begin to understand ‘Palestine as a feminist Issue’, as the Palestinian Feminist Collective invites us to, then we can imagine and build a radically different and just future for everyone. As the eloquent Palestinian human rights activist and scholar, Noura Erakat, responding to Israelis’ fears of what Palestinian freedom might entail, announced at a recent protest: ‘You can stay; just not as our masters’.

Figure 3: Poster ‘May First’, designed by Jihad Mansour (pseudonym for Marc Rudin, Swiss-born artist who joined the PFLP in Lebanon in the seventies), Joint command of PFLP & DFLP, undated. Collection of A. Bou Jawde.
Notes

1. See for instance: ‘Palestine and Praxis: Open letter and call to Action’; ‘A letter against Apartheid’; ‘Architects and Urban Planners against Apartheid’; ‘Palestine is a Feminist Issue’; and many more letters by academic communities at specific universities.

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Stills: Sekigun-P.F.L.P: Sekai sensō senzen 1971
(The Red Army / PFLP: Declaration of World War)

Captions:
Adrian Lahoud and Jasbir Puar

Has there ever been a peaceful day for the oppressed people?
Denied even a day of peace, life for the oppressed is an art of conflict. Fighting as living is life’s form in permanent combat,
a composition in congregation as warfare.
Before us is a highly armed struggle as the landscape...
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THE JVC PALESTINE PORTFOLIO

THE JVC PALESTINE PORTFOLIO

A landscape that is to stand by the scope of the world.
Our frontline is the edge of a sword against a neck. The landscape of struggle propagates through the air until it fills the globe and their lungs.
The world is not watching but the people are on standby.
For the borderless army all liberation is co-liberation. A global intifada strikes at the nervous system of a global occupation.

Sheikh Jarrah, Tottenham. Gaza, Minneapolis. In a sense we already as one sing...
already saw the world
What is the people
The congregation of the damned is the unbound co-existence of all oppressed people that have died, that are still here, and are yet to be born.

The congregation persists in everything everywhere.
The people’s weapon is the art of calling this congregation to assembly.
On ‘Victory images’ and Gaza

Alan Feldman (Feldman, 2014) described Israel’s regime of total control over Gaza as ‘genocidal desistance,’ in which ‘each Israeli attack on Gaza is simultaneously and implicitly recast by state subtext as a desistance from genocide’. The violence inflicted on Gaza in May 2021 can be analysed from different angles, but the regularity in which the terror of the destruction of Gaza recurs, inflicting much of its deadly damage on innocent civilians, makes the besieged territory a unique global emergency. The following comments are my attempt to explain one visual filter through which this violence is normalised in Jewish Israeli society.

In Israel, the repeated campaigns in Gaza are framed as a regular necessity of conflict management, which was euphemistically termed ‘mowing the grass’ (Inbar and Shamir, 2014: 65). The unleashing of disciplining violence in almost regular intervals is seen as a structural necessity. Moreover, the ‘Gaza wars’ as Bregman (2016) calls them, provide a sense of ontological security to the Israeli state to a large degree derives its corporeal identity as a ‘nation in arms’ from its fighting stance and from its largest institution – the Israeli Defence Forces (Galai, 2019).

Scholars like Yagil Levy (2008, 2017) Edna Lomsky Feder (2010), Erella Graciani (2018), Adi Kuntsman (2020), and others have interrogated the tensions between militarism, militarisation and the identity of the Israeli state. At the heart of this tension is a discrepancy between the image of the state of itself as reluctantly having to be vigilant to protect itself from harm, the changing nature of its security practices as the occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza are further entrenched, and the regularity in which violence is inflicted upon Palestinian (and Lebanese) civilian populations.

This tension manifests in the visual realm and it sparked a search for visual artefacts that could resurrect a view of the state’s ‘conflicts’ as something honourable and familiar, as indicators of achievement. These visual artefacts took the form of ‘victory images,’ or iconic photos denoting military success, and this term has become a constant refrain during the violent military operations 2008-9, 2012, 2014, 2018 and 2021, with pundits in TV studios repeating the message that “The IDF is looking for a victory image’ as a goal of the operation that would allow it to stop.

The ‘victory image’ began functioning as an operational goal during the 2006 conflict in Lebanon, at the same time as the IDF’s ‘Dahye doctrine’, which targeted civilian infrastructure. With Israeli public perceptions of the war as a failure, due to the continued missile strikes from Hezbollah even after the ground invasion, IDF command came up with a plan to achieve the appearance of success. On 8 August, an Israeli military unit was charged with capturing the same building from which Hezbollah chief Nasrallah gave a historic speech and to fly the Israeli flag. The resultant image, they hoped, would serve as a ‘victory image’ much in line with previous use of such iconic imagery (Azoulay, 2011).
Figure 1: Operation ‘Defensive Edge’ - Graphics generated by the IDF’s spokesperson unit and disseminated in social media, available on the IDF blog available at: http://www.idfblog.com/blog/2014/08/05/operation-protective-edge-numbers/
The picture-taking operation was a complete failure. Two soldiers were killed by friendly fire (Rappoport, 2007: 264-265) and the image that was taken was not at all impressive and was not distributed to the media, as was initially planned. However, the notion of a ‘victory image’ survived, and later a different image was found. Moreover, the concept of a ‘victory image’ that would legitimise the use of the army became entrenched in Israeli public discourse.

In the subsequent military operations in Gaza, talk of the much needed ‘victory image’ was rife in the Israeli media. However, no image was found. Yagil Levy (2017) explained that the IDF in its operations in Gaza engaged in risk-management and approved remote military operations that were predicted to cause a great deal of ‘collateral damage’ in order to avoid placing soldiers at risk. Remote warfare does not yield victory images. The enactment of the Dahiyeh doctrine, which meant the heavy bombing of civilian areas, offered nothing that could be celebrated and any rudimentary search in newswires would reveal the horrific and bloody reality of emaciated bodies that suffer its consequence. Yet, the concept of the ‘victory image’ only grew in prominence. It simply transformed from a visual depiction of an act of heroism or success that inspired pride in the military achievement to a narrative statement or a collation of data that lays claim to an achievement. Israeli journalist Uzi Benziman (2012) explained that ‘lacking a spontaneous victory image, the Israeli leadership is trying – through verbal media, to instil in the public consciousness a feeling of unequivocal achievement’. In conceptual terms, the victory image, whether visual or verbal is an act of ‘victory staging’ in which ‘a symbol of victory becomes a condition for the cessation of fighting’ (Galai, 2019).

The conversations in Israeli TV studios during these military operations in Gaza, including the most recent one, heavily used the term ‘victory image.’ For example, the IDF’s operation in 13 May, in which it faked an invasion and used reporters to corroborate its ruse, was already being framed in the Israeli media as a ‘victory image’ until it became known that it did not succeed. The intention was not to celebrate the scenes of Israel’s enemies buried alive in tunnels as a visual image of victory, but to render them into data as part of an additional transformation of the ‘victory image’ that occurred in 2012 and had repeated itself in more recent IDF operations in Gaza.

The compiled ‘victory image’ of which two samples are presented here, re-visualises such data as an infographic that serves two purposes. First, it serves as a victory image, designed to look like a scoreboard, indicating something like the end of a level in some video game. In this respect, it is well aligned with the self-perception of Israeli society as having to progress through constant conflict. Second, it embodies a desire for a new visual interface through which to experience ‘the conflict’. A clean, high-tech aesthetic that would devour the messy reality of genocidal desistance.
A *virtual-victory-reality* is established in which Palestinian dead bodies are screened-off (Feldman, 2005: 212) and only ‘terrorists’ remain who in 2014 were ‘killed’ and in 2021 were ‘neutralised’. This newest iteration of the ‘victory image’ visually emplots claims for military achievement into a neat and symmetrical scorecard. In giving up on iconicity and taking on icons these new images turn away from the classic story of sacrifice and victory in the face of defeat and instead, they carry an implicit promise – we will do better next time. There will be a next time.

Figure 2: 2021 - Operation ‘Guardian of the Walls’ - Graphics generated by the IDF’s spokesperson unit and disseminated in social media, available on the IDF blog available at: https://twitter.com/idf/status/1396170789305659402
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Anti-Colonialism and Decolonisation: USSR and Palestine

From where do you speak?

We are taking this key decolonial question as an anchor. It seemed to us an impossibility to trace one’s position when it is puzzled for those who operate within many political coordinates as we do. This May, 2021, the Russian-speaking information space we inhabit, our meticulously curated lefty-anarcho-feminist information bubble, was glitching and disintegrating. We witnessed, reacted, and commented on the split reality, trying to assemble it back together in direct messages. While we anticipated the pro-Israeli positions of the Russian liberal media (Meduza.io, 2021), the split we recall here came from within the hollow, present in the ‘neutrality’ of the left. Confusion and fear to take sides were haunting political statements: ‘Israel-Palestine conflict’, ‘the benefit for both sides’, and ‘antisemitism’ as a crux of Israeli aggression, stumped us.

To answer the question ‘from where do we think?’, we reflect on past conversations and anticipate those that are yet to be had. Our positionality is entangled with Soviet colonial and anti-colonial politics. We look at USSR and soviet dissidents’ views on Palestine, Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and the Zionist colonial project to see where we are today. Whose are the voices we should be attune to while listening to the space from which we speak?

To discuss the USSR’s foreign policy from a decolonial perspective, one needs to unlearn the ‘Cold War’. Suppose you are to describe all Soviet colonial occupations and interventions through another Empire. In that case, you will inevitably find yourself embodying the colonial gaze that perceives the sovereign states as mere territories for the ‘real’ USSR-USA confrontation. Just like contemporary Russian colonial wars are not caused by ‘NATO aggression’, despite Russian propaganda constantly claiming they are, the USSR had its own colonial rationale outside of fighting ‘capitalist imperialism’. Therefore, we bring various colonialisms and their entanglements to the foreground. A great example of such a mesh lies in the colonial unconscious of Russian Wikipedia:

> Israeli experience of fighting Islamist terrorist organisations is of particular value for Russia. Russian security forces in Chechnya use the Israeli experience to fight terrorism. (Wikipedia, 2021)

Despite the apparent factual mistake, this paragraph illustrates well the porousness of colonialisms, how one colonial violence can inform the other. In order to understand the different stages of the official Soviet position on Palestine, these need to be contextualised in the colonial processes which occurred in the period of the Soviet Union. These stages can be split into three key moments: the support towards the Zionist project (1947-1953), neutrality (1955-1967), and the pro-Palestinian stance (1967-1991). We’ll go on now to
address these three moments, and, to conclude, we would like to mention Russia’s current double standards policy towards Palestine. It is distilled in the statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2017, which puzzled everyone by claiming Western Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Eastern Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

1947-1953. Overlapping Colonialisms

Figure 1: The photograph from the Israeli ‘Day of Workers’ Solidarity’ with Stalin in the centre shows the intimacy of the USSR-Israel alliance. Tel Aviv, May 1, 1949. Pinn Hans/Israeli Government Press Office. Commons.wikimedia.
As the first representative of Israel in the UN, Abba Eban claimed: without Soviet support, Israel ‘would have never made it from both the military and diplomatic points of view’. Indeed, the USSR was the first state to de jure recognise Israel on May 18, 1948. One year before that, on May 14, 1947, the Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko supported the partition of Palestine and Israel occupation of Palestinian land. In the proposal Gromyko made, one can easily spot a particular framing that omits mention of the British Mandate:

First option: establishing a single Arab-Jewish State with equal rights for the Jews and the Arabs. Suppose this option turns out to be impossible, in case Arabs and Jews state that they cannot live together because of the soured relationships between them. Then ... the second option is the partition of Palestine into two states – Arab and Jewish.

(Gromyko, 1947, italics ours)

These remarks, ignoring the role British colonial rule played in such ‘soured relationships’, are symptomatic of the simultaneous denunciation of colonialism by the USSR and its support of the Israeli settler state. The definition of settler colonialism, provided by Evelyn Nakano Glenn (Glenn, 2015, 57), sheds light on the difference between colonialism as it was understood and criticised by Soviet propaganda and settler colonialism. As Glenn writes: ‘Settler colonists do not envision a return home. Rather, they seek to transform the new colony into ‘home’.’ At the time, the USSR precisely understood colonialism as distinct from turning the colony into a ‘home’. Stalin searched for ways to revoke a license which Bolshevik historians were issued in the 1920s and ’30s ‘to denounce peasant colonisation as one of the Tsarist regime’s many exploitative policies, publishing fierce critiques which explicitly compared Russian settlement in Asia to other instances of European colonialism.’ (Morrison, 2016) Such erasure of settler colonialism from Soviet anti-colonialism split the latter from both Western colonialism and the grim reality of the numerous genocides USSR inflicted upon Soviet Muslim communities, which included the burning of books, closures of the Muslim schools and mosques, and large scale repressions. Chechens, Ingushes, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks were deported in 1944 to allow for the russification of their lands. Thus, the supply of weapons through Czechoslovakia (Kahng, 1998) for the Israeli army, during Nakba, fit neatly into the USSR’s settler Islamophobic politics. The sponsoring of genocide of Palestinians intertwined with the unfolding of the colonial project in the USSR.

1955-1967. Islamophobic Neutrality

Both Russian and Soviet colonial violence has been based on multiple forms of othering, with islamophobia being one of the cornerstones of the Russian colonial project. The repressions against Muslim people, having existed as long under the Russian governance as Russian colonialism has, were amplified during Stalin’s period by the logic of Great Terror, with 36% of the Great Purge victims arrested based on ‘nationality’ (Krechetov, 2017). Anti-Semitic
repressions, unreasonably portrayed in Russia as exceptional, followed the same logic. Instead of antisemitism, Russian colonialism has to take centre stage to untangle multiple colonialisms.

Soviet antisemitism, exemplified in the ‘Doctors’ Plot’ and the denial of the right for Jewish people to migrate from the USSR, led to the breaking of diplomatic ties between the USSR and Israel on February 11, 1953. Islamophobic politics inside the country continued: from 1954, the destruction of mosques gained new momentum, and new anti-Islamic texts were published in the languages of the USSR republics. (Benningsen, 2009)

In such a context, it is unsurprising that the USSR did not shift its positions, seeing Palestine as a territory rather than a sovereign state, where a ‘refugee problem’ had been unfolding since Nakba. As Soviet engineer Gerbert Efremov recalled the 1957 Suez crisis:

The explanation was sent to comrades English and French with circles, which showed how many megatons of nuclear explosions one would need to put on England to disappear and how many on France. Within three days, everything was curtailed, and Suez Canal and Egypt were left alone.

Thus, the acknowledgement of the ‘full rights of Palestinian Arabs’ in a communique for the President of Egypt Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1958 and a similar statement from Nikita Khrushchev during his visit to Egypt in 1964, was aimed at engaging with Egypt and Syria and did not imply any real change in politics towards Palestinian struggle. (Golan, 1980) Indifferent to Palestine as a sovereign state, USSR ignored the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), formed in 1964. Contrary to the critical role attributed to the USSR in the Six-Day War, Brezhnev warned Abdel Nasser about the possible Israeli aggression towards Syria without having a clear plan or an understanding of consequences. (Bar-Noi, 2003; Golan, 1980) In these instances, Palestine was still framed by the USSR as a secondary issue in the conflict between Israel, Syria, and Egypt. Despite the slight change in course, in 1968 the Palestine Liberation Organization was described as ‘hysterical’ in the central Soviet newspaper Pravda. (Golan, 1980) The USSR still saw Palestine solely as a ‘territory’, where a war was unfolding, while the connection of Palestinians to this land remained unclear in Soviet discourse. If Palestinians are refugees (Demchenko, 1967; Golan, 1980), where are they coming from, if not Palestine?

Simultaneously a new approach to Palestine started to develop when Pavel Demchenko’s ‘Arab East in the Trying Times’ was published in 1967. Despite still talking about refugees, it made a significant step by explaining the antizionist positions of Fatah and the PLO as well as reasons for not recognising Israel as a legitimate geopolitical formation. The new approach to Palestine in Demchenko’s book was part of the general context of the 1960s when a new theory of the national–democratic revolution and national-liberation movement gained popularity (Filatova, 2009). The label of ‘bourgeois nationalism’, put on any national identity during the 1930s Great Terror, was
finally separated from the notion of ‘national-liberation movements’. With this new positive notion of a national movement, Soviet foreign politics developed a novel perception of anti-zionism as anti-imperialism. (Golan, 1980).

The new approach to national liberation movements did not come as an initiative from top ideologues, even though they did take a new direction. Instead, they were reacting to the growing national grassroots consciousness in the USSR republics. The tension was building between the internationalist slogans, promoting racial and ethnic blindness, and growing consciousness of and resistance towards soviet colonialism. According to Pivovarova (Pivovarova, 2003), historians in the 1960s–70s documented this tension in a manner specific to soviet scholars, highlighting the emergence of a new undesired phenomenon by actively denying its existence. They incorporated a new struggle for decolonisation of the Soviet Union into the new internationalist paradigm while debunking ‘the bourgeois falsifications’, contrary to which ‘the country had no preconditions for the development of the national movements’. At the core of such decolonisation, started by the residents of autonomous republics and the displaced nations, were demands for national independence, preservation of culture and language, and lifting of the ban on return to their rightful land. The Soviet state appropriated these demands, transforming them into the new terms of the national revolutionary consciousness. Decolonisation of the USSR was tamed for export as anti-imperial soviet financial and military ‘support’/control, delivered as one package for the Global South national liberation movements since the late 60s.


Soviet support of Palestine therefore came at the peak of its appropriation of decolonial political demands, when the term ‘national liberation movement’ was ‘widely used during the International Congress of the Communist and Working Parties in 1969’. (Brutentz, 1977). Simultaneously, the Palestine Liberation Organisation gained much more significant political weight, with Fatah becoming its fraction (Golan, 1980). The growing influence of the PLO and new anti-imperial politics made the USSR acknowledge the PLO as a national liberation movement and invite an official visit in 1970. However, questions of Palestinians as a nation and Palestine as a state remain unresolved. (Golan, 1980). Although new anti-imperial politics implied a change in terminology used to refer to Palestine, this change came without clear explanations, sliding between old and new paradigms. Slides from a film strip, produced in 1972, provide an excellent example of such oscillations.
Palestinians were still seen solely as unidentified refugees.

Figure 2: ‘In the Middle East, there are around 2 million of underprivileged - exiled refugees, whose destiny is the life in the precarious existence in the campsites’, Image source: diafilmy.su

Figure 3: ‘From the formation of the first settlements on the Palestinian territory in 1948 to the contemporary attempts of the annexation of lands of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, to create the unified state of “Great Israel” from the Nile to the Euphrates.’ Image source: diafilmy.su
On the map from top to bottom: ‘Aggressor; Occupied territories; Invaded Countries’

The map fails to show Palestine as a state, while reproducing the colonial trope of empty lands that were settled only with the partition of Palestine in 1948.

The choice of the word ‘partisans’ over ‘guerilla’ was intentional as a part of new Soviet anti-imperialist terminology. With the lack of explanation provided for the nature of anti-colonial resistance, the word for guerilla fighters was taken from WWII anti-fascist resistance rather than struggle for decolonisation. This gave the resistance forces both legitimacy for armed struggle and erasure of unique reasons they carried their struggle for.

This film strip showcases how the new discourse, encouraging national-liberation movements, did not imply revising the previous colonial paradigm. Instead, both co-existed at the same time.

Such oscillation between paradigms was eased after 1972 when the support for Palestine as a state and Palestinians as a nation was announced on the anniversary of the October Revolution. This support, followed by the new agreement to supply arms to the PLA (Golan, 1980), increased further during

Figure 4: “Not another hour under the yoke of occupation” - that is the slogan of the Palestinian partisans today, carrying out armed struggle for the liberation of their motherland from the invaders.’ Image source: diafilmy.su
and after The Yom Kippur War. It crystallised in the XXX session of the UN General Assembly held in 1975. With the active participation of the USSR, the Assembly condemned Zionism as a form of racial discrimination. As a result, the resolution, supported by the Socialist countries and the countries of the Global South, was accepted.

Racist Moebius strip

Figure 5: Zh. Efrimovskyi. Zionism is racism! 1976. Poster No: 2973; 56x42.2. Image source: tramvaiiskusstv.ru
The resolution caused a harsh reaction from many Soviet dissidents. In his Nobel Prize for Peace acceptance speech, white3 Andrei Sakharov, Soviet physicist and political activist, stated:

... a deplorable event took place: the General Assembly adopted - practically without any real debate - a resolution declaring Zionism a form of racism and racial discrimination. All impartial persons know that Zionism is the ideology of a national rebirth of the Jewish people after two thousand years of separation, and that this ideology is not directed against any other people. The adoption of a resolution of this kind has, in my opinion, dealt the prestige of the United Nations a hard blow. (Sakharov, 1975)

His lecture was emblematic of soviet dissidents’ racism and Islamophobia, which, as Rossen L Djagalov points out (Djagalov, forthcoming 2021), was massively fueled rather than addressed by Soviet anti-imperialism. Djagalov describes the dissidents’ views as ‘if the Soviet Union is for Vietnam/Angola/Palestine/Arab states/Civil Rights movement, then I am against it.’ He uses as an example another Nobel Prize winner, Russian-Jewish poet Joseph Brodsky, who uttered racist slurs towards homogenous groups of ‘Arabs’, ‘Africans’, and ‘Afro-Amercians’ (Djagalov, forthcoming 2021).

Analysing the reasons behind such reactions to the Soviet anti-imperialism, Djagalov supposes that Eurocentrism of the dissident community urged it to defend the imaginary, idealised West from the attacks of the ‘Soviet proxies’. The same logic still haunts post-soviet liberal intellectuals, defending ‘democracy’, ‘freedom of speech’ and whiteness from the racialised Others. For instance, white Russian journalist Yulia Latynina claimed that ‘everyone understands the connection between Islam and violence’ and, during a 40-minute long broadcast on May 15th this year, managed to use the word ‘terror’ and its derivatives towards Palestinians more than 20 times. (Latynina, 2021)

Similarly, white3 Russian journalist Constantine Eggert claimed that those who criticise Israel’s settler colonialism ‘have never seen multiple Mein Kampf editions in the windows of Arab bookshops, have not watched TV programs seriously discussing “the Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, and have not witnessed Palestinian schoolchildren singing songs praising “shahid bombers”’. (Eggert, 2021)

The support of Israeli occupation by the post-soviet liberals bleeds into the Islamophobia and racism inside Russia, producing the Moebius strip of colonialism. As colonialism sprawls and stretches from external to internal and back, so does decolonial solidarity. One can witness and support such solidarity in decolonial movements struggling against Soviet and Russian colonialism. In 1983, during the arrest of indigenous Crimean Tatar activists Asan and Mustafa Dzhemilev,4 who were travelling to Crimea to attend funerals, Asan Dzhemilev said that the Soviet state has ‘started a genocide (in Crimea) as if it was the second Palestine’. Later, in 2011, before another annexation of Crimea by Russia, Mustafa Dzemilev met with the Ambassador of the Palestinian National
Authority in Ukraine, Mohammed Kasem Al-Asa. Even though taking an official stance became practically impossible since the Russian occupation of Crimea, Crimean Tatar activists have continued to voice their support for Palestine.

Therefore, to redefine the slogans of Soviet anti-colonialism, we should switch from appropriating to amplifying the domestic struggles.

We would love to see the future, as well as the present, of a decolonial solidarity that reclaims this history when needed, and moulds it from angles un-recorded in official policies; which is also to say that we would love to see the decolonisation of the soviet anti-colonialism.

![Figure 6: The just cause of the Arab people of Palestine will prevail. Post Stamp. 1983. Image source: shutterstock.com](image)

Notes:

1. Both colonial wars in Chechnya (1994-1996; 1999-2009), started by Russia, became the basis of the contemporary ‘war on terror’.
2. Until 1950 USSR understood colonialism of other countries solely as invasion and control of the distant communities and countries, as it was primarily busy with surveillance and violence within the imperial borders.
3. Here we understand whiteness visa—à-vis Russian settler colonialism. We see whiteness as a set of conditions, which maintain one’s privilege of positionality as ‘neutral’ Soviet/Russian citizen. There are multiple forms of racialization in Russia, as Lana Uzarashvili puts it: ‘in Russia people are racialized based on their ethnicity, language, citizenship, migration status, accent,
name, surname, appearance, etc.' in Uzarashvili Lana. ['You have to be better than them': how does racism work in Russia]. Sh.e. July, 20. 2020


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Vietnam-Palestine Solidarity across Visual Culture

June 24, 2021

During spring 2021, as I was completing the revisions for my book manuscript, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine* (forthcoming with University of California Press in spring 2022), the Israeli state’s renewed attack on Palestinians in Occupied Jerusalem, Gaza, and across Historic Palestine again clarified the political stakes of this research and prompted self-reflection on my positionality as an Asian American Studies professor and second-generation Vietnamese-Filipina, situated on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Gabriellino/Tongva peoples. In *Archipelago of Resettlement*, I unpack what I call the ‘refugee settler condition’: the vexed positionality of refugee subjects whose resettlement in settler colonial states after forced displacement render them implicated in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples. I trace the resettlement of 366 Vietnamese refugees in Israel-Palestine between 1977-1979, noting how the Zionist state emphasized connections between Jewish Holocaust refugees and Vietnamese refugees while simultaneously directing attention away from Palestinian refugees, in a move that Candace Fujikane (Fujikane, 2017) has termed ‘yellowwashing’. Such humanitarian rhetoric positioned Vietnamese Israelis in a structurally antagonistic relationship to the ongoing Palestinian liberation struggle. To work through this impasse, the book turns to cultural production by Vietnamese Israelis and Palestinians to think through decolonial potentials for solidarity across structural divides.

I began this project while a PhD student at UC Berkeley on Ohlone lands, during another moment of intense Zionist violence: the air strikes on Gaza during summer 2014. Then, as now, I felt prompted to connect my own family history, as the daughter of Vietnamese refugees and Filipino immigrants, to the legacy of Palestinian resistance - to understand the global stakes of what Loubna Qutami (Qutami and Zahzah, 2020) calls the ‘Palestine analytic’: how Zionist settler colonialism intersects with U.S. imperialism, militarism, and settler colonial violence around the world. Elsewhere I have written (Lê Espiritu, 2018, and Phu et al, forthcoming 2022) about the Cold War entanglements and Third World solidarities connecting Vietnam and Palestine during the 1967-75 period. In my brief comments here, I’d like to elaborate on the visual culture connections between Vietnam and Palestine that inspire and motivate my work.

The online Palestine Poster Project Archives documents the solidarities and tensions between Vietnam and Palestine during the Third World Liberation movement and today. A film poster for *Đối mặt tổ quốc*, a documentary film co-produced by the Viet Nam Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio and the Palestinian Cinema Institution, for example, features the signature red, white, green, and black colors of the Palestinian flag, as well as a sketch of Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat wearing an iconic kaffiyeh and
sunglasses. On the poster, Arafat raises his right pointer and middle finger in a symbol of both victory and peace. The film documents the struggle and resiliency of Palestinians forcefully displaced to neighboring refugee camps; the title, featured prominently on the film poster, references how the eyes of Palestinian refugees (đôi mắt) are ever directed toward the homeland (tổ quốc), insisting on the as-yet-realized Right of Return. The Viet Nam Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio’s support of the film is but a synecdoche of the larger Third World solidarity that Vietnamese revolutionaries expressed in support of the Palestinian liberation struggle, both during America’s War in Vietnam and its aftermath. Meanwhile, another poster from 1979 documents the solidarity that the Beirut-based arm of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), the first transnational Palestinian student organization that had been founded in Cairo in 1959, expressed with the ‘students people and youth of Vietnam [sic].’ Designed by Hosni Radwan and featuring both English and Arabic text, the poster features four abstracted white doves flying over the heads of threatening guns and spears, symbolizing a global student struggle that both drew connections between, as well as rose above, the military violence enacted by Israeli Zionist forces in Palestine and U.S. and French colonial forces in Vietnam.

