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Locating Nonviolence: the people, the past and resistance in Palestinian political activism

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an ethnographic investigation of political culture and contemporary activism in Palestine. I illustrate the entangled processes that enabled the discourse of nonviolence to flourish in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) in the last ten years. I particularly explore the refashioning of the Palestinian Authority under the banner of a ‘state’ through intensive structural reforms that emphasize ‘security’ as a marker of political modernity and the dominant liberal hegemonic understanding of morality through a shifting global political context that impacts perceptions on political violence. In addition, the phenomenon of NGO-ization in the OPTs has functioned as a force of repoliticization through the construction of a new paradigm of ‘nonviolence’ to narrate the Palestinian history of struggle.

This study also addresses perceptions and practices of resistance that arise in response to the colonial modalities of control, analyzing the fusion of discursive processes that produced a new taxonomy of society under colonial control and the structural transformations of the material conditions of society. I ethnographically demonstrate how contemporary confrontation politics in the OPTs function in opposition to the logic of settler colonialism, where the primary focus of colonial subjugation is located in the land, on the body, and in political consciousness. Confrontational politics mobilizes around these same sites through the notion of dignity and the primacy of the land. I contextualize these
discussions by examining representations of armed struggle that still prevail within local activism in the OPTs, particular through resistance song and literature, in connection to the history of the Palestinian national imaginary and the contemporary neoliberal economy and process of state-formation.
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Table of contents

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter One: State, Hegemony and Re-Signification.................................................21

Chapter Two: Seeking Popular Participation: Nostalgia, Heroism, and the People…..49

Chapter Three: Fragmented Resistance ......................................................................94

Chapter Four: The Echo of Body and Arms...............................................................121

Postscript: Reflection on Nonviolence .........................................................................140

Bibliography .............................................................................................................147
Introduction

[The intellectual is] someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas, or ready-made clichés, or the smooth, ever-so-accommodating confirmations of what the powerful or conventional have to say.

(Edward Said, Representations of the Intellectual)

In January 2013, the Palestinian Center for Policy Research & Strategic Studies – Masarat, a major Palestinian research institute, held its annual conference in Ramallah. During a talk given by an academic and official representative of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the speaker said: “We Palestinians know our goals, but we disagree on the best way to achieve them. Our discussion should focus on the means of resistance, not the goals. This is why we should only use popular nonviolence resistance.” During the Q&A session, many questioned whether “our goals” were in fact clear. Other attendees questioned the possibility of differentiating between means and goals; while others connected the notion of resistance to a larger understanding of the sociopolitical context of colonialism. This debate has been a refrain throughout my fieldwork in the West Bank between 2009 and 2011 and continues to be heard today. What is resistance? Resistance against what? How do we resist? Who can resist?

In this dissertation, I conceptualize the notion of resistance not merely as a direct confrontation with the structure of domination—colonized against colonizer, the powerless against power—but as a process where material and discursive elements shape the act of resistance and, perhaps more importantly, the
meaning and signification of resistance. In other words, in an unevenly globalized world, local acts of resistance cannot only be understood through a binary lens but are often framed and shaped by a network of powers.

Arguing that the core elements of resistance revolves around action and opposition to a particular domination structure, Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L Einwohner provide a typology of the ways the notion of resistance has been conceptualized and studied by social scientists. These include a physical and material lens that focuses on bodies and objects in a protest action or within everyday forms of resistance, symbolic forms of resistance, the scale of resistance (individual or collective), the direction and goals of resistance (such as achieving change), and the politics and identity of resistance (new social movements, for example). This typology is useful in conceptualizing what is described as active resistance under settler colonialism in Palestine. Nevertheless, what is described as active resistance again locates action and opposition in the people who are subject to domination. My point is that “the people” cannot be read as ethnologically isolated or homogeneous. Neither is the mode of domination even or temporally consistent. To understand acts of resistance in a context where local, regional, and international factors play a constitutive role, in addition to the temporal depth of the culturally loaded struggle, the mode of colonial domination must be conceptualized.

1 Hollander and Einwohner 2004.
In her edited book *Living Palestine: Family, Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation*, Palestinian sociologist Lisa Taraki urged researchers to rethink the notion of “prolonged occupation” as “prolonged war.” The emphasis here is on Palestinians being subject to war over a century of colonization, a war that takes on different intensities at different historical moments. Framing what Palestinians endure as prolonged war is comparable to the logic that governs settler colonialism. As Patrick Wolfe argues, settler colonialism is genocidal. However, he continues, as the liquidation of the natives depends “on the historical conjuncture, assimilation can be a more effective mode of elimination than conventional forms of killing, since it does not involve such a disruptive affront to the rule of law that is ideologically central to the cohesion of settler society.” The process of assimilation, as Elizabeth A. Povinelli points out, takes place in a state of late liberalism manifested in neoliberal economics and multiculturalism. However, in the case of Palestine, the prolonged war of settler colonialism has manifested itself materially and culturally through a process of visibility/invisibility that does not recognize the Palestinians as part of the make-up of society. The settler colonial establishment of the state of Israel’s

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2 Taraki 2006.

3 Taraki’s use of “war” here must not be misread as if it is taking place between two equal parties or two peoples, but rather is meant to stress that Palestinians are subject to war by the Israeli colonial project.

4 Wolfe 2006.

5 Ibid.

6 Povinelli 2002.
multiculturalism usually refers to assimilation of non-European Jews. When it comes to Palestinians as a nation, they are always viewed as an existential threat, whether in the state of Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories (OPTs), or the diaspora.

On the one hand, Israel’s colonial control makes Palestinians visible to the Israeli colonial apparatus and visible to international aid and humanitarian interventions. On the other hand, Palestinians are denied the collective right of self-determination, in other words, the nation is made invisible. Those Palestinians who remained on their lands in 1948 when the state of Israel was declared are discursively covered over by the category of “Israeli-Arab,” as those in the diaspora are denied the right of return and those living in the OPTs are enclavized away behind literal concrete walls. The idea of a “colonial geography” is the deliberate fragmentation of the Palestinian social body temporally and socially through a settler colonial process that divides Palestinians into three different groups with different legal characterization. This is manifested symbolically with the names ’48 (Palestinian lands occupied by Zionists in 1948, upon which the state of Israel was declared), ’67 (Palestinian lands Israel occupied in 1967), and the diaspora, and spatially through constant reconfiguration of the

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8 Taraki 2008.
9 Tabar and Alazzeh 2014.
10 The Palestinian lands that Israel occupied in 1967 are referred to as the occupied Palestinian territories (OPTs) in the dissertation.
land of Palestine by bantustanizing Palestinians into territorially fragmented areas. In this way, Israel recognizes them as Palestinians while denying them nationhood or political rights. In such complexity of domination and fragmentation, resistance also becomes fragmented.

In such a colonial control mechanism, the notion of resistance becomes a wide category that can include the very existence of Palestinians, daily practices, cultural and signifying performances, and acts of confrontation. Scholarly work in the last ten years on the notion of resistance in Palestine has focused attention on daily practices or on militant forms of resistance. For instance, the suspension of daily life during the first intifada was considered an act of resistance. “Getting by” checkpoints and other obstacles put in place by the Israeli occupation and even “getting there” (such as to one’s workplace) have become part of the rhetoric and category of resistance, as have household and community economic practices. In this dissertation, I focus on a practice of resistance that is labeled “nonviolence,” which is semi-organized and framed in a binary opposition to armed struggle. As my research focus is on the practice and

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11 Dakak 1989. Mansour 1984. The notion of sumoud (steadfastness) was prominent in Palestinian political culture after the 1967 occupation, in order to support Palestinians under occupation to stay on their land. It arose from the understanding of settler colonialism to eliminate the colonized people. Scholars differentiate between static sumoud and resistance sumoud; the first aims to keep the people on their land, and the second works to establish a social and economic base that would support mass participation in the resistance.


13 Allen 2008.

14 Hammami 2004.

discourse of nonviolence in the OPTs, studying the notion of nonviolence allows for a deeper understanding of contemporary Palestinian political culture under Israeli occupation and the fragmentation and institutionalization of resistance.

**The Assemblage of Nonviolence**

The label of “nonviolence” has become a major discursive category and dominant signifier in any discussion on resistance in the West Bank since 2006. This label came to exist although it was hardly used throughout the history of the Palestinian national narrative, despite the fact that Palestinians practiced numerous forms of unarmed civil resistance to protest Israeli colonial policies throughout the decades. In this dissertation, I identify multiple components that play in the making of the category of nonviolence. These include: media discourse, NGOization of political activism, re-signification of past experiences of resistance (primarily the first intifada), refashioning of the PA to become a ‘state,’ international interventions mainly by the United States and European Union, and local activism that has adopted this discursive category. Nonviolence has become industry-like through the intertwining of these components.

This industry reproduces itself by playing on Western Orientalist and essentialist imaginaries of Arab-Muslim-Palestinian culture represented as violent. Most of the rhetoric produced around nonviolence is therefore directed toward ‘international’ (a category that constantly evokes Western Europeans and

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16 Marcus and Saka 2006. I use the term “assemblage” as a structure-like context that produces a certain prominent values and meanings.
North Americans) audiences. The marketing of nonviolence is based on producing moral sympathy, not political solidarity. This industry is also profitable for international and local NGOs that advocate for Palestinians’ use of nonviolence. The role of the PA in this profit-making is based on gaining political legitimacy internationally by representing itself as having a monopoly on using violence and disciplining its subjects by preventing the use of arms as it simultaneously claims a resistance position before the local population.

The actors taken part in the industry nonviolence tend to fall into three categories: PA bureaucracy members (mainly of the Ministry of Settlement and Apartheid Wall Affairs), international and local NGO workers, and local youth engaged in organizing protests against Israeli colonial policies. These three groups together created the new category in the Palestinian lexicon of ‘the activist’ (nashit). Historically, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) faction members were called fida’i (the one who sacrifices) and munadil (the one who struggles), shabab (youth) dominated in the first intifada, and muqawim (the one who resists) dominated in the second intifada. The term ‘activist’ most often refers to those involved in protests against the building of Israel’s Wall and settlements on Palestinian lands. Following the social revolts in the Arab world in 2011, a few local youth groups that formed to protest both PA and Israeli policies have also been described as activist. As the term itself is very fluid as a category, it also includes any one who is involved in a semi-organized form of protest, such as in support of prisoners.
Although media and scholarly work on confrontational protests by Palestinians against Israeli colonial policies has focused on its local nature, in this dissertation I aim to widen the lens in order to contextualize nonviolence and resistance within broader Palestinian national politics and international interventions. In contrast to the predominantly positive connotations of nonviolence in many approaches, I look at nonviolence as an industry without denying the ethical and political stances of many actors involved. This broader and more critical framework offers a complex analysis of the heterogeneous network of actors, cultural signs, and history of resistance.

**Locating the Terrain**

Equipped with theoretical and methodological knowledge of anthropology and a solid understanding of multi-disciplinary scholarly work on Palestine and the Palestinians in Arabic and English, I began my fieldwork with the following two questions: “What has made the concept of nonviolent resistance so prevalent in the West Bank today?” and “What are the cultural specificities of nonviolent practice by Palestinians?” The idea for my research arose from an interaction with an old friend I first met at Bethlehem University in 1996. He was a bit older than the students in the class, and I learned later that he

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17 In the field of postcolonial studies, debate continues on the use of the hyphen between post and colonial. I therefore asked myself what would be the most accurate way to write nonviolence/nonviolence in the case of Palestine. The OED (online) entry makes use of a hyphen and the primary meaning given is: “avoidance of the use of violence, esp. as a principle.” The separation between the words indicates the “non” as a disappearance and vanishing of violence. In the dissertation, I choose to write the word nonviolence without the hyphen, in order to indicate nonviolence as a phenomenon in Palestine, rather than the negation of an act of violence. The phenomenon of nonviolence, I argue, is an industry of global and local construction.
had been imprisoned by Israel for six years for throwing a Molotov cocktail at an army jeep in 1989, which caused no injuries.