Third World solidarities between Vietnam and Palestine also inspired leftist artists in the United States, situated in the heart of empire, such as Jewish American artist Ron Weil. Weil’s vibrantly colored painting entitled ‘Peoples’ War, Peoples’ Victory’ – text which also appears at the bottom of the image in black – was published by the activist People’s Press in San Francisco during the 1970s. The poster can be read both horizontally and vertically, creating a visual parallel between ‘Viet Nam’ on the left side and ‘Palestine’ on the right. Text of the respective countries’ names is accompanied underneath by black-ink sketches of the head and shoulders of a Vietnamese and a Palestinian individual respectively, superimposed on the aqua blue sky. Below these faces – donned with the signature nón lá (conical hat) on the left and the checkered kaffiyeh scarf on the right – are illustrations of revolutionary peasant villages in Vietnam and Palestine respectively, colored in matching whites, pinks, and greens. Through these visual parallels, Weil’s painting emphasizes that the Vietnamese and Palestinian peoples’ struggles were linked via resistance to multiple forms of oppression: capitalism, militarism, imperialism, and forced displacement, necessitating a transnational, revolutionary armed response.

Today, connections between Vietnam and Palestine are more vexed, as evidenced by a poster with a stark white-text headline against a black backdrop reading ‘Where Does Vietnam Send Students To Learn Advanced Agricultural Methods?’ Published in 2008 by BlueStar, a San Francisco-based ‘Jewish Ink Tank’ that releases pro-Israel posters, brochures, and other visual media, the poster features a colored photograph of a smiling Vietnamese farmer wearing a nón lá and embracing two children. To the right of the three figures is a text box explaining that Vietnam regularly sends agricultural college students to an eleven-month course in Israel to learn ‘Israel’s state-of-the-art agricultural technologies, advanced irrigational techniques, post-harvest technologies, and farm management techniques.’ What this poster elides, however, is how
Israel's agricultural campaign is predicated on a genocidal initiative to ‘make the desert bloom’ (George, 1979) - that is, the desire to erase native Palestinian presence by transforming the indigenous landscape to resemble Europe via what Lila Sharif (Sharif, 2016) calls ‘vanishment’ and ‘eco-occupation’. The poster also erases Vietnamese farmers' own indigenous agricultural practices, which sustained and fed Vietnamese revolutionaries before, during, and after the Indochina Wars against colonialism as well as Vietnam's own civil war. However, it is important to note that since the Socialist Republic of Vietnam established diplomatic relations with the State of Israel in 1993, Vietnam has increasingly abandoned its revolutionary ideals in favor of economic exchange with the Zionist state. Nonetheless, according to Ambassador of the State of Palestine in Vietnam, Saadi Salama (Salama, 2015), ’Vietnam continues to extend its strong support to the Palestinian people’s just cause and their struggle to achieve their national rights, including the right of self-determination and the right to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. This is the unchangeable position of Vietnam toward the question of Palestine.’

In sum, visual culture plays an important role in educating the public about the ongoing Palestinian struggle, to counter Zionist repression that seeks to isolate and erase Palestinian people, livelihoods, and art. Visual media documenting Vietnam-Palestine solidarities not only archives the revolutionary connections forged during the Third World Liberation movement; it also calls forth and inspires continual solidarities in the present.

Notes

2 https://www.palestineposterproject.org/search/site/vietnam
4 https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/students-people-youth
5 https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/peoples-war-peoples-victory

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Notes on the Logic of Speed

1. Seize the Engine

The Watt steam engine marked the beginning of a new era of generating power that is dependent completely on the machine, replacing human or animal power for the first time. This Engine that was developed and designed between 1763 to 1775 dropped a dramatic change in world history, bringing an unprecedented mechanical speed and power for the newly introduced European planetary colonial project and the industrial revolution in its four stages: Mechanisation, Mass Production, Automation and Smart Systems. In which the engine evolved from motorization to processorization. Speed and power were and still are at the foundation of the colonial planetary project and it came into existence side by side with the theorisation of the new ‘Europe’ and its ‘mission’. The motor was an instrument for the ‘western civilisation’ and its expansionist, exploitive economy and wealth. If colonialism can be described as the process of extraction and transportation, the engine was the weapon used in all these processes. The motor was at the heart of the mass genocide of indigenous peoples and native life in the americas carried out by the European settlers and then the mass kidnapping of people and transferring them from one continent to another, in the slave trade by the British and the Dutch. The Engine represented an absolute exterminating power in the face of native ecologies on a planetary scale, starting with exterminating the natives who blocked the settlers’ access to land. In his essay ‘Aesthetics of Singularity’, Fredric Jameson argued (Jameson, 2015) that ‘Postmodern politics is essentially a matter of land grabs, on a local as well as global scale. Whether you think of the issue of Palestine or of gentrification and zoning in American...
small towns... The land is not only an object of struggle between the classes, between rich and poor; it defines their very existence and the separation between them.'

Much like one of Paul Virilio’s most famous statements, ‘when you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck’ (Virilio, 1999), the introduction of the motor by the British colonists in Palestine was also the introduction of the colonial motor accident. Palestinian natives realised from the beginning, the advantage that the British has with the motor, the power and speed it generates. And with that, Palestinian Fallaheen (peasants) launched a war against the colonial motor. During the European zionist colonisation of Palestine between 1947 and 1949, and as the motor was developed further, the resistance against it was also developed. The natives waged a popular war against motors, known as the ‘transportation war’, in which Palestinian fallaheen disabled anything that would move with an engine. Military vehicles that were used in transporting weapons, soldiers, settlers, tools...etc., were under the fire of the fallaheen. This popular defence strategy was an attempt to balance the speed and power between the natives’ anti-colonial resistance and the highly trained and well equipped European army. The natives’ self-defence must be faster, dynamic and transformative in order to compensate for the colonial speed and power. The native understands that slowing down means death. The natives’ anti-colonial equation is simple: seize the engine. In ‘Why we use violence’, Frantz Fanon states:

violence in everyday behaviour, violence against the past that is emptied of all substance, violence against the future, for the colonial regime presents itself as necessarily eternal. We see, therefore, that the colonized people, caught in a web of a three-dimensional violence, a meeting point of multiple, diverse, repeated, cumulative violences, are soon logically confronted by the problem of ending the colonial regime by any means necessary. (Fanon, 1960).

In the late settler-colonial regimes, the territory of the colonial power doesn’t end with geography as land, sea, and sky but extends its power and domination over the natives’ bodies. From exterminating the existence of the colonised subject to harvesting organs and using bodies as test fields, these practices has been documented in the colonial context in Palestine with Palestinian bodies, whether they are alive or dead. Settler-colonial state sovereignty is violence on the native’s worlds. If sovereignty means law and order, resistance is a violation of that.
2. The last frontier, the last sky, and the Iron Wall

In her last Facebook post on the 16th of May - a day after the commemoration of Nakba 15th of May - Mai Afaneh, a 29 year old, a PhD student in psychology and a mother, wrote ‘we are a people who refuse to be called refugees or displaced’. She was shot dead on the 16th of June 2021 by Israeli colonial forces near Hizma checkpoint in the occupied West Bank.

‘The Iron Wall’ was an essay written by Russian zionist Ze’ev Jabotinsky in 1923 – a classic pretext that theorised for the jewish colonial death-squads and militias before, during and after the Nakba, that evolved later into what is called falsely ‘IDF’. In his essay Jabotinsky stated that ‘there can be no voluntary agreement between ourselves and the Palestine Arabs. Not now, nor in the prospective future’, and he continued:

my readers have a general idea of the history of colonisation in other countries. I suggest that they consider all the precedents with which they are acquainted, and see whether there is one solitary instance of any colonisation being carried on with the consent of the native population. There is no such precedent. The native populations, civilised or uncivilised, have always stubbornly resisted the colonists, irrespective of whether they were civilised or savage. (Jabotinsky, 1923)
Then he argued that ‘zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population – behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach.’

Mohammed Deif, The Ghost, The Shadow,... The Commander-in-Chief of Al Qassam Brigades, a Palestinian refugee from a fallaheen family that was expelled by the zionist gangs during the Nakba from a village in Ramle Subdistrict, was born in a refugee camp in Gaza Strip and is a former theatre worker, writer and an actor. Daif and Gazan resistance released the maximum human potentiality in all shapes and forms, the new human resistance is the antithesis of the Iron Wall. Its echoes reached Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, and diaspora as well as indigenous resistance worldwide – it is an embodiment of the indigenous contract against the Settler Contract.

Carole Pateman described (Pateman, 2007) the Settler Contract as ‘a specific form of the expropriation contract and refers to the dispossession of, and rule over, Native inhabitants by British settlers in the two New Worlds. Colonialism in general subordinates, exploits, kills, rapes, and makes maximum use of the colonized and their resources and lands. When colonists are planted in a terra nullius, an empty state of nature, the aim is not merely to dominate, govern, and use but to create a civil society’. She continues, ‘the Native peoples are not part of the settler contract – but they are henceforth subject to it, and their lives, lands, and nations are reordered by it.’ On the other hand, the indigenous contract operates with a very basic yet comprehensive understanding of value: Land or Death.

The latest armed confrontation between the Palestinian resistance and the zionist colonial forces in May 2021, a few days before the commemoration of the 73 years of Nakba, each side named the battle in a way that couldn’t be more clear to the argument I am trying to make here. The Palestinian resistance called its battle: ‘Sword of Jerusalem’ in which it refers to the indigenous contract and right to self-defence. On the other side, the zionist colonial forces called their battle: ‘Guardian of the Walls’, referring to their genocidal credo and the Iron Wall.
3. Friday of Tires

‘But you fools, owned the technology, missiles and jets, but couldn’t decode our people and his resistance.’ Abu Obaida, al-Qassam Brigades spokesman, 13. May 2021

‘The tires unit’ is one of the popular resistance groups, in which each group is called by the tool it uses, for example, a laser use assigned to a group becomes the ‘Laser unit’, and so on. The tires tactic and method is basically to gather a huge amount of tires along the colonial walls and borders, and burn them in a way so that the wind will blow the fire-smoke towards the colonies and the colonial forces direction.

Burning tires is a Palestinian popular resistance method. The resistance used burning tires to blind snipers, disturbing the settlers, and, in short, to bring a State of Emergency into the colonial context. This tactic has a long history in Palestine, starting with Palestinian refugees revolution in the 60s in Amman, 70’s Beirut, the Intifada of the 80s and 00s... But mostly during the Great March of Return protests in Gaza in 2018-2019, where it was expanded and developed further, and introduced first in what was then called ‘Juma’at el Kawshuok/Friday of Tires’. It evolved into a major disturbance to the ‘normal life’ of the settlers and surrounding colonies. This tactic emerged again in June 2021 in the village of Beita near Nablus, where its natives (peasants) resisted the continuous land theft and establishment of new colonial roads and settlements. Palestinian fallaheen in Beita gathered tires and burned them to defend their land and world. The Palestinian Nakba is an ecological Nakba and the Palestinian struggle is an ecological struggle.
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In *After Evil*, Robert Meister (Meister, 2011, IX) drew a seemingly contradictory conclusion, explaining the bizarre mismatch of Israel's human rights abuses against Palestinians and neighboring populations, and Israel’s self-image as an endangered ‘victim-state’. 'In post-Holocaust debates about human rights', he writes in 2011, ‘the violence that Israel uses to defend itself has become a laboratory for the violence that the “world community” (and especially the U.S.) would be obliged to use in protecting an Israel that could not defend itself. The post-Holocaust security of Israel thus stands as the constitutive exception on which twenty-first-century humanitarianism is based.’ The phrase ‘constitutive exception’ contains the difference and reciprocity of what is considered ‘normal’ (systemic) state violence and its ‘exceptional’ (sovereign, colonial or otherwise) extreme. Today, Israel does not only function as a techno-scientific laboratory for exceptional state violence, and its ‘live’ enforcement, but also as the ideological test site for the fabrication of justifications for the latter. In this way, the ‘world’s most moral army’ produces and reproduces the ‘ethics’ of the ‘justified’ killing of unprotected civilians. Within this ‘humanitarian’ battle zone, Palestinians, civilians and fighters alike, are not only the physical but also the ideological target.

Speaking from the antifascist perspective of the ‘tradition of the oppressed’, Walter Benjamin (Benjamin, 2003[1940], 392) diagnosed in pre-Holocaust Europe that in modern states the ‘state of emergency’ (*Ausnahmezustand*, or ‘state of exception’) has transformed itself into the ‘rule’. Already in 1940 there is no excuse for the depoliticizing and moralizing astonishment that exceptional acts of state violence are ‘still’ possible in the twentieth century. In the case of systemic violence and the asymmetry of perpetrators, victims and beneficiaries, however, rule and exception are not the same; they are interrelated in the precise sense that the exception becomes the rule by constituting, producing and testing out the ‘normal’ functioning of violence. Following Meister’s argument, in the ‘exceptional’ case of the state of Israel, its victims, although ultimately contingent, also function as the ‘necessary exception’ to justify the ‘normal’ legitimized use of state violence, be it ‘peace keeping’ or ‘peacemaking,’ military invasion, ‘war on terror’ or suspension of basic human rights in the name of state security. In this way, the ‘world community’ becomes the beneficiary of its own declared ‘humanitarian’ mission and ‘responsibility to protect potential victims of another Holocaust by creating another Israel which the world community would then have a special duty to defend.’ (Meister, 2011, IX) While the new humanitarian rights discourse, as proposed and enforced by the ‘world community’ after 1990, consists in declaring a new ‘post-ideological’ age that ‘would repudiate past violence ... by endorsing exceptional violence – that of rescue and occupation,’ (Meister, 2011, IX) the ‘old’ Holocaust functions as the foundational crime of this new age. The project and mission of preventing the return of such an exceptional genocide would necessitate granting the self-declared survivor, and victim-state, the state of Israel, impunity and constitutive exemption from international human rights. In this way, the ‘world community’ can cast its role of the ongoing beneficiary of past ‘evil’ as the current ‘rescuer’ of future victims of an imagined new genocide.
Meister’s multi-layered argument, in consequence, implies that the historically contingent victims of the state of Israel necessarily must appear as terrorists, evil, unjustified, barbaric and illegitimate as long as they insist on and fight for justice and refuse to become an ‘innocent victim’ purified of all vengeance and spite. Hence Palestinians, voluntarily or involuntarily, by resisting Israel, also resist the current world order of Western humanitarianism which has deemed the struggle for justice and the age of revolution (roughly speaking 1789-1989) as ‘past evil’ - a totalitarian cycle of violence and counter-violence that the post 1990 ‘world community’ seeks to leave behind, buried in an ‘evil past’. In the current world order, Palestinians are asked to give up their lost cause, accept defeat and their role as ‘victim of the victim’.

This anti-Palestinian racism is systemic, ‘humanitarian’ and follows from the world community’s self-perceived role as savior and rescuer to avoid ‘past evil’ in the present and future. In the case of Germany, the state of former perpetrators and current beneficiaries of the Holocaust, this racism is particularly extreme. In order to cast its global role as humanitarian, liberal and cosmopolitan, Germany has become one of the central ideological and legal guarantors of granting Israel impunity. The only way for Germany to be past evil and maintain its position of ongoing beneficiary of past evil, economically, politically, culturally, morally, is to outlaw the Palestinian struggle for self-determination as criminal, unjust and terrorist. Following this twisted worldview, Palestinians cannot be victims: they are the current agents of past evil (antisemitism, revolutionary violence, or both), hence the state that ‘rightfully’ fights them, the state of Israel, is to be supported globally and locally.

Of course, this is not by accident. In the case of Germany, it is fair to speak of a quasi-transcendental anti-Palestinian sentiment. In terms of ideology and discourse, it is the condition of possibility under which one enters the public discourse and can speak. What A. Dirk Moses recently called ‘The German Catechism’, (Moses, 2021) a set of beliefs underpinning the public discourse, holds that antizionism equals antisemitism and casts Palestinians as potential antisemites until proven otherwise. In this way, Germany’s psycho-political support of Zionism and an ethnocratically defined Israel (‘Israel as a Jewish state’) acquires a quasi-religious character. This ‘catechism’ does not only apply to mainstream political discourse or elites but also structurally organizes whose voices are where and under what conditions heard in public debates. In a post-migrant society like Germany, this discursive gatekeeping amounts to back-door racial profiling: people from non-German backgrounds are expected to learn and get used to this ‘catechism’ and its specifically anti-Palestinian sentiment. In effect, this ‘catechism’ frames the construction of Palestinian identity under the premises of Israel-related antisemitism. This can even lead to the accusation that the very signifier of ‘Palestine’ (along with Nakba or occupation) is perceived as antisemitic. It has, at least, become a dubious signifier that needs further scrutiny. This suspicious scrutiny of, and anxious distance towards, the issue of Palestine is one of the entry points to German discourse. This is not by chance but structural. Anti-antisemitism, in this logic, is the name of Germany’s 'Peaceful Crusade' (Emily Dische-Becker
et al) against Palestinians globally on the world-political stage and locally in Germany.

In May 2019, the German parliament passed a resolution categorizing the peaceful Palestinian Boycott, Divest, Sanctions (BDS) movement as antisemitic and restricting organizations that are close to BDS from accessing public funds and public space. An expansive culture of fear and inquisition has inevitably followed. The situation has reached such a boiling point that just recently major cultural institutions in Germany published an unprecedented joint open letter decrying the censorship and harassment produced by the resolution. But the most immediate result of this political climate is the ongoing silencing of Palestinians in Germany – one of the largest Palestinian diasporas in Europe.

From a perspective of German beneficiaries of the Holocaust, aptly called ‘Menschen mit Nazihintergrund,’ Hilal and Varatharajah in Rothberg, 2021, people with nazi background, Palestinians and Palestine solidarity movements are the perfect subject of antisemitism. Germans have collectively atoned and become the ‘benevolent’ beneficiary of their own historical crimes and feel entitled to teach ‘morals’ to their secondary victims, the Palestinians - a stateless people who do not fit both the German and global post 1990 ‘humanitarian’ world order. In this way, Israel’s ‘security’ and Germany’s commitment to the non-existent ‘Two-State Solution’ - that is, in fact, the commitment to the non-existence of collective Palestinian rights and the denial of the existence of Palestinians as people and political agency - has become the German raison d’état, as Chancellor Merkel put it. It is as absurd as it sounds: in order for Germany to be ‘past evil’ Palestinians have to be the new antisemites. Any attempt to prove the opposite challenges the ‘humanitarian’ mission of current Germany, its polished place among the ‘civilized’ nations of the world.

In this way, the Palestinian struggle, in its persistence and ongoing, yet unaccomplishable defeat, challenges the dominant world order and discourse of human rights. It thereby exposes a moralized version of realpolitik in which beneficiaries can enjoy their gains in an ‘ethical’ way by reaching out to depoliticized ‘innocent’ victims and persecuting victims that keep on fighting for their rights. From a Palestinian perspective of struggle, the human rights discourse, its major players, perpetrators and beneficiaries - Germany as one of its key players and self-righteous vanguard - reveal themselves as the ‘ethical’ successor of the old evil, the counter-revolutionary project that fights those who fight for their own and their neighbor’s justice. However, ultimately such a counter-revolutionary project is doomed to fail. The ‘tradition of the oppressed’ (Benjamin) teaches us that by staying in the struggle, however defeated, the oppressed will not vanish. This is the logic and asymmetry of the partisan’s position: you gain victory not by winning, but by staying on the ground, by not disappearing.
Notes

* Passages of the following text were published in the interview ‘Palestine, Antisemitism, and Germany’s “Peaceful Crusade”’, Protocols, Issue 8, 2020, URL: https://prtcls.com/article/berlin-art-and-palestine-conversation/

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Cartography-ing the Israeli Apartheid in Palestine*

Maps remain a crucial tool to expose the settler colonial logics of the Israeli apartheid in Palestine: they show the spatial control and segregation at work in an undeniable manner whether in the West Bank, Gaza, as well as the rest of historical Palestine currently known as Israel. However, cartography retains an imperial gaze that deincarnate the violence of these logics on Palestinian bodies. As such, maps can never do the work alone of exposing the political reality of Palestine.

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Figure 1: Refugee camp of Shu’fat in Jerusalem: Home of 12,500 Palestinian refugees forcefully evicted from their villages and neighborhoods during the 1948 Nakba and the 1967 Naksa, Shu’fat is a high-density refugee camp within the Jerusalem municipal area but separated from the rest of the city (invaded by the Israeli state in 1948 and 1967 and then annexed in 1980) by the apartheid wall.
Figure 2: Atlas of Israeli Colonies in the West Bank and East Jerusalem: Drawn on a map originally created in 2010 entitled ‘The Palestinian Archipelago’, this map shows the ‘islands’ on which Palestinians are able to exercise a snippet of political autonomy in the West Bank in a sea of Israeli military control, where no less than 139 Israeli colonies hosts over 750,000 settlers.
Figure 3: The Architecture of Settler Colonialism in Palestine: Map originally created in 2014, and regularly updated since then. Sources of data includes, among others, OCHA, Palestine Remembered, Zochrot, and UNRWA.
Figure 4: Biddu and Al Jib: West of Jerusalem, the Palestinian villages of Biddu and Al Jib are surrounded by the architecture of the Israeli apartheid. Surrounded by the apartheid wall and only linked by a 1.5 kilometer tunnel, a series of infrastructural and architectural apparatuses enforces the absolute segregation of space.

*All maps by Léopold Lambert

Léopold Lambert/The Funambulist
Paris
In the Pocket of the Earth\(^1\), I Heard a Soliloquy of a Landscape....

Looking upon a nascent landscape of an as-yet unborn nation (Palestine) … How does a country look to the world? How does the world look to a country? And how can the landscape itself be said to have a perspective? Does this not suggest, quite literary, that the landscape looks back in some way at its beholders, returning their gaze with a blank, impassive stare, its face scarred with traces of violence and destruction and (even more important) with the violent constructions that erupt on its surface. (Mitchell, 2000, 200) [italics mine]

This was written over twenty-one years ago by W.J.T. Mitchell, who visited Palestine a few years prior to attend a conference on ‘Landscape Perspectives on Palestine’ which was opened by the late Edward Said at Birzeit University. Re-reading the quote, what particularly resonates for me is the returning gaze of the landscape. What are the experiences of this landscape, which both preceeds us and succeeds us in our own mortality, what is its perspective on us? And who is the us? My sense is that deep scars litter the landscape, as you move across Palestine, (for those for whom movement is permitted), you often experience an incredible sense of insurmountable sadness, as though the landscape is burdened and aged, scarred and aching, and that this somehow can be felt; it is faint, almost inaudible, but envelopes you with its presence. It is as though the landscape is continually being sutured and re-stitched, never healed, always in an in-between state of vulnerability and exposure of a wound in a process of suturing. The memory of pain is buried deep in the atlas of its scars in the terraced hills and sands of the coastline.

Various writers have written of experience of landscape, Rema Hammami (1998) for instance suggests:

> My feeling is of being burdened by Jaffa, this place that only exists in the world of lost paradises and is no different from that of any other child of a Jaffait, for there are no former Jaffaites - they never really left in 1948, but still carry it around with them everywhere and always. I would love to be able to walk through the city without being weighed down by its past and my duty to that past - just to be able to be fascinated by the architecture and the people who live there now.

While Raja Shehadeh (1982, 87) writes: ‘I find myself looking at an olive tree, and as I am looking at it, it transforms itself before my eyes into a symbol of the samidin, of our struggle, of loss.\(^2\) And at that very moment I was robbed of the tree.’

The landscape is continually vanishing from us, both from our field of vision and in its physicality. The continual violent transformation enacted by the colonial settler state, through erasure, land confiscation, and dispossession of Palestinians means that we experience the dichotomy of being refugees in
our own homeland, living sometimes no less than 15km from our birthplace, while other Palestinians can never set foot on its soil. This continual loss, the totality of this loss is perhaps unarchivable. The physical transformation of the landscape is something we are unable to effect, we have no control over the changes, we only bear witness. I recall crossing Qalandia checkpoint for over fifteen years, for over a decade on a daily basis, but can I remember exactly where the old road was? Can I remember where the soldiers used to stand? Can I remember exactly the position of the concrete blocks? Can I remember, since the checkpoint has been altered across the decade. Is forgetting a form of survival in which inadvertently the landscape slips away from me. I try to re-position the road and concrete blocks, should I even undertake this anguish-filled exercise? Perhaps what is remembered is written within the body, the exhaustion, and tension of the repetition of endless waiting. I recall a similar soliloquy by Palestinians in Jerusalem, who narrate the city as they gently walk through its passageways. Often there is only a trace and many times none (as all has been erased) of a correspondence between what we see (architecture and landscape) and their narratives, a stark disparity comes to the foreground between the city's physical form and the narrator’s memories which etch maps of loss. Palestinians re-inscribe their testimonies however ephemeral and fleeting as we walk along the ancient stone streets.

The experience of living in Palestine has led me to reflect upon the impossibility of representation of the landscape, that in fact landscape resists representation, defies our ability to represent its histories, experiences, vistas, our sensual experiences of it; this is precisely why for me the attempts at representation become so fascinating. Is it not the case that, as Mitchell put it all those years ago (Mitchell, 2000, 207), ‘Palestine has been reduced to a landscape, framed, hedged about, shaped, controlled and surveilled from every possible perspective… a landscape, to be seen and not touched, not dwelled upon.’

The landscape has also vanished from our own field of vision; perhaps that is what most significantly resonates with the Partition Wall and the isolated islands of areas A, B and C in which we live. In the removal from the settler coloniser’s field of vision, we become the blind spot, the invisible mass ‘over there’ yet at the same time are subject to intrusive scopic regime of surveillance. Distances, perhaps the very opposite of David Harvey’s theories of time-space compression, are, rather, stretched out, time becomes monotonous and often a loop of repetition. The smallest distances expand into journeys while horizons shrink and disappear from all parts of our life, for as Edward Said (Said, 1986, 19) suggests:

The stability of geography and the continuity of land - these have completely disappeared from my life and the life of all Palestinians. If we are not stopped at borders, or herded into new camps, or denied re-entry and residence, or barred from travel from one place to another, more of our land is taken, our lives are interfered with arbitrarily, our voices prevented from reaching each other, our identity is confined to frightened little islands in an inhospitable environment of superior military force.
It becomes evident that there are multiple competing visions of Palestine, which are increasingly becoming irreconcilable.

A ghost of an image from recent months inhabits my visual field. It is the scene of bellowing smoke that engulfs the billboards that are scattered across the landscape, temporary monuments to the failed neo-liberal dream; was our dream a facsimile of a consumerist heaven? Spare tires are brought in by a pickup truck as clouds of black smoke become thicker and more choking. Everyone knows their place in this chaotic choreography, the only unknown is who will leave us and return to the navel of the landscape tomorrow. On what ground do we stand? And where do we position ourselves in front of the cyclical waves of immense violence undertaken against the Palestinians and the land. In these unknown scenarios where will we be eventually placed, and confined?

Jawad al Malhi, Untitled, mixed media on canvas, 182 x 150 cm, 2021.
Notes

1. In reference to Berger (1991, 91)
2. Samidin is the term used to evoke steadfastness to the land, a method of resistance adopted by Palestinians in the Occupied Territories during the 1980s and 1990s.

References


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When Our Land Becomes Their Land

When the other side thinks Palestine, they hardly ever think it was an inhabited place, and people – basically Europeanists – came in and took their land away from them. Among the ones who call Israel a ‘democracy’ because of a voting structure, who reads Said’s Out of Place? Who reads Wadad Makdisi Cortas’ A World I Loved: The Story of An Arab Woman, an account of a developed middle-class culture in Palestine? Who reads Khalid Ziadeh’s Neighborhood and Boulevard, which describes the Islamization of a Lebanese city by the French? Who watches Nizar Hassan’s My Grandfather’s Path, which ‘opens up’ the contemporary Israeli map of ‘Palestine’, and shows us its deliberate errors referring always to his grandfather’s journal? Has anyone imagined colonialism, what it is like to step from Tijuana into San Diego and be penalized for entering a ‘foreign country without documents’, when the land was taken from the inhabitants through battle after battle? State-legitimized violence by a colonizing state and extremist extra-colonial violence should be judged by the same eye. I am a pacifist, and, my problem with the state of Israel is that it will not let me be one. I think of Tillie Olsen’s parents, working in the Jewish Bund, the strongest revolutionary force in the Russian empire, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, solidly Jewish, solidly critical of Zionism; I think of my dearest friend Lore Metzger, who ran from Germany at the age of thirteen in 1938 losing one uncle at a concentration camp on the way; whose incredible account of how the whole atmosphere changed in school for a child in Frankfurt during those years remains unforgottably anguishing, yet who still remained profoundly critical of the state of Israel in its occupation, not confusing it with antisemitism. There never will be enough said on this.

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Visit Palestine: An Image Remixed*

In 1936, Franz Krausz, a Jewish Zionist immigrant graphic designer to Palestine created a poster for the Zionist Tourist Development Association to ‘Visit Palestine’. Featuring Jerusalem’s iconic 7th century Muslim shrine the Dome of the Rock, the poster was printed, used, and then faded from the known archive of pre-1948 Palestine historical and visual material. In 1995, Israeli artist David Tartakover obtained Krausz’ permission to reprint it and brought the poster back into the public sphere. Tartakover, well-known for his support to ending the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, described his decision as a gesture of hope in the post-Oslo environment. Immediately following the fine-art reprinting run of 1,000, the poster appeared as a smaller, paper poster that was sold in the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and could be seen hanging in Palestinian Authority offices, Palestinian homes, and in Palestinian book and tourist shops. Tartakover (Updike, 2003) described the diffusion of the poster as natural: ‘I think everyone can use it the way that he wants’, he said. ‘You can’t control something you put out there. You can’t give people instructions how to use it.’

Indeed, this poster re-entered the world in 1995 with a message and an audience that the original never had. It was in particular embraced by Palestinians who saw its graphic beauty and symbolic and literal message evidencing that Palestine existed and was part of their history. Palestinian artist and designer Amer Shomali (Shomali, 2015), who would rework this poster in 2009 (see below), interpreted the embrace of the poster as follows: ‘The Palestinians, in effect, are taking advantage of the ironies embodied in the provenance of “Visit Palestine” to thumb their noses at the Israeli government that for decades claimed there had never been such a place’. In other words, those who read the fine print on the poster might have known that the Tourist Development Association and Franz Krausz had produced a Zionist poster proclaiming ‘Visit Palestine’ and that this poster and message contradicted the statements by Israelis, most infamously perhaps, Golda Meir’s proclamation (Alloul, 2016) that ‘there is no such thing as Palestinians’. For so many Palestinians and activists who had been told for decades that there was no such place as ‘Palestine’, the poster was proof of Palestine’s existence. Many people didn’t look up the poster’s history or even care.
The imagery of the ‘Visit Palestine’ poster — the view from the Mount of Olives looking west toward the Old City framed on one side by a mature tree — is much of its appeal (and ambiguity). In part, the ambiguity is because Krausz chose to make the Dome of the Rock, a Muslim shrine, and the iconic view of the eastern wall of the city made famous in Western travel imagery from the Mount of Olives, as the dominant image. The Western Wall (or Wailing Wall) is not visible in this poster. Following the reprinting, many have assumed that this poster could not have been made by a Zionist both because of the word ‘Palestine’ and the detailed image of the Muslim Dome of the Rock and the rest of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif. But both assumptions would be wrong.

By 2009, a number of reworkings of this poster appeared. The hopeful optimism of the Oslo Accord was gone. The reality of Israel’s continuing military occupation of the West Bank (which includes East Jerusalem) and Gaza had solidified and become more entrenched. And Israel was seven years into the construction of a huge concrete Separation Wall, what the Israeli government calls ‘a security fence’, isolating the Palestinian West Bank. This massive Wall prevents Palestinians from normal movement within the West Bank as well as travelling beyond it. Travel out of Gaza, or to Gaza from the West Bank is all but impossible. The Wall and the checkpoint system established after the Oslo accord prevent Palestinians from visiting Jerusalem. Palestinian artist Amer Shomali makes this clear in his 2009 remix of the poster, of which he made numerous iterations.

Then and now, the vast majority of Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza cannot visit the Palestine depicted in Krausz’s original image.

Shomali places the Wall in front of the viewer. The artist writes that ‘[a]fter the failure of the peace process it was the time for a third print declaring the failure of the previous two prints.’ On the poster image itself he credits Krausz and writes:

I agree that adding the wall is vandalism and a rude intervention

~ The Designer
This re-mix of the ‘Visit Palestine’ suggests an imagined landscape. The viewer would need to know the original poster because the identifying markers of Jerusalem are fully or partially blocked by the wall (depending on Shomali’s different versions). The Wall is reproduced as it is experienced and seen including the graffiti that adorns it. In reality, the Wall does not exist on this exact location, but rather it is on the other side of the Mount of Olives, behind the viewer. Its placement here symbolizes the Israeli restrictions on Palestinians entering Jerusalem so that not only can they not visit the city, they cannot even get this view of the city. Thus, just as the city view is blocked in the poster by the Wall so too are most Palestinians prevented from seeing the city. As such the poster imagery comments on and captures the historic transformation of Palestinians’ relationship to the city over the decades.

In another version, Shomali places the Wall such that it blocks out the entire cityscape of Jerusalem, and he replaces the ‘Visit Palestine’ text with ‘Visit Apartheid’. He also extends the Wall outside the printed frame of the poster, thereby marking the addition of the Wall as something new to the original. All of Jerusalem is blocked by the Wall which is the experience of most Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza today. Prior to the Oslo Accord, they could travel to the city and did, to see family, do business, live and work, and worship. The Israeli government choice in where it built the Wall also placed one-third of Palestinian Jerusalemites on the other side of the Wall, thus separating residents from the city, preventing them accessing family, friends, neighbors, markets, places of worship, crops, and open spaces that that had been part of their lives for centuries. Shomali’s poster showing the reality of Palestinian lives and calling their experiences ‘apartheid’ was an important visual reminder of the connection between Palestinians’ military confinement and the legal discrimination they face under Israeli rule and the similar experiences of non-White South Africans living under the legal regime and government of apartheid during the second half of the 20th century. Apartheid in South Africa was brought down by activists and citizens engaging in public demonstrations and advocating for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions by those outside of South Africa. Shomali’s poster can be seen as part of a similar activism to end Israeli apartheid by Palestinian activists and those in solidarity with them.
Why call it apartheid? Most simply, like apartheid in South Africa, Israel has also created a legal regime of discriminatory law and practice, in this case towards non-Jewish Palestinians living within its borders. Noura Erakat (Erakat, 2019) shows the development and implementation of this legal regime in her book, *Justice for Some: Law and the Question of Palestine*, and Palestinian, International, and Israeli human rights organizations and journalists, have documented over and over the discrimination faced by Palestinians and the failure of Israel to adhere to the Geneva Convention established rights and responsibilities held by an occupying power.9

When Israel occupied and annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, it annexed the land, but not the people, who now number over 370,000 (more than 30% of the whole city’s population).10 Thus, the Palestinians living there are legally deemed ‘permanent residents’ to live and work there, and they receive most services; but that status can be (and is) revoked if they own property or work in the West Bank or outside the country. We see all of this embodied in how Palestinians in Jerusalem are unable to get building permits (relevant in the case of Silwan and other Palestinian neighborhoods in the city currently in the news) thus forcing them to move outside Jerusalem (and thus lose their Jerusalem permanent residency status), while Jewish citizens of Israel are able to get building permits with relative ease.11 And if Palestinians who decide to apply change their status from residents to Israeli citizens, there are delays in and rejection of the vast majority of Muslim and Christian Jerusalemites’ applications for Israeli passports (13 percent of applications were granted citizenship between 2014-2018).12 These practices and others make it clear that Israel’s rule over Palestinians is apartheid, highlighted in the ongoing attempts at removal of residents and demolition of houses in two areas of Jerusalem – Shaykh Jarrah and Silwan.13 These practices are not new but their more extensive media coverage and the resulting international solidarities have increased.

Shomali’s remix of the Visit Palestine poster illustrating what ‘apartheid’ looks like is one of many such remixes. It is his simple addition of the Wall to reflect Palestinians’ lived experience imposed on a tourism poster that remains the most visually and politically powerful. After Tartakovar and Krausz reprinted the ‘Visit Palestine’ poster in 1995, it became referential material for a myriad of other posters and artworks. The ubiquity of the reprinted Krausz poster among Palestinians meant that it also entered other graphic realms, beyond that of fine art and artists. The advertising for the 6th al-Kamadjati Baroque Music Festival in 2010 used the image, unaltered, except for the addition of the Festival information, and the image was altered for advertising the Palestine Film Festival in Australia (2012) and Kuala Lumpur (2016).14 The original poster image was also picked up and reworked into the art of those working in solidarity with Palestine or to address human rights abuses or house demolitions or with Palestinian artists.15 The advertising for an art exhibit of ‘The Streets of Ain el-Helwe’, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, at the Danish Arts Foundation was a reworking of the ‘Visit Palestine’ poster, featuring the tree on the left side, with a long-abandoned car instead of Jerusalem. The goal of the exhibit was to explore ‘an urban landscape embodying 64 years of exile’,
and the graphic suggests that the Palestine one is encouraged to visit now is here in the camp. Jerusalem is no longer pictured, and ‘Visit Palestine’ has been reframed to be where Palestinians live.

The ‘Visit Palestine’ poster’s origin, the reprinting, and the complex remixings of it over the years reveal the power of the visual representation and of the name ‘Palestine’ to those who reprint and remix it. The remix of the poster underscores the continuously changing ways that individuals and communities understand the history of this imagery and word, and how the meanings imbued in them reflect their lived experiences in the present as well as the past. The ‘Visit Palestine’ poster in particular evidences the Palestine that existed before 1948 and a refutation of the Zionist efforts to suppress and change that Palestine. Shomali’s remixes show how Israeli apartheid has changed the city. The embrace of the poster and its remixing also illustrate how Palestinians, both in Palestine and the diaspora, have resisted and asserted their rights to Palestine, past, present, and future.

Notes

* From the vantage of 2021, this contribution is an extensive re-working of an earlier article on Palestine posters and the Palestine Poster Project Archive by the authors, published in the Jerusalem Quarterly in 2015.
2. See 60 of his poster works here: http://www.palestineposterproject.org/artist/david-tartakover. The post-Oslo environment is situation after the 1993 Israeli and Palestinian signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements that had been secretly negotiated in Oslo, Norway.
4. The Wailing Wall wasn’t a space of non-religious tourism promotion or strong concern of Zionists pre-1948, who were more secular and more interested in colonizing land and developing it for Jews. In addition, prior to 1967 the Wailing Wall was a narrow space with houses and buildings all around it. From 1948-1967 it was under Jordanian control. When Israel took over the area after the 1967 War, it destroyed the area around the Wall and made it the place of visitation that it is today.
6. Israel began building the Wall 2002 and it now measures more than 700 kilometers. It does not follow the 1967 border of the West Bank, but snakes deep into that territory, effectively taking Palestinian land and making it part of the Israeli state. The International Court of Justice ruled it as ‘contrary to international law’ in 2004. For more information, see https://stopthewall.org/the-wall/
7. See the art version here http://www.amershomali.info/post-visit-palestine/ and the Visit Apartheid version here: http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/visit-apartheid-original
9. See, for example, the annual report of al-Haq for 2020: https://www.alhaq.org/monitoring-documentation/17950.html; and Btselem's January 2021 declaration that 'this is Apartheid' https://www.btselem.org/apartheid: 'The Israeli regime enacts in all the territory it controls (Israeli sovereign territory, East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip) an apartheid regime. One organizing principle lies at the base of a wide array of Israeli policies: advancing and perpetuating the supremacy of one group – Jews – over another – Palestinians.'

10. Following the 1967 War, Israel occupied the West Bank (which included East Jerusalem), Gaza, and the Syrian Golan Heights. Israel annexed East Jerusalem and its environs (illegal in international law and later condemned in UN Security Council Resolutions 476 and 478).

11. An app collating home demolitions is here: https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiMjkZGRhYWQtODk0MS00MjI2LTkyNTAtMTMzOC0zYjIwM2E1MDIzIiwidCI6IjUzNzc1MDFhNy1mNzIyLTk1ZjAtNjg0Mi1hZDEyYWNlMTExZjciLCJcIjoiMjIyOTQ5ZmZmZmQ2NjYzOTBlZjE4ZDQ4ODU4MjM0NyIsImMiOjB9. For those who want to understand the Kafka-esque quasi-legal situation of building permits, it is worth reading the short UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) report on the Jerusalem neighborhood of Sur Bahir in July 2019: https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/threat-demolitions-east-jerusalem


13. For more on what has been happening in these two neighborhoods, see https://www.silwanic.net/index.php/aboutsilwan and https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/11/jerusalem-gaza-israeli-authorities-reassert-domination#


15. See Meera Sethi’s artwork of the wall and an excavator demolishing houses: http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/visit-palestine-zaraffeh and a tribute to Banksy's paintings on the wall can be seen here: http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/visit-palestine-banksy-tribute


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Palestine Poster Project Archives, at http://www.palestineposterproject.org/


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Stones, pebbles, and rocks

The news coverage here in London is maddeningly complicit with what poet Mahmoud Darwish describes as an enforced ‘translation’ of Palestine (Darwish, 2020 [1973], 32): a comprehensive programme of silencing and erasure, symbolised for Darwish by the substitution of Arabic place-names, and involving a systematic negation of Arab memory and experience, and the inevitable rationalisation of violence and assault on Palestinian rights.

I watch my children, 2 and 4, pick up stones, pebbles, and bits of rock. It’s something they always do, wherever we are. ‘That’s a stone!’ the younger exclaims. ‘We can keep this for our collection’, the older explains.

I think of the stones, pebbles, and rocks of Palestinian resistance, longing, and belonging.

Darwish often mobilises stones, pebbles and rocks in his writing, their thingness a natural defence against the destructive onslaught of translation. I reach for his prose to take this line of thinking into what he calls ‘the Arabic sentence’, to language as identity and as place. In his Journal of an Ordinary Grief (Yawmiyyât al-Huzn al-’Âdî, 1973), Darwish points out the absurd bad faith of expecting or demanding a ‘philosophy of things’ from Palestinians in order to determine how ‘worthy’ they are of belonging (Darwish, 2020[1973], 38-9). He then retorts with a dialectics of a rock, elaborating on that absurdity:

Your awareness of the need for proof of the history of a rock and your ability to manufacture proof does not give you a priority of belonging vis-à-vis someone who can tell when the rains will come from the smell of that rock. For you that rock is an intellectual exercise, but for its owner it is a roof and a wall. And a rock is not a rock when it can change into a totem that you carry in your bag and bring out as a demonstration in your lectures. The rock is a rock when it can be your neighbour...

Darwish tells us how Jerusalem is ‘a treasure made of rocks, defeat, and rare trees’ (Darwish, 2020[1973], 120). And how the rocks of Galilee are both ‘a prison and a horizon’ where he wants the ‘small voice’ of his prose to carve ‘a shape’ (Darwish, 2020[1973], xv). Rocks - confiscated, occupied, demolished, persistent - delineate Palestinian existence in relation to homeland.

I watch my children play with the stones, pebbles, and bits of rock. They are clearly relishing this direct engagement with their material properties and transformations. The younger one pulls out a small greyish pebble from her
mouth and appreciates its wetness and shininess. The older one holds up a big piece of flint and enjoys its weight and how it fits his hand.

I think about how pebbles and stones are declinations of rocks, transformations of the substance of rock as it enters into different relations. Pieces of rock become pebbles, smooth and rounded, when they are associated with flowing water, worn by time, and washed up on beaches. And pieces of rock are stones, hard and compact, when they seem shaped by or for human use.

In Darwish’s Arabic sentence, stones and longing coalesce in the path of memory (Darwish, 2020[1973], 17). Pebbles are ‘petrified pieces’ of his exiled father’s heart, which he bends to pick up from the ground (2020[1973], 3), and stones are ‘made of time’, ruins that commemorate massacres and provide a site for lamenting loss (Darwish, 2020[1973], 95). But his father’s search for pebbles is his ‘refusal to get lost in [his] loss’ (Darwish, 2020[1973], 4), and the stones of ruins are also a site for celebrating endurance (Darwish, 2020[1973], 95), and the rock is what Darwish wants his writing to ‘shake a little’, to unsettle, ‘so that this ordinary grief may stop accepting being acceptable’ (Darwish, 2020[1973], xv).

In defeat, despair and loss, ‘all [is] transformed from stones into thoughts’, but this abstraction never lasts for long. Homeland, even as an idea, and even as a dream – for Palestinians to be able ‘to practice [their] humanity in a place of [their] own’ (Darwish, 2020[1973], 7) –, is so fundamentally entwined with the Palestinian condition that it soon ‘turns more solid than a rooted tree’ (Darwish, 2020[1973], 7). And, by being ‘tied to a rock’, the dream remains an incentive for struggle (Darwish, 2020[1973], 7).

As they move through their imaginative declinations, the stones, pebbles and rocks of Palestinian longing turn into the substance of resistance.

I watch my children throw stones in frustration, offer pebbles preciously to loved ones and strangers, and bring rocks home that end up just lying there. My children only understand Arabic in translation, responding to me in English when I speak it to them. But as I watch them with their stones, pebbles and bits of rock, I think with hope about rallying, assembling, and gathering against enforced translation.

Notes
1. ‘Go to the Arabic sentence’, he writes, ‘and you will find self and homeland’ (2020[1973], 137-8)

References

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Silwan and the City of David

With the heavy rains of the winter of 2018, the landslides and sinkholes returned to East Jerusalem. One such sinkhole opened just behind the Ein Silwan Mosque in Wadi Hilweh, a neighbourhood in the village of Silwan. Within a short time of its opening, a truck arrived to fill the hole with cement. The amount of concrete needed, seemed surprisingly large; the liquid cement kept on pouring through the crack into the opening, a testament to the size of the underground cavity. Sinkholes and collapses are not a natural phenomenon in Jerusalem, a city built on solid rock, and yet the earth under Wadi Hilweh has been shifting. The first time such a hole opened-up beside the Silwan mosque was over a decade ago, and since then cracks have gradually started to appear in family homes, roads, public stairways and walkways. That morning in December 2018, outside the Ein Silwan Mosque, the opening of the road’s surface revealed for a brief moment the (officially unacknowledged) connection between the violence, damages and quite literal undermining of Palestinian life and the archaeological underground tunnelling of the Israeli Jewish settler colonial project led by the Ir-David foundation.

What is popularly referred to as the ‘City of David’ is an amalgamation of over 150 years of archaeological excavations, researching the history of settlement on the site of ancient Jerusalem. It is located amidst the houses, gardens and fields of the century’s old Palestinian village, gradually displacing its population as part of the Judaification attempts led by the El’ad Organisation.

Officially registered as an NGO on September 8th 1986 by David Be’eri, a former Israeli commando officer, El’ad proclaimed its commitment to ‘continuing King David’s legacy as well as revealing and connecting people to Ancient Jerusalem’s glorious past through four key initiatives: archaeological excavation, tourism development, educational programming and residential revitalization’ (Ir
David Foundation, nd). El’ad residential revitalisation plans, similar to those practiced by settler organisation, ‘Ateret Cohanim’, meant a persistent process of terrorisation, forced buyouts and displacement of Palestinian families only to then repopulate their emptied homes with ideologically driven Jewish families. Unlike ‘Ateret Cohanim’, El’ads public facing activities were led by The Ir-David (City of David) foundation which focused on the widely accepted Zionist and evangelical practice of biblical archaeology.

Tunnels now run underground across the entirety of the Wadi Hilweh neighbourhood of Silwan; some follow ancient pathways; some are newly excavated. Despite the fact that all digs are carried out by the archaeologists of the IAA – albeit, contracted by El’ad - The precise routes and depths of many of these huge underground projects, are to this day undisclosed to the public. It is only as the buildings, balconies, public stairways and roads began collapsing that the extent of the project was forced into the spotlight.
In this short text and series of images, I wish to highlight a less addressed aspect of this violent apparatus, the role of imaging, modelling and especially spatial (3D) optical imaging in the entangled space of Silwan and the City of David. Three-dimensional imaging is used throughout the Holy Basin; by the Israeli state as part of its apparatus of security and control; by the municipality in its planning and monitoring and surveillance mechanisms; by archaeologists in their inspection and recording of the City of David site and its artefacts; and by El’ad in its methods of imaging, imagining and narration of the ‘City of David’. Largescale terraforming, tunnelling, climate control, acoustics, landscape design as well as imaging, projection and modelling are all deployed in order to control degrees of vision, erasure and opacity. Scan data was first used in the City of David site as part of a survey of ‘Area G’ and its sloping structure. What is immediately striking (yet consistent with this computational vernacular) is how in the point cloud, the site is detached from its surroundings and imported into a standard software environment. A floating object set against a gradient backdrop. The same ideology that erases
all mention and trace of Silwan, Abu Tor or sheikh Jarrah from its official maps, finds here a technology that can perform a similar erasure, but at the level of the data. ‘Less relevant’ information is discarded. The point-cloud scan doesn’t only show an isolated, abstracted archaeological model, but it is first and foremost an operational photographic entity, providing a ‘design-ready’ dataset, streamlined into archaeological, engineering and architectural workflows.

In this site, the thin crust of the surface forms an optic divide that enables a separation of narratives, archaeology and dispossession. Damage to Palestinian properties and infrastructure is separated from the narrative of Jewish indigeneity, exile and return according to the dictates of divine providence.
By cloaking its public communications in a professional, technical, practical discourse, and not solely in the blatant ideological language of Judaization. In 2008, for example, El'ad's Be'eri was filmed giving a tour of Beit Hama'ayan (the ‘Fountain House’). As the group he leads descends underground, Be’eri describes how bit by bit his family and he dug through the floor of a house they bought at the top of the hill, down to the Gihon spring: The events that Be'eri speaks of took place a few years earlier, yet they were not achieved by Be’eri and his family alone. In fact, the site he is discussing had already been dug and developed by Archaeologist Ronny Reich of Haifa University (also in charge of the Herodian tunnel excavations). The Fountain House is now the largest and most technologically developed section of the City of David site, so it is clear that despite the ‘guerrilla’ tactics Be’eri describes, his actions were always deeply acknowledged and embraced by the Israeli state and aided by its professional bodies.
Already in 2009, as the archaeological excavations continued to expand and the damage, they were causing on the surface was becoming increasingly evident, Palestinian residents and supporting NGOs filed legal petitions to stop the works. The Supreme Court’s response was twofold. First, it claimed that there was no clear proof of a correlation between the tunnelling (or ‘earth-clearing works’ as they were described) and damage to Palestinian property above-ground. Secondly, it deemed that any damage that did exist was ‘acceptable’ in light of the significance of the archaeological discoveries to Israel’s cultural heritage. Under the auspices of the Supreme Court, the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) and the municipality’s engineers, archaeology and settlement have been mobilised in tandem to dispossess the Palestinian residents and obscure the non-Jewish heritage of the site. Some modes of violence do not meet ‘the norms of recognizability because they are hidden from view through being openly visible, perhaps even hyper-visible’ (Winter, 2012). Digital theodolites, Lidar and photogrammetry survey scans provide accuracy and spatial orientation as never before. And yet the information linking the ground and the underground, used to conduct the operation is withheld and obscured every time the city of David needs to account for its implications in Silwan. This discontinuity of perceptible perspectival vision has been instrumentalised politically through means of architecture and optical media and put to use to further Israel’s extensive development of Palestinian East Jerusalem and the ‘Holy Basin’ heritage site.

Even though El’ad’s activities above ground, directed towards the cleansing of Palestinian presence in Silwan is highly contested and its ideological extremism recognised (though rarely curbed), its massive archaeological endeavour complicit and part of the same project is widely embraced. Throughout the ongoing development both above and below the earth’s surface, spatial
imaging has been used to bridge the gap, to the point of conflation, between the messianic narrative and the scientific data, between the existing and the planned. El’ad’s success is inextricably linked to its strategy of forming partnerships with civic, scientific and commercial entities and its ability to present its operations through professional, technical and ‘secular’ discourse and not solely in ideological, religious terms. Whereas for the early pilgrims, the ruins they encountered in Palestine verified the prophecy of a deserted Zion, for the present-day messianic right wing, construction and terraforming validate the act of return. As the spatial photograph with its calculable, parametric nature is now part of the architectural and engineering mechanism of production, it is – just as much as the home, the road or the archaeological site – a form of settlement.
How can a changed spatial dimension in optical imaging be turned into a mode of practice and resistance? How could the routes of the tunnels and their relation to the overground Palestinian life be made public? How can the negative spaces of unexcavated archaeological layers be made visible? In my ongoing project, a fragment of which is shown in the images here, I’m using the information held within the myriad of photographic, video datasets made public in order to slowly build a complex navigable point cloud of the site. It is formed out of an assemblage of found footage by Evangelical tour guides, 19th century PEF royal engineers, Palestinian residents uploads to social media, Jewish Israeli excavators, El’ad public relations filming, as well as my own scanning walks and the kite mapping images conducted by children of Silwan with Shai Efrati, and with Public lab activists Hagit Keysar and Jeffrey Warren.7
This point cloud is a form of heat map of the intensity of mediated gazes across the volume of the site. By recording the meandering surfaces as they fold from the open air into the underground and back out. It is a type of geo-endoscopy, registering the volume of the site, hoping to show its entanglement of its spaces, their interconnection and their violence.

Notes

3. A recording of David Beeri, Head of the Elad NGO. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-MiOPPPUD-Ok.
4. In 2017 David Be'eri received the Israel Prize for his contribution to Jewish cultural heritage through his founding of Elad.
6. The ‘Holy Basin’ is a modern Israeli term for the geographical area in Jerusalem that includes the Old City and its adjacent territories.

References

Ir David Foundation, 'City Of David':


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Ploughshares into Prayers

The Garden, in the context of Palestine, conjures conflicting imaginaries of security and abundance, disobedience and control, inside and outside, and of exile and return. These binaries are the narrative components of the enclosures and infrastructures that have distinguished the Garden from untamed wilderness. As such, the genealogy of the garden in Palestine can be read as a story that parallels Ottoman and British privatization of the commons, the colonial project of ‘making the desert bloom’, and the rise of neoliberal politics, bubble economics, consumer debt and real estate speculation sweeping the West Bank today. Continued annexation, greenwashing, and destructive notions of progress have all but wiped out the memory of an indigenous mythology once deeply rooted in an embodied, balanced stewardship of nature. How can the merging of artistic methodologies with agricultural practices address this loss of cultural capital in Palestine? How might collective action help decolonize the social, political, economic and narrative structures that govern our relationship to nature and promote a sense of ecological intercommunalism?

The story of Abu Ibrahim is worth noting. I came across this research by Samuel Dolbee and Shay Hazkani through the Institute for Palestine Studies (Dolbee and Hazkani, 2015). Abu Ibrahim was a Palestinian peasant (fellah) who wrote a column, the ‘Peasant Letters’ in the Filastin newspaper from 1911–1912. He made an impassioned argument that in order to modernize, Palestinian peasants needed to abandon the commons (masha’) and invest in modern infrastructures and technologies. He argued that masha’ hindered progress, arguing that by investing in modern agricultural techniques,
Palestinian peasants could become competitive and enter a surplus rather than a sustenance economy. However, the way masha’ worked was that you did not own your land; the land rotated between families, so why would one family invest in infrastructure if the next season someone else was going to use it? What if they do not maintain it? There is a relationship between the loss of masha’ beginning with the introduction of Ottoman land deeds, and the loss of cooperative labor, all in the name of progress and modernization. ‘Abu Ibrahim was, in fact, a pseudonym for Menashe Meirovitch, an agronomist who immigrated from the Russian Empire to Palestine in 1883 to help establish one of the first Zionist colonies, Rishon leZion’, (Dolbee and Hazkani, 2015, 25).