When I met Raed\textsuperscript{18} in the mid-1990s, the hope for a ‘peace settlement’ in Palestine was on the rise. Bethlehem University received many visiting delegations from around the world, and I was often invited to host the student delegations because I was active in student life on campus. During an American university’s student delegation, one delegate asked Raed his political opinion on the peace process. With full confidence, he responded by pointing to a rope necklace he wore that held a bullet as a pendant. As the American delegate showed lack of understanding, I intervened to explain that many Palestinians, such as Raed, still believed that armed struggle and not negotiations was the only means to fight colonialism. The more I got to know Raed, the more I heard him glorify armed struggle and show disdain for other forms of political activism.

In 2008, while conducting my graduate work in the U.S., I received an email from Raed that was sent to a number of Palestinians and internationals, calling for a nonviolent demonstration against the Wall. My surprise at the sudden change in belief from armed struggle to nonviolent resistance was the catalyst for my project. As I knew Raed to be a committed student, friend, and political activist who thought through his ideas, I took the shift in belief seriously. To begin to understand Raed’s turn to nonviolence as a political strategy, I began to read the plethora of journalistic accounts on nonviolence in Palestine, which used

\textsuperscript{18} I am using an alternative name to respect the privacy of individuals. The rest of the dissertation does not make reference to individuals but rather uses descriptive terms, such as “activist” or “scholar” to refer to personal interviewees.
glorifying language to describe courageous Palestinians who have adopted nonviolence as a means of struggle. The contradictory nature of the two strategies—armed and nonviolent resistance—has come to dominate how the Palestinian national struggle is discussed, making my research worthy of note.

In the beginning of my field research in the West Bank in 2009 as I was trying to map the field, meeting with activists, NGO workers, going to demonstrations, and attending lectures and conferences, I was attracted to the notion of nonviolence, regarding it as a practice in Palestine. There was a feeling that a grassroots movement was emerging to challenge and find a way out of the status quo. The discourse and appearance of nonviolent resistance practices was persuasive.

One of my initial interviews was with the head of a local NGO in Bethlehem that describes itself as a leading institution in promoting nonviolence in Palestine. The NGO specifically represents itself as a faith-based organization comprised of Palestinian Christian and Muslim nonviolent advocates and some international volunteers. As I entered the meeting room of the NGO, the big hall was fashioned as if a Bedouin tent with mattresses low to the ground in the style of an Arab Bedouin traditional sitting space. The additional element of imitation Orientalist paintings on the walls made it clear to whom these representations were directed. The NGO was targeting Western, non-specialists of the Arab world by capitalizing on stereotypical images produced in the West. As I introduced myself and my research project, the head of the NGO offered me office space and
partial employment in the NGO. He believed that the NGO could benefit from my Western academic training and my presence as an ‘expert’ on nonviolence.

George Marcus’s article on the uses of complicity in anthropological fieldwork immediately came to my mind.\(^\text{19}\) If I wanted to be complicit, I thought, it would not be with an NGO but with the local activists on the ground protesting against the colonial authorities. Also of import to me in this meeting was the notion of expertise, as I was quickly named an expert and in connection with nonviolence, a concept that I had not given much critical thought to at that time.

After observing protest demonstrations organized in different localities in the West Bank, I attended one of the major events of nonviolent advocates in Palestine. It was an annual conference, held since 2006, on grassroots popular struggle\(^\text{20}\) that takes place in one of the villages where weekly demonstrations occur in direct protest of the building of the Wall.\(^\text{21}\) The conference was held in

\(^{19}\) George Marcus identifies two forms of complicity in the classical Mise-en-Scene of anthropological fieldwork, the first of Clifford Geertz where complicity takes place through engagement of “evil-doing” with a community to establish a position of “insideness,” which is essential to fieldwork; and the second of Michelle Rosaldo in which complicity occurs with the broader context of colonialism. Being critical of the NGO-ization process of Palestinian political activism, I felt I would be complicit with the colonial/neocolonial context, and preferred the complicity of Geertz’s cockfight story. Marcus 1998.

\(^{20}\) Of note is the different terminology used for the title: In Arabic, the title reads: “The 4\(^{th}\) Bil’in International Conference on Popular Struggle,” and in English: “The 4\(^{th}\) Bil’in International Conference on Popular Nonviolent Resistance.”

\(^{21}\) According to the Stop the Wall Campaign: “The Wall’s total length will be some 810 km . . . The Wall has destroyed a large amount of Palestinian farmland and usurped water supplies, including the biggest aquifer in the West Bank. 78 Palestinian villages and communities with a total population of 266,442 will be isolated as follows: Villages surrounded by Wall, settlements and settler roads - 257,265 Palestinians; Villages isolated between Wall and Green Line - 8,557 Palestinians; Villages isolated and residents threatened with expulsion - 6,314 Palestinians. The Occupation has created agricultural “gates” in the Wall; these do not provide any guarantee that farmers will have access to their lands but instead strengthen Israel’s strangling system of permits and checkpoints where Palestinians are beaten, detained, shot at and humiliated. In total, there are: 34 fortified checkpoints - 3 main terminals, 9 commercial terminals, and 22 terminals for cars and
the yard of the village’s public school. Approximately one hundred white, plastic chairs were laid out. Attendees were predominantly internationals and Israeli solidarity activists. The Palestinians who were present included some members from the village, many of whom worked the tables that sold small handmade embroideries or small refreshments. There was also some non-village Palestinian NGO workers and representatives from political parties. The contradiction between the title of the conference as “popular struggle” and those present at the conference was eye-opening for me, as I began to question the discourse and notion of popular resistance on the ground in Palestine today. As the majority of speakers emphasized nonviolence rather than addressing the core issue of how to dismantle the Wall, I also began to develop a critical mindset toward the usage of the term nonviolence.22

A few weeks later in a gathering among Palestinian academics in a middle-class restaurant in Ramallah, the concept of nonviolence was put into question for me even further. As we were enjoying German beer and fried onion rings, I mentioned my topic of research to get feedback. One of the academics workers that control all Palestinian movement. 44 tunnels will connect 22 small ghettos inside 3 main ghettos. 634 checkpoints or other military obstructions including trenches, roadblocks, metal gates under Occupation control. 1,661 km of settler roads connect settlements and settlement blocs and complement the Wall system. [http://www.stopthewall.org/the-wall](http://www.stopthewall.org/the-wall)[ last accessed, October 2, 2013].

22 I grew up in Palestine, finished my undergraduate and MA in local universities, was active in the student movement and a part of political and academic circles in the West Bank, yet I rarely heard or read the term nonviolence used. The exception was Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian-American psychologist whose views had minor significance during the first Intifada, according to all those I met in the last three years of fieldwork. He was not taken seriously on the grassroots level. One cynical account I was told about Awad’s calls for nonviolence in the first Intifada is as follows: “One activist asks another about Mubarak Awad’s ideas on how to struggle. His response: every family should build ten rooms in their house so that the soldiers exhaust themselves while searching the house.”
commented that in a settler-colonial context where our physical existence is under threat by the colonial project, drinking beer here is a nonviolent act of resistance. Although it was spoken in a cynical way, it triggered the question of using the term “nonviolence” as a new frame of thinking on Palestine. The shift in thinking about my project from the enthusiasm for a new form of activism taking place to the questioning the language used in representing it became an essential component of my thinking through of the dissertation. At the same time, I started to question the notion of popularity.

Being visible as a researcher investigating protest activities taking place in the West Bank, especially in the relatively small academic world in Palestine, I received an invitation from a major research institute in the West Bank to speak at their annual conference. In my talk, I did not offer an analysis but rather framed my talk as a set of questions. “Why are certain protest activities called nonviolence? What are the conditions that produced such a discourse? How does such framing limit our understanding of events on the ground? Will this framing lead to a new political framework in Palestine?” Proceedings of the conference were published in a supplement to a local Palestinian newspaper, leading to more invitations for media appearances.

In being labeled an ‘expert’ and a university scholar, I was contacted to draft a substantial report by a research center at Birzeit University in cooperation

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23 As anthropologist Patrick Wolfe explains: “Settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base . . . settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.” Wolfe 2006.
with an international NGO that sponsors nonviolence activism. At the very first meeting with my research team, conflicted visions between the internationals, on one side, and local Palestinian activists, on the other, arose. The international NGO desired an advocacy-oriented report written in a language that would attract international sympathy, particularly from European political bodies and international organizations. Meanwhile, local activists envisioned a report that would evaluate their work and its effectiveness. These two approaches exemplify the gap between having a strategy of confrontation that learns from its mistakes to develop alternative models and an NGO approach that wanted a beautified account to enable more sympathy. Also of significance was the internationals’ insistence on using the term “nonviolence,” on placing import on legalistic channels, and on emphasizing the positive impact on gender dynamics. Knowing how much emphasis has been placed on gender-related topics by NGOs and donors in the Arab world in general, it was clear how nonviolence had become another ideological industry rather than a political strategy to achieve Palestinian basic rights.

Framing and terminology is not only an international concern. Palestinian NGOs use the same framework to attract international funding. In a one-day session of panels I co-organized on the notion of popular resistance that was sponsored by a local leading NGO research center, one of the invitees was a main leader in the Jenin refugee camp battle in 2002 during the Israeli invasion of
the West Bank. He also wrote his MA thesis on the experience of the fighters in the camp and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. The title for his session was “Jenin Camp as Popular Resistance,” as suggested by the NGO. He wasn’t pleased by the title and insisted on adding the phrase “armed struggle,” which opened a debate between the organizers and sponsors. The NGO did not accept the phrase, as it would directly affect their funding status. For the speaker from Jenin camp, the phrase “popular resistance” in the context of the panel session was equated with nonviolence, as he was very critical of the ways in which “popular resistance” had been discursively manipulated and capitalized on by the PA, NGOs and Western media.

In contrast, the most prestigious academic research center in Palestine, the Institute of Palestine Studies, asked me and a colleague to contribute a monograph providing a critical reading on Palestinian popular resistance under Israeli occupation. Although there is a recognized industry-like phenomenon of nonviolence in the OPTs today, the notion of popular resistance is taken seriously due to the seeking of a strategy for political struggle in Palestine that does not follow a binary of nonviolence/violence or negotiations versus armed struggle. The search for a strategy and political vision for confronting Israel’s settler-colonial project has produced a feeling of anxiety today in Palestine among

24 In 2002 the Israeli army invaded Jenin refugee camp, which resulted in nearly equal number of casualties of Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters (23 to 30). The battle is often evoked as an example of the ability of Palestinians to undertake effective armed struggle against the occupation.

25 In our first meeting with the research committee of IPS, I sensed that the expectation was for us to produce a policy-oriented monograph directed to the PA in order to create a dialogue. My colleague and myself refused the idea and insisted on producing an academic critical study.
political activists and intellectuals. While presenting the final draft of the monograph, the attendees could be categorized into two groups: an older generation who were nostalgic for the pre-Oslo era and the first intifada and youth who were seeking guidance for their political activism and answers on how to get out of the status quo.

Locating the Self

The quick shift from researcher to expert made it clear to me that an important component of contemporary Palestinian political culture is the feeling of being lost: lacking trust in the current political leadership and institutions, lacking a clear vision on how to confront the colonial modality of control, and lacking clarity on what decolonization in Palestine entails. My past experiences in political activism, my commitment to scholarly research and work, and the knowledge I have of life in Palestine locally and comparatively facilitated a sense of trust among those I encountered during my fieldwork. It is not a matter of cultural affinity, as some anthropologists would claim, but rather a commitment to the ethical-political question of Palestine and the rejection of hegemonic fixed frameworks that enabled this trust.