Similarly, around 1905, European ideas of landscape began to take root in the Zionist project of constructing garden cities in Palestine. Garden cities were inspired by English architect and planner, Ebenezer Howard’s ‘Garden Cities of To-morrow’, a utopian city in harmony with nature, and German landscape architect and planner Leberecht Migge’s Green Manifesto, a progressive and sophisticated sustainable green urban planning scheme that never took hold in Germany but thrived under many planners he influenced in Palestine (Zaidman and Kark, 2015).

Figure 2: Sketch based on the 1924 plan of Bayt VeGan suburb of Jerusalem by Kaufmann. Nida Sinnokrot, 2016.
In the essay ‘May be solved by the construction of garden cities: German-Jewish literary proposals on garden cities in Eretz Israel’, Ines Sonder notes how in 1919 architect Alexander Levy, inspired by this Green Movement, worked out his formula for urban planning. He explained it in a letter titled ‘Palestine: a Garden’ that he wrote to Richard Kauffmann, a German Jewish architect who migrated to Palestine in 1920. Levy went on to write: ‘a Garden of God if you want, neither town, nor village is suitable for us Jews and for the New Man at all. The city is too much inherent in us, the village too little’. Shortly thereafter, the garden cities concept was officially adopted by the Jewish National Fund (Sonder, 2014, 140).

Garden cities became the urban planning inspiration for modern Israeli settlements. To these architects and urban planners, they were making use of untamed wilderness, civilizing it and creating living conditions suitable for European immigrants who viewed the Palestinian village and city as unhygienic, crowded, unplanned, and unsuitable for habitation and lacking in infrastructure. In contrast, to the indigenous Palestinians, this so-called wilderness was a thriving ecosystem that was bountiful, often held in common ownership, with rich customs, practices, and mythologies that informed the sharing and stewardship of natural resources.

For example, The Huleh Lake was a key node in the migratory patterns of wildlife from Africa, Asia, and Europe and served as a natural filtration system for water flowing into the upper Jordan River. Huleh was one of the oldest freshwater lakes in the world and the site of some of the earliest indigenous settlements. In Glenna Anton’s article ‘Blind Modernism and Zionist Waterscape: The Huleh Drainage Project’, Sandy Sufian explains the architectural methods of the indigenous inhabitants of the lake contrasted with Western capitalist imperatives of intensive agricultural cultivation and irrigation in which natural resources were seen solely as commodities. Rather
than striving to conquer the land, Sufian explains, Arab farmers, lacking capital intensive technologies, saw themselves as working with the land, within its constraints and accepting its material limits. Thus, they did not depend on ‘capital from abroad’, as did the Jewish settlers. Instead, the peasants relied on naturally-produced inputs. In Sufian’s words:

...fellah sharecropping had its own logic, privileging communal economic security over immediate monetary rewards. In 1950, the Jewish National Fund announced its plans to drain the Huleh valley as part of a larger project to make productive use of the water of the Jordan Basin. By 1958, the valley had been entirely drained, malaria free, and suitable for garden city settlement (Anton, 2008).

The garden can be a colonial tool for legitimizing nationalist claims and can be read as a narrative of civilized vs. barbaric, modern vs. primitive, sustenance vs. surplus. How can we disentangle these relationships and complicate these narratives? Perhaps we can get some insight by looking into how these notions of landscape have developed in post-Oslo Palestine.
Precarity is nothing new to Palestinians; it is a foundational component of their modern experience. But bubble economics, consumer debt and real estate speculation are the contemporary ingredients of that experience in the West Bank. In the period following Salam Fayyad’s reform plans (2009-2010) that adopted the free market economic model for state building, and large incentive for bank loans, the West Bank was covered with billboards made of white corrugated sheet metal. Everywhere you looked, it seemed that there were billboards popping up across the land like white mushrooms. They were empty. There was a feeling of dread for when they would be covered with advertisements but also an enchantment to them, a promise of something, not clear what. This idea of a promise reflected in these thousands of empty canvases gave us a surface, a blank slate, or a landscape on which to project our hopes, desires, and fears. The material reality was a strong indicator as these billboards are made of corrugated sheet metal, an invention of a British officer in Australia in the 1800s as a way to cheaply house inmates. It is also the material used for making shipping containers, which are notorious in the West Bank as settler housing units. When you see a shipping container house on a hilltop, you know that the hilltop has been taken over by settlers and that the army would soon follow. I became very curious to know what happens to that original shipping container once that hilltop settlement becomes a fully developed city; where did that ‘container as seed’ go?

Figure 5: Nida Sinnokrot, Corrugated Landscape no. 01, 2013-14 oil on canvas, 60 x 40 cm.
I began to search for these shipping containers and discovered that many get sold on the black market to Palestinian builders where they serve as construction site offices. ‘Johan’s Whale’ is a container that I cut into 11 cross sections hand slicing it through all the layers of steel, gypsum, insulation, wires, carpets, windows, and even a mattress where someone used to sleep. The title is derived from the biblical tale in which a whale devours the prophet Jonah for defaulting on a promise made to God. While in the belly of this great whale, Jonah pleads for forgiveness, and vows to repay his divine debt, and eventually, after three days and nights, God commands the whale to spew out Jonah. But how shall we escape from the pathological debts that hold claim on our lives, and who shall give the command to spew us out? ‘Jonah’s Whale’, the shipping container colloquially referred to as caravan in Palestine, references flows of global capital and debt, expansion and extraction, and architectures of occupation. Slicing the caravan sheds light upon itself and the landscape it has been instrumental in shaping. Here, distinctions of interior and exterior collapse as this transnational agent of globalization, the shipping container, functions to frame the complex palimpsest of power and commerce that shapes the landscape well beyond the regional context.

Figure 6: Nida Sinnokrot, ‘Jonah’s Whale’, 2014, hand-sliced Israeli settlers’ caravan repurposed as Palestinian construction site office, 480 x 1,200 x 240 cm.

Figure 7: Image of Nida Sinnokrot’s ‘Jonah’s Whale’ in Sankt Peter Cathedral, Cologne, Germany. Photo by Chris Franken (2019).
Since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, I’ve seen the rise of debt–culture, mortgages, neo-liberal policies, NGO-ization, radicalization, violence, and the trivialization of indigenous agrarian, social, and spiritual practices connected to land. This story can be read in the scarred surface of ‘Ka (Oslo)’, named after the ancient Egyptian Ka concept and made from the 1993 model of the JCB 3X backhoe.

![Figure 8: Nida Sinnokrot, ‘Ka (Oslo)’, 2017. 2 JCB 3CX 1993-model backhoe arms, 600 x 400 x 100 cm. Exhibition view ‘Jerusalem Lives’ at The Palestinian Museum, 2018. Photo by Ziad Trad.](image)

The ancient Egyptian Ka concept has numerous interpretations both ontological and relational, from the life force of all things, to the promise of return or resurrection, to letting go or departure, to a moral code for submission and power, to Ka as self, as double. And riffing off this semiotic web, ‘Ka (Oslo)’ can be read on a horizontal axis - above ground and below ground - as refusal, defiance, supplication, prayer; begging the heavens while questioning their earthly purpose. And around a vertical axis with the implements pointing to mimetic desire and conflict between colonized and colonizer. In this sense, we see Israeli and Palestinian leadership imitating each other’s desires, nationalist aspirations, modernist notions of taming the wild, scapegoating, and silencing dissent in the name of order and security. But in order to be free and truly liberated, we have to stop seeing ourselves in this drama of reciprocal imitation.

The technologies and mythologies we use to maintain colonial narratives of progress, extraction, liberation, etc. are not neutral. If we think about technics as power, and as a power that inherently distorts and exploits nature, these implements - hands, arms and base - give expression to the complicated matrix of violence we see happening in Palestine.
Perhaps Ka’s potential, the life-force it represents, resonates between its hands, between transmission and reception, and in that sense, it is an antenna or a tuning fork for a forgotten frequency. As such, in the tattered, scarred, re-finished, inscribed (Arabic, Hebrew, English), and tattooed surface of these tools, we can reconsider territories, imagine new ways of mapping, and invent new implements that embrace ambiguity and a plurality of weights and measures that challenge our false idols of permanence, power, nation states and the infrastructures we build in their service.

My friend Kenny Strickland once described Ka as ‘ploughshares into prayers’. ‘Ka (Oslo)’ is calling us to heal the rift between culture and nature, between art and agriculture, as an antidote to the increasingly hostile and alienating stage of late-capitalism we are living through. Responding to this reality Sahar Qawasmi and I established Sakiya - Art | Science | Agriculture in the rural village of Ein Qiniya.

Sakiya is a story of survival that is rooted in its name. In Arabic every word is formed from a three-letter root. Meaning is relational in structure, encoded in this root. The root of Sakiya - سقي - ساقية relates to the stem of a mushroom, papyrus, an irrigation ditch, a water wheel, a cupbearer, to quench someone’s thirst, the act of supplying or obtaining water. It also means to conclude a sharecropping contract or the right to access water, to tend to or care for, or to make flow.

Figure 9: Um al Einein spring at Sakiya.
Sakiya’s vision is: ‘Liberation through a society whose confidence is rooted in traditional and contemporary ecological practices, whose tolerance echoes nature’s diversity, whose generosity springs from collective labor, whose creativity is enriched by the intersections between art, science, and agriculture and whose prosperity is shared beyond boundaries.’

Sakiya brings artistic practice, pedagogy, and heritage together on our rewilded hillside. So, one way to think of Sakiya is to ask: what if museums, farms and schools were thought of as one and the same? This is a huge proposition, a far-reaching experiment and research topic to unravel.

Sakiya’s task is thus twofold: to provide a platform for alternative pedagogy within and for Palestine, and to connect to a growing network of ecological struggles around the world. Overwhelmingly, sites of climate research are located far from communities where the effects of climate change will be most acutely felt. By connecting knowledge intimately to the land, Sakiya seeks to address these challenges locally, while developing methodologies at the intersection of art, science and agriculture, as part of a worldwide commons.

Our recent open-call is soliciting ‘ephemeral infrastructures’ as artistic interventions on our site. If infrastructures are the invisible forces that govern and mediate our relationship to the built environment and nature then are not mythologies similar to infrastructures in that they govern and assuage our anxieties and offer forms of embodiment, collective labor, and celebration? This is the work of the artist and the work we engage with at Sakiya. So perhaps there is a way to imagine, between our shared experiences, not only the practice of sustainability as it relates to design and technology, but also to grow sustainable mythologies that can germinate our imaginations as we move into the future.

To challenge what a garden can be, we need to bring to bear artistic practices that cultivate commoning, embrace a culture of cohabitation, and invent new tools and technologies that that help us listen to those neglected frequencies that amplify polyphony, polyculture and a plurality of life forces.
References:


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Soft Tactics: on liberating the mental space

The journey below sheds a light on the absurd Palestinian landscape with its visible and invisible boundaries and our continuous attempts – as Palestinians – to fight its alienation and fragmentation. The excerpt from my diary reflects on the sense of invisibility, subversion and in-betweenness that come with everyday life surviving under occupation. While I try to unpack the confusing landscape, I also argue that there is a degree of irony and power that lies within Palestinians that can subvert spaces of oppression into spaces of play and creativity in which social life can be recuperated.

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The Invisible Hitchhikers

(From my own diary, 25 June 2009)

All I wanted was to go for a swim in the Dead Sea before I made my way back to London the next day. Sahar, Dana and Luke joined in; all of them were exhausted from a hot summer day and could not wait to be in the water. We got into the famous yellow Ford van on the Ramallah-Jericho route, and half way through the van drivers in the opposite direction were flashing their lights. Apparently, a ‘flying checkpoint’ was blocking the entrance, just a few metres before reaching the seaside. Our driver was not interested in taking a new route, nor did he want to risk crossing the checkpoint. So we were instantly dumped in the usual ‘non-place’ at the junction where the roads for the Palestinians face those of the Israelis; hopefully another adventurous driver would pick us up. From there, at the entrance to Jericho, our journey really started.

‘Put your scarves on’, Dana whispered while leading the way towards the opposite side of the road. ‘What headscarf?’ I asked. With confidence, she wrapped hers around, just like the Israeli settlers do, and headed towards the hitchhiking spots known in Hebrew as ‘trempiyada’ (תרמיפיהדה). My heart started sinking; for the first time in my life I was heading towards Israeli settlers instead of running away from them. ‘Dana, this is insane’, I cried. ‘Don’t worry, Yara, not only it is free, no checkpoint will stop us; we can go all the way to Eilat beach if you like.’ Despite my shock and fear, I sensed from Dana’s confidence a lifestyle she was so accustomed to. I defied my dear friend Suad’s words rumbling in my heart ‘nothing to lose but your life’ – and thought to myself: ‘why not let’s give it a try?’

I remained quiet, trying to think what needs to be done to pass as an Israeli settler? Other than myself, no one else seemed to care if we ever got caught. Why should they? Sahar has a Jerusalem ID, Luke is American, and Dana is so blonde that she can hardly be recognized, as a Palestinian – especially with the distorted stereotyped image Settlers have on Palestinians’ look and image. The main problem is really me in terms of how I look. I disguised my look as much as I could. Unsuccessfully
I tried to wrap the scarf around my head, while watching the crowd pointing with their fingers to the cars.

Ten minutes of waiting, and nothing still is coming through. Only the spoken Hebrew of the settlers around me is echoing in my ears. It took me a while to feel anywhere near confident; instead, I kept examining myself to make sure I look convincing. I knew that hitchhiking is a common thing in Israel, but how on earth should I as a Palestinian know how it works? ‘Just press the button’, Dana suggested after a long wait. Apparently, it is a way to alert Israeli drivers while waiting on traffic lights that they get ready to pick up their fellow settlers on the way. ‘Don’t worry, Yara, we’ll be fast; no settler would want to be at the entrance of Jericho at this time of the day’, Dana whispered with a cheeky smile.

A few minutes later, and we were all squeezed at the back of a car driving across the highway. Dana starts with her American accent: ‘Can we get as close as possible to the Dead Sea, please?’ The car driver replied: ‘Dead Sea? Sure it’s on my way, I live in Mitzpe Shalom. Where from are you?’ While Luke tried to join the conversation, Sahar and I stared at one another realizing what we got ourselves into. Mitzpe Shalom is well known for its right-wing settlers who would not hesitate to do anything if they recognize our real identity. Luke’s loud voice interrupted my scary thoughts: ‘We’re from Ohio, but we’re here to look around.’

Yes, it was true – I really started to look around, nervously examining the car, its objects and any possible signs that might help us in case we got kidnapped, attacked or had to run away. Of the whole car, I could only spot the tiny stickers on the rear window. All I could read with my broken Hebrew was: ‘They are handing over the Dead Sea too’, and ‘Hebron ours ... ever since then and forever’.

I happened to remember the Hebron sticker very well; Ruba my friend would use them in her car to pass through checkpoints with less hassle.
Apparently, such cynical tricks have worked so well that Palestinian taxi drivers have also been using them inside Jerusalem for some time. With such stickers, not only do they get through checkpoints fast, but they also increase the chances of taxi drivers picking up customers who might otherwise not want to get in with a Palestinian cab.

That map beneath the sticker looked also very familiar to me. I had once worked on the regeneration of the historic centre of Hebron for a whole year, and visited every single house and walked through its maze of alleyways. I was hosted at Maha’s house for three days under curfew just so that the Israeli settlers could walk free. Who knows, our driver could have been one of them?

At that point, I felt the poster was really there to remind me that, Hebron is indeed OURS - not his - just as the Dead See is also ours. If it takes an Israeli settler to drive me through my own map, then let it be, why not to enjoy it, if eventually I will be able to cross all boundaries?

With a few jokes here and there, we were soon about to reach our destination. A shiver ran down my spine; this one however was of happiness, not of fear. For some reason, I felt that I was no longer chained; neither the driver, nor the settlements around, could occupy us anymore. At that moment, it was me who was occupying him. Just before he drove off, I asked: ‘Where is the best spot to get dropped at Beersheva? My friend Dana wants to visit Adamama Farm.’

I didn’t join the final leg of the trip to Beersheva, but definitely it was worth the effort. From Ramallah, Dana told me she had made it through to the village of Beit Sahour, down to Hebron, reaching her first hitchhiking point near to the Israeli settlement of Kiryat Arba (known to host one of the most extremist right-wing groups in Israel). From there she made her way to Beersheva and finally to Adamaa Farm. ‘I smelled the scents of Gaza and the Mediterranean a few minutes away, before
I made my way back hitchhiking through Jaffa, Jerusalem and finally Kalandia checkpoint.' It was Dana’s only way to explore what she has been missing in her whole 30 years of life.

Indeed, if it weren’t for Dana’s sense of humour, or the car stickers and the whole hitchhiking adventure, my own mental map would not have been stretched so far. The journey itself did not really matter; more important were the boundaries we broke with our new hidden rules of daily co-existence.

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BORN UNEQUAL ABROAD

JEWISH AMERICAN BORN IN THE U.S.

CAN I VISIT ISRAEL & THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY?

YES
You can visit Israel and most of the West Bank, and you’ll find programs that may help fund your trip

NO
You are barred from entry to Israel, the West Bank or Gaza

CAN I MOVE THERE?

YES
Because you’re Jewish, the 1950 Law of Return guarantees your right to live in Israel. Plus, you’ll get a free flight and a bunch of perks if you do so

NO
As a Palestinian refugee, you’re barred from returning and denied residency rights, even if you have family living there

CAN I BECOME AN ISRAELI CITIZEN?

YES
The 1952 Citizenship Law entitles you to automatic citizenship, even if you’ve never set foot in Israel before

NO
You are ineligible if your family became refugees between 1947 and 1949, even if they had lived there for generations before

CAN I PASS ON MY LEGAL STATUS TO MY SPOUSE IN ISRAEL OR THE OPT?

YES
Upon becoming a citizen, you can pass along legal status and even citizenship to your spouse (except if they’re Palestinian from the OPT or from several Arab countries)

NO
You have no legal status and cannot gain one, even by marrying a citizen or resident of Israel
BORN UNEQUAL

EAST JERUSALEM

JEWISH CITIZEN OF ISRAEL
BORN IN EAST JERUSALEM
(SETTLEMENT)

PALESTINIAN RESIDENT
BORN IN EAST JERUSALEM

IS MY LEGAL STATUS IN JERUSALEM SECURE?

YES
You’re an Israeli citizen and it’s government policy to maintain a Jewish majority in the city

NO
Just like foreigners who move to Israel, you’re a resident, a conditional and revocable status. You can apply for citizenship, but you’re unlikely to get it

CAN I MOVE ABROAD FOR A FEW YEARS AND COME BACK?

YES
Whenever you decide to move back to Jerusalem, you’ll be welcome

MAYBE NOT
You can leave, but if you stay away too long, your residency could be revoked, leaving you without legal status

WILL I KEEP MY LEGAL STATUS IF I MOVE TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WEST BANK?

YES
You can move to an Israeli settlement in the West Bank. Your legal status is secure, regardless of where you live

MAYBE NOT
If Israeli authorities determine that you no longer “maintain a connection” to Jerusalem, you might lose your residency

CAN I EASILY MOVE TO A NEW HOME IN EAST JERUSALEM?

YES
You should have no problem moving into a settlement

MAYBE NOT
It’s virtually impossible to obtain a building permit, and built-up Palestinian areas are already overcrowded
BORN UNEQUAL WEST BANK

JEWSH CITIZEN OF ISRAEL BORN IN AN ISRAELI SETTLEMENT

PALESTINIAN ID HOLDER BORN IN A PALESTINIAN VILLAGE (AREA C)

CAN I HOP IN MY CAR AND DRIVE TO JERUSALEM?

YES
You can do so on roads designed to bypass Palestinian communities and facilitate your commute

NO
You need a rarely issued Israeli permit that’s generally time limited. Even with a permit, you’ll face checkpoints where you’re likely to experience delays and humiliation

IF I’M ARRESTED, WILL I GET A FAIR TRIAL?

YES
You’ll be tried in Israeli civil courts with full due process rights

NO
You’ll be tried in an Israeli military court with a near 100% conviction rate, or possibly even held in administrative detention without trial or charge, based on secret evidence

DO I HAVE THE RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH AND RIGHT TO PROTEST?

YES
Only speech with “near certainty” to “seriously jeopardize” vital security can be restricted. You can protest without fear of state repression

NO
Military orders restrict your right to free speech and right to protest. If you violate these vaguely worded orders, you could face up to 10 years in prison

CAN I BUILD A HOME?

YES
Israel has allocated large swaths of the West Bank to settlements, where plans have been approved to build thousands of homes

NO
Because you live in the 60% of the West Bank that is under exclusive Israeli control (Area C), it’s virtually impossible. You may be more likely to have your home demolished than get a permit to build
**BORN UNEQUAL NEGEV**

**NIKIT**
JEWISH CITIZEN OF ISRAEL
BORN IN AN ISRAELI TOWN

**WISSAM**
PALESTINIAN CITIZEN OF ISRAEL
BORN IN UNRECOGNIZED BEDOUIN VILLAGE

**IS MY COMMUNITY RECOGNIZED BY THE GOVERNMENT?**

**YES**
As part of a policy to “Judaize the Negev”, Israel actively nurtures the development of Jewish communities in the Negev

**NO**
Israel does not recognize 35 Palestinian Bedouin communities, making it impossible for 90,000 or so residents to live lawfully in their homes

**CAN I ACCESS BASIC SERVICES?**

**YES**
Likely without any obstacles, thanks to billions of shekels Israel has invested in major infrastructure projects to attract Jewish residents to the area

**NO**
Israel refuses to connect your unrecognized village to national electricity or water grids or provide basic services like paved roads, sewage systems and schools

**CAN I STAY HERE FOR YEARS TO COME?**

**YES**
Israel continues to make more and more land available to Jewish communities to encourage you to stay and raise your family here

**MAYBE NOT**
Israel seeks to concentrate Bedouins in government-planned townships. As a resident of an unrecognized village, you live under constant threat of home demolition

**IF I WANT TO MOVE, DO I HAVE A LOT OF OPTIONS?**

**YES**
You can move to a big city or one of hundreds of other small Jewish towns across Israel

**MAYBE NOT**
Among other challenges, hundreds of small Jewish towns have admissions committees that have power by law to exclude Palestinian citizens from living there
Palestine, From the River to the Sea: A Palestinian man and woman hold and protect the original map of Palestine - a call for freedom from the river to the sea. The man is in traditional dress and wearing the Kuffiyeh while holding an olive branch, which represents the significance of olive trees in Palestine and their love for the land. The woman is wearing a traditional embroidered thobe featuring various motifs that bear significant meanings. She is holding the key to her house, a symbol for the right of return. This work takes inspiration from Palestinian resistance art, particularly the works of Abdul Rahman Al-Muzayen.
Nakba 21: An ode to the rich culture of Palestine and to commemorate 73 years of the ongoing Nakba. A man and woman in traditional Palestinian attire, wearing the Kuffiyeh a symbol of resistance while carrying a key to their house. The key is a popular Palestinian symbol for the right of return. This work takes inspiration from Palestinian resistance art, particularly the works of Abdul Rahman Al-Muzayen.
Hebron Arrow

A surveillance camera, or two, occupy space on the roof of this home in Hebron, West Bank. The home’s front door is green and slightly ajar. Spray-painted on that door is an upwards pointing black arrow. We were told that this black arrow is to indicate that the door to this Palestinian home must remain open to Israeli soldiers night and day, so that their access to the camera is constant and seemingly unending. Hebron, April 2019.

Simone Browne
Austin, USA (sbrowne@austin.utexas.edu)
On Borrowed Time in Gaza

In mid June 2021, two weeks after Israel’s May 2021 genocidal attack on Gaza, I travelled to the Strip to assist in a group initiative to establish an art therapy program for children traumatized by the repeated military bombardments and daily distresses of life under military siege. A trip from Cairo to Rafah that should have taken four hours took over 70 to complete. After two nights on the road, luggage and body searches at multiple checkpoints, I reached the Palestinian province of Gaza for the second time in my life. Despite holding a photojournalist card, my equipment was held by Egyptian officers instructed to prevent certain items from entering the province, which allegedly included my camera. Other items such as children’s remote-control toys, games, and perfumes were also among those confiscated. The photographs that comprise this series are therefore taken using my cell phone camera or on borrowed equipment.

The images attest to the conditions of life in Gaza, a coastal-bound prison Israel has made to operate on borrowed time. For the Palestinians of Gaza - a majority of whom are refugee-survivors of Israel’s original campaigns of ethnic cleansing in 1948 - to be made to operate on borrowed time means to survive without a period for coping or healing between one violent onslaught and the next. The lives of the 2.2 million Palestinians living within the 360km² area are temporally and spatially proscribed under the eruptive violence of seventy-three years of dispossession and displacement and a 14-year long blockade punctuated by colonial oppression and violent military offensives.

The children of Gaza live with the devastating impact of intergenerational trauma, massacres, and displacement. Images of American-made rocket fire clouds deployed by Israeli-operated warplanes and drones have become synonymous with images of Gaza. This photo essay shows images from the aftermath of the terror inflicted on the Palestinian civilians in the Strip, where ongoing trauma and unbreakable steadfastness converge.
Time stopped on May 12, 2021 at Al-Jawhara Tower in Gaza city when Israeli warplanes fired a series of missiles causing widespread damage to the building. The tower that survived the 2014 Israeli offensive didn’t collapse but was extensively damaged.

An ad located on the third floor of Al-Jawhara Tower, a children’s clothing manufacturing company, which was shattered into pieces. A large hole in the floor was made by an Israeli missile and the ceiling and walls turned grey and black.

There are also houses, residential apartments, media offices, and other firms in the tower. Two months after the Israeli onslaught on Gaza, Al-Jawahara Tower remains under assessment by construction engineers to determine whether the nine-story building can be repaired or needs to be demolished.
The house of Sharif Obeid’s family in Gaza city, which was severely damaged when their neighbor’s house was bombed and leveled to the ground. Obeid’s home and all surrounding houses were damaged, becoming unsafe for habitation. As a result entire families were displaced from their homes. Before firing their rockers, Israel’s forces fire a warning missile, often from a drone, spreading terror to entire neighborhoods, alarming them of incoming death strikes. The residents are given ten to thirty minutes to evacuate their homes, most times they hold their children and rush bare foot to safety, leaving everything behind, and watch from a distance as their homes crumble.

The only refuge for Gazans, the sea, is painted on the walls of the bedroom of Sharif Obeid’s children. This house is one of over 2,000 houses which became uninhabitable during the latest offensive.
Inside the severely damaged home of Mohammad Qatamish in Magh azi refugee camp in central Gaza Strip. Mohammad’s house was destroyed when Israeli warplanes fired a 3.5-ton missile on the house of his brother and neighbor Fathi Qatamish, flattening it and causing destruction to seven other homes including the home of his third brother Khalil. The scene of the neighborhood in Magh azi refugee camp resembles a war zone.

Documents pertaining to Palestinian prisoners in a law office in Al-Jalaa Tower in Gaza city. The words visible on the shreds of papers from a destroyed law office read: ‘With their pain and agony...determination...this is the situation...date of imprisonment February 6, 2019’. The 11-story Al-Jalaa building that was bombed on May 15th by Israel’s warplanes consists of residential apartments, international and local media offices, medical labs, and law offices.
At the site of a massacre in the town of Beit Hanoun, north Gaza Strip, when the lives of eight members from Al-Mari family including six children were obliterated. The massacre carried out On May 10, 2021 by Israeli missiles struck four houses.

Palestinian construction workers in Gaza city repair steel bars retrieved from destroyed buildings in order to reuse them in new construction and repair. Building material is prohibited from entering Gaza since the start of Israel’s 14-year genocidal blockade. Recycling has become common practice in Gaza.

Dispossessed from their towns of Lyd, Ramaleh, and Majdal in 1948 and displaced for the second time, an entire community was devastated in the Beit Lahia massacre. The Tanani family of seven were obliterated. The five-story house of Kayan Abu Safiya was flattened for the fourth time since 2008. The house of Ibrahim Zawaraa’s family, who is currently serving a 16 year sentence in an Israeli prison, was destroyed and his family is displaced, and another five houses were wiped out or damaged.

Rehab Nazzal
Toronto (renazzal@gmail.com)
Becoming a mother during a massacre in Gaza

Loving you is like loving Palestine, My Daughter

I want nothing but your joyful existence.

Our People in the Land blessed your birth.

Your Elders brought meat to their doorsteps to honor you.

Your Grandmothers whispered prayers into your ears
And anointed your skin with olive oil.

We did not yet know you would share a name

With the Mother from Gaza¹ who gathered her children

To die together

As missiles fell over Gaza.

Notes

1. Basher, E. [@SometimesPooh]. (2021, May 12). 'Tonight, I put the kids to sleep in our bedroom. So that when we die, we die together and no one would live to mourn the loss of one another’ [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/SometimesPooh/status/1392612906089525251.

Lila Adib Sharif
Illinois, USA (Isharif@illinois.edu)
Escaping Virginia

This is an excerpt of correspondence left intentionally raw and untranslated between writer and poet Mahmoud Al-Shaer, based in Gaza, and artist and image-Scholar Oraib Toukan, based in Berlin, written during the recent Onslaught of Gaza, and its aftermath. Together with Gaza-based Artista’ Majdal Nateel, Salman Nawati, and Rehaf Al Batniji the Group convenes weekly, online to read key Arabic and Arab Translations of literary texts. The group grew out of an online Course in Gaza taught by Oraib Toukan during the pandemic in Goethe’s *after the Turn* program, that progressed into a collective Weekly exercise of un-normalising the Siege, using the pleasure of Voice and inter-existence.

***

19.5.2021

عزيزتي عريض،

ليس الخطأ في حد ذاته ربما ما نود الاعتذار عنه، أحيانا نود أن نعتذر عن الوقت الذي أكملنا فيه الخطأ ونحن نعرف أنه كذلك، لقد فاجئنا أنفسنا، هذا حقيقي، حتى أنا من تحت النار في لحظة ما لم أكن أتخيل أن يخرج منًا كل هذا، مجموعين، صيحتنا واحدة، وهذا الذي نبدو عليه الآن، نصرنا في أننا اجتمعنا مرة أخرى بعد غياب طويل، وهذا الحين إلى مشاهدنا المشترك، وهما المشترك، كنا المشترك، ورائدتنا التي لا نتقؤ، كنا وسنبقى أصواتنا يصعب قتلها، وشعرت أنني عندما أضعفت تحمل جبهات أخرى على المعركة.

نعم لدي القدرة، كما لم تكن من قبل، أنا قوي وموجود وبصوتي لديه مزيد من الوقت، سأكتب عن الوجه والفرح والأغاني التي تتسم على خجل.

لقد نجوت لنتو في معركة طاحنة، فرحًا بالأمان أحاول تجاهل الخوف، الخوف من أسلطة كبرى أمام كل حركة وحرف وكتابة وفكرة، وأراني لا أعرف في سواك الجدوى، لكتي غارق في سواك هم الأمر يا عريض، ماذا سيحدث لكل ما أفعله إذا طحت الحرب جسدي، هل ستبقى، أي ثورة تلك التي نخوض فيها ..؟
al-dafh is da’if al-bayage, wa’al-aml huwa Amal al-ḥiyah lila yahsam sa’iṣa harāb wa’muraq, Amal 
bahya ammanQA yA ḍarib.

Kitab al-nass tahli al-harb,

Ya Sāyid al-ṣawr, maṭī ta’adDan bil-raz̄ha. .? 
laqD Oujunni haṣa al-ṭaq�, wqalbi mūnhaq, wa’dhakrati la tKHAT min al-nazīf,
on al-shaṣaṣa, ṭaghfr fi al-ḵiṣaṣ, ṭanṣBH ṭal al-sawqa, ṭanṣBH ṭal ma kitb, ḍemåe fi al-majz la 
tHDA, anha miṣal ṭar al-ṭaqīm.

Ya Sāyid al-ṣawr, min aṭam.. .? lamDa anĐadi ṭibllah?
Ya Allâhu, lamDa amṭani aṭay lâ akn.. .? lamDa Ǧal haṣa ḍaraṣ.. .?

Rdt audniy shalī: ṭrwak al-world l9l-qidrīn.. .?

Mḥbティ،
Mḥmoud

25.5.2021

Dear Mahmoud,

For me as well alas something has shaken my preoccupation with 
the-dead-Palestinian-body: celebrating Palestinian Life. No, not in 
terms of ‘Hamas’, or ‘victory’ in any shape or form, or of resilience 
or Sumood itself (which can become derogatory as an expectation 
of the Palestinian). But celebrating this moment of hope - 
evertheless. Hope - despite all. Celebrating this colossal 
sense of life. Celebrating above all, the friendships - it turns out – 
we have been making all along. It’s our rebellion and it has 
matured.

If you recall, Munir Fasaḥa wonderfully asked that Zoom evening 
with Ayreen and Rene: what knowledge has Gaza as a community 
produced because of all this? What knowledge has Israel been
unable to wipe out? What knowledge has delayed neoliberalism in Gaza, that never arrived, managed to make thrive in Gaza instead? How does Gaza’s local soil, local culture, local economy make do in its rebellion, how does it repair? What is this tune – Gaza’s humanity– not its cruelty - that is now playing in our head and what kind of support structures are behind it?

At the same time, then what is this place that goes through THIS → (this is my index finger scrolling down from Berlin, at this never-ever-ending parade of images of total anguish and loss, of bodies lifted and wheeled, mouths open, frozen in time, with smoke that obscures this tiny Mediterranean city all the more). These are not pictures of a war. It is an onslaught on a dignified hero of the Palestinian Catastrophe called: Gaza.

Does this smoke in my pictures obscure Gaza for you too? Does it hide your friends and all their details, his exact way of thinking, no, not those thoughts. Her way of thinking actually, but not that way of thinking, there, over there. That coffee brewer, this lemon tree, this فولجي - he is the best, this mosque, not that mosque, these dill seeds, that shop window, his مشاوي, no their مشاوي, THIS → exact shade of sky blue.

Oraib

29.5.2021

عزيزتي غريب،
 كيف يبدو المشهد من عندك الآن ..؟ استمري في الكتابة لي. إذا كانت لديك الطاقة ، والدافع ، والرعاية ، والإرادة ، والأفكار ، والقوة ، والمصلحة ، والحاجة ، والقدرة ، وغذاء الفكر ، والأفكار ، والإلهام ، والمعنوية ، الإحراج ، الفكرة المخفية للكتابة ، وعن وجود الحياة بمعناها البسيط من حولك ربما يمكنك الكتابة. سأستمر في كتابة أفكاري. انطباعات - فارغة ، ضحلة ، غير كفؤة ، عقيمة. ماذا عن الكتابة خارج التمثيل أيضًا. هل هذا ممكن؟ هل يمكننا التأثير على المدى البعيد ..؟
أردت أن أعيد إرسال رسالة سابقة منك مع تغيير اتجاه الأسئلة ..؟ كيف بدا الأمر هذه المرة ..؟

من ناحيتي،

بي طاقة كبيرة كبيرة يا غريب، نفسى أرقع ببار، رغبة الاحتفال بما حدث ما زالت قائمة، وهذا برأيي رغبة جماعية، انظري إلى صور بحر غزة بالأمس، أكثر من نصف السكان كانوا هناك، كيف بدا هذا المشهد للجندي المتبرع به من داخل البحر، هل أرى نظراً الطلب في الجيش الإسرائيلي وغيرهم خارجنا إلى البحر، هل ترغبونا ريغبتنا في الحياة يا غريب ..؟، صرت آري لهذا الفعل أثراً في المقاومة، عادت هذه الأفعال اليومية للحياة تعبير عن وجودها من جديد، ما الذي تغير بأي ..؟ أنظر هذا المشهد السياسي ولا أرى أي شيء تغير، التعريص ذاته، والاستسلام متشر في قادتنا السياسيين (حتى الذين يحملون البنادق) حتى آخرنا، لماذا لا نرفض القرارات الدولية ..؟، لماذا نحن ملتزمون مع أطراف غير ملتزمة ..؟، هل تابعت كيف جرى التصويت على تشكيك لجنة تحقيق في المعركة الأخيرة ..؟، الجميع يعرف أننا أصحاب الحق والجميع يرفض الاعتراف بذلك.

نظر إلى المستقبل، وأقول لخيالي، عشرون عاماً للأمام، في 29/05/2041، بدأ الأمر سخيفاً بالمناسبة عندما كتبت التاريخ ضمن النص، لكن عندما أختار المستقبل، لا أفترض فيه شيئاً غير عادي، أنظر إليه على أنه احتمال لحياة طبيعية، كهرباء، وما وبني تحتية خدمات عامة عادية، كالمشاعر من خلالها في بريق ملائ، وأرى أن المستقبل احتفالُ نمو، وتطوير، واستقرار، ودولة، وانتخابات، وحرية، وقدرة على الفعل والكلام والحدث، والمستقبل هو عدم الخوف.

هل يمكن المستقبل أن تكون لنا الحياة الطبيعية ..؟

أخيراً،

برأيي الشخصي وردنا على أسلحة فاشة، لقد أنجحنا أُجْذبة الحصار والحروب، وصارت هذه معركتنا، وغنتها وشعرنا، وأسلمناها في التواصل مع الآخر، وكوننا أساخينا الحفاظ على شيء من المحو، أمال ما هي المعرفة التي نجحت إسرائيل في محوها وما المعرفة التي لم تصلنا ؟، هل نحن في الأزهار ؟

وإن كان لدي إجابات اضافية، لكن لا نصلح شيء، نحن نستمر خرابنا، نعيد صياغته، تغييرنا يكسوها الركام، ولا هياكل هنا، نحن أجزاء مبعثرة مثل شرارة الكهرباء، يدعمنا بينينا الدائم أنه لا منطقة وسط، إما خراب كبير وبالتالي استثمارات جديدة أو انفتاح دائم وكن للركام.

محمود
2, June 2021

Dear Mahmoud,

You know even when I was writing, thinking, or working with images that come out of Gaza onto my screens, whether I was living in Ramallah, Oxford, or Berlin, I only realized now that I too was actually writing from a place of not knowing Gaza beyond cruel images of itself. And that is the problem. Because a cruel image eclipses the sun behind it. It passes between the viewer and a subject that is larger than life, so as to seal its rays. Eclipses return and each time, they never seize to fascinate us. And in between one eclipse to another is an oscillation between total life and total death. I keep thinking of what Salman told the five of us last week on Zoom from Gaza: that come day-time, when that exact shade of blue sky reappears, and that exact sea expanse is still there, he feels that him and Majdal can withstand the terror of the sound of indiscriminate bombardment when you have kids, and are hiding with them alone, for the first time.

There is a remarkable scene in Basma Al Sharif’s 2013 film Home Movies Gaza where her camera moves from the same gaze that every outsider to Palestine is in shock and awe by: the shoulder-width alleys of Palestinian refugee camps. She completes an uninterrupted travelling shot following ‘Gaza’ around, from مخيم الشاطئ on to a very wide-angle view of unstoppable layers and layers of waves, and layers and layers of blue hues and perfect cloud formations. I remembered that place called Gaza that I used to visit, beyond the dead images it has to keep exporting of itself.

I then saw Mahmoud Salem’s picture of Gaza’s beaches bursting with life and joy and horses and safety lilos for children swimming. He hash-tagged it: #we teach life, Sir based on Rafif Ziadah’s poem. And from here I read your question: does this overflow of joy on Gaza’s beaches terrorize that soldier watching all that life,
from an Israeli navy vessel? Can this soldier finally understand terror through so much life?

For the past fifteen years I have had something like - an accident - with image captions that read like this: ‘Gazans enjoy the sea’, ‘Gazans swim in the Mediterranean’, ‘Gaza’s fisherman enjoy the sea’. As though the Palestinian is not native to the Mediterranean, but rather, has the privilege of using it; in the extension of good times granted to them. As though, Palestinians borrow the Mediterranean Sea. I have never seen a photo caption that reads ‘the French enjoying the Mediterranean’. Have you? I know you don’t care for mainstream media, you told me so, because it kept you out from the very beginning and was never interested in you. I should learn that skill too.

We are all asking the same question: what changed, exactly? It feels like someone hit that tiny 3D button on the bottom right corner of Google maps and added a whole other dimension to Palestine and The Palestinians. With this said, I don’t want to humor this question just yet, or even the will to write that I hypocritically presented you with. Not because I don’t have initiative, or drive or a grave need to. But because one part of me wants to refuse to indulge in the reflection writing requires. I ask myself, does it really need a war, lynching, and mass eviction to step out of our haze. Let us admit it, Palestinian resistance inspires, and that can be a problem too.

See you Tuesday,

Oraib
17 June 2021

عزيزي عربي،
أتمم أن تكوني بخير،

أتمنى أن تكوني بخير، أنا بخير، لقد كنت القراءة لمنير فاضحة الثلاثاء الماضي تشبه انارة الشوارع، كنت أمشي مع منير ووجاءت هذه القراءة لقضيء فهمي لأفكاري وما يقوله، كانت القراءة تحمل مشاهد حية للحجرية.

أكتب هذا البريد مقرراً ملئك التأمل في اختيارنا لفرجينيا وولف (عنوان هذا الحوار الذي تجريد من شهر)، ما الذي حدث، أستطيع أن أرى وأحمل الأمر أكثر من فكرة الهرب إلى فرجينيا وولف، ونحن الذين جمعنا كل شيء لا يعود إلى فرجينيا.

أكتب لك لأسألك عن ما يشبه بحثك في الصورة وانتاجها وظروفها وقت الحرب. لقد سمحت للفسي بأخذ مسار الأسئلة نحو الكتابة، أقوم بفتح حوار مع كتاب التأمل الانتاج والكتابة في وقت الحرب، أكد لي ساند سويرك أن تجربته مع الحرب يمكن أن يقضي إلى كتابات غير منظمة، وأن فعل النشر في هذه المنطقة هو فعل صراخ واضح، تأملت ما قاله وأستقرع عليه نفسي، قرأنا بعض مما كتبته له وقال معلقاً يا الله على الصراخ، تحدث ساند عن عودته في العام 2018 لنصوصه التي كتبها ولم ينشرها أثناء الحرب عام 1941، ووصف عودته إلى النصوص جاء مثل مسارات للتأمل، تفقت للمشاهد، وانتباك مباشر مع الذاكرة، ليس بالعودة فجأة بل من خلال تأمل ندبات الحرب، قال خرجت معني

نصوص جديدة، تحمل مشاعر الحرب لكنها تناسب بالحياة مرة بعد مرة.

حوار آخر أجريته مع الكاتب عثمان حسين، أول مرة قرأت فيها النص لعثمان لم أكن أعي القدرة على اكتشاف الأراء بشأن الكتابة، ونظرتها، وقال معلقاً صراخ عالي وصاحب، لم أنتبه إلى ما قاله، لكن عندما عدت محملاً بسؤال الكتابة وقت الحرب قال، لا، وقت ذلك، أنا دائماً مشغول بالهرب، وهذا تأمل أتي بعد حوارات كثيرة للكتابة، هل أكتب عن الحرب؟، إنه انكسار لا أقوله، وإنكسار تعودت عليه. (عثمان حسين) يعيش في أقصى الشرق، أقرب بيت على الحدود، وأول يومنا التي يراها الجنود، وعثمان هناك منذ العام 1969، كان يُمثل معنى لعودته إلى قرية بنيا التي هاجر منها والديه عام 1948.

ما زلت مستمتعاً بتأمل مجمعي الشخصي، أتفقد الأدبيات، وأتفقد كلامي ومعانيه، وأتفقد قدرتي على فعل ذلك كله.

على صعيد آخر، هناك أشياء كثيرة تجري منذ انتهاء المعركة في مايو الماضي تستمر اسرائيل في فرض حصار قاسي علينا، هذا لا يتنازل الإعلام، لكن كل شيء أرتفع ثمنه بنسبة 30%، الحديث، البلاستيك، الألمنيوم، الورق، الكرتون، هذا بالإضافة إلى أن معبر ابرز من области المعاملات الإدارية بين غزة والقدس ورام الله، كل شيء متوقف تماماً في الخارج، السياسة تعبر بSubscribe كبير، لكن هناك أشياء تجري في الأروقة (الممرات)، هناك
June 22, 2021

Dear Mahmoud,

In our reading group we escaped to Virginia Wolfe’s writings and even in our escape we could not escape. She too tried to escape war, through writing, after her house was bombed. Some of her most profound writing was during war. She writes on writing: ‘A kind of growl behind the cuckoos and t’other birds. A furnace behind the sky. It struck me that one curious feeling is, that the writing “I” has vanished. No audience. No echo. . . . We live without a future. That’s what’s queer: with our noses pressed to a closed door.’ Today you, Mahmoud Shaer, are writing from hope, and a collective ‘we’. Quite different to the ‘I’ that art, and writing requires. It is here why I want to refuse to reflect so near in time to the event, and so distant in space from it. This is a different need than your more effective question. An escape you or Sa’ed and others confront when under direct bombardment. It’s fantastic that you opened up this is a reflexive exercise for conversations about writing itself. Under what conditions can we write, but also what cannot be written? I am curious about the latter.

But also, is it odd, or maybe very familiar to you, that words can even pour from you under severe conditions (no matter how sensical, or non-sensical they are). Because one would think that war shuts down the faculty of language altogether? But alas, language backs up, and is backing up. Like you say: at some point sense can, and will be made.
To answer your question. For me personally, as someone who is very affected by images, I wanted to learn to disengage with them by somewhat, demystifying them. On the one hand, if I can truly reach my hand in and pick up an individual grain from an image, I would. On the other hand, the image of war in its specificity, is a commodity. It is bought and sold under very specific conditions. And some of these images end up hiding a lot more than they show; they even abandon Gaza altogether. Knowingly, or unknowingly. For example, as you put it: here we are again, the lenses are gone but Gaza is still under siege, life is 30% more expensive, Erez is closed. Though documenting is necessary, and though the instinct to document is even automatic and natural, cruel images can end up serving Israel. The picture became proof that Gaza uninhabitable (as though), that its people only ‘know’ violence. So unlike writing, perhaps refraining from the act of picking up one’s Jawwal is an act of counter-resistance.

See you this afternoon on Zoom!

Oraib

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Palestine as Stage

Within the confines of the children's theatrical plays, I played many roles. Even the role of Israeli soldiers.

I would hold their guns and wear their uniforms.

It was comforting.

The comfort didn't come from feeling their power. It didn't emerge from the intoxication of drinking their superiority of arms.

The comfort arose out of a brief detachment from the reality of being under them.

Separated by time and space, I recall and reassemble the backstage instructions of our director; what he was truly saying, underneath his actual words:

Yes, we need more red paint on that white shirt. Some in the audience tonight are foreigners, and they only understand our pain through blood. And blood is only graphic for them when it is displayed against something White. You know what, we need a whiter shirt. Bleach it white. That's the only way they see our blood as pain.

No, don't carry the gun the way you carry a stone. Forget the stone for your role. Carry the gun as if your weapon can actually gain you a victory of force. And wear the uniform as if it will allow you to reach a powerful status. It's not a keffiyeh, it's an official uniform, there is a difference. The keffiyeh and the stone are more meaningful, I know. But the foreigners will never see them that way. They don't understand our world. They're comfortable with us as helpless victims, never as meaningful lives; as lives who have a meaningful connection to life!

Yes, we need more tears on her face. Make sure that the cosmetics drift away with the tears. The foreigners only sympathize with us through a young girl's tears. Remember to weep loudly, make a scene, grab their attention. You must hold onto their attention. Grip them with your tears, and hold them with your weeping. Give them what they expect. They're more comfortable helping you as one, but not us as many. Shit, we'll take it. Anything, anyone, anywhere.

Yes, that cell is small enough. Make sure that the prisoner has no room for maneuver. A bird in a cage is not what we're after. We can only wish to fly as freely as does a bird in a cage. Fuck it, make it even smaller. I don't care if he can't fit in it anymore. Make him fit. Get a smaller child if you must. Make it small. Make it like the real thing. No movement. None. Let him shit and piss where he stands. And let him sleep there, standing.
No, no, no. That’s not how you set up the courthouse. The judge’s bench is too low. Make it higher. Much higher. And don’t look the prisoner in the eye. *Inta Majnun?* A self-proclaimed superior being never looks an animal in the eye. It is their ways we are trying to capture here. Forget yours. Drop the stories from your heart. Drop the word of justice. Take this wooden hammer. And take this convoluted book of law. The book of justice has no place in their courts. My fuck, do I have to teach you all everything?

Get it together children, *habaybi*. We are about to draw the curtain. I wish that this stage was merely the reflection of your lives. Your lives are worse. Your lives are also those that must display their lives on this stage, in this way.

The height of the first Intifada (1987-1993) is where I became politically conscious of the world as a young child in Palestine. The further I was temporally and spatially removed from those experiences, the more I felt the need to recount them in their raw form. Not as a detailed account of what had taken place, but as an effort to write what remained unsaid but was always, on some level, understood.

The most recent surge in the long history of Palestinian resistance in what Palestinian activists are calling *The Intifada of Unity* has garnered international attention. Like many people around the world, I am following the events on the ground through the social media accounts of Palestinian activists and journalists, largely in English but also in Arabic. And as I began to consume their coverage, I could not help but think back to what I had begun to write on Palestine as a stage almost ten years ago. Except the stage this time around is a digital one, with a massive audience and with Palestinian actors on stage who are superior to our child’s play.

In the repeated efforts of Palestinians to educate and correct world audiences about Palestine, I felt the same frustration alluded to above in the ‘words’ of the director. It is critical to underscore that I never saw that director as a naïve participant, caught in a fool’s hope that an appeal to the humanity of the foreigners would free Palestine. Rather, the director and us children (on some level) understood that we were acting out of desperation, knowing the limitations of what we were able to achieve through displays that reflect our lived reality under Israeli settler colonial domination through an accentuation of a shared humanity. In some respects, this may still be happening on this new grand digital stage – that all these latest efforts will only end up being heard as a depoliticized humanitarian appeal. But what can be stated now is that these new actors are explicitly, on stage, declaring their disdain for the game. They will simply not play according to those rules anymore. They will not display their lives on this stage ‘in this way’ – even if audiences might still consume them in that way, at least they are explicitly telling them not to.

This is exemplified in the many social media posts of Mohammed el-Kurd, Yara Hawari, Mariam Barghouti, Omar Ghraieb, Linah Alsaafin, among many
others. It is also exemplified in the viral video of Nadine Abdullatif, the 10-year-old girl from Gaza who spoke through and past her tears, as her words and gestures penetrated not just the hearts of the audience but attempted to challenge their way of thinking as well. When she asks, ‘You see all of this? What do you expect me to do? Fix it? I’m only 10’ (Hussaini and Andrews, 2021), she is shaming the world’s audience for their complicity in the destruction of Palestinian lives. She is telling the audience that if she was able to help her people, she would, but she is only 10; so how can you as an audience that enjoys comfort, security, freedom, and even power tolerate and normalize this destruction? How can this audience not immediately spring into action to end the Israeli destruction of Palestinian lives? She is not just pleading for help to rebuild from the rubble but demanding that the audience act to stop the intentional making and remaking of Gaza into rubble.

When she pointed out that Palestinians are being killed and destroyed merely because, as her family told her, they were Muslims, she was indeed pointing the audience, irregardless of whether she fully understood it, to the historically documented fact that Israel is built on a foundation of Jewish exclusivity: that a majority Jewish population must eliminate and replace a non-Jewish population (which includes all Palestinians regardless of their faith of course) (Khalidi, 2020; Masalha, 1997; Said, 1979, 1995; Sayegh, [1965] 2012). ‘Elimination and replacement’ is the foundational feature of all settler-colonialisms across their varieties, and this certainly applies to Israeli settler colonialism (Salamanca et al., 2012; Veracini, 2018; Wolfe 2006, 2016).

At the core of these latest explanations and accounts from Palestine is not a plea towards the ‘humanity’ of the Israeli colonizers or their imperial supporters in the USA, Canada, the UK, the European Union, and so on – an approach that has long been understood and critiqued in Palestinian resistance (e.g., Barghouti, 2011). Their accounts instead amalgamate and communicate the experiences and the worldview and explanatory paradigms of the colonized.

For decades and continuing into today, when we’re not being cast as antisemitic terrorists, when the fact of our death and destruction is impossible to deny or conceal, Palestinians are posited in mainstream Euro-American discourses as victims of a violence that is presented as it if it as natural an occurrence as any natural disaster. Headlines state that Palestinians have ‘died’ (e.g., Hunter et al., 2021) instead of being intentionally killed by Israeli soldiers or civilians, buildings ‘collapse’ after Israeli airstrikes (e.g., CNN, 2021) instead of being intentionally destroyed by Israeli bombs and missiles, and so on. This leads the consumers of Euro-American mainstream media to sympathize with the Palestinians only on the humanitarian level – the context becomes depoliticized and devoid of any notion of settler colonialism and decolonial liberation.

This humanitarian concern is ultimately a form of detachment from the realities of settler colonialism and apartheid. It is an exercise in creating a false sense of comfort: while for Palestinians, this comfort from detachment, as I allude to in the beginning, comes from an often acknowledged brief
and fleeting escape from the pressures of being colonized, for the foreign audiences comfort comes in the form of an unacknowledged detachment from the reality of their complicity in the colonization of Palestine. This latter comfort is but a self-serving exercise that secures the ‘humanity’ of the Euro-American audience while continuing their participation in the destruction of Palestine and Palestinian lives.

The world must listen to the worldview, to the paradigms that Palestinians advance which will allow Euro-American audiences to properly make sense of and contextualize the different experiences of Palestinian suffering, whether it is imprisonment, torture, beatings, killings, maimings, carpet bombings, ethnic cleansing, settlement projects and practices, besiegement, development of the economy, the destruction of health infrastructures, the Apartheid Wall, and other forms and types of Israeli violence.

What is urgently needed in Euro-American spaces is the outright and complete removal of the particular foreigner’s gaze that I outlined in the beginning. That foreigner is part of the problem. Audiences in Euro-American spaces must choose: they either acknowledge that the Palestinian struggle is against settler colonialism and apartheid, and then actively engage in opposing and transforming those material structures; or they continue to claim a shallow mantle of humanitarianism, where they express concern about the suffering of Palestinians while simultaneously being complicit in the ongoing structural destruction of Palestinian lives. Without material actions that place pressure on Israel, such as BDS, then these humanitarian Euro-American audiences will continue to participate in the colonization and destruction of Palestine and stand in the way of Palestinian collective freedom and liberation.

References:


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Minor Feelings

Where do we come from?

Don’t lie to me—
Not on a map, Baba
Show me

We wait on a mini bus for twenty million hours
Counting bottles of beer on the wall like they tell me to,
I want to pee, but I keep it inside deep.
A little pee equalled a treacherous path to wee.

Outside the window sit big blobs of chipped concrete,
Some painted with stars
Others with giant words scrolled in cursive
Stories I cannot read or speak.

It is summer-time
Birthday time
For Geminis like me
Summer-time is A/C O’clock.

But the driver switched it off
Too much A/C eats the bus intestines
And then we,
We all end up cartoons.

Baba’s clenched palms leave mine
He flings himself out of a back window

Bellowing words to the air in Arabish
I can only understand half
Because I was only taught how to speak the -ish

In-between the tiny pebbles on the ground
A parade materialises—
Or is it a stampede?
Bugs in multi-colour—from Pixar movies
Disney+

A rotund high-school kid has his eye on me
He is wearing a No-Fear t-shirt:
Classic Ramallah EMO.

Plumes of smoke unspool from his mouth
He belches, a cough.
Reprise
The boy’s chest emits clotted cream, the yellow kind.

His arms stretch out
Grab hold of me from behind
Pinching my bony butt-cheeks

I flutter out into the clammiest air that I had ever breathed

*

Baba’s greasy hands linger away from mine.

We line up, a gazillion blind mice—
I feel like we are about to leave the Bank for-ever.

Overhead is a hawkish creature with a rifle—
Airborne, but still—a cyborg drone.

Veiled women straddle me
Clambering and clamouring
On top of each-other,
Wearisome wild geese—fleeing.