Being a Palestinian anthropologist conducting research on Palestine is like any other native under colonial control, being subject to arrest, harassment, or

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26 As a result of the monograph, I was contacted by a newly established local ‘think tank’ to draft and supervise a strategy paper on popular resistance for the Palestinians over the coming three years.
even being killed, witnessing and living through physical and structural violence. Of great significance for the researcher is also the limiting of one’s research and investigation tools, as I said to a colleague of mine: “the colonial geography of Palestine dominates the ‘field’ of study itself.” Restricting my field research to the West Bank, although I speak of ‘Palestinian political culture,’ is a result of the challenges and obstacles any Palestinian scholar faces. Having a West Bank ID card, I could not conduct any fieldwork in Jerusalem or Israel proper because I am denied permits to enter those areas due to ‘security’ reasons. Neither could I access Gaza as it is besieged and isolated even for West Bankers. In addition, the West Bank checkpoint system is always a serious obstacle for someone conducting research on politics.

Reflecting on the critique of the discourse and construction of the phenomenon of nonviolence in Palestine today has also raised anxiety for me. As I follow in detail the daily destruction and death from colonial wars, the war machine of tyrant regimes and imperial interventions in the Arab world, I question my act of critique. The following analysis is not meant as a dismissal of the claims for nonviolence nor an analysis in favor of any form of violence, but

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27 On several occasions I was very close to being injured in a demonstration. In one case in Bil’in village, a tear gas canister was shot by the Israeli army toward demonstrators, hitting a small wall and missing me by two feet. I recall that because of my anger, I picked up the tear gas container, without thinking, and threw it back at the soldiers. This, of course, caused a serious burn in my hand that took three weeks to heal. On other occasion near Ofer prison close to Ramallah, live bullets injured two of my students, who were standing only a few meters before me.

28 By “colonial geography,” I mean “the exercise of colonial power through spatial and temporal fragmentation of the native society in addition to horizontal (communities, localities, ethnic and religious divisions) and vertical fragmentation through class disparity enabled by dependency on the colonial economy.” Tabar and Alazze 2014.
rather a study to deconstruct the processes that produced the phenomenon of nonviolence. This research has also been a challenge to think through political culture and activism in Palestine outside the dominant paradigm.

**The Chapters**

In chapter one, I illustrate the entangled processes that enabled the discourse of nonviolence to flourish in the OPTs in the last ten years. I explore the refashioning of the Palestinian Authority under the banner of a ‘state’ through intensive structural reforms that emphasize ‘security’ as a marker of political modernity and the shaping of the economy through a neoliberal modality. Such refashioning is contextualized within the dominant liberal hegemonic understanding of morality and legality within a shifting global political context in a post-colonial/colonial order and state-system world. I show how the selective discursive use of legality and morality that is based on power disparity between state and non-state actors impacts perceptions on political violence. The chapter argues that the phenomenon of NGO-ization in the OPTs functions as a force of re-politicization through the construction of a new paradigm of nonviolence to narrate the Palestinian history of struggle.

Chapter two opens with the debate among Palestinian activists in the post-Oslo era regarding the notion of popular resistance informed by the great nostalgia for the experience of the first intifada (1987-93). Unlike common perceptions and arguments that portray the practice of popular resistance through the binary of violence and nonviolence, I argue that the question of mass-based
participation is the catalyst for nostalgia. This study addresses perceptions and practices of resistance that arise in response to colonial modalities of control, analyzing the fusion of discursive processes that produced a new taxonomy of society and structural transformations of the material conditions of society. I demonstrate the ways in which Palestinians understood their emancipatory role during the first intifada as comparable to a Gramscian-articulated war strategy.

In chapter three, I demonstrate how contemporary confrontation politics in the OPTs function in opposition to the logic of settler colonialism, where the primary focus of colonial subjugation is located in the land, on the body, and in political consciousness. I argue that confrontational politics mobilize around these same sites through the notion of dignity and the primacy of the land, the popular perception of the hunger strike as negating the body and the law’s ability to exercise its power thus challenging the state’s sovereignty, and the relationship between individual acts and collective political consciousness. I contextualize these fragmented sites within the dynamic of individualization and institutionalization of political activism.

In chapter four, I ethnographically explore the diffusion and evocation of the symbolism of armed struggle. I show how the presence of the past as a set of signifiers is dominant in daily life and contemporary activism in the OPTs. By focusing on cultural production in the form of novels, visual arts, song, and poetry, I exemplify art as a popular practice that creates multiple reflections of the echo of rhetoric of ‘body and arms.’ I focus on resistance song and literature and
their connection to the history of the Palestinian national imaginary as it is reproduced in a contemporary neoliberal economy and process of state-formation.

In the postscript, I engage with the theoretical debate on violence/non-violence and subject formation. I offer an introductory reflection on subject formation, non-violence as an ethical claim, and debates in political theory over violence.
Chapter I

State, Hegemony and Re-Signification

*The day the Palestinians become institutionalized, I will no longer be on their side.*

*(Jean Genet)*

The importance of political anthropology lies in the study of particular kinds of processes rather than groups or localities. Political processes are shaping mechanisms of discourse and representation and also products of power dynamics: ideological interventions, paradigmatic framing through knowledge production, and significantly of discursive formations. In an interconnected, hegemonic capitalist world system, what appear to be localized practices are rather multi-sited interfaces of power. Power in global political processes lies in the art of governing, and to use the words of Foucault, is to “structure the possible field of action” for the weaker’s political actions, discourse, and imaginations.

This chapter addresses the multiple entangled processes that enabled the discourse of nonviolence to flourish in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) in the last ten years. I argue that the refashioning of the Palestinian Authority (PA) under the banner of a ‘state,’ through intensive structural reforms with particular emphasis on the notion of ‘security’ and the marker of political modernity, centralized the use of legitimate violence in the hands of the state. I then discuss how the dominant liberal hegemonic understanding of morality is

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30 Foucault 1984.
used selectively by the powerful to delegitimize political struggles of the less powerful and to legitimize imperial wars. My closing analysis explores the phenomenon of NGO-ization in the OPTs as a force of re-politicization through the construction of new paradigm to narrate the Palestinian history of struggle.

**The State and Being Modern**

In one of the most important anthropological interventions in studying the state, Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta have pointed out that seeing the state as “culturally embedded and discursively constructed ensembles” and grounding it in a transnational context of “globalized representations of the state in the present neoliberal context put[s] a particular spin on how the state should be.”[^31] This understanding is very useful in the context of Palestine as the formation of the state-like entity has been fundamentally set and shaped through international intervention.[^32] Max Weber’s analytical understanding of the state argues that political modernity lies in the rational bureaucracy where violence is centralized in the hands of the state. The question of violence in Palestine requires us to understand the state not only within a transnational global effect but also through a functionalist lens. Weber’s analysis on the monopoly of the legitimate use of violence is still a dominant framing in the age of the so-called global war on terror.

[^31]: Sharma and Gupta 2006.

[^32]: The formation of the PA was in part shaped by international intervention through the offering of financial and technical administrative support, and most importantly, political shaping through international recognition and expected entry into a world state-system.
The second Palestinian Intifada in 2000 emerged as a response to the failure of the ‘peace’ process that started in 1993 between the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the state of Israel, culminating in the Oslo Accords. Seven years of negotiations only deepened the Israeli settler-colonial project and did not meet the minimum demands of the Palestinians, resulting in Palestinian investment in the use of arms as a primary means to resist the Israeli colonial military occupation. Because the use of arms, among other tactics, has always been used in the Palestinian national struggle, as in other Third World national anticolonial movements, the PLO leadership, and primarily Yasser Arafat, was accused of terrorism by the U.S. since the 1970s. This accusation reached a peak in 2002 when the U.S. advocated for a new leadership and new governing institutions for the Palestinian people as a prerequisite for a Palestinian state. To analyze the question of violence in the context of state-like formation in Palestine, we need to understand what elements constitute a Palestinian state based on the performance of a particular (primarily US) international image in a context as Sharma and Gupta articulate of globalized representations in a neoliberal age.

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34 Yasser Arafat and the PLO were considered terrorist by the U.S. and the Western world since the 1970s. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 was awarded jointly to Yasser Arafat, Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin "for their efforts to create peace in the Middle East." http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1994 [last accessed, October 3, 2013]

And, as Philip Abrams articulates, the state is an ideological power, and therefore we also need to comprehend the state as a product and producer of ideological shaping.

Two years after the start of the second Intifada, the U.S. and the EU in addition to Israel isolated Yasser Arafat, the head of the PLO and the PA. They simultaneously called for reforms to be implemented within the PA, specifically with regards to control of PA security forces and the allocation of money within the PA. Subsequently, a globalized process of reform of the PA was implemented. The UN, U.S., EU, and Russia created the international Task Force on Palestinian Reform in 2002. The main target of such reform was the PA security apparatus.

Palestinian sociologist Jamil Hilal argues that the post-Oslo political field was reshaped through new hegemony, and the PA security apparatus played a central role through its monopoly on legitimate violence. George Giacoman, a Palestinian political scientist, analyzed Arafat’s way of leading the PA as being a “clientist” system where power and money were channeled through Arafat

37 The Task Force on Palestinian Reform, composed of representatives of the Quartet (U.S., EU, Russia and the UN Secretary General), Norway, Japan, Canada, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, met in Rome on December 11, 2003. According to one of their statements, the Task Force recognized the establishment of the office of a Palestinian Prime Minister as a “major political reform achievement” in 2003. It also commended the significant efforts by the Palestinian side in the fields of structural administrative, financial, and economic reform. The Finance Minister now publishes the Palestinian Authority’s budget on the Internet, including monthly spending reports.” See more at http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/8ED7BEBF6F796BF385256E2F006D288C#sthash.9PSDKOW.dpuf [last accessed, September 23, 2013]
38 Hilal 1998.
himself. Arafat was the glue of the political system in the post-Oslo PA and continued to lead PA institutions in the same way he used to lead the PLO.\textsuperscript{39} Negotiating a position between being an acceptable political partner according to international ‘standards’ and being a leader of a national liberation movement, Arafat did not encourage PA official security forces to participate in the second intifada, but it was known that he did financially sponsor armed resistance groups. Such an act was considered as supporting terrorism and giving cover through PA institutions to individual resistance fighters.

The moment what is described as the international community decided to isolate and remove Arafat, an internal debate was raised within Fateh, as the main PLO political faction and backbone of the PA institutions and security apparatus, on how to proceed after Arafat.\textsuperscript{40} One of the requirements of reform within the PA was the creation of the position of Prime Minister. Mahmoud Abbas held the position with the support of the U.S. and Israel, as he was known for his role in signing the Oslo agreement and being a strong opponent to the second intifada.\textsuperscript{41} Arafat himself referred to Abbas as the Karazi of Palestine, making reference to Hamid Karazi, the US-appointed Afghani president following the US invasion of Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{42} In a 2002 interview, Abbas made it clear that Palestinians were

\textsuperscript{39} Giacaman 2011.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{41} For example, see Nathan Thrall, Our Man in Palestine. \url{http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/oct/14/our-man-palestine/?pagination=false} [last accessed, September 19, 2013]

\textsuperscript{42} Kanfani 2007.
defeated and that the intifada must come to an end. He was not alone as dominant figures within the PA came to a similar conclusion. After Arafat’s death, Fateh nominated Abbas for the election in January 2005. In an interview with one Fateh activist, he explained: “When Abbas was chosen to run in the election, the leadership was telling us that it is the time for internal reform and that Abbas is appropriate for such a task. It is the time to move away from the father figure of Arafat to a rational leader like Abbas for he is a man who respects institutions.” In a similar fashion, a PA ambassador who was appointed by Abbas echoed Max Weber’s categorization of leadership in speaking to a fellow anthropologist. He said that Palestinians have moved away from “charismatic leadership”/Arafat to a “rational leadership”/Abbas. In his election campaign, Abbas emphasized “enforcing law and order,” the “end of security pandemonium,” and “insuring the personal safety of citizens,” stating: “Only one authority and one legitimate weaponry.”