I grab onto my peep
Burrowing through the stink of body odour—
The kind that sticks to polyester abayaas.

A turnstile
Like in The Terminal

Are we going to fly now?

*

A taxi driver with a name like Eyad meets us on the other side.
He listens to really old Rock like Rage Against the Machine
His car tastes of farts and cigarettes.

Baba’s eyes are droopy
Not limp sleepy—
He is somewhere else now.

Sunset approaching—
A winding path
Scorched earth greets us before a bay of red roses, and
Manicured green grass
On the sloped hills of Mount Carmel

I can smell the sea!
Eiad turns to me.
Baba gestures, ‘straight-on’!

We roll up past baroque manses
The House of...?
Justice
A court?
No, a temple, Baba corrects me.

Temples are only in Spielberg movies
Or so, I saw.

SeaDream does not come to be.
But the fragrance of briny marine life—
Congests my fear of being-in landlock,
And hides-up the stink of my dried-up wee.

We are ejected at the Shrine of Bab:
North-West Entrance.

Baba thrusts his hands through his salt and pepper:
Halts, and starts pulling it,
HARD

Are we too late?

As the sun goes to bed
We walk down the squillions and zillions of stairs,
Down a high peak.

We are in a big-screen TV
Picture-perfect
I wish Baba had a camera phone
This is where I want to learn to selfie.

I wave goodbye to the palm trees—
Enter a Falafel shop

Baba knows the man making the balls in the humus-y bread:
They both speak Arabish

We are in our spiritual home

Spirits are ghosts
But not the type that haunt people,
We all have spirits, actually—
Some call it a soul
Mine is an exceptional one that is Baha’i.

I am wrong again.  
We were Baha’i  
Baba says we can’t be anymore.  
He tells me of a magnificent temple-mosque somewhere north, in Yazd.

Now it is a pile of rubble,  
Ashen trees soaked in pasty pulp and mucky grime—  
Dirt-stained bricks act as memorial.

If we win a green-card lottery we can be Baha’i again.  
But not in Haifa,  
We would live in Chicago  
Where there is a humungous temple where all the Baha’i hug and kiss.

The only person I ever did kiss except for my Sito is my pillow.  
Sometimes it gets very soggy  
After I practice the tongue-squiggles

Baba practices his with an American who sports a rat-tail  
They have a beard and everything  
They do it outside, even when its sweltering  
More than one-thousand degrees.

Where do we go from here?

Raised hands  
Clamp and grasp onto the shaky table top  
The Baba shudders, the oblong of his body outstretched:

Do you want to cry?

I wished hard that the Gemini in me could make another person  
A grown-up one  
Tall enough to grab him from behind  
Drip water on his forehead  
Hold him like a baby Jesus  
Kiss his scruffy cheeks  
Pat the belly  
Like a drum-beat  
Till the fear goes away.

In the morning, Baba was going to Law and Order  
He was joining the ‘tribunal for everyday life’  
He said it was Nuremberg times one-hundred!  
I nod as if I knew  
But I did not know  
And I did not want to.
Fences ring around the roses,
Not barbed, but pointy, like BBQ skewers
The kind Gido uses when he is young Han Solo.

A thud—
Is someone dropping bags of flour
Onto my head?

The voice in my inner cranium
Sings sounds I have not heard before—
Underwater racket: Whale clatter, shrill dolphins?

Rubber Coated Steel
Pierces through weathered clothes
Causalities of curiosity

Rare is our truth any better than the lies they tell us.

Omar Kholeif
The Word Israel is Plumply Piped

Photographic print back-view

Stamped on the back of the print is the address of the photographic studio where the image was printed. On the face of it > a harmless, innocent short form poem. Just an address. An inch away, hidden inside are geopolitical < prophetic clues. Each of the four lines, a chapter in Zionist history and the catalyst for its settler colonialist actions. A secret code to a magical key into the acrid gates of Israel.
Photographic print front-view

A small black & white photographic print with softly cut frilled edges. Two young women sit next to each other, smiling, shoulder and arms touching. Above them, a man is leaning over, affectively making the women appear smaller, childlike, almost infantile, his body casting a shadow on the back wall. He is sporting a moustache and is neatly dressed (European style) in a tie framed within an army jacket and a barrette. He is smiling, holding the arm of the woman on the left, somewhat protectively or possessively → it isn’t possible to gage the tightness of the grip, but it is causing a fold in her jacket. 1+2+3= the three figures have a glint in their eyes that complements their smiles. The women look directly into the camera, the man’s gaze floats into a mid-range distance.

Foregrounding the image, is a table holding a large cake decorated with a brilliant white piped whipped cream. The undoubtedly sweet and non-dairy (kosher) formation depicts two olive tree branches that are embracing the central motif of a Menorah. Underneath this assemblage, the word ISRAEL יִשְׂרָאֵל is plumply piped in traditional Hebrew letters reminiscent of biblical typography.

The young woman on the right is my mother, she is about 18 years old, and the date is May 14, 1948. It is an office party. My mother and her colleagues are performatively conjoining in celebrating the Israel Declaration of Independence that will mark the end the British Mandate in Palestine that night. The clothes are incongruously warm for a spring weather in the region → it’s long known that narration isn’t reliable and not to be trusted blindly, or confused with the truth. Told with investment, conviction and repetition, the Zionist (in)vision and its (im)plausible narratives, is a construct that intentionally, systemically and successfully (1+2+3) had turned the truth on its head, making it one of the most violent mythological and illusionist regimes in modern history.

The image encapsulates the fabricated moment-of-birth of the Jewish Home in Palestine > from a white Jewish perspective. The well-worn sentiment of ‘a land without people for a people without a land’ was first applied in the mid 19th century by Christian Restorationists and was later adopted by the European Jewish Zionist movement, creating a mirage of emptiness, of no-people, and thus paving the way to the decades-long genocidal ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people in their own homeland, as though they vanished by a mere speech-act, a spell (1+0=0).

Elements of the image emanate through a scheme of (p)reversed illusion:

∞ the olive tree branches, usually carried by a white dove in mid-flight, are an Israeli popular motif of Peace, (imagine only the violent destruction by Zionist nationalist settlers of Palestinian native olive trees on Palestinian indigenous land, branches broken and burnt,
the Menorah is a religious and nationalistic symbol of pure golden light, celebrated from a young age in Israel and appears widely in the popular imagination such as seen in children’s drawings (imagine only the darkness in Gaza, the constant power cuts and the control of air and waterways, supplies, and infrastructure,

the promised moist and decadence of the cake conjures up the promised land of Milk & Honey, a term capturing the emotive sentiment of cultivating the Judaean Desert’s صحراء يهودا wilderness by Jewish Europeans Zionist ‘pioneers’ (imagine only the theft of the land, of heritage, of culture, of history, of plants, and of agriculture from the indigenous Palestinian population,

the normalisation of masculinist gender domination under the guise of socialist genderless pioneering comradery, (imagine only that Israeli army ‘girls’ don’t engage in direct combat mostly, assigned female at birth I was I was selected to train as a weapon instructor

the effigy of the white supremacist Jew as ‘The Jew’ whitewashes the racist violent and criminal acts performed against Jews from Arab countries and continues to date in various forms of structural racism (imagine only that Jews from countries such as Morocco and Yamen were sprayed with DDT (Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) upon arrival to Israel by white Zionist Jews,

∞∞∞∞∞∞ seamlessly merge in a magical act of reverse optical and psychological illusion, a trick and a miracle that only a barbaric god could perform.

Oreet Ashery
London

As we browse through more than 1,500 photographs conserved in the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive, taken between the late eighties and early nineties by French photographer Joss Dray, we contemplate Dray’s shots that capture Palestinians in their households, neighbourhoods, streets and farms. One can have the impression that these images portray monotonous and mundane daily routines for ordinary people, except that these representations depict daily the chronicles for Palestinians under curfew. They illustrate how Palestinians have innovated modes of resistance from the simplest tools found in their environment under severe circumstances.

It is typical for those who lived through the first Intifada (1987-1993) and second Intifada (2000-2005) to know perfectly well what it is like to live under curfew for days, or possibly, months. This practice carried out by the Israeli authorities remained a recurrent collective punitive measure against Palestinians for years. Israeli Occupation Forces are still besieging villages, refugee camps, towns and cities by spreading soldiers and military vehicles. Curfews are still being imposed through loudspeakers during army patrols calling, in broken Arabic, on Palestinians not to leave their houses. Imposition of curfews entails that life stops as there are neither schools, nor work days, nor shopping hours. Palestinians are subjected to long waits in their houses and the threat of losing their lives if they step out of the house.

French photographer Joss Dray lived through the first Intifada, and she experienced life under curfew. She moved between Palestinians’ homes, monitoring their slow and heavy daily routine with her cameras. The Palestinian Museum preserves in its archives a treasure trove of Joss’ photographs. These photos reflect a history of steadfastness and labour. Women worked tirelessly during curfews, and men working non-stop in popular self-sufficiency committees in villages and camps to provide the population with food after the popular committees decided to implement civil disobedience which entailed imposing strict economic boycotts on all Israeli goods. As a result, individual and collective initiatives served as instigators for economic resistance experiments. The developments of the Intifada imposed urgent changes to patterns of consumption and production amongst Palestinians. On the other hand, the economic blockade and the labourers’ cessation of work inside the Green Line areas has resulted in a decline in the income of Palestinian families necessitating the creation of operational production spheres that somehow secure work and food for the purpose of maintaining sustainability. (The Palestinian Museum, nd)
This is an illustrated tour of an aspect of Palestinian life more than 30 years ago during the first Intifada. One constant variable links all these images with the present, which is the continuous striving for work, survival and steadfastness amongst Palestinians.

Joss Dray collection, the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.

Women’s daily activities under a curfew in al-Mazra’a ash-Sharqiyya Town (northeast of Ramallah), 1988. Joss Dray collection, the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.
Women’s Popular Committee for Food Self-Sufficiency at work in Ramallah during the First Intifada, 1989. Joss Dray collection, the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.

A Demonstration Heading Ramallah, 1989.
Joss Dray collection, the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.

Joss Dray collection, the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive.

Reference


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A Gathering Place for Objects That Have No Place: Nour Bishouty’s 1-130

‘An object is a construction of the mind, sometimes with physical extensions’, writes Nour Bishouty in her artist book 1–130: Selected works Ghassan Bishouty b. 1941 Safad, Palestine – d. 2004 Amman, Jordan (2020). It could be the self-reflexive aphorism of a conceptually minded artist, or a diasporic meditation on loss — or, in Bishouty’s case, both. In 1–130, the Toronto-based artist evokes a constellation of absent objects, places, and people related to her late father, Ghassan Bishouty, a little-known artist who lived in Lebanon and Jordan after being displaced from Palestine in 1948. (The book’s title enumerates the paintings, drawings, and sculptures selected and photographed by Nour.) 1–130 serves as an archive for an artist whose life was uprooted twice, by the Palestinian nakba and the Lebanese civil war, a reparative gesture of gathering in one place the pieces of a life scattered.

Achille Mbembe (2002, 22) has characterized the archive, ambivalently, as a ‘struggle against the fragments of life being dispersed.’ In the context of state archives, and museums rooted in colonialism, such centralization subdues unauthorized histories and unruly memories. But amid the ongoing deracination of Palestinian life, assembling errant objects restores continuity to personal and communal identity. By gathering her father’s art, using certain recognized archival procedures, Bishouty lends it a degree of visibility and order. At the same time, she unsettles museological conventions and permeates her father’s artworks and ephemera with her own acts of collage, ekphrasis, and storytelling. Her book obliquely reconstructs her father’s work — and her relationship to it — through an array of forms and media, narrating his life in lists, anecdotes, poetic fragments, family photos, newspaper clippings, and video stills.

Among the ephemera Bishouty reproduces are everyday notes handwritten by her father. One of these, featuring directions for where to buy rubber above a sketch of a mosque, grabbed my eye: it includes my own family name, written in Arabic. The corner my grandfather’s store occupied in Beirut’s Furn El-Chebbak neighborhood was known by his name, and landmarks, not street addresses, orient Beirut’s residents. This chance materialization of our families’ partially overlapping trajectories infused our conversation on displacement, memory, archives, and Palestine — presented below in abridged and lightly edited form — with a personal significance amplified by the emotions recent events in Palestine have stirred.

Kareem Estefan (KE): How did this book begin for you?

Nour Bishouty (NB): 1–130 is part of an extended multimedia project in which I engage the artistic oeuvre and personal archives of my late father, Ghassan Bishouty, an artist largely obscure during his lifetime. My initial motivation was perhaps an instinctive desire to commemorate my father, to take care
of his work. But it was also clear to me that within that intimate act of commemoration there were other insistent questions to be asked, pertaining to obscurity and visibility, and cultural discourses on memory, trauma, and marginalized identities.

**KE:** What does it mean for you to take care of your father’s work, in terms of your relationship with him, and with regard to the cultural memory of a Palestinian artist?

**NB:** My father dedicated his life to his artistic practice. He amassed a considerable oeuvre, first in Lebanon, where he lived after his family was expelled from their home in Safad in 1948, and then in Jordan, after fleeing the Lebanese civil war. Yet as an artist he was largely unknown.

The question of cultural memory is central to my work. I am particularly interested in thinking through the personal and collective circumstances, including but not limited to his experiences of war, injury, and displacement, within which his practice developed — and was obscured. So the sense of duty I feel is multifaceted: on the one hand, it is about preserving a collective cultural heritage that is constantly disappearing, and on the other, it is about excavating narratives from the materialities and histories of my father’s personal belongings, his tools, notes, and sketches. Objects acquire a different weight and meaning when a person dies.

**KE:** You’re working with a personal archive in a poetic way, even as you adopt certain institutional archival protocols. The precise index in your book’s title, for example, proves to be misleading. Can you speak to this tension, and how you engage museum practices with this personal — or interpersonal — archive?

**NB:** Many of the book’s ideas and forms emerged from the act of archiving. Although my aim was not to create an official archive, I was generating systems that mimicked the practices of institutional collections: sorting, categorizing, indexing, storing, and of course, evaluating and canonizing objects. But I use that institutional language to question its validity and push its boundaries. The book cover is designed with front and back full-page flaps housing an index of 130 artworks represented in thumbnail images. The presence of an index invites a process of referencing, but unlike a ‘real’ index, there’s an erratic drift here. You have to ask yourself what this or that item in the index is pointing to and see what arises in the process of moving from the index to an uncertain reference point.

**KE:** Right, there’s not a one-to-one relationship between the book’s index and its content. A number might correspond to one of your father’s artworks and to a collage of yours; one of your texts, with its poetic, personal, philosophical, and descriptive elements, may be prefaced with a range of numbers corresponding to a dozen of your father’s artworks. The reader makes meaning out of these multi-pronged correspondences and intervals. In this sense, you’re unraveling the informational or museological function of the book-as-archive.


**NB:** Exactly. The book contains many short pieces of writing — sometimes poetic and fragmented, sometimes descriptive or indexical — which tell parts of stories, but can only be understood in relation to other visual and written content. So, its pages disrupt the authority of the index and create a nonlinear layering of images and narratives. At the same time, the book itself, as an object typically read front to back, implies a kind of containment, something I deeply appreciate about the medium. The book acts as a repository, like a storage unit in the basement of a museum.

**KE:** The book is both protective and portable, qualities that point to vexed issues around cultural institutions for Palestinians. What can be built in conditions of ongoing settler colonialism, occupation, and exile? Of course, there is now a Palestinian Museum, near Ramallah, which grapples with how to serve a local, largely refugee population, as well as a regional and global diaspora, in the absence of sovereignty. Do you think of your book as a kind of archive for the displaced? Can an artist’s book stand in — provisionally — for a Palestinian archive or institution, given Israel’s recurrent invasion, looting, and destruction of Palestinian cultural spaces?

**NB:** In a sense, yes. I’m not placing my book on the same plane as The Palestinian Museum, but I think it functions in a similarly paradoxical manner. It is a gathering place for objects that have no place — in this case, for the artworks made by a man whose practice existed on the periphery of the prevailing cultural discourses. Many Palestinian artists of my father’s generation who are celebrated today are discussed in the context of revolution and resistance. But what defines resistance art? Who defines it? And who is excluded from that or any other dominant conception of Palestinian art?

**KE:** What context, then, was your father making art in?

**NB:** My father produced works in many mediums and with varied aesthetics. Understanding the contexts within which he made his work, or why he made any of it, requires guesswork that is both investigative and imaginative.

**KE:** Can you talk more about that process of imaginative investigation? How do you collaborate with someone who’s absent?

**NB:** Collaborating with someone absent necessitates a level of speculation. I think of this book as a collaboration, and I also like to imagine my father approves of using his life work as my own raw materials. But there’s a contradiction here, because I know that when my father was alive, he rarely exhibited or shared his work. Why was he making it in the first place, then? And what does it mean for me to reveal it now? What kind of authority am I granting myself in making these decisions?

**KE:** To me, your questions imply a pressure to generate information about your father’s art and its context, to render his personal legacy, as well as his displacement and dispossession, legible. Both of us, as people of Palestinian descent, feel an urge to expose what remains obfuscated by power — to say,
for example, that our grandparents were forced out of Jaffa, Safad, Jerusalem. But when my grandmother speaks to me about leaving Jerusalem, she tells the story differently each time. So, each time, I ask, when was that? Where did you first go when the fighting broke out? How did you get to Lebanon? Who went with you? Your book, I think, conveys the fragmented, disordered form in which our ancestors tell their stories, a form that is always relational, always collaborative, because you have to call forth memories they have displaced or repressed. If your book resists an informational function, maybe that’s because memory and narrative do too.

NB: I remember hearing Ocean Vuong describe this fragmentation beautifully. He said that there’s often a demand placed on an artwork, in his case the ‘American novel’, to be a cohesive statement of a generation, but that cohesion is not part of his post-9/11 generation’s imagination (Vuong, 2019). In an entirely different context, but perhaps even more potently so, cohesion cannot be a part of my people’s lexicon or identity. We are not only living our own experiences of displacement, but also those of our parents and grandparents.

References


Kareem Estefan in conversation with Nour Bishouty

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In the colonies the truth stood naked, but the citizens of the mother country preferred it with clothes on\textsuperscript{1}

The London Exploration Fund is a Project where I attempt to show the version of the truth I know; naked, in your face, and uncensored. A version of the truth that does not care about middle class civility, a truth that is not scared to stare you in the eye challengingly, in all its nudity, screaming: What the fuck are you going to do about it?

To manifest this truth, I rewrite history, a history where Palestine is the colonizer, and Britain, the colonized. A history told through the story of one woman: Maryam Bint Hind al-Shamiyyeh, the Palestinian Explorer who discovered London in 1830, and set up the London Exploration fund.

The following pages are excerpts from the publication *Performing Coloniality, in the Footsteps of Maryam Bint Hind Al-Shamiyyeh*, produced for the London Exploration Fund. These excerpts are taken from different parts of the publication and presented as a coherent contribution in *Journal of Visual Culture*.

**Notes**


**References**

Pages 5-8: excerpts from the prefatory note, collage photocopied onto Khadi Paper

Page 13: Title page for colonial methodologies, collage photocopied onto Khadi Paper

Page 25: Title page for the London Exploration Fund, collage photocopied onto Khadi Paper
Once upon a time, not very long ago, I lived in a small city called Ramallah. It’s not really a city; it never was really a city, let’s rephrase that:

Once upon a time, not very long ago, I lived in a small colonized spot of the planet, two small villages that joined into one small land-locked city, surrounded by watchtowers and walls, soldiers, guns and olive trees.

To be fair it’s called a city because that’s where the centre of power lies. No, not the Palestinian Authority (our administrative governing body) I mean the real power, all the non-governmental and governmental organizations, the consulates, representative offices, and embassies. It’s where all the money accumulates into fancy restaurants, swanky bars and big houses protected by security alarms and private companies.

It’s only called a city because it’s the defacto capital of a piece of land that resembles Swiss cheese, what you call “the occupied Palestinian territories” and what I called home. Not because it was planned, but because

Jerusalem (the actual capital) is out of reach.
Once upon a time, I knew my purpose in life. I was an activist, things were clear, I knew who my audience was, and I knew what language to use: Arabic for local audiences and English for international audiences.

Did you know that activists can burn out? Just like candles, trying to illuminate the eternal darkness, we burn out in our ceaseless game. Perhaps that’s not an accurate metaphor, we burn like flies attracted by a better future, a better world, we burn out in our never-ending flight towards the light at the end of the tunnel, a tunnel carpeted by millions of flies.

What’s my role? Who’s my audience? What the fuck am I doing?
Am I re-examining my relationship with the metropole?
Am I taking revenge?
Am I treating the metropole how my cities were treated?
But what cities?
Cities that I never lived in, yet I am eternally theirs?
Cities that lie not in the present, but in the past, or the future?
Cities of my imagination?

Fast forward to today and I’m living in London and fucking confused...
What does it mean
To express myself
In English?
To use
The language of the colonizer?
What does it mean
To have a thousand and one books in the library
Written about me
About my people
And my land?
All from the gaze of the anthropologist,
The ethnographer,
The designer,
The political science student,
The professor,
The archaeologist,
And the fucking theologian,
A thousand and one books,
Bound
In our broken backs,
Covered
In our coloured skin,
And painted
In bloody white!
...
For who are my people anyway?
...
What does it mean
To study in a university
That still has “explorers”
Mortalized in marble
And bronze
“Explorers” who enslaved
The world,
Who claimed
Millions of black bodies
Wrapped in wrought Iron
Whipped into building
Their speculative futures
Beaten to enrich
Their critical work
And disfigured
To fill their empty souls?
For what does it mean
To be educated
By the civilised?
To be indoctrinated
By power?
For what does it mean
To be considered
an immigrant?
When all you’re trying to do
Is reclaim your shore
Of the wealth stolen from you?
To resurrect a future
Brutally murdered
By those
Who promised to deliver it
To the world?
What does it mean
To re-imagine
A history
Where things
Are reversed?
What does it mean
To become an expat
Instead of an immigrant?
A colonizer
Instead of colonized?
What does it mean
To design
A world full of hope

Instead of misery
And who the fuck am I
To design the world?
Or even think about it?
...
For what the fuck
Does it fucking mean?
منهجيات استعمارية

Colonial Methodologies
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الفلم عمل فدائي

A Fidai Film

Fidai; Fighter
Fida; A woman’s name

A project idea by Kamal Aljafari
After occupying Beirut in the summer of 1982 the Israeli army raided the Palestinian Research Center (f.1965), the cultural arm of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon. While the massacres of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps were underway, the army tore up the center, carted away its equipment, and confiscated its library, containing 25000 volumes on Palestine. One of the world’s largest collections on Palestinian history, this library was housed in the Center’s eight-floor building in Ras Beirut. The documents were loaded onto trucks and driven to Israel.

During the invasion, employees of the Center were considered targets, just like the Palestinian fidais and activists, and conducted their work from hideouts. 9 year old Fida hid with her parents Sabri Jiryis, the director of the Center, and Hanne Shahin who also worked at the Center. After the Israeli army’s withdrawal from Beirut, some of the Center’s employees resumed their work and began to rebuild its library. Half of the contents were replaced, with the help of donations from private libraries of Palestinian families in Beirut, and by printing out volumes from microfilm.

On July 13, a car parked in a lot next to the center exploded, causing minor damage. Later on 18 Aug 1982, a car bomb was found outside the building, but PLO personnel managed to clear out most of the area before it exploded, wounding four people. On 5 February 1983, a car exploded in a parking lot near the center, killing 18 people, including eight of the center’s employees, wounding 115. It is believed that the bomb was delivered by a woman who parked her car in front of the Center’s building. To persuade the guards that she would return within a few minutes she gave them the car keys and also left a 2-year-old child in the car. Soon afterwards the car exploded.

The streets were choked with bloodstained glass and clothing. Smoke billowed out from the Center, the two apartments in the same building, as well as the Libyan diplomatic offices across the street. Many people were trapped on the upper floors of their buildings, or waved from windows or balconies, hysterically calling for help. To escape the raging fire, a few women leapt into a tree outside the building. Others held on nervously until firefighters arrived with ladders and ropes.

Fida, who narrates the film, will go on to tell us about her life, and the fate of the archive. Her mother was killed at the Center.

Several people were trapped inside an elevator in the Center and were believed to have suffocated to death. Other bodies were pried from the debris, too disfigured to be identified. Fragments of charred documents from the Center fluttered over the street for an hour after the blast.

This project begins with the image of those charred papers. It asks what it may mean to reclaim an image, and a country, from the debris of colonial history?
In 2021, the Israeli Cinematheque made available online hundreds of films and footage covering the life of the Israeli state, which had not previously been open to the public. The material included documentary materials, fiction works, propaganda newsreels, films from unidentified sources and private amateur footage. For me it is an archive of Palestine, apprehended as a stream of stolen, disfigured images.

I spent days going through the material.

Often in newsreels and films the Hebrew word for ‘saboteurs’ is used to describe Palestinians, in particular the Palestinian freedom fighters, or fida’een, who led operations against the occupation in the 1960s and 1970s. And the longer I watched, the more I felt myself wanting to become a saboteur.

My project chronicles my sabotage of the Cinematheque material. It is a sabotage that is also a reconstruction, reclaiming from the footage latent narratives, creating a counter-archive from repurposed images, and making Israeli fiction more fictional, so that another reality can be revealed.

Repurposed images and films and names and texts and logos found in them are digitally defaced. Red scribbles blot out parts of the footage. Israeli colonists are cut out, or replaced with random material found in the backgrounds of their scenes. Their presence becomes ghostly and spectral.

By such means, I reconstruct a Palestinian image that no longer has an archive. It is a fidai film. And it is Fida’s film.

Selected scenes

The film opens with a scene from an empty Ben Gurion airport. A plane hovering in the sky morphs into a toy. A bomb-detecting robot carefully approaches a suspicious suitcase. Is it a bomb? The robot inches towards the suitcase and fires at it, blowing it open. But there is nothing inside, it has been emptied (by the saboteur).

We begin journey through Palestine, and through time,

A tourist hugging a group of Jewish militiamen in Jaffa after its occupation in 1948. The camera captures their cheerful faces and excitement about the militiamen’s clothes. One man lifts the trousers of a soldiers to expose new military boots to the camera, laughing. The camera pans across Israeli soldiers with guns watching two young Palestinian men digging. The pan is juxtaposed with an image of anxious elderly Palestinian men sitting behind a barbed-wire fence.

The scenes are from Jaffa’s Ajami neighborhood, which was turned into an Arab ghetto after the war. It captures the Palestinians who remained in the
city after its occupation, including my grandparents. I feel the longer I look at
the image the more it reveals itself to me. I begin to search in the background
grain of the image for my grandfather, who was 20 years old at the time.

What emerges from the images is the fiction of settler colonialism, and
settler colonialism as fiction. Israeli actors appearing in the footage, set
against footage of the sea of Jaffa, and undulating fields, are masked by the
opening and closing film credits. The names that appear and disappear on
the screen devour the images, the actors and the land. I reimagine the credits
as an act of occupation and blot out the names with a red marker. Over and
over again. Flames of red envelop the images. They are the wounds produced
by the continuous colonial aggression towards the Palestinian narrative.

The face of Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, is replaced with a
piece of the sea as he approaches the port of Jaffa. All that remains of him is
the grey suit and tie.

In some places I weave in contemporary material. A video found online, which
then disappeared, taken by a Palestinian woman living in Jordan, going to see
her family’s expropriated house in Jaffa. She knocks on the door and an Israeli
woman opens it. The Palestinian woman asks if she can take a look inside?

- May I enter the house, please — only for five minutes?
- Five minutes is too much, only two minutes, OK?

Using digital editing I excise the Israeli woman from the image, letting her
face appear for a fraction of a second, before it vanishes again, and her voice
remains. I move within the footage taken by the Palestinian woman, she tries
to record as much as she can within her two minutes. She leaves carrying
images of the place she was displaced from.