Foucault identifies discursive formation, consisting of forms of representation, statements, and signs with culturally and historically located

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43 Al Masri 2003. Hilal 2013

44 Ibid.

45 Using the same wording, Abbas’ statement for the Fateh sixth annual conference set the political platform by “Emphasizing the principles of democracy, pluralism and peaceful transfer of power, consolidating those principles and protecting the freedom of individuals and their rights as the bases of state-building. Achieving security, safety and respect of the law, and re-building the security apparatus on national and professional foundations. And continue building and rebuilding state institutions, preserving the constitution and the laws regulating political, economic and social life.”
meanings, as establishing a regime of truth. The notions of rationality, order, rule of law, good governance, accountability and transparency, among others, have been used rhetorically by PA leadership in nearly every communication toward either international audiences or local consumption. This set of terms is part of a discursive mechanism of the PA to resemble a state, a practice of refashioning the PA in accordance with global (neo) liberal representations of what a state is.

In 2007, Prime Minster Salam Fayyad, an ex-IMF and World Bank official, proposed a plan for building a Palestinian state in which “security is a national goal and an essential element of the enabling environment for economic growth and social development.” According to Fayyad, through security and economic activities, Palestinians will achieve the “goals of good governance, national prosperity and enhanced quality of life. It [security] is also clearly a key underpinning of a free Palestinian state living in peace with its neighbors.” Once again the question on the monopoly of using legitimate violence is a central prerequisite for a state and the quest to fulfill political modernity begins with such a condition. In the case of the PA, this monopoly was performed through the

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46 Foucault 1986. Meanwhile according to Foucault, in the regime of truth, discursive formations are intertwined with non-discursive practices such as institutions, political events, economic practices and processes.

47 Fayyad 2009.

48 “This will consist of three branches that deliver high quality policing, national security and intelligence services. Substantial investments in infrastructure will be made: including eight governorate headquarters – Moqata’at – detention facilities, barracks, training facilities, and a central prisoner rehabilitation facility.” See [http://imeu.net/engine2/uploads/pna-full-report.pdf](http://imeu.net/engine2/uploads/pna-full-report.pdf) [last accessed, October 3, 2013].
exercise of power over local Palestinian society, ensuring ‘citizens’ safety not from Israeli daily attacks but rather from internal social disruption.

Discursive state refashioning is first and foremost tied to institutional power relations. Comparing the ‘state-building’ plan drafted by the PA to the Road Map for Peace put forth by the international Quartet (US, EU, UN and Russia) reveals striking similarities in language use and in the vision of constructing/reforming PA institutions. A major emphasis is placed on the issue of security and reforming the security apparatus in both plans. These reforms, including the official training of PA security personnel, were realized by the U.S. and the EU. The U.S. took the role in funding, training, and equipping PA security forces while the EU trained the civil police. The representation of Palestinian institutions through global power dynamics is exemplified in the words of US security envoy Keith Dayton in a talk titled “Peace through Security”:

“But over the last year-and-a-half, the Palestinians have engaged upon a series of what they call security offensives throughout the West Bank, surprisingly well coordinated with the Israeli army, in a serious and sustained effort to return the rule of law to the West Bank and reestablish the authority of the Palestinian Authority…Across the West Bank, these security campaigns have featured clamping down on armed gangs amid a visible police presence, dismantling illegal militias, working against illegal Hamas activities, and focusing on the safety and security of Palestinian citizens. Crime is down. Teenage girls in Jenin can visit their friends after dark without fear of being attacked. Palestinian shops are now open after

49 Ibid.

50 See http://www.eupolcopps.eu/content/what-eupol-copps and http://www.state.gov/s/usc/ [last accessed, October 3, 2013].
dark—they never were….senior IDF commanders ask me frequently, “How many more of these new Palestinians can you generate, and how quickly, because they are our way to leave the West Bank.”

The relationship between PA discourse and the American security coordinators’ discourse provides us with an understanding of what security means in such a context. On the one hand, it provides security to the colonial state, and on the other, it enforces a disciplinary mechanism on the local population through a native authority. The monopoly on the legitimate use of violence is solely for the purposes of such self-disciplining of the Palestinians and in effect the creating of new subjects. The notion of generating “new Palestinians” is not simply a matter of pacification, but rather a mechanized production process stamped for approval by Israel and U.S.

The global representation and refashioning of the PA into a mere security apparatus works hand in hand with a process of fashioning the economy through a neoliberal modality. In accordance with the 2003 Quartet reform plans, the PA has placed strong emphasis on notions of enabling the private sector, good governance, and accountability. The PA plan for building a state uses a similar discursive strategy. Sobhi Samour and Raja Khalidi have pointed out that neoliberalism became the route for liberation in PA imaginations of statehood “faithfully reflect[ing] the economic policy agenda set forth in the so-called “Post-Washington Consensus” (PWC) orthodoxy advanced by the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWI), the World Bank Group, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), since the late 1990s.”

Structurally, this economic policy created more dependency on the Israeli occupation economy and on donors’ money. Deepening the dependency through a neoliberal economy also functioned on the level of subject formation, i.e. the creation of a consumer society, a bureaucracy that is dependent on foreign funding, and a capitalist class working within the Israeli economy. The two processes of state refashioning, a security apparatus and a neoliberal economy, have been contingent with a third element, negotiation with

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52 Khalidi and Samour 2011.

53 Roy 1999.
the Israeli state. Such negotiations, made clear by the PA as being a ‘strategic option’ for Palestinians, resulted in achieving nearly nothing of the national aspirations of self-determination for the Palestinian population.

In 2007, Hamas took control over Gaza creating a serious challenge to the PA. The PA security apparatus became more crucial in the West Bank and engaged in massive human rights violations of its opponents. Gaza itself under Hamas control was besieged by the international community as a form of collective punishment. In stark contrast, international donors’ money poured into the West Bank, in part to show that accepting the conditions of the international community, led by the U.S., would make people’s life prosperous, unlike Gaza.

On the level of negotiations, it was clear for the PA that the state of Israel was not offering the Palestinians anything of substance. Structurally, however, they were bound by the process of state fashioning, i.e. the mere existence of the PA was contingent upon the two elements of security and a neoliberal economy. There was also a deep fear of losing local legitimacy and trust, because the PA was not able to offer any alternative strategy for resisting the occupation.

In the midst of this, the notion of nonviolent resistance emerged as a façade or smokescreen manipulated by the PA in order to communicate to the local population that we (the PA) are doing something in the face of the occupation. During fieldwork, some activist’s evoked Frantz Fanon’s articulation on nonviolence in Algeria:

54 For more information: http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/01/18/building_a_police_state_in_palestine [last accessed, October 1, 2013].
In its raw state this nonviolence conveys to the colonized intellectual and business elite that their interests are identical to those of the colonialist bourgeoisie and it is therefore indispensable, a matter of urgency, to reach an agreement for the common good. Nonviolence is an attempt to settle the colonial problem around the negotiating table before the irreparable is done.  

In Fateh’s sixth conference in 2009, Abbas’s speech exemplifies the PA’s adoption and rhetorical use of nonviolent resistance:

The forms of this struggle, which can be successfully used in the current stage to support negotiations and reactivate them, or substitute them if they do not deliver may include: a. Mobilization of popular non-violent struggle against settlement activities as expressed in it successful present model in Bil’in and Ni’lin against the Wall . . . Our mission is to mobilize all citizens to take part in those activities, to mobilize Arab and international participation, to provide all kinds of support from the Authority and its agencies.

Although the PA calls for popular mobilization, the first goal is ultimately the reactivation of negotiations, and nonviolent resistance is a means to achieve an effective negotiating process. However, if negotiations fail, the notion of popular mobilization is restricted to nonviolent means, as alternative models are not imagined.

\textit{When the Means become an End}

In conversations with international activists during my fieldwork, I was asked the same questions found in numerous academic and journalistic articles on Palestine today: “Where is the Palestinian Gandhi or Martin Luther King? Why

\footnote{Fanon 1963.}
don’t Palestinians embrace nonviolence? What would happen if they did?” This moralistic language needs to be understood through the shifting global political context and perception on political violence.

In his reflection on violence, Walter Benjamin located the debate around violence in the realm of law and justice. He pointed out that the debate is between two approaches within law itself that are built around a binary of moral order based on absolute terms: a political philosophy natural law approach vs. a positive law approach. The natural law approach locates the legality and illegality of violence in the ends, i.e. the use of violence can be considered moral if the cause is just. On the other side of the binary, the positive law approach defines legality and morality via the means. In the decolonization era of the 1940s through the 1980s, the issue of just cause overshadowed the question of means and the natural law approach became the moral imperative of anticolonial national movements.

In a post-colonial / colonial order and state-system world, positive law became the hegemonic framework mobilized against weak parties. The striking difference between PLO leader Yasser Arafat’s speech in the UN in 1974 and US President Barak Obama’s speech in Cairo in 2009 marks this shift on the question of the legitimate use of violence. Arafat, at the peak of decolonization struggles across the Third World, stated:

56 Benjamin 2007.

57 Obama’s speech in Cairo was the first that addressed the Arab world since his election. It was a hopeful moment for some in the region for a new beginning to US-Arab relations. http://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/full-text-president-obama-speech-cairo-university-
“The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and the colonialists, cannot possibly be called terrorist; otherwise the American people in their struggle for liberation from the British colonialists would have been terrorists, the European resistance against the Nazis would be terrorism, the struggle of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples would also be terrorism. . . . This is actually a just and proper struggle consecrated by the United Nations Charter and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As to those who fight against the just causes, those who wage war to occupy, colonize and oppress other people, those are the terrorists. Those are the people whose actions should be condemned, who should be called war criminals: for the justice of the cause determines the right to struggle.”

As if Obama was responding to Arafat’s 1974 speech, he stated:

Palestinians must abandon violence. Resistance through violence and killing is wrong and does not succeed. For centuries, black people in America suffered the lash of the whip as slaves and the humiliation of segregation. But it was not violence that won full and equal rights... This same story can be told by people from South Africa to South Asia; from Eastern Europe to Indonesia. It's a story with a simple truth: that violence is a dead end. It is a sign of neither courage nor power to shoot rockets at sleeping children, or to blow up old women on a bus. That is not how moral authority is claimed; that is how it is surrendered.

[article-1.372558] [last accessed, September 21 3013]. Arafat’s speech can be found on [http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/chaier/proche-orient/arafat74-en] [last accessed, September 21 2013].
The shift in locating morality from the ends to the means has come to dominate
discussion on Palestine today. Framing violence through the morality of the
means has been always the logic of the powerful no matter the ideology, as can be
seen by liberal, democratic, dictatorial, and colonial states. The issue of moral
authority is what is at stake. Performing victimhood for the ‘world’ to claim moral
authority is still conditional on the means used to do so. Focusing on the means
above all else for legal and moral authority overlooks the politics of domination.
Violence is compartmentalized through a moral discourse of good and bad, legal
and illegal, rational and irrational. In such discourses, the moral question of
justice and the political question of colonialism are surpassed in an act of
depoliticization/repoliticization, transforming the means into an end in itself.

The debate over means and ends does not function in a vacuum but rather
in geopolitical contexts. Today, in a unipolar world system and dominant
neoliberal, capitalist discourse, Palestinians find no room for speaking the ‘old’
language of anti-colonialism, for the means have become the calibration for
morality. However, states do not always rely on the moral framing of violence
through the means; states make use of the ends as the moral principal to legitimize
its use of force and violence. The many US imperial wars and Israeli colonization
of Palestine, among numerous other examples, most often evoke the moral ends.\textsuperscript{58}
The selective use of the two approaches to law is based on power disparity
between state and non-state actors. As a Palestinian journalist once wrote, “Where

\textsuperscript{58} Chomsky 2002.
is the call for Israel to embrace non-violence? 

A rhetorical question, because the founding issue on the question of Palestine lies in a violent act of colonialism, the journalist is questioning the selective use by those in power of framing the question of morality in anti-colonial struggles. This selectiveness creates a hegemony without an effective counter-hegemony due to the stifling of the weak opponent’s ability to speak. Attempting to eliminate the ability to speak and/or be heard if not through the normative discourse of the powerful can been seen in Obama’s speech, a striking prototype of the relationship between hegemonic discourse and power. His use of the phrase “simple truth” is compatible with Foucault's notion of 'true discourse.' Such a discourse excludes alternative conceptions of reality and concepts that could bring understanding to how different forms of power can operate.

**Rewriting History**

In *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, George Marcus and Michael Fischer argue that critique requires questioning the validity of knowledge and the method of investigating cultural practices. That Palestinian history has been over-studied by both local and international scholars can obstruct one’s ability to think through the topic. In the past few years, however, the staggering number of NGO reports, academic articles, documentary films, books, and media writings

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59 Baroud 2009.  

60 Marcus and Fischer 1999.
addressing the question of nonviolence in Palestine cannot be overlooked.\textsuperscript{61} Because the writing of history always operates “under the constraints of social ideologies,”\textsuperscript{62} these writings on nonviolence have become a form of rewriting the history of Palestine thematically through a violence/nonviolence binary. Unable to locate any account written by a Palestinian scholar using this categorization more than ten years ago\textsuperscript{63}, I show how this is a new paradigm shaping and recoding Palestinian history that informs today’s framing of reality.

The premise behind a majority of writings using a violence/nonviolence dichotomy to narrate the Palestinian struggle is the question, which has become an uncritical adage: Where is the Palestinian Gandhi?\textsuperscript{64} In addition to the numerous journalistic writings,\textsuperscript{65} Wendy Pearlman’s 2011 book\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement} is a recent case in point. Based on questioning why Palestinians have not followed a path of nonviolence, Pearlman argues that organizational coherence is a precondition for the Palestinian national movement to undertake a nonviolent path in its struggle. Such a perspective focuses on what Palestinians are “lacking” by posing the primary

\textsuperscript{61} There are several documentary films produced since 2006 that largely focus on the notion of nonviolence. For example: Bilin Habiti (2006), Budrus (2009), Little Town of Bethlehem (2011), and Five Broken Cameras (2011).

\textsuperscript{62} Hirsch and Stewart 2005.

\textsuperscript{63} The exception was Mubarak Awad. One of the examples is Awad 1984.

\textsuperscript{64} One telling response is: \url{http://mondoweiss.net/2009/12/where-is-the-palestinian-gandhi-in-israeli-prison-of-course.html} [last accessed, September 23, 2013].

\textsuperscript{65} Media representation of Palestine using the dichotomy of violence/nonviolence is not only the traditional Orientalist gaze of mainstream Western media, but also extends to non-mainstream media.

\textsuperscript{66} Pearlman 2011.
question of ‘why not?’ and then attempt to offer an explanation. The question becomes an answer in itself, as the framing is methodologically problematic due to the pre-decided assumption that social and cultural practice should unfold along a certain path. The question of lack overlooks the complexity of what is there.

A secondary strain of writings emerged in response to the question of the Palestinian Gandhi attempting to assertively affirm the existence of nonviolent resistance in the Palestinian struggle. *A Quiet Revolution*, a book written by the American civil rights activist Mary Elizabeth King, depicts the first intifada as nonviolent resistance, a result of a “struggle within a struggle” of activist-intellectuals (middle class, predominantly male, Jerusalemites) who pushed forward a nonviolence agenda and took on a key leadership role in the intifada.67 Tracing a history further back, Mazen Qumsiyeh’s book titled *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (published in Arabic and English) traces nonviolent resistance in the Palestinian struggle from the late Ottoman Empire until today, covering a period of 130 years.68 Such retroactive readings are based on a linear genealogy that reduces the complexity of Palestinians’ revolts, marginalizing what does not fit into the narrative, in order to adhere to a preconceived set of categories and practices.

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67 King 2007. In King’s account, she offers a great reduction of a complex nation-wide revolt to fit into the preconceived set of categories and practices attributed to an American scholar and nonviolence advocate such as Gene Sharp, whom she gives a major role in her account for visiting Palestine three times.

68 Qumsiyeh 2011.
Bassem Khadir Tamimi’s MA theses at Birzeit University, which was published in book form, also argues that Palestinian nonviolence has deep roots in the long history of Palestinian struggle. Although Tamimi’s work is largely a descriptive account lacking a clear theoretical framing, it is important to note for it was published by an NGO. The role of NGOs in advocating for nonviolence as a strategy for Palestinians has significant repercussions, for it endorses a particular prism through which to understand the Palestinian struggle with the aim of shaping how Palestinians confront the colonial power, i.e. constructing reality. Many books follow a similar nonviolence advocacy approach. Maia Carter Hallward and Julie Norman’s edited volume Nonviolent Resistance in the Second Intifada: Activism and Advocacy, Michael Bröning’s The Politics of Change in Palestine: State-Building and Non-Violent Resistance, Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta’s Refusing to be Enemies: Palestinian and Israeli Nonviolent Resistance to the Israeli Occupation, and Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley’s Seeking Mandela: Peacemaking Between Israelis and Palestinians are a few examples.

Coming from different national and political backgrounds and areas of interest, these authors offer a sample of the numerous writings on the question of nonviolence in Palestine. They share the basic uncritical premise of a violent/nonviolent binary. ‘Nonviolence’ becomes a paradigmatic signifier and

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69 Hallward and Norman 2011.
70 Bröning 2011.
72 Adam and Moodley 2005.
fundamental analytical unit. The current usage of the term nonviolence reflects a new paradigm of rewriting the history of Palestine, thereby imposing a particular frame of understanding the Palestinian struggle and delegitimizing Palestinians’ use of arms in their fight for national liberation. The focus on the paradigm of nonviolence also decontextualizes settler-colonialism as a fundamental premise in understanding the struggle of Palestinians. Thus, it does not address the multiple forms of colonial violence, physically, structurally, symbolically, imposed on the Palestinian population over the decades.

**NGOs, Funding and Pedagogy**

James Ferguson argues that development projects in the Third World make use of a distinctive discursive regime functions as an “anti-politics machine,” in other words, a process of de-politicization. 73 He also notes that “NGOs, social movements, and ‘civil society’ today participate in new, transnational forms of governmentality that need to be subjected to the same sort of critical scrutiny that has been applied to ‘development’ in the past.” 74 Following a similar approach, Bob Jessop argues that the usage of empowerment, democracy, civil society, and good governance discourses points to a global apparatus of neoliberal rule. 75 On Palestine, Raja Khalidi and Sobhi Samour have written that since the beginning of the Oslo process, local NGOs that are financed

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73 Ferguson 1994.

74 Ferguson 2002: 146

75 Jessop 2002.
by international donors have been “among the first sectors in Palestinian society to embrace neoliberalism, and they have acted as an important conduit of its development paradigm.”\textsuperscript{76} According to these analyses, the work of NGOs can be understood not as de-politicization but rather re-politicization in adherence to a neoliberal framework. As such, local grassroots organizations that were active in the pre-Oslo period were transformed into donor dependent institutions\textsuperscript{77} with a professional development-orientation. Framed within the permissible political parameters set by the Oslo Accords, they lost their ability to effectively mobilize the grassroots population.\textsuperscript{78}

In the West Bank alone, there are more than twenty-five local NGOs specializing on the themes of nonviolence and peace. Each promotes itself as targeting marginalized communities, such as women, children, and youth. Encountering tens of such NGO workers during my fieldwork, I quickly became aware of how similar their lexicon was, revolving around such phrases as: peace-building, mutual understanding between people, cultural dialogue, nonviolent conflict resolution, promoting nonviolent culture, promoting nonviolent resistance and beautiful resistance.\textsuperscript{79} In conversation with one of these Palestinian NGO workers, I asked him if he believed in what he was doing. He smiled and ignored

\textsuperscript{76} Khalidi and Samour 2010.

\textsuperscript{77} See Mariam Shahin and George Azar. Donor Opium: The Impact of International Aid to Palestine [documentary film] 2011.

\textsuperscript{78} Hammami 1995.

\textsuperscript{79} See for example a list at: \url{http://www.justvision.org/organizations}. 
the question. Two moths later in a demonstration in Bethlehem, I saw him throwing stones at Israeli soldiers.

At the end of the demonstration, I asked him if his superior would approve of stone-throwing or if would it be considered a violent action. He responded jokingly: “I’m not afraid of my boss, but I am terrified that my pictures will be seen by the donors. That would label me as a terrorist.” It was a simple joke that said a lot about the landscape of NGOization in the West Bank. As Sari Hanafi & Linda Tabar, and Khalil Nakhleh have pointed out, international donors set the agenda and construct the conceptual apparatus for local NGOs. Furthermore, since 9/11, most major international donors have also put in place a legal framework for their funding that excludes any NGO suspect of supporting and sympathizing with ‘terrorism.’ Funding is contingent on what are classified as ‘positive’ political developments by international donor organizations and governments.

In order to attract funders, NGOs fashion their goals and vision according to donors’ language, or, in the words of Ferguson, within the parameters of a politicized “discursive regime.” In the words of a USAID report on Palestinian NGOs, part of the mapping process to locate potential recipients of funding sought NGOs committed to “modern, secular ideals in their society,” “a

80 Foreign Terrorist Organizations according to the US State Department: http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm [last accessed, October 10, 2013].


82 Ma’an Development Center 2011.

83 Hanafi and Tabar 2004.
democratic future for Palestinians,” and the ability to “compete with the Islamist vision of Hamas.” The World Bank’s parameter in funding contributed a political framework where “the clashes between Hamas and Fatah, particularly since 2006, need also to be considered in any development proposal.” The political imperatives of international donors are clearly indicated in the ways Palestinian NGOs fashion themselves.

In Blond Ramallah, a recently published novel that critiques the international presence in Palestine—which I described as “an anatomy of the colonial city” in a book review and others described as a local counter-narrative and melancholy of the post-colonial colony—the narrator-protagonist is an ‘expert’ in the English language and particular in the language of proposal writing. Addressing the international presence in Palestine, the narrator states: “‘Proposal’ has become one of the most famous words in Palestine in the last decade.” He describes how workshops and trainings are constantly being held to teach the ways and skills of proposal writing where “terms associated with proposal writing have become part of the daily conversations in English, while the Arabic synonyms have disappeared.” In the work of Palestinian NGOs, a stress is placed on training “professional staff’s capacity to design projects and develop

84 The NGO Mapping Project 2008.
85 Lopes 2011.
87 Yahia 2013.
proposals.”88 In one of the Palestinian universities, an MA program in Development and International Cooperation, designed and supported by major international NGOs and UN agencies and accredited in local perception as a prestigious program, offers a full course in writing for international donors, equal in credit hours to a course in Anthropology and Development.89 The language of proposal writing, i.e. ‘how to speak properly to international funders’, is not only a skill but a necessity for many local NGOs to continue functioning on the ground.

NGOs function in producing and disseminating knowledge by publishing manuals on how to teach nonviolence in Palestine, conducting surveys on local perceptions of violence and nonviolence, and funding educational programs and films for youth on nonviolence leadership. Through the exceedingly large number of publications and media projects, NGOs participate in the construction of reality through the binary of violence and nonviolence. The debate on Palestinian resistance, thus, is sharply shifted away from the question of colonialism and de-colonization to a debate on the means of struggle. The terminology has been fixed in place through a nonviolence regime of truth.