Note:

*A Fidai Film is the last part in a trilogy, following, “An Unusual Summer” 2020, and “Recollection” 2015

Kamal Aljafari
https://kamalaljafari.art/
A Moment of Clarity

This collection is a remarkable moment. That so many people have defied the pro-Israel mandate in this one small field of visual culture tells us something fundamental. The field was founded by people who understood that Palestine is a defining issue for anyone who has concerns about coloniality, racialization, reparations, refugees, surveillance and visualized war. This is visual culture, as it is and was understood by Walter Benjamin, John Berger, Judith Butler, Gayatri Gopinath, Stuart Hall, W. J. T. Mitchell, Jasbir Puar, Christina Sharpe, and all the contributors here.

This visual culture is, to use an old tag of Stuart Hall’s, ‘inside the university but not of it.’ Its mission is not to impart some carefully-modulated ‘visual literacy’, or to teach young people a canon. It uses visual culture as an anti-colonial tactic to analyze and make social change. Its ‘object’, to use the older categories, is change. Different inflections of this tactic have been seen in Black Lives Matter, the statues wars, and activism for the restitution of cultural property.

This is foundational. Walter Benjamin stayed working in the old green-shaded reading room of the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris right up until the Nazi occupation. He produced the Arcades project, the ‘work of art’ essay, the final ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ (1940) - defining texts for the first generation of visual culture. He could have left. His Zionist friend Gershom Scholem kept urging him to move to Palestine. In the midst of the Palestinian General Strike (1936-39), Benjamin could see that the foundational myth of a ‘land without a people’ was simply untrue. He refused to go. I’ve stood in the little cemetery on the top of the cliff in Port Bou, Spain, where he died, trying to evade the Nazis.

In the 1970s, John Berger was inspired by recent translations of Benjamin to write Ways of Seeing. It’s true there’s not much in Ways of Seeing about Palestine. Berger spent years in the latter part of his career in and around the issue, though, as Jill Casid rightly remembered in the JVC themed issue on Berger. Berger worked with Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, making translations, and illustrations. He visited Gaza and the Occupied Territories. Berger saw in Palestine ‘the careful destruction of a people.’ He writes about rubble, physical and verbal. He writes about the Nakbah. He understood that the situation was exemplary not exceptional. We should follow his lead.

If it ever was, this is not now complicated. The Israeli regime has made this abundantly clear with its law that Israel is a state for Jews only, even forbidding citizenship to Palestinians that marry Jews. That was undone by Loving v. Virginia (1967) in the United States, a time now looked back on through rose-tinted glasses labelled ‘a more perfect union’. If it was wrong in the US, is it not wrong in Palestine? In South Africa, I gave a talk about the 2018 Great March of Return in Gaza. I braced myself for the inevitable onslaught, but it did not come. One attendee said laconically: ‘We recognize apartheid when we see it.’
Let's begin again: knowing that visual culture is a field in which Palestine is a paramount issue, how do we start? Take Farah Nabulsi's short film *The Present* (2020). It's on Netflix. The film shows that the checkpoint is the interface of state, police, technology, surveillance and disposable bodies. It condenses all these issues into a material, dangerous form. It exemplifies Simone A. Browne's analysis (Browne, 2015) of 'racializing surveillance'. You could then bring in Nicole Fleetwood's 'carceral aesthetics' (Fleetwood, 2020) to think about how prison is a key institution in Palestine. As I write, the Palestinian activist Ghadanfar Abu Atwan has concluded a 65 days hunger strike when the Israelis finally agreed to release him. For reference, Irish rebel Bobby Sands died after 66 days of hunger strike.

As the testing-ground for counterinsurgency, Palestine remains the cutting edge of visualized war. The British imperial tradition since 1857 of the ‘punitive expedition’ - brilliantly reconfigured in the context of museums by Dan Hicks (Hicks, 2020) - was well-learned by the Israeli regime. In their 2021 aerial expedition into Gaza, the spoken motive was to achieve ‘quiet’, as if the issue were a delayed bedtime, rather than incursions into the sacred al-Aqsa mosque and the confiscation by fiat of homes in East Jerusalem. The hundreds of homes targeted around the American Colony hotel are just yards from the house where my grandfather grew up and my father spent much time as a child. It’s gone now, converted into crowded flats, lived in by the ultra-Orthodox. There’s nothing to see, the past has been invisibilized. Empire erases and forgets. Our work is to remember.

Walk up the hill, and if you can find a gap in the buildings you will see the illegal Israel settlement of Ramot on the tops of the hills outside the city. The site is canonical in visual culture. Jean Mohr, who worked so much with John Berger, photographed modernist flats there for Edward Said’s *After The Last Sky* (1998) The pictures were later discussed by W. J. T. Mitchell in his ‘Holy Landscape’ essay (Mitchell, 2000). That modernist block has been swamped now, according to Google street view, with endless banal flats, faced with Jerusalem stone. From the front, some of architecht Zvi Hecker’s polyhedrons, also now home to the ultra-Orthodox, still appear to be present in the midst of all this. But go round the back, and all the pentagonal windows have been filled in, or made into squares. Residents have added terraces, balconies, A/C units. Scruffy shrubs are the only plants. The demotic redesign includes a shabby wooden footbridge to get out of the apartments in the back. In the background of Mohr’s 1979 photograph was a Palestinian village amidst groves of fully-grown olive trees. Taking in the view via Google’s 2011 picture, some of the trees remain but the entire village has been disappeared, leaving only an empty space. (Figure 1, Figure 2)
Can we take this as a metonym? From the front, a modernist reclamation of the ‘empty’ desert. Smooth facades of stone. From the back, a ramshackle assortment of failing built and natural environments. In the back, stolen land is just that, stolen land. The settler’s houses look like informal housing anywhere, complete with the ubiquitous blue plastic sheeting. The shabbiness and the claustrophobia are tangible. As is the spectre of the erased village.
Visual culture takes Palestine as a lens, because it helps us see our own condition. Perhaps that is why the expression of support for Palestine creates such fury, albeit carefully orchestrated, well-funded fury. Never look past the facades of glory! Retain and explain! Heritage not hate! To these calls for amnesia and to invisibilize, we can only respond with the strike.

The strike to find a way to be human, the human strike as Claire Fontaine has it (Fontaine, 2020), is a process, not a slogan. The human strike for me, as a Jew, begins with the necessity to refuse to be othered in relation to Palestinians. To refuse to be ‘diagnosed’ with self-hatred. To refuse to make self-deprecating jokes about self-hatred. To realize that the complexity of love is that my grandmother, the blood-relative I have most loved, was a settler and a participant in Zionist armed resistance. These are the agonies of what Hazel Carby (Carby, 2019) calls ‘imperial intimacies’.

For us as visual culture practitioners, the human strike begins with and for Palestine, here and now. No exceptions, no equivocations. For visual culture, this is the moment of clarity.

References


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A Modest Proposal for Israel-Palestine

It is clear that we are at a turning point in what we used to call ‘The Question of Palestine’. Two recent events have made this clear: 1) the brutal bombing of Gaza City, causing spectacular collapses of high rise apartment buildings filled with women and children has had the effect of producing an unprecedented moment of unity among four distinct groups of Palestinians: the inhabitants of Gaza, the West Bank, Palestinians within Israel ‘proper’, and the Palestinian diaspora; 2) the fall of Netanyahu, and the installation of a fragile coalition government that includes an Arab party, headed by a Prime Minister who opposes any form of ‘two state’ solution. It now appears that the only party that still believes in two states is the U.S. State Department, which clings wistfully to a fantasy of two states that has been obsolete for many years, serving only as the proverbial carrot dangling in front of a donkey to keep him moving forward without ever reaching his goal. Edward Said foresaw this moment long ago, and now it has come to pass.

So what is to be done?

The first step is obvious: Israel must accept the reality that it has desired for so long, namely, that it is one country, with all of the military and economic power of any significance between the sea and the Jordan River. The dream of ‘Eretz Israel’ has come to pass. But with fulfilment of that dream comes responsibility, especially responsibility for the welfare of all the persons within its borders — Jews, Christians, Muslims, Bedouins, and atheists. It could make a small start in accepting that responsibility by making sure that all Palestinians who wish to be vaccinated against Covid can receive the same inoculation guaranteed to all Israelis. Instead of running the current experiment of giving the Palestinians only nearly-expired vaccines to see how they do, it could accept its responsibility for the public health of everyone within its borders.

Acceptance that the Zionist dream has come true thus involves a recognition of the legitimate claims of the non-Jewish peoples it has conquered. Israel faces a momentous choice. It can continue its policy of settler colonialism coupled with the expulsion of indigenous peoples, or their exploitation as dispossessed wage-slaves. This choice requires Israel to accept that it is an apartheid state, with a substantial minority deprived of political and civil rights. It will be hard to reconcile this with the Zionist dream of being a ‘light to the nations’, and will make it very much like ancient Egypt, holding a people in bondage, at the same time it is driving them out. The Palestinians, as Said often said, will be ‘the Jews of the Jews’.

The other alternative is to accept responsibility and care for all the peoples within its borders, granting them equality as citizens of one state, perhaps a hyphenated state called ‘Israel/Palestine’. The next question, then, is what happens to ‘the dream of a Jewish state?’ How can ethnocracy and theocracy be reconciled with democracy? This is where my modest proposal kicks in.
For a model of reconciliation between the claims of genealogy and religion and the claims of democracy, we need look no further than the United Kingdom. The U.K. is a parliamentary democracy with a hereditary monarchy that is defined by familial succession (the House of Windsor) and the national Church of England. The figure of the sovereign as ‘head of state’ is kept rigorously distinct from the head of government. The sovereign is a purely symbolic and moral position, with no power to raise taxes, wage war, or pass laws of any kind. The prime minister, as head of ‘Her Majesty’s government’ has all the real, practical power.

In short, Israel must re-define itself as a constitutional monarchy, and figure out a procedure for inaugurating a royal succession. Perhaps some worthy descendant of the House of David could be tapped as the ‘King of Israel’ (or, even better, the Queen), who will rule over all the subjects of Israel/Palestine with an even, benevolent hand, reminding them of the highest ideals of Zionism as a model of liberation for all peoples, while letting her secular, multi-ethnic government take care of practical matters concerning borders, public health, and national security. This would allow Israel to continue to declare its status as a Jewish state, while maintaining its claim to be a democracy. Even better, the Queen of Israel could enter into a romantic relationship with a handsome young Palestinian. Their female offspring could ensure the continuation of a matrilineal line of succession, and if the Queen failed to produce a female heir, a special council or Sanhedrin could be convened to figure out the next step.

When I have laid out this modest proposal to my Jewish and Palestinian friends (some in my own family), they are all quick to declare that I am just a crazy Irishman. But I wonder if it is any crazier than the present condition of a state of moral and political confusion, punctuated by periodic civil wars and uprisings, and a daily life of oppression for a large minority. And it could, in fact be coupled with a related modest proposal made by Palestinian artist, Shuruq Harb, several years ago. The idea was to solve the problem of maintaining the fantasy of a Jewish state by finding a cooperative progressive rabbi who could administer the conversion of all Palestinians to Judaism in one mass ceremony. This could be easily accomplished today by a gigantic Zoom meeting. It could even include the Palestinian diaspora, which could then lay claim to the right of return.

Okay, I admit that my proposal may seem utopian to some, dystopian to others, and there are innumerable practical objections to be overcome. So I would leave the working out of the details to a select committee of Palestinian and Israeli artists and theological/political thinkers. This committee would commit itself to realizing the prophetic mission of a democratic Zionism that would unite all the peoples who dream of peace, security, and prosperity as a light to a planet that needs a model for long-term survival.

Long live the Queen of Israel/Palestine!

W. J. T. Mitchell
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Challenges of Identity: A Talk and Art Exhibition by Four of the Founding Members of the Modern Art Movement in Palestine
Born in 1947 in Birzeit, Palestine, Siman Mansour is considered to be an important and distinguished figure in Palestinian art. Considered as an artist of the Intifada, Mansour has established himself as an artist dedicated to giving visual expression to Palestinian identity.

Mansour studied Fine Arts at the Bezalel Art Academy in Jerusalem from 1967 to 1970. He served as the head of the League of Palestinian Artists from 1986 to 1990. In 1994, he co-founded Al-Wa'ad Art Center in East Jerusalem and served as its director from 1996 to 2003. Mansour is also a member of the founding board of directors of the International Academy of Art Palestine, established in Ramallah in 2004.

Uniting Mansour’s body of work is the depiction of the orange tree (symbolising the 1948 Nakba), the olive tree (a symbol of the ‘67 war), traditional Palestinian embroidery, village life, and the figure of the Palestinian woman as the mother figure of Palestine. Mansour also uses mud as a medium in his compositions to depict Palestine, its history and people.

Besides being an artist, Mansour is also a professional cartoonist who published his cartoons from 1981 to 1995 in Al-Fajr, a weekly English publication based in Jerusalem. Simen Mansour has exhibited his works in Japan, Korea, Russia, Europe, the Middle East and North America. His works are also showcased in the permanent collections of Matfa’ Arab Museum of Modern Art, Barjeel Art Foundation, the Jordan National Gallery and the Institut du Monde Arabe to name a few.

Simen Mansour resides and works in East Jerusalem, Palestine.
Born in 1959 in Jabalia Camp in Gaza, Tayseer Barakat is considered to be one of Palestine’s most prominent artists, whose practice over the past years has drawn inspiration from the ancient past, oral traditions and cultural narratives that are intimately tied to life in Palestine.

Barakat graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from Alexandria University, Egypt in 1985. Upon his return to Palestine, he moved to Ramallah where he became an artist and a teacher. He works primarily in paint, ink and dyes. His colour palette is often limited to monochromatic tones, which imbue his works with a sober tone. Barakat believes that the use of dark colours reflects the hardships of our time and our present life, and the pressure imposed on us makes us use dark colours.

Barakat continues to be heavily influenced by the environment where he grew up. This is reflected in both his subject matter and the variety of media he works in, including wood, metal and glass.

Tayseer Barakat has exhibited his work as part of solo and group exhibitions, which include the São Paulo International Biennial (1997), the Sharjah Biennial (2003) and galleries in Europe and North America.

Tayseer Barakat resides and works in Ramallah, Palestine.
Born in Jerusalem in 1945, Vera Tamari is a visual artist, Islamic art historian, art educator, and curator. Tamari graduated with a BA in Fine Arts from Ben Gurion University for Women in 1966. She specialised in ceramics at the Istituto Statale d'Arte per la Ceramica in Florence, Italy in 1978 and obtained her M. Phil. degree in Islamic Art and Architecture from the University of Oxford in 1984.

As an artist, Tamari specialises in ceramic sculpture and conceptual art and since 1974, has exhibited her work in the UK, Palestine, Japan, Middle East, Europe and North America.

Tamari served for more than two decades as professor of Islamic Art and Architecture and Art History at Birzeit University, where she also founded and directed the Virtual Gallery and the Birzeit University Museum between 2005 and 2010. There, she also conceived the Cities of Exhibition series, curating and co-curating three of its editions (2009 – 2012).

Tamari is actively involved in the promotion of art and culture in Palestine and serves as advisor and member to numerous institutions and cultural boards. She served as a jury member for the Young Artist of the Year Award NAKA, organised by the Abdul Nasser Gatter Foundation and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture.

Vera Tamari resides and works in Ramallah, Palestine.
Born in Latroun, Palestine in 1943, Nabil Anani is a key founder of the modern Palestinian art movement. Anani graduated in Fine Art from Alexandria University, Egypt in 1969. Upon his return to Palestine, he began a career as an artist, teacher and trainer at the UN college in Ramallah. Anani is a multi-disciplinary artist working as a painter, ceramist and sculptor, using media such as leather, henna, wood, paper-maché, copper and natural dyes in his unique works.

Nabil Anani

Biography

Anani held his first exhibition in Jerusalem in 1972 and has participated in solo and group shows in the UK, Japan, Russia, the Middle East, Europe and North America. His works are showcased in the collections of the Institut du Monde Arabe, the Aga Khan Museum, the Guggenheim Museum and the Jordanian National Museum as well as in private collections.

In 1998, he was appointed as the head of the League of the Palestinian Artists and played a key role in the establishment of the first International Academy of Fine Art, in Palestine. He was awarded the first Palestinian National Prize for Visual Art in 1997 by Nasser Azzam. In 2006, Anani was also awarded the prestigious King Abdullah II Award for Creativity.

He is the co-author of a number of books on Palestinian arts and folklore. Nabil Anani’s Palestine, Land and People (2018) is his latest publication.

Nabil Anani resides and works in Ramallah, Palestine.
This collective as well as the artists’ works produced in the 1970s, proposed ways that art could be used as a tool for propagating political activism, resistance, civic and public awareness in occupied Palestine.

Inspired by the concept of a free and independent state of Palestine, the first exhibition as a group took place in Jerusalem in 1989.

The ‘New Visions’ exhibition traveled to Jordan, Germany, Italy and the United States.

In 1994, the group renovated a traditional Arab-style house in Jerusalem, establishing Al-Hawat Art Centre. The inaugural exhibition from Exile to Jerusalem, featured the works of Jabara Ibrahim Jabra, Laila Shawa, Vadim Tamari and Kamal Boulati among other.

Challenges of identity is their first group exhibition in Beirut, Lebanon.
Dar El Nimer
Beirut, Lebanon (info@darelnimer.org)
With Palestine still

Hold up the Israeli regime and the violence of its settler colonial occupation of Palestine to the clarifying lens of the crime of Apartheid and what do we learn? Consider the graphic condensation by the Visualizing Palestine collective of the Human Rights Watch report, ‘A Threshold Crossed: Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution’ (April 27, 2021) released just weeks before the 73rd anniversary of An-Nakba, the beginning of Israeli settler colonial rule in 1948 and after decades of Palestinian intellectual and legal work to call the world to count and recognize the practices of the Israeli state by their proper name. What we see is not a conflict with two sides. Superimposed over an aerial map view, four slides apply the three main conditions of the 1998 Rome Statute to the International Criminal Court and 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid to diagram and, thus, make visibly undeniable the way the Israeli colonial regime’s integration of Jews and separation of Palestinians, intent to dominate, and systematic oppression enact a condensed diagram of the criteria for Apartheid in practice.

But does seeing Palestine through the frame of the crime of Apartheid shift how we sense or where we stand? How does it alter any collective ‘we’ that we can be or become, particularly when and as seeing is not enough to unlearn the pedagogies of settler coloniality? When seeing is not enough to refuse the cynical weaponization of charges of antisemitism abetted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s working definition that, since it was pushed through in 2016, has recruited 30 nations (including Great Britain and the United States) to sign onto its equation of criticism of the state of Israel with antisemitism?

The lessons of visual activism have taught us the praxis of the volatilizing question as a way to exercise the power of rendering visible to make actionable. To ask not how to see Palestine but, rather, how to see with Palestine might engage us in the ethical and political work of not just contestation but also commitment to emergence - from the recognition and enactment of the right of return to abolition imagination and freedom dreaming. How to see with Palestine still in the wake of the forced un-homings in Sheikh Jarrah, the violent incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the carpet bombing of Gaza, already the world’s largest open-air prison, and organized settler attacks and also especially through the prism of the May 15th General Strike amplified by solidarity rallies and marches around the world, and the growing Boycott, Diversity, Sanctions (BDS) movement?

In the still of this wake we might take heed of the tactical cartography of the Free Palestine/Strike MoMA: Call to Action for May 21, 2021 by the Strike MoMA working group of the International Imagination of Anti-National Anti-Imperialist Feelings (IIAAF) that confronts the role of artwashing, drawing the lines from the ‘crime scene’ of Palestine to the museum board’s involvement in support of Israel’s apartheid regime. But turning the forensic light on MoMA’s boardroom is not merely to expose the art museum as war machine that
burnishes reputations and normalizes violence. It is to work to convert the art museum’s hold on creative imagination into a machine of solidarity:

When we focus on the interlocking directorate of the MoMA board, the museum becomes visible as a shared site of action for our interconnected struggles. This works against the all-too-frequent isolation and exceptionalization of Palestine, and strengthens the bonds between Free Palestine, Indigenous sovereignty, Black Freedom Movements and all other movements for land, life, and liberation, from Puerto Rico to Kashmir and beyond.

Over 300 answered the call to assemble in the 7th week of the Strike MoMA action, many carrying signs that reclaim love for Gaza by putting an altering spell on Robert Indiana’s iconic LOVE design first conceived for the Museum of Modern Art as a Christmas card in 1965 (the year in which Fayez Sayegh founded the Research Center of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and published Zionist Colonialism in Palestine which calls out the Zionist project of ‘racial self-segregation’) and then a screenprint in 1967, the year of the Naksa, Israel’s violent seizure of the remaining Palestinian territories of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza strip and dispossession of over 300,000 Palestinians. Signs like these rearticulate the question of how to see with Palestine still as a practice of love.

Mad love. For here we are still in the wake of the repetitions of ‘none of us are free until all of us are free’. The ‘Letter against Apartheid’ (published on e-flux on May 26, 2021 and also available at againstapartheid.com) signed by Palestinian artists and writers and allies calls for an immediate and unconditional cessation of Israeli violence against Palestinians, an end to military support of Israel (especially the annual 3.8 billion from the United States), and that we act in solidarity with Palestinians ‘to help dismantle the apartheid regime of our time’. The question of how to see with Palestine still as a practice of love also entails a kind of ecstatic embrace of bearing the wound, of bearing with stigma, of acknowledging the stain of complicity with Israeli Apartheid and not allowing that to hold us back from the work of materializing an abolition world after Zionism. On a shimmering, gilded background and tiled across multiple Instagram posts (May 13, 2021), artist and activist Virgil B/G Taylor binds the pledge that ‘[W]e must fight until palestine is free’ to a quickened, activated sense of obligation to post-Zionist worldmaking: ‘as we may never be able to unstitch the stain of zionism from the fabric of jewish life/we must offer, through practices of liberation and activities of care, what judaism means to each of us in diaspora and without zionism.’

This is durational solidarity work, mourning and not moving on work, the practice of rage-grief resistance over the long haul, a practice of the still that we might also call a kind of militant melancholy that refuses to allow the whiteness protection programs of nationalism to weaponize the false security promises of subordinate inclusion at the expense of the bodies it expels. Jewish Voice for Peace’s campaign of solidarity with Palestinians acknowledges that this means re-building community and family and gives us queer and trans
movement elders to love and, thereby, bind our attachment to the practice of being with Palestine still. Take the JVP posters that hold close the memory of ‘movement transcestor’ Leslie Feinberg Z”L (1949-2014) with close-up images of Feinberg staring down the camera and rallying a crowd as a trans Jew who stood in lifelong solidarity with Palestinians because zie did not believe that ‘our sexuality, gender expression, and bodies can be liberated without making ferocious mobilization against imperialist war and racism an integral part of our struggle.’ As they bind us to Feinberg they also enact the kind of melancholy work of carrying our dead with us to the battles we wage in their names that this durational, transgenerational liberation labor of mad love demands. The images celebrating the 91st birthday of JVP’s oldest member Shatzi Weisberger (June 19, 2021) work to create a sense of felt community in anti-Zionism while also working to bind us to a world before Zionism as we see Shatzi still at demonstrations sitting on a walker draped in a pink sign painted with the declaration, ‘Jewish Dyke standing with Palestinian queers’ and reminding us on the poster portrait by Micah Bazant: ‘I have been alive for longer than Israel has existed. Judaism beyond Zionism is possible.’

As I write this, Israel’s supreme court hearing on Sheikh Jarrah (August 2, 2021) evaded ruling on Palestinian land rights, using the compromise of a stay of eviction orders as cover for its underlying reinforcement of Israel’s apartheid regime. An ethics and politics of being with Palestine still demands a different attunement to not just life and the before Zionism, before 1948, before 1967 but also the micro-agencies of what is still here in the incalculable aftermath, that wild, indeterminate zone of being with what is declared dead, dried up, uninhabitable, irreparable and past that Palestinian artists Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme re-script as the queerly generative break of being ‘in the negative’. On Tisha B’Av, the Jewish day of communal mourning that -according to ritual tradition - ends at sundown, I immersed myself again in part one of their decades-in-the-making but still unfolding trilogy May amnesia never kiss us on the mouth commissioned in part by Dia Art Foundation for the Artist Web Projects series. ‘Postscript: after everything is extracted‘ rescripts the fugitive material and digital archives of resistance with Palestinian loss as the crucible for confronting the immensity and overwhelm of the global scale of mourning and loss in the mutations wrought by heteropatriarchal racial capitalism and settler colonialism’s thefts of the wild that made the conditions for the novel coronavirus to become both pandemic and lethal. Moving between sound fragments and pop-up screens that allow toggling between English and Arabic, note-like poetic text fragments, watercolor sketches, skin-grafted avatars that echo the outlines of something called the human, and solarized, washed and/or shadowed already lo-res video footage culled from the larger digital archive of public posts the artists maintain appear and recede against a dense field of deep violet, offering us poetic technologies for collective mourning as it holds space within our screened life for rage-grief to become a resource for solidarity work by attuning us to other frequencies of transmission that tremble across estranged forms of life and death: ‘The wind blows harder/with every breath/as though the pores/of this sea and land they called dead/are transmitting/times and breaths we don’t know/anything about./’ A way of being with what
remains unintelligible to and defies colonial knowledge systems set against the corrosive forces of unknowing that use the ruse of false protections from bad feeling to suppress confronting the reality of settler colonialism and ethnic genocide, this being in the negative remaps rage-grief resistance as an opening porosity to the radically alter times and breaths through which we may be with Palestine in the bonding sense of a free Palestine still here.

Postscript: I think of this sense of being with the potential of a free Palestine still as a vital offshoot of the tree that, as a child negotiating the shame politics of Zionist trauma pedagogy at a Jewish religious school in Dallas, Texas, I, nonetheless, refused to plant in Israel. And, while I have my Holocaust-surviving, statistician grandmother who changed her name from Berta to Bert to acknowledge for that queer, trans-generational gift of how to refuse the conscripts of Zionism and heteropatriarchal racial capitalism, the bonds of the no are there for the forging.

Jill H. Casid
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The Next Wave

I am captivated by the erratic edge and restless tide that Etel Adnan describes. Poetics of urgency and impulse. A refining, reshaping, and remaking of the geometry of the ocean - not only as a powerful metaphor for exile and ruin, or as historical container or return. The poetry of the sea, it is our fundamental condition.

The condition of leaving one’s known geographies. The transit of perpetual becoming. A mode of erasure, a longing for liquid and stable ground. Attending to our own experience in relation to transit, the leaving, the being forced in place by theft. The inability to leave that brings with it the capacity to endure. This restless tide that impresses and erodes, remaking and unmaking. The unbearable condition of punished being.

With Adnan I seek the impalpability of language as an essential violence. And language’s more palpable grid of sunlight in oblique lines. The immaterial dimensions that obscure the operations of pain. Flesh that remembers land. Land that remembers flesh. The relentless decimation of the young. And still, they rise within the dominant current of destruction. Brimming with biomatter, a storm breaking loose. That storm.

Visibility is decreasing. The cloud burst appears, and then dissipates across the planet. We stand with and then memory fades into the place with irradiating light. The erratic edge of sludge and sand where empires crumble. Earth has become too small for the energies that are unleashed. And, too finite for their insatiable demand.

Yet new growth. Thin water. Springs that merge as earthly connective tissue. Wetlands that are cared for in crowded citadels. Nourishment of the home garden. The revolution knows its secret relations. And it is there that absolute and cosmic love flourishes. An outpour, the still heart of the righteous. Preparation for a time of the ocean’s engulfment.

The demand of the next wave.

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From al-Sheikh Jarrah to Gaza: Palestine is Presence

‘I went today to al-Sheikh Jarrah where I took this picture in front the Kurd family home, threatened with forcible displacement, along some other households. Here, people made a library named after the bookstore Samir Mansour in Gaza, which was demolished in the last onslaught.’

Alaa Dayeh is a film-maker and cinematographer from Jerusalem, whom I met while teaching at Dar al-Kalima University for the Arts and Culture in Bethlehem. ‘The youth paint murals on the wall, despite the fact that the Occupation repeatedly erase them. Bouquets of flowers’, she explains, ‘are hung in planters to beautify the conversation space. The presence of the youth and their meetings may exactly be what resistance is; resistance from the attempts to uproot them from that space.’