The process of professionalization of activists extends beyond the sphere of NGOs into higher education. In another local university, a new MA program is

88 The NGO Mapping Project 2008.

89 Mahmod Mamdani comments on what he describes as consultancy culture in African higher education saying that “Academic papers have turned into corporate-style power point presentations.” In the case of Palestine, the NGO culture plays a dominant role. For example, in Birzeit University’s social science and humanity departments, there is constant debate on the role of NGO funding in setting the agenda of research and student intellectual orientation. Mamdani, 2011. http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-27-africas-postcolonial-scourge [last accessed, October 11, 2013].
being established in Law and Nonviolent Popular Resistance. The aim of the program, fully funded by a Spanish NGO and designed in cooperation with a Spanish university, is to educate activists in nonviolent actions. Thirty-five students are currently enrolled in the degree, many of whom were members of political parties and spent time in Israeli prisons. In the program’s Spring 2013 semester, students were offered two courses: one on international law and another on nonviolence, which is taught as a free-style lecture in part by a head of an NGO and in part by her husband who is celebrated by Israeli and Western media and academia as a “prominent political philosopher.”

The pedagogical function of NGOs extends beyond material resources and the production of literature to the sponsoring of international ‘experts’ to ‘educate’ Palestinians on the concept and practice of nonviolence. Aside from the colonial dynamic embedded in the act itself, how this is executed reveals a reductive and trivializing understanding and logic on the part of the NGOs. In October 2011, a local NGO held a conference in Ramallah’s Red Crescent Society building on nonviolence and conflict resolution for university and high school students. I was invited as a local ‘expert’ to comment on a paper given by a white American scholar titled “Narrative and Nonviolence.” The paper presented did not mention Palestine, and it was clear in the Q and A session that she had a very limited understanding of the situation on the ground. The moment the session came to an end, I walked out for a smoke. Standing by the coffee table

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90 The program officially offers a law degree but ironically the program states that degree holders are not allowed to practice law.
were two unmistakable US private security or army personnel. It was not difficult to notice the marks of their pistols under their gray shirts. I asked one of them if he would like a smoke in order to instigate a conversation. I learned that they were US consulate security guards who were escorting the American ‘nonviolence expert’ as her visit and lecturing program was sponsored by the US State Department.

A few days later, it was written in a US consulate newsletter that the American scholar’s “visit is among the many programs sponsored by the U.S. Consulate General throughout the year in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, which promote dialogue and mutual understanding between Palestinians and Americans.”

The irony in this scene that an advocate of nonviolence required armed escort in the West Bank is a prominent example of how nonviolence functions as a silk glove of a violent armed fist.

In another example of the US’s pedagogical strategy, the US consulate in Jerusalem sponsored an American scholar to lecture on Martin Luther King Jr. and nonviolence in a small refugee camp in Bethlehem and in one of the local universities. In the two lectures, the scholar’s discussion of King was reductive, making King representative of nonviolence and nothing else. The act took another turn when King’s son visited Palestine. His presence was made into a

91 For more information, see: http://jerusalem.usconsulate.gov/pr_022812.html [last accessed September 4, 2013].

92 King visited Ramallah and Tel Aviv, showing that his trip was not for Palestinians but rather equated two sides, the colonial state and society with people under colonialism.
celebratory event of “nonviolent struggle to end oppression.”

Evoking the father through the son has not been limited to King but also enacted through the visit of Mahatma Gandhi’s grandson. Arun Gandhi has visited Palestine a few times “to preach” on nonviolence, as his grandfather is used as a figure to educate Palestinians via the Hollywood production on the Salt March.

Talal Assad urged the field of anthropology “to take the cultural hegemony of the West as its object of inquiry.” The quest of imposing the concept and practice of nonviolence on Palestinians is not only official political discourse. It is part and parcel of a hegemonic framing and pedagogical process of re-politicization that adheres to a discursive regime of truth. It is an industry enabled financially through the complicity of the local context with transnational actors in a neoliberal world system. This can be seen in local activists’ communication for protest actions.

Emails and calls for demonstrations are written in both Arabic and English with each language targeting a different audience. The words most often used in English are “non-violent” and “peaceful,” while in Arabic the terminologies used are “jamhirriyyeh” [grassroots] or “sha‘biyeh” [popular]. The difference in the

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95 Asad 1993.

96 This is not making any claim of cultural relativism about Palestinian culture being incompatible with ethical calls of nonviolence but rather to differentiate between non-violence and a nonviolence industry.
use of language shows the efforts Palestinians make to gain popular international solidarity with their struggle. Thus the term “non-violence” has become a keyword to gain solidarity through moral sympathy rather than political rights.

Another element in the colonial dynamic emerges from the discrepancy in the use of language. It is not a matter of lack of translation or lack of knowledge of the history of activism in Palestine that words like ‘popular’ are replaced by the word ‘nonviolent’; rather it is a colonial, Eurocentric re-signification of cultural notions and resistance practices in Palestine. It is colonial for two main reasons: first, the binary of violence/non-violence is signified through the prism of the colonizer. That is to say, the significations of actions as ‘violent’ is made when directed against Israeli civilians or soldiers, not when against Palestinians, who have in fact been subject to violence since the first moment of the Zionist colonization of Palestine; and second, it is colonial because it obliges Palestinians to use a Western lexicon to describe themselves or otherwise they will not be heard. To borrow Gayatri Spivak’s words,97 Palestinians who make use of the nonviolence/violence dichotomy are entrapped within the hegemonic discourse, “wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed.” In order for them to speak, they must use the hegemonic discourse.

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Chapter II

Seeking Popular Participation:
Nostalgia, Heroism, and the People

“The mind of man is capable of anything--because everything is in it, all the past as well as the future”

(Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness)

In this chapter I discuss the great nostalgia today among Palestinian activists for the experience of the first intifada. Unlike common perceptions and arguments that portray the practice of popular resistance through the binary of violence and nonviolence, I argue that this nostalgia is fundamentally connected to popular mass participation in the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle. The concern with mass-based participation, and the anxiety regarding the lack of it, arises from the loss of agency many Palestinians feel in the face of a new modality of colonial control that emerged at the end of the first intifada in 1992-1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords. Conceptualizations of popular resistance are intertwined with changes in the notion of ‘the people’ and the sectors of society over which the colonial state of Israel exercises its control. An assemblage of three components that reinforce each other—shifts in the colonial control mechanism, structural socio-cultural changes, and formative discursive representations—inform our understandings of popular resistance in the OPTs and help us to reflect on why the experiences of the first intifada have not been effectively monopolized upon following the Oslo Accords.

In his study on the legacy of late colonialism in Africa, Mahmood Mamdani analyzes how the mode of anti-colonial resistance is shaped according
to the modality of colonial control. In Palestine, following the formation of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in 1994, a clear shift is visible in how resistance to Israeli colonial control is practiced. While a central concern has remained mass participation in direct confrontation with the colonial power, in the form of demonstrations and clashes, I argue that resistance practices today have not been built on a multi-tactical strategy that locates power in the social mass under colonial control.

Unlike the first intifada, where heroism was represented in the *shabab* (children and youth) as a socio-cultural category that revolted against direct disciplinary mechanisms of control, post-PA social identity of resistance has become ambiguous as it is at times located in “the people” as a holistic term but most often in the individual hero (*al-muqawim*, which translates as “resistance fighter”) who resembles the *fida’i* of the 1970s. The leading role of the *shabab* in the first intifada was but one of a cluster of other societal categories that engaged in the liberation war without arms. Palestinian categorization of society

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98 Mamdani 1996.

99 In the Oslo Accords, the official name is “Palestinian Authority” because the state of Israel refused the addition of the signifier “national” to the name. This is but one example of how settler colonial practice functions to deny nationhood to the native population, including the former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir’s statement in 1969 that “There is no such thing as a Palestinian people” and Haim Gerber’s scholarship on how Israeli production of knowledge, scholarship and historiography denies Palestinian nationhood. Gerber 2003. See also Patrick Wolfe’s work on the fundamental logic of settler colonial projects to eliminate the native population, starting with the symbolic violence of denying them the ability to self-represent. Wolfe 2006. In the dissertation, I will use the designation PA due to another reason. During my fieldwork, the majority of activists questioned the political legitimacy of the PA to represent all Palestinians; thus their refusal to use the signifier “national” for the authority institution but not for the Palestinian people.

100 *Fida’i* is an Arabic word for “the one who sacrifices.” It was used by Arabs and mostly by Palestinians in the late ’60s and ’70s. I discuss the term in more detail below.
followed a leftist Third Worldist understanding of what is society, in other words, a taxonomy of the social mass that included the working class, peasantry, petite bourgeoisie (usually referred to as merchants), refugees, professionals, students, and women. This categorization impacted the process of mass organization that started taking place from the early ’70s, the goal of which was to solidify a national consensus and drive social progress.\textsuperscript{101}

This multi-dimensional understanding of society was the pretext for the first intifada as a coordinated, mass-based war of liberation that resembled a Gramscian framework of making political change that combined war of positions and war of maneuver.\textsuperscript{102} Framing the first intifada in military terminology, although it was predominately unarmed, shows the particularity of a struggle that aimed to dismantle and decompose the total colonial hegemony of the state of Israel over the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs). After the formation of the PA, the new modality of control through nativist authority and indirect control created obstacles for Palestinian mass participation. These impediments, I show are a fusion of discursive processes that produced a new taxonomy of understanding society under colonial control and structural transformations of the material conditions of society.

\textbf{Nostalgia: The Collective Soul of the First intifada}

\textsuperscript{101} Taraki 1989.

\textsuperscript{102} Gramsci 1992.
On December 9, 2011, Mustafa Tamimi, a 28-year-old Palestinian, was shot in the face by an Israeli soldier. The explosion of the tear gas canister, fired from only a few meters away to his head, caused his death.\(^{103}\) That day also marked the second year his small village Nabi Saleh began its weekly demonstrations against Israeli appropriation of their land and resources for the Israeli settlement of Halamish. That day also marked the 24\(^{th}\) anniversary of the first intifada.

During Tamimi’s funeral in the village cemetery, I heard eulogies that included the common refrain: “Your death is a continuation of our village struggle. You are walking on the path of the martyrs of the first intifada.” Those from outside the village commented: “This village sets an example of resistance as it was in the first intifada and is continuing today.” After the funeral ceremony ended, we started to march toward the main road, but before long, Israeli soldiers fired tens of tear gas canisters and rubber-coated bullets toward us. I returned to the wake, joining some older men of the village as they drank black coffee, smoked, and began telling me about the village’s experience of struggle. The conversations that began with today’s martyr traveled back twenty years or more to experiences of the first intifada. These kinds of narrations were not uncommon, as an older generation of men and women watched from afar the younger generation clashing with Israeli soldiers. They recalled the time of their own youth with pride.

What was surprising was that the younger generation who lived through the first intifada as young children shared common feelings toward the first intifada. That period crossed generational differences and entered into the collective memory of Palestinian struggle. Talking with activists in Birzeit village, a few kilometers from Nabi Saleh, about the reminiscences during Tamimi’s funeral brought more stories of the “time of the intifada” and a strong sense of nostalgia.\textsuperscript{104} Such narrations of the past form the shadows of today’s practice of political activism in the West Bank. I intervened to ask if Palestinians today miss those days? A young Palestinian women in her mid-30s responded: “We miss the feeling of having a role to play in the struggle, a meaning to our life, the collective soul in the [first] intifada.”

The first intifada has been a site not just for recollection but also for mimicking its confrontational tactics. In 2011, in solidarity with Palestinian prisoners on hunger strike,\textsuperscript{105} demonstrations and subsequent clashes with occupation soldiers took place beyond the local sites of such villages as Bil’in, Ni’lin, Ma’sara, and Beit ‘Umar where demonstrations recurrently occur. Predominantly young activists marched to the major Israeli checkpoints around West Bank cites, such as Qalandia, a border-like area dividing Ramallah from Jerusalem. Hundreds of young Palestinians coming from Ramallah gathered at the entrance of Qalandia refugee camp, and, joined by youth from the camp, started marching toward the checkpoint. An estimated hundred fully armed Israeli

\textsuperscript{104} Rosemary Sayigh also makes this point about collective memory, where younger generations mark the starting point of their history not by their birth but by the Nakba. Sayigh 2008.