Alaa’s image is dense: 7850 on the wall represents the number of Palestinians currently facing expulsion from and confiscation of their homes in Jerusalem alone. ‘No to a new Nakbah in the neighborhoods of al-Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan’, written in the colors of the Palestinian flag, a flag outlawed by the Apartheid regime. In the foreground, a sign on the wall next to bookshelves, claiming the space:
Samir Mansour Bookstore.
The bookstore in Gaza was destroyed on the 18th of May, 2021.
It was rebuilt in al-Sheikh Jarrah on the 19th of May, 2021.

Handwritten signs on the bookshelves state, ‘From here Jerusalem to Gaza’ and ‘You want to become intellectual, you have to become an engaged intellectual’. Alaa shows us young Palestinian men and women from Jerusalem, many of them her friends, artists, activists and students, who gather on a daily basis, discussing politics, art, strategies of resistance, and stories of friendship. They hold this space. As Alaa notes, they claim it as an act of daily resistance, as refusal against, in her words, ‘the Occupation’, a settler colonial regime that persistently works to ‘erase’ Palestinian presence, whether that be from Palestinian walls, homes, streets, or lands. The intervention of Alaa and her friends is a testimony of Palestinian indelible presence, a permanence beyond erasure’s capacity. Photography plays a role in this testimony, as Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian says, in ‘speaking life’ and the power of livability under the tremendous and relentless forces in the settler colony. (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2020) The cultural, political and intellectual work of these young people, including the production of art and photography, emerge from a continuity of Palestinian resistance and presence that rebut the settler technologies of psychological abuse and physical dispossession that started before al-Nakbah in 1947-48.

The country now known as Israel has tried to change the demographics of Jerusalem, including al-Sheikh Jarrah since 1967, maintaining an official policy to 70% Jewish and 30% Palestinian ratio. Legal challenges brought by settlers started in the seventies and eighties, eventually forcing the Hannoun, al-Ghawi, and al-Kurd families temporarily from their home in 2002. Relocated by 1956 to al-Sheikh Jarrah in 1956 by the Jordanian authorities, these families were dispossessed from their ancestral homes in 1948 by the Zionist forces; the Kurd and Hannoun families originally from Haifa and the al-Ghawi family from the Sarafand area, near Ramleh.1 In 2009, settlers succeeded in stealing the homes of the al-Ghawi and Hannoun families, and occupied half of the Kurd family’s home. Currently, the Jaouni, Iskafi, al-Qasim, and Kurd families are targeted for removal and the Apartheid court has also ruled that each family must pay 70,000 shekels (over $20,000) in fees to cover the settlers’ legal expenses. (El-Kurd, 2020) Noura Erakat (Erakat, 2014) offers a meticulous account of the Israeli juridical mechanisms by which the Zionist state programmatically works to dispossess Palestinians, confiscate their homes and lands and encourages Judaization throughout the settler colony. Erakat carefully shows (Erakat, 2019) how the judiciary licenses specious legal arguments to clear the terrain for colonization of Palestine from the inception of the settler state. These laws, legal arguments, and frameworks are still in motion today and essential to state sanctioned if not state sponsored land grabs, confiscations, home demolitions, and expulsions.2
Home confiscations and expulsions in Jerusalem are, therefore, in intimate relation to the systematic demolition of Gaza. Salim Mansour’s bookstore and publishing house was destroyed for one reason: to extend the colonial sovereignty over defiant, lived Palestinian space. Founded in 2000, the bookstore also served as a community center and, with a number of other bookstores, is located on al-Thalatini Street, known as Maktabat Street (Bookstore Street). (Bulos, 2021, Kotan, 2021) Salim Mansour’s shop was more than only a social hub in Gaza. It is a space of presence; a space that collaborates with the community to ensure Palestinian life and its longevity. To keep Alaa’s image in mind while acknowledging the ruins of Salim Mansour permits us, to borrow from Rana Barakat’s discussion of the forcibly depopulated village of Lifta, to recognize ‘settler violence as ongoing’. At the same time, Alaa’s image and the popular intervention it documents conjures the ‘vitality’ of the ruins that demand return, al-‘Awdah. (Barakat, 2018, 8) If we speak of return, then, it is a return for the Palestinian refugees who, while physically in the West Bank, Gaza, Jerusalem, Jordan, Lebanon or anywhere in exile, still claim sovereignty and, yes, ownership of their homes, lands, villages and farms in Palestine. They claim this sovereignty and title not because they are delusional but because those living on the land and in their houses are occupiers and settlers. Palestinians refuse the legitimacy of the settler colonial state and the claims of the colonizer. They claim sovereignty and ownership because the land is theirs. No measure of polite diplomatic language, Zionist mythology, international cover, or Apartheid violence can change or cloak this.

But also, the resurrection of Salim Mansour’s ‘ruins’ and their migration to the al-Sheikh Jarrar testifies to indestructible, although not invulnerable, sumud and presence of the popular resistance. Yazid Anani proposes to us to consider the demolished remains of Zionist aggression as al-atlal, the classical Arabic poetic trope signifying the signs of an abandon encampment. Ruins are the remains of vibrant lived spaces, ‘key signifiers in definition of contemporary culture and identity’ – signifiers that ‘appreciate the significance of, and therefore aims to shed light on, stories and experiences related to’ the library as a center of popular resistance. (Anani, 2017, 12)

Alaa’s image conjures the vitality of Palestinian popular resistance, drawing the relationship between the uninterrupted spaces of Jerusalem and Gaza, between spaces held by the youth, whether in front of the Kurd home, playing instruments on the stage of ruins in Gaza or protesting in the streets of al-Lydd, Jaffa, al-Nasirah (Nazareth), Nablus or Ramallah. Palestinian popular resistance, Alaa shows us, is always a cultural resistance, encouraging us to remember the ways in which Palestinians have produced knowledge through cultural interventions that affirm Palestinian Arab identity. For me, as a scholar of al-nahdah al-‘arabiyah, Salim Mansour and the space held in al-Sheikh Jarrah are links in the chain of libraries throughout historic Palestine. In addition to the venerable twelfth century al-Maktabah al-Budayriyah or the Aqsa Library on the grounds of the Haram al-Sharif, we may think about the Khalidi Library in the Bab al-Silsalah neighborhood. (Figure 2)
Still in operation, the Khalidi Library was founded in 1899 by al-Hajj Raghib al-Khalidi, to create a library that would ‘help restore the Arabs to prosperity by fostering knowledge, and enabling them to match the powerful cultural establishments created by foreign powers all over the region.’ (Khalidi, 2010, 46; Sheehi, forthcoming 2022). Al-Hajj Raghib and Tahir al-Jaza’iri are among those standing in front of the doorway along with Musa Shafiq al-Khalidi, Khalil al-Khalidi, and Muhammad al-Habbal from Beirut.³ As a part of a pan-Arab project of knowledge production and shared cultural lives, the Khalidi image, not unlike Alaa’s photograph in my hands as a Lebanese Arab academic, recalls that Jerusalem, in the words of Muzhaffar al-Nawwab, remains the ‘Brigid of Arabism’, an Arab city that is steadfast and defiant, despite the ruin inflicted by imperialists, settler colonialism, and their indigenous lackeys, ruling class, and collaborators. (al-Nawwab, 2009)

In listening to the images of Alaa, Salim Mansour, and the Khalidi Library, as Tina M. Campt teaches us (Campt, 2017, 72), we may hear the first lines of a Samih al-Qasim poem: It is inevitable/It will come/It will come with the sun/Its face scarred by the dust of textbooks.’ (al-Qasim, 1982, 16, my translation) Alaa’s image does not represent Palestine. It compresses history, past, present, geographic locality, and gender into one space, anchored in the gravity of Jerusalem, the eternal capital of Palestine. This one space is
the condensation of Gaza and Jerusalem, of 1899, May 18, 2021 and May 19, 2021, of spaces held by the popular resistance, spaces populated by youthful passion and intellectual thirst, and structured around indigenous knowledge production that cuts across the past, present and future of Palestine. This one space is where even ruins - even the anticipated ruins of the Kurd house - call for the ‘inevitable’ return. At the same time, the popular resistance refuses to cede spaces saturated with Palestinian presence even under siege and imminent settler colonial violence. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 205, 135) calls these material and photographic spaces ‘counter spaces’ of ‘the past, of things and acts and rituals remembered, but they are also places of refuge that secure a future’ that defies the bulldozers and predatory Apartheid legal system in order to secure the permanence of Palestinian home. Alaa’s image, as dense as it is, tells us something very simple: From the River to the Sea, Palestine is present in the present, past and future. It is inevitable. No amount of settler colonialism, state criminality, bombings, detentions, expulsions, land confiscations, and home demolitions can change that.

Notes

1 I experienced the story of the Hannoun family, in the audience of Sharihan Hannoun, who relayed how her family's tragic and heroic story at ‘Testimonies from Jerusalem,’ Cafe Palestine, UK-Palestine Mental Health Network, June 26, 2021. Also see, Evicted Jerusalemites Present their Case in Washington’, Wafa News Agency (English), November 2, 2009; found at https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/108238. As Mohammed El-Kurd, perhaps the most visible activist-resident of Sheikh Jarrah notes that the neighborhood has been in the crosshairs of militant Zionist settlers, backed by well-funded activist organizations, the Israeli judicial system, the Israeli government and the Israeli Occupation Army. Mohammed El-Kurd, ‘If they Steal Sheikh Jarrah’, Mada Masr, Feb. 16, 2021; found at https://www.madamasr.com/en/2021/02/16/opinion/u/if-they-steal-sheikh-jarrah/


3 The image appears on the Khalidi Library webpage, where all the members are identified. See Khalidi Library, http://www.khalidilibrary.org/openinge.html

References


Stephen Sheehi
William & Mary, Virginia, USA, July 8th, 2021 (spsheehi@wm.edu)
I Witness Silwan - Who Is Watching Whom?

The idea of de-colonization as an intervention in the field of vision is not only about physical occupation.

How do you own something through vision? How do you participate in the landscape through vision?

Eyal Weizman, Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, Bayt Sahur

‘I Witness Silwan’ is an international public-art intervention that challenges the ‘colonial gaze’ in East Jerusalem. ‘I Witness Silwan’ supports Silwan’s longstanding fight against dispossession with large-scale murals of watchful eyes. Hundreds of Palestinians in Silwan and East Jerusalem have been dispossessed, and thousands more are facing expulsion. The eyes depicted belong to local heroes, international leaders, philosophers, activists, revolutionaries, writers, and artists. Facing the Old City, the eyes are visible from miles away, including from Israeli tourist centers.

‘I Witness Silwan’ is organized by the Jerusalem-based Madaa-Silwan Creative Center and US-based Art Forces, and is partially funded by contributions from the Sam Mazza Foundation, Left Tilt Foundation, Middle East Children’s Alliance, and the Greenberg Foundation. The project emphasizes transnational solidarity and makes similar struggles worldwide visible.

A growing series of eyes are nestled in the hillside of Batn al Hawa, Silwan, East Jerusalem. The eyes are visible from Wadi Hilweh across the valley, the Old City and Israeli tourist sites. Featured above are the eyes of Rachel Corrie, Alex Nieto, John Berger, Bai Bibiyaon, Hamed Moussa, Nihad Siyam, Che Guevara, and Community Members. The eyes are mixed media on concrete and stucco. Photo: Kobi Wolf for Art Forces.
Statement from Zuheir al Rajabi, community leader and director of Madaa-Silwan Creative Center, Batn al Hawa Branch:

We try to keep our children away from the violence and try to give them a normal life despite our situation. We have built a center here, the Madaa-Silwan Creative Center so that the children will not be at risk of arrest. The activities at the Madaa-Silwan Creative Center create for the children a sense of culture. We educate them about their rights and teach how to defend their rights, their fate, and their lives.

Statements from children of Batn al-Hawa, Silwan:

- Peace be upon you. We think that the murals made Silwan really, really beautiful.
- The murals gave us a lot more space to have fun.
- Silwan is a beautiful place and is more beautiful with the drawings – Silwan is beautiful and will not be shaken by anything!
- The murals show that Silwan is a beautiful place full of creativity.
Um Nasser paints a mural on her family home. Photo: Laura Rosner for Art Forces.

Batn al Hawa youth painting ‘We Love Silwan’ in the stairwell leading up to the Madaa-Silwan Creative Center–Batn al Hawa Branch. Photo: Laura Rosner for Art Forces.
Um Nasser:

Um Nasser has lived in Batn al Hawa her entire life. She has been steadfast in her decade long struggle to stay in her home, which is now slated for imminent demolition. Um Nasser and her family painted flowers and eyes on the front and back of their house. The eyes on the back of the house can be seen across the valley.

Um Nasser said:

‘Batn al Hawa means everything to me. It is my life. The murals mean everything to me. They mean my existence and my resistance – my life, my house. I thank the organization from America that supports the murals because they are in solidarity with us, and they emphasized our existence by painting on our houses. I thank them and I love them because they drew my eyes and my granddaughter’s eyes on the house.’

Statement from Bayan Rajabi, Um Nasser’s Granddaughter:

We all gathered and painted together. The murals are pretty to look at, they give the buildings a refreshing feeling.

This will always be our neighborhood.
In this neighborhood you see many settlers, and arrests and assaults. My brother who is 16 has been arrested several times. The soldiers used to break into our house and break everything in it and throw our belongings on the ground and beat us. They arrested my mother and my brother and my cousin more than once. There is this one time when they sneaked in on my cousin while he was all alone in his house, they put the gun to his head, and they arrested him. The settlers and the soldiers threaten to take over the houses and to occupy the whole neighborhood and make it a neighborhood for the Jews.

Statement from Zuheir Rajabi:

We are here in Batn al Hawa where we hung a banner of the eyes of George Floyd who was killed because of racism in the United States of America. We condemn such racist acts. Our situation is similar, here in Palestine and in Jerusalem in particular. Batn al Hawa is facing racism in many forms. The Israeli settlers are trying to take control of the houses and expel the residents. We condemn this.

Statement from Palestinian American artist John Halaka, who contributed the image of Hamed Moussa:

Hamed Moussa (circa 1909–2013) was a farmer from Dayr El Assad, a village in the Akka district of Palestine. Hamed Mousa experienced and witnessed the first phase of the Nakba, in 1948. He, along with all the members of his community, were marched out of their village at gunpoint and placed in an Israeli forced labor camp for over six months. His family’s agricultural lands were expropriated. His large image, along with the images of others that have been installed on the side of buildings in Silwan, stand as sentinels watching over the community, and as witnesses to the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Jerusalem.

We are all witnesses to the forced displacement of Palestinians from their homes and homeland. We are all witnesses to the dehumanization of Palestinians by Israel’s settler colonial enterprise. We are all witnesses to an ongoing cultural genocide of Palestinians. Yet so few of us dare to speak. So few of us dare to act. ‘I Witness Silwan’ is a courageous act of creative cultural resistance that declares to occupiers ‘we are watching you. The whole world is watching you.’
Jadallah Rajabi, co-director of the Madaa Creative Center-Batn al Hawa Branch stated:

As for the murals project ... I think it has added a lot to Silwan, and also added a lot to the children – they are living through all of this frustration and suffering because of the settler’s presence. The project has changed the children’s lives and changed their way of thinking in this neighborhood. It has given them a new level of awareness.
John Berger was an art critic, painter, and writer. His writing has shaped how many individuals see, analyze, and try to remake their world. Berger wrote frequently about Palestine in his late work, such as in ‘A Place Weeping’:

A few days after our return from what was thought of, until recently, as the future state of Palestine, and which is now the world's largest prison (Gaza) and the world's largest waiting room (Cis-Jordan), I had a dream.

I was alone, standing, stripped to the waist, in a sandstone desert. Eventually somebody else's hand scooped up some dusty soil from the ground and threw it at my chest. It was a considerate rather than an aggressive act. The soil or gravel changed, before it touched me, into torn pieces of cloth, probably cotton, which wrapped themselves around my torso. Then these tattered rags changed again and became words, phrases. Written not by me but by the place.

Remembering this dream, the invented word landswept came to my mind. Repeatedly. Landswept describes a place or places where everything, both material and immaterial, has been brushed aside, purloined, swept away, blown down, irrigated off, everything except the touchable earth.
Rachel Corrie was a student from Olympia, Washington who was killed in Gaza in 2003, run over twice by a D9 bulldozer, driven by an Israeli soldier. After she died Rachel’s parents initiated the Rachel Corrie Foundation for Peace & Justice to continue Rachel’s vision for Palestinian liberation and justice for all.

Rachel Corrie stated:

‘Nothing could have prepared me for the reality of the situation here. You just can’t imagine it unless you see it. And even then, your experience is not at all the reality: what with the difficulties the Israeli army would face if they shot an unarmed US citizen, the fact that I have money to buy water when the army destroys wells, and of course, the fact that I have the option to leave. I am allowed to see the ocean.’

Iyad al Halak was killed by Israeli border police at Lions Gate checkpoint in the Old City on May 30, 2020. Mr. Halak and his teacher had been walking to Elwyn El Quds center, which provides services for children and adults with disabilities.
Alex Nieto, an American citizen, was killed by police officers in San Francisco, California in 2014.

‘Nieto died because a series of white men saw him as a menacing intruder in the place he had spent his whole life.’ Rebecca Solnit

Khalid Zir, whose property in Silwan has been demolished several times stated:

These people have complete impunity, no accountability from the US, Europe or anyone. On the contrary, these countries assist the Zionists in the violence towards us, whether with arms, planes, tanks, money... so I say we need solidarity with the oppressed, regardless of people’s religion, race, what country they’re from.
Sahar Abassi, Deputy Director of Madaa Creative Center stated:

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

References


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Two Red Poppies, Possibly More

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

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

The public nature of the mural’s creation also underscores creative organizing methods that attempt to politicize the public sphere through collective action in urban spaces and link nodes of the Palestinian diaspora, given the San Francisco Bay Area is home to a Palestinian community spanning at least three generations. It was heartening to think that the mural in the Mission would
remain after the protest was over, a tangible sign of persistent Palestinian resistance, including among a younger generation of Palestinians in the diaspora, and of struggles linking local and global politics.

The visual imprint of Palestinian freedom struggles on the surface of the street itself is politically significant given the exceptional censorship of the Palestine Question in the US media, educational, and even liberal-left activist spheres, including censorship and vandalism of Palestine solidarity murals in the Mission. This literal erasure of visual solidarity is countered by transnational
and cross-racial solidarity linking different communities struggling with displacement, border violence, and policing, highlighted in recent years by Palestinian-Latinx protests of Trump’s immigration policies and of US and Israeli border walls and the Black Lives Matter movement’s solidarity with Palestinians resisting Israeli state violence and policing.

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

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New terrains of struggle

Eyal Weizman (EW): The recent global attention on the Palestine-Israel conflict has had an impact on both the ground in Palestine and around the world.

The death and destruction May 2021 brought on Palestinian communities was heartbreaking, but it was an amazing moment in which the struggle in Palestine brought together in a very clear way all Palestinians that had been cut apart by the different kinds of administrative barriers (from the ideological to the literal) that divide Palestine. It erupted in Jaffa, in Jerusalem, in Lydd, Haifa, Gaza, and for Palestinians in the diaspora.

This moment revived the feelings of the eruption of the pervious May, 2020, with the murder of George Floyd in the US, and of how the Black Lives Matter movement ignited a global solidarity with Black-led liberation struggle. Some of that got entangled with what happened in Palestine. This combined with the long-term work that’s been done on the ground for a decade by Palestinian groups that has foregrounded ‘Apartheid’ as the legal and ethical framework for understanding life under Israeli domination in Palestine, and as a way of energizing the anti-racist movement. It was this that was later picked up by Israeli human rights groups such as Yesh Din, and later B’Tselem, and then by Human Rights Watch. That groundwork coming from legal and human rights groups gives all of us now a framework for understanding the Israeli-Palestine conflict as a settler colonial process; whether that’s historically (in terms of the way in which Palestinians were treated by Israeli regimes in ’48, in ’67 as a part of a ‘Jewish Supremacy’ project, an Apartheid) or in our own present moment (where we are finally seeing the impact of the slow process of language’s incredible transformation, seeing for instance this use of ‘Apartheid’ employed widely, even in mainstream media platforms such as The New York Times).

Today, there is a crystallising in the work of different sectors: the arts and culture sectors; Decolonize This Place, our friends and comrades who we support, bringing that struggle to MoMA, having brought it to The Whitney; on the human rights level; on the journalistic level; on an evidentiary level, actually collecting evidence of violations, as we do with Forensic Architecture, to show what is taking place, and what are the meanings and consequences of the Israeli regime’s attacks.

Shourideh C. Molavi (SM): May 2021, it was an historic moment in that Palestinians from across the divided borders were organising, and not along sectarian lines. 48-Palestinians blocked the roads to make a statement; they used all the institutions to which they had access. In the West Bank, there were regular types of protest. In Jerusalem there were blockades. And in Gaza, you had marches to the border, which is what we saw in the past. And the Israeli military response, it also reflected the intensities that we saw: in Gaza they bombed; in Jerusalem they tear-gassed, used stun grenades, and so on.
The significance of what happened in May was of course that Palestinians were organising fully; but also it was the global response. We saw tens of thousands out on marches, sometimes one hundred thousand; on one day there were in total a million and a half people around the world protesting. These are Iraq War numbers, these are not the numbers that we’re used to seeing, yet it was another war in Gaza that mobilised everyone. There was something different about this, and everybody felt it. The question now is: what happens after, and whether momentum can be built across the dividing borders of Palestine.

EW: Around this time, Forensic Architecture was working on an exhibition at The Whitworth Art Gallery, part of the University of Manchester, entitled ‘Cloud Studies’ (https://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/upcomingexhibitions/cloudstudies-mif/). At that time, the independent galleries in London were putting up statements in solidarity with Palestine, just like last year when they put up statements of support with the Black liberation struggle. The big public sector galleries like Tate and The Hayward did not. We asked the Whitworth if they would, and they did put up a statement, but a lobbying group called UK Lawyers for Israel complained to the University, and the University removed that statement from their Instagram account.

We started the exhibition with a very strongly worded statement about Palestine; and then continued with a project called ‘Cloud Studies’ that is about the limits of forensics. (Figure 1)

The limits of forensics? Well, with Forensic Architecture we continuously employ techniques and technologies to collect and preserve evidence, and investigate cases with them; and we also reflect on the conditions, on the limitations, on the social and political meanings of the evidence. The dictum of forensics is: every contact leaves a trace; you find the trace, you construct the event from it.

And yet, continuously we’ve been coming across a problem of and for forensics. It is a form of airborne violence that was based on toxic clouds. We realised that we’d worked a lot on clouds over the years; at the Whitney Museum of American Art for instance we worked on tear gas, and participated in the action that led to the removal from the Board of Warren B. Kanders, who owns Safariland, a manufacturer of law enforcement and military supplies, including tear-gas grenades that had reportedly been used against migrants at the United States-Mexico border.

Shourideh was working on herbicidal clouds that were being sprayed from airplanes, mobilising the wind, resulting in the destruction of Palestinian crops (https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/herbicidal-warfare-in-gaza).

We were working on chemical strikes in Syria. We were working on the smoke in Grenfell Tower. We were working on forest fires, and on continental scale point clouds data, and we began to realise that clouds were a different kind of object, they were objects that didn’t leave a trace, that were very hard to map, that were very hard to... evidence.
Clouds, they are an optical blur, they are an epistemological blur, we wanted to think how we could see them from the inside out, to see from tear gas, you have a blurred vision, the pain goes through our eyes, though our nose, it’s a very immersive experience; chemical warfare even more so.
So, we started our exhibition at The Whitworth with the testimony of a Palestinian man, made in the recent sequence (in the last decade and a half, let’s say) of those bombings in Gaza by Israeli regimes. The man’s house was evaporated, and he said to me: ‘I’m breathing in my house’. His house had turned from solid to gas; from architecture, from something object-like to something that is more environment-like, into a condition. Those clouds, they are also like photographic milieu, because they refract the light in a particular way, holding light and information in a particular way.

Cloud studies moved to different places in the world, and ended with an investigation of lead by Imani Jacqueline Brown from Louisiana (https://forensic-architecture.org/about/team/member/imani-jacqueline-brown) on the areas of plantations along the Mississippi, that are now part of the petrochemical industry, and the search for mass graves of the formerly enslaved in order to assist those who are wanting to put an end to the sale of that further land for industrial purposes.

The solidarity statement with Palestine we wrote was taken off The Whitworth’s Instagram account. We put it up at the entrance to the exhibition, and right now we are locking horns with the University who are claiming that words such as apartheid settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing which we used are in violation of the public sector equality duty. Again, in fact, because it’s not the first time: they’d previously targeted us during out Turner Prize exhibition (2018) at Tate, on a case where we exposed the murder and cover up in Israel of a Bedouin policeman called Yakub Abu al-Kiyan. (https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/killing-in-umm-al-hiran). By the way, later the Israeli government apologised and acknowledged that the Bedouin policeman wasn’t in fact a terrorist!

One thing is to speak of Palestine, another is to say that the question of Palestine is saturating all levels of politics and culture, especially in this country, and even an exhibition becomes a catalyst for this.

**SM:** It’s worth saying that with Forensic Architecture’s investigation into the extrajudicial execution of Ahmad Erekat in Palestine in 2020 (https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-extrajudicial-execution-of-ahmad-erekat), comes a new generation of Palestinian investigators and practitioners. With our colleagues at Al-Haq, a legal centre in Ramallah, we’ve established a Forensic Architecture sub unit within Al-Haq. This will be composed of Palestinian lawyers, architects, designers, practitioners, using Forensic Architecture’s methods, from a Palestinian perspective, to investigate Israeli state crimes, and the crimes of the Palestinian Authority. We’re excited by this new generation of practitioners, using FA’s methods, and pushing FA’s methods beyond their limits to suit the Palestinian context. This is a new chapter, which gives hope, if you want to talk about hope.

So there is cause for optimism here. For hope, even. We have hope for anti-colonial struggle and the dismantling of racialized systems of inequality in Palestine.
What we see with each Israeli incursion is the divide between what’s happening in Palestine and what’s happening outside in pro-Palestine movements. There’s a real distinction. So, in Palestine in May there was hope and unity and anger, and people were united in their anger and their frustration. Outside, though, there were very few sentiments of hope, because people outside were so disconnected. They were even surprised when I said that people in Gaza are celebrating. Even though they’re suffering, they were also saying that this was a moment of unity and strength, and not just of Palestinians as victims, again, as targets, again, and only as targets. In May, there was a kind of empowerment, the country mobilised. And then people outside responded to it. There was focus in the country, and there was focus outside of the country; even in the way that chants were moving between the inside and the outside, there was a real call-and-response quality to it: from Palestine to Toronto. From Palestine to Berlin. From Palestine to Stockholm. From Palestine to London. And back again.

Look, in Palestine, what we have are three different systems of oppression: we have a settler colonial project; we have apartheid systems, political and legal; and then we have occupation, which is the tool that spreads apartheid from ’48 to ’67. So, if you’re asking about hope, about wanting things to change, about the possibility of change? It’s not just an end to the occupation. It’s not just that one has to change the apartheid structures that prevent Palestinian families from uniting, even when Israeli families can enjoy freedom of movement, can go vote, can see one another, even during a pandemic. What has to be confronted is that settler-colonial substructure and logic.

Yes, so, even when there are so-called ‘two state’ solutions, when there’s a ‘binational’ solution, and so on, unless you confront Jewish privilege, legally entrenched Jewish privilege, within the country as a single geographic unit, then you’re not really addressing the issue. That is what’s hopeful, because Palestinians from across these enclaves that Israeli regimes have created across 70 plus years came really close to saying exactly that: as a citizen, I confront the state. As a refugee, I confront the state. As a resident, I confront the state.

There’s something happening. May was the beginning of something, and it’s ongoing.

Note
1. This contribution is an edited transcript of an interview with Eyal Weizman and Shourideh C. Molavi conducted by the JVC Editorial Collective on 10th August 2021.

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