\textsuperscript{105} Hunger strikes are discussed in more detail in chapter 3.
soldiers were waiting for them, blocking the street, standing alongside the Wall by the checkpoint, and occupying the nearby tall buildings. When the front line of demonstrators were within a few hundred meters reach from the soldiers, tens of tear gas containers and metal bullets started to fall, injuring the protestors. Many young people ran back, taking shelter in the nooks of buildings, including myself. Hundreds of demonstrators and locals watched the tens of young males and females throwing stones at the soldiers, which continued for four hours. Later in a small coffee shop in Ramallah, I met some organizers and activists of the demonstration and heard the comment that their “work today is a leading step to a new intifada, a popular one.”

In February 2012 the Aljazeera Arabic website reported on the demonstrations in support of the prisoners’ hunger strikes with the title: “The West Bank Recuperates the Atmosphere of the First Intifada.” The environment of the demonstrations are described as comparable to the atmosphere of the first intifada, also called Intifadat al-Hajar [the Intifada of the Stones]. Similarities include stone-throwing, mass demonstrations and “overall political conditions,” which, according to report, are “helpful as never before” for a third intifada to breakout, an intifada that is “armed only with stones,” the report clarifies. 106 While the title evokes the first intifada, the content of the report focuses on the possibilities of a new intifada. Activists on the ground in the West Bank have often spoke very positively about the first intifada, particularly what is described

by many as “wa‘iy al-intifada” [the consciousness of the intifada]. One activist described this consciousness as a “collective ethical understanding of the responsibilities and reasons for why people are revolting.”

Throughout my fieldwork I encountered a common narrative among activists: the story of the first intifada, where commitment, collectivity and creativity, among other factors, consolidated in mass movement of the whole population of the OPTs. In strong contrast, the second intifada, also known as al-Aqsa intifada, is memorialized as a painful experience that was elitist and lacking popular participation, costly on Palestinians and ineffective. For activists, the two intifadas are sites of memory and not of history. As Pierre Nora put it: “Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past.” An important distinction Nora makes between memory and history lies in the characteristics of memory being “in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations,” and being “affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it.” In other words, according to Nora, memory and the recollection of the past function within the realm of the sacred, while history functions as secular production that is subject to analysis, reflection and criticism.

The difference between the sacred and the secular in distinction between memory and history can be located in the social production of each. History-

107 Allen 2009.

writing as a representation of the past or “complete event” as “fact” and “actual” is a process of objectification. History as object becomes an essential component in the exercise of power by institutions with authoritative experts (state, education and research establishments). It reflects the teller’s authority over events and the way the event is being used. Memory exists in a more democratic sphere of one’s ability and willingness to narrate.

The relationship between narrative and memory is clear in the Arabic linguistic tradition, as the word *thakera* (memory) comes from the root *thakar*, which is the past tense of ‘to say’ (said). The canonical Arabic dictionary *Lesan al Arab* in one entry explains the word *thakera* as: “what flow on tongues.” A similarity between individual’s memory and personal narrative lies in selectivity, whether deliberate or unconscious, for in both there is a reconstruction of the past in order to make sense of it. Victor Turner argued that:

- narrative component in ritual and legal action attempts to rearticulate opposing values and goals in a meaningful structure, the plot of which makes cultural sense. Where historical life itself fails to make cultural sense in terms that formerly held good, narrative and cultural drama may have the task of poesis that is, of remaking cultural sense.¹⁰⁹

In conversation with a 22-year-old female activist at Birzeit University about the ways of organization and mobilization in the newly formed activists circles, she

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explained that she did not learn anything about the first intifada from school or the university. \(^{110}\) Everything she knew and shared with her friends, she said, was based on the memory and narration of others. The narrated memory of the first intifada not only functions to remake cultural sense of the experiences of the past, but has also been used to formulate a future vision.

The Popular Struggle Coordination Committees (PSCC), for instance, states on its webpage that the “Popular Committees present a unique form of community based organizing and resistance in the tradition of the first [1987] Palestinian Intifada.”\(^{111}\) Transforming memories into futuristic vision appears to be in contradiction to the idea of nostalgia. Nostalgia is commonly used to describe a state of longing for a place and/or time in the past. Often represented with negative connotations vis-à-vis truth, nostalgia of the past tends to glorify that spatial or temporal site. The selectiveness of narrative and the dialectic of remembering and forgetting works in favor of ‘good’ memories while suppressing negative experiences. In the words of Monika Palmberger, “Nostalgia has been dismissed as remembering through rose-coloured glasses and therefore being devoid of any claim for truth.”\(^{112}\) However, narration of nostalgic memory does not function in a void, for as all memories it is informed by the context of remembering.\(^{113}\) In the case of activists of the popular resistance, nostalgia for the

\(^{110}\) Palestinian textbooks make little reference to the first intifada.

\(^{111}\) See for example: https://popularstruggle.org/content/about [last accessed July 16, 2013].

\(^{112}\) Palmberger 2008.

\(^{113}\) Kuhn 2004.
first intifada is not a question of the past, but rather a question of a particular moment that can be reproduced, a replicable event. The search for collectivity and popular participation has made the first intifada an important “site of memory” to be visited and narrated.

**Heroism of a Generation, Social Hierarchies and Colonial Control**

In his analysis of popular memory with regards to the first intifada generation, anthropologist John Collins identified six rhetorical modes that dominate the narrative on the experiences of the Intifada, the first being heroism.\(^{114}\) Heroism is a historically dominant rhetorical mode among Palestinians whether in literary production or official and popular national narration. While the notion of the hero is dominant in anti-colonial national movements, in the case of the popular memory of the Intifada, the notion of the hero according to Collins, is assigned not to individuals but rather to a whole generation.

The “generation of the stones,” “children of the stones,” and *shabah* are common signifiers among both Palestinians and observers of the first Intifada, where the narrative on heroism evokes the novelty and exceptionality of what the “generation” of the first Intifada was able to achieve in confrontation with the

\(^{114}\) Collin 2004. The other five modes are victimization, guilt-shame, potential, testimonial, and empowerment.
colonial power. Poetry and songs of the intifada highlight the role of the coming generations. For instance, a widely distributed collection of songs popularly referred to as “the Intifada cassette” includes a song with the following opening: “Oh world, look at me in camp, village and city / see the Palestinian army of Zahrat and Ashbal.” Zahra (singular of Zahrat) means flower, referring to coming-of-age teenage girls, and Shibl (singular of Ashbal) means a lion cub, referring to coming-of-age males, roughly around twelve to sixteen years of age. Another song by a local band opens with: “The Sabaia (females roughly between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five) and shabab went out to challenge the army jeeps / the flames of the intifada set the West Bank on fire.” The term shabab took on an empowering signification.

Palestinian anthropologist and folklorist Sharif Kanaana found the popular stories of the heroes of the Intifada approachable through the analytical lens of Palestinian folktales. Not attributed to any author and depicting the extraordinary, heroic actions of the shabab, the popular stories resemble the form and mythical status of folktales. They predominately focus on young males and sometimes young females and women, and exclude men, who if mentioned only play a

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115 The assumption in this argument is that occupation policies were not confronted before. I argue, however, that the first intifada’s confrontation has a long history of organizing and resistance and the intifada transformed this history into routinized practice.

116 The stanza before this one is as follows: “Swearing by my life, my honor, and my leaking blood, the voice of the intifada is higher [stronger] than the occupation.”

117 Kanaana 2010. Anthropologist Sharif Kanaana pointed out that the backbone of the intifada, or its visible active members, didn’t coincide with any known social class or sole age category but rather an interface between two age categories—awlad and banat (boys and girls) of six to thirteen years and shabab (young men and women) of fourteen to twenty-five years. However the children prefer to be described as shabab because of the empowering signification of the term.
passive role. The shabab, represented as determined, self-confident, and rarely present in the family house, are not willing to be submissive to colonial rule and social norms.\textsuperscript{118} The analysis of heroic actions is thus also situated in relation to structures of authority in Palestinian Arab society.\textsuperscript{119}

Concern over the age grouping in representations of the first Intifada is therefore related not only to the large percentage of youth participating in daily protests and organizing against the occupation army, but also marks a socio-cultural shift in a ‘traditional’ society, an indicative change of power and authority within kinship dynamics. As one activist told me: “We [the shabab] revolted against the occupation alongside our traditional parents’ generation, whom seemed to us at the time to be cowards only caring about [making a] living. They were \textit{taqlideen} (traditional) in one way or another, and we felt they accepted the occupation.” The pluralism in “we” is a key element of the first intifada narration, as the imagination of a collectivity is attributed to the nature of the protests, which are dependent on the social mass and popular participation, on one hand, and a reference to a whole generation of youth and children, on the other.

Nearly twenty years before the start of the first intifada, prominent Palestinian writer and thinker Ghassan Kanafani wrote \textit{Um Saʿad} [The Mother of Saʿad], a short novel about Palestinian refugees in Lebanon at the moment when

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{119} Kanaana and Muhawi 1989. Kanaana and Muhawi’s analysis of heroism highlights the individual will to stand out, the confidence to do things differently and disobey authority that “necessarily entails a capacity of isolation for isolation and separation of self from collective identity.”
PLO factions were taking the lead in the Palestinian national movement. As the novella opens, the young Sa‘ad, a member of the PLO, is arrested on his way to cross the border into Palestine and fight. The mukhtar (literally, “the selected one”) the traditional head of the village, and in the novel the head of the refugee camp, tries to help get Sa‘ad released from prison. In their meeting, the young Sa‘ad, laughing along with his inmates, tells the mukhtar: “Son, send our regards to [the people in] the camp.” Being described as “son,” the mukhtar felt disrespected not only because he is older than them and nearly among their fathers’ generation, but also because of his high social status. Sa‘ad’s comment challenged his stature and was meant to dismantle the power dynamics and establish power in the name of the new revolt. At the close of the novella, Um Sa‘ad states to the mukhtar that “Sa‘ad did not mean to disrespect you, but it is his [i.e. his generation’s] turn now not yours.”

Referring to the leadership role of the young generation of Palestinians after the formation of the PLO factions in the 1960s, Kanafani was playing on the kinship dynamic in Arab society to show the transformation of the overall sociopolitical context of Palestinians. ‘Taking up arms’ and ‘Palestinian self-reliance’ became dominant tropes in national historiography and representation of nationless refugees becoming national fighters (fida‘yin), against feelings of

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120 Kanafani 1963.
humiliation and emasculation resulting from the 1948 Nakba, \textsuperscript{121} and sociologically, the transformation from peasants to revolutionaries. \textsuperscript{122}

That moment Kanafani captured in the scene between Sa’ad and the mukhtar in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon was mirrored in representations within the OPTs. The leading role of the generation of the intifada, its youth and children, marked a rapid rupture in the representative power structure within Arab kin relations and to a larger extent Arab-Palestinian society. The sociological representation of the Arab family in Western and Arab sociological accounts is described as extended family and patriarchal, where power is demarcated through gender and age with the oldest male having the maximum authority. On family and kinship, Suad Joseph argues, “Kinship is the centre of Arab society. It sustains a person’s sense of self and identity, and shapes their position in society. . . . The centrality of kinship has implications for patriarchy: kinship transports patriarchy into all spheres of social life.”\textsuperscript{123} Such framing of the family coming from a structural and structural-Marxist lens has been used to explain wider social contexts of politics in Arab societies at large.

Kinship and family structure become either a prism through which social transformations in Arab societies have been seen through or a model that political and social practice has been shaped accordingly.\textsuperscript{124} In a classical text that has

\textsuperscript{121} Baumgarten 2006: 153-172.

\textsuperscript{122} Sayigh 2008.

\textsuperscript{123} Joseph 1996.

\textsuperscript{124} Barakat 2000.
been taught for the last thirteen years in all Palestinian universities as the sole canonical text on Arab society, *Al-Mujtama’a al-‘Arabi fi-l Qarn al-‘Ashreen: Bahth fi Taghir al-Ahwal wa al-‘Alaqat* (Arab Society in the Twentieth Century: Research on the Transformations of Conditions and Relations),¹²⁵ Halim Barakat states that society is a mirror image of the family. There are no major differences between them regarding relations and roles, and to a large extent an authoritarian relationship depicts the relationship between father and son. Such representations of familial social structure have been reflected onto Arab society as a whole as an “analytical category, an ideal type or model, an interpretive principle, a formal theory” applicable on macro and microstructures.¹²⁶

Hisham Sharabi’s work on “neopatriarchy,”¹²⁷ the patriarchal values and social relations that exist within a facade of ‘modernity’ and ‘modern’ institutions in Arab society, has become a dominant framework of analysis. Sharabi writes that in patriarchal relations “between ruler and ruled, between father and child, there exist only vertical relations: in both settings the paternal will is the absolute will, mediated in both the society and the family by a forced consensus based on ritual and coercion.” Unlike Orientalist accounts on the concept of culture that treat cultural practices as ahistorical, essentializing and supraorganic to society,

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ In a similar fashion, over the last three years many analysts and writers have framed the uprisings in the Arab world as a revolt against their father-figure leaders, mobilizing the notion of the “death of the father” or the killing of the father, to describe the psycho-social transformations of Arab cultural values.

analyses of patriarchy in Arab society are framed within global dependency theory and put stress on the Marxist notion of production relations to show that family as a cultural unit consolidates as a socio-economic unit.

As depictions of Arab society have been framed within the dichotomy of modern versus traditional and have been represented as an object of modernization, notions of authority within the family continue to play a major role in analysis of the generations in the first Intifada. Mass participation of the shabab (this includes young women) in confrontation with the occupation army was perceived as a challenge to patriarchal authority. As Salim Tamari, a leading Palestinian sociologist, writes: “One consequence of the first intifada is the manner in which generational conflict has been re-defined and the traditional normative behavior towards elder members of the family by younger ones has been disrupted.” He argues that during the intifada young males and females found nationalistic justifications to legitimize their long absences from the family house. The unit of the family lost its authority in the face of political parties that were perceived by youth as holding a higher national interest. Other scholars have represented this phenomenon as liberation from all forms of authority including the traditional patriarchy and the military occupation.

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128 Ibid.
129 Barkat 2000.
130 Tamari 1993.
131 Tamari 2005.
In my fieldwork, some activists saw the mass participation of shabab in the first intifada as a deliberate action to dismantle the colonial authority that mobilized local cultural values to maintain its control. According to some, the manipulation of local culture was part of the disciplinary mechanism used even before the first intifada and thus must be confronted. When I asked a forty to forty-five-year-old group of first intifada activists in Bethlehem about the question of generations, one of them replied: “It was not about fathers but about the overall network of relations, from the father to the hamula (clan) to the mukhtars.” Another commented that everything they “thought was an obstacle to the Intifada was a target.” He then added: “But, you know, I feel sad for our fathers. I don’t know what I would do if my twelve-year old son would do this to me? But it was different. They [our fathers] represented al-waʿi al-muhtal (to have an ‘occupied’ consciousness).” This representation of the fathers complements a dominant analysis of the Palestinian father who loses his authority, on the one hand, because he feels helpless as he is not able to provide security for his family in the face of Israeli soldiers, and, on the other hand, because children and women take visible roles participating in the intifada. For many activists, their fathers’ generation represented, in the words of one activist, a “defeated consciousness.” Challenging them was therefore seen as a challenge to the occupation. Understanding this challenge as a nationalistic political act is connected to a form of colonial control that did not depend on sheer military

133 Colen 2004: 52.

power alone but rather on a complex set of disciplinary practices. One of these practices was the manipulation of local cultural practices formulated though an Orientalist gaze and a one-dimensional modern-traditional axis.

The mobilization of local cultural traditions in Palestinian society was a common practice of the Israeli occupation. The social category of the mukhtar, for instance, was used by the Israeli occupation to play a liaison position. Usually the elder of the biggest family/clan, the mukhtar in Palestinian Arab society is expected to resolve local societal disputes and mediate between the community and the state. Because under the Israeli occupation everything required permission from the Israeli military administration, such as building a new house, official documentations, and commercial licenses, the mukhtar facilitated nearly every aspect of peoples’ life in the OPT. As anthropologist Ted Swedenburg noted about Palestinian villages in the West Bank in the 1980s, the occupation army struck hard at nationalist activities and organizations by buttressing conservative elements such as landlords, mukhtars, and the head of hamulas. This strategy was not limited to rural areas but extended to all the OPT.

A clear example of this understanding by Israel and use of the modern-traditional binary was in the 1976 municipal elections. Since the early days of the 1967 occupation, three entities fought to gain popular support in the OPT: Israel as the new occupation state, Jordan as the administrator of the West Bank from 1948-67 and the PLO in exile. Jordan and the Israeli ‘civil administration’

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135 Swedenburg 1990.
depended on the traditional structure of hamula elders and appointed mukhtars. The PLO faction, in contrast, worked to organize grassroots nationalists outside the ‘traditional’ family/hamula structure. Before the 1976 municipal election, Israeli security was estimating that the pro-PLO nationalists would win the election but the government went on with the election based on the opinion of the Prime Minister’s advisor on Arab affairs. He was an Orientalist scholar who insisted that “tradition would win out and that the interests of the Hamula is still more powerful than modern politics.”

Although nationalist candidates predominantly won the election, the same Orientalist-colonial gaze continued to drive disciplinary strategy. After deporting most of the elected members and the ‘unsolved’ murder of others, Israel created ‘villages leagues’ that consisted of appointed mukhtars who aimed to play a nativist authority within the colonial control mechanism.

In two separate yet similar accounts, one from a village and the other from a refugee camp, I was told how the Israeli military authority officers (officially titled ‘the Israeli civil administration’) used to hold meetings (usually in the mukhtar’s house) with elders of Palestinian communities ‘giving them lessons’ on how to prevent their kids from taking part in nationalist activities and keeping them out of ‘trouble.’ One activist told me how he lost respect for his father when he saw him going to such meetings. At the beginning of the first intifada, Israeli authority officers turned to their network of local collaborators, largely the


appointed mukhtars, in order to stop what seemed to be a massive national revolt. A landmark moment in the intifada occurred at the start of 1988 in the village of Obatia (near Jenin) when a group of activists assassinated the village mukhtar, hanging his body from an electricity pole. The representation of heroism of an entire generation during the first intifada therefore needs to be understood not only within the prism of patriarchy in Arab society or as a by-product of mass participation, but also within the complexity of colonial control mechanisms that manipulated local cultural practices to solidify its disciplinary power.

Following the formation of the PA, the family social structure was subjected to more indirect control by the colonial mechanism as it became an object of social categorization and legal codes produced by the PA. The traditional socio-cultural system of Arab Palestinian society became part of the new control mechanism of the PA, which reproduced and capitalized on kinship relations to maintain its political legitimacy. In the second intifada, for example, society as whole was represented as a network of support for al-muqawama (the resistance). Acts of resistance became the daily practices of “getting by the occupation” and the suspension of daily life in support of the resistance.

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138 A song on “the Intifada cassette” glorifies the act: “It was the people of Obatia who exhausted the [occupation] army, the wetness of the electricity pole / Thus the traitors destiny shall be.”

139 Allen 2008.

140 Jean-Klein.
The family and household, while not given a direct political marker,\textsuperscript{141} regained its signification as a shock absorber and major social unit in its ability to adapt during the intensities of the second intifada,\textsuperscript{142} as well as reproducer of national subjectivities and acts of resistance through actions of solidarity and support for its members and others affected by the occupation\textsuperscript{143}. The transformations in the role of the family and kinship relations between the two intifadas are directly linked to the various forms of colonial control used over the years. As discussed, kinship relations before the first intifada were manipulated by Israel and used to deepen colonial control over the Palestinian populations. The new generation that emerged during the first intifada challenged the occupation as it did against familial power hierarchies, becoming a national signifier. New forms of control in place during the second intifada located the family itself as an integral part of resistance practice. Resistance as such was not the district confrontation with the occupier but rather the ability to survive colonial measures.

The family unit and kinship relations are one example of the shift in the discursive taxonomy of society in the post-Oslo era in the OPTs. The pre-Oslo classification of society into sectors (working class, peasantry, students, merchants, and so forth), which was viewed directly vis-à-vis the colonial mechanisms of control, disappeared for a national lexicon in favor of a liberal

\textsuperscript{141} Taraki 2006.

\textsuperscript{142} Johnson 2006.

\textsuperscript{143} Abu Nahleh 2006.
taxonomy such as civil society, state institutions, non-governmental organization, the poor, women, businessmen, and the private sector. With this new classification, a structural shift impacted the potential and practice of mass-based popular participation in the resistance.

**Seeking Popular Participation: The People**

In his study on the role of family in preserving [national] identity, anthropologist Sharif Kanaana argues that Israeli and Western media and scholars perceived the first intifada as a revolt against elders and disobedience against traditional authority. Palestinians and other Arab scholars, he continues, were persuaded by this framing and adopted it in their analyses. Kanaana, however, argues the contrary. He writes that the intifada created a mutual understanding among the generations because all of Palestinian society took part although in different ways and to different degrees. For Kanaana, it is important to differentiate between visible and active forms of the intifada, the former being the shabab who confronted armed Israeli soldiers with stones and public demonstrations, and the latter being the wider invisible network of support from society.¹⁴⁴ These included elders and the family structure in supporting the new generation. While Kanaana’s argument holds merit as it addresses how all parts of society took part in the uprising, it does not explain what society is. In other words, what were the sectors

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¹⁴⁴ Kanaana 2010: 430-432.
of society involved in the first intifada and in what capacity? How did they come to exist as social actors? What kinds of tactics were they a part of?

While representations of the new generation being the leading force in Palestinian society dominate accounts on the first intifada, during the second intifada, the notion of the heroism of a generation disappeared from public discourse and representation of the resistance. In its place, a relatively new national signifier emerged, *al-muqawim* (resistance fighter). The image of a male mid-twenty to mid-thirty-year-old holding a gun became the most widely circulated representation of the active Palestinian fighter against the Israeli. Taking on many of the characteristics of the *fedayeen* of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) during the ’70s and ’80s who represented young Palestinians who became armed revolutionaries, committed and ready to die for the cause. The new term *muqawim* replaced the term *fida’i* (singular of *fedayeen*) that disappeared following the signing of the Oslo agreement and the formation of the PA. In addition, it also replaced the term *mujahid*,[^145] the term widely used in the ’90s that was associated with Islamic-ideologically inspired groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.[^146] The usage of the terms *muqawim* and *muqawama* (resistance) takes on the connotation of a position of defense, in contrast to *fida’i* and *mujahid*, who represent figures on the offensive. All connote fighting for the

[^145]: In English, it is often translated as holy war fighter. In Palestine, however, the word is also used for national secular fighters until the late 1980s with the emergence of the national religious movements.

[^146]: *Harakat al-Muqāwamah al-Islāmiyyah* (Islamic Resistance Movement) was established in 1987 during the start of the first intifada. They were inspired by Muslim Brotherhood ideology combined with Palestinian nationalism. *Al Harakat al-Jihād al-Islāmi fi Filastīn* (Palestinian Islamic Jihad) formed in the early 1980s, inspired by the Iranian revolution.
nation against foreign invasion. As a signifier, muqawim is coupled with the colonial occupation in a binary opposition.

Today, yet another mode of representation among activists is being used. The “people” in the OPT as a holistic term encompasses imaginations and narrations of the first intifada. Activists who call for unarmed popular uprising use the term in a broad sense to speak about national heroism. The terms an-Nass and as-Sha’b (both of which refer to “the people”) that I encountered in activists’ speech, however, were not used in a glorifying manner but rather as an indicator of mobilization and participation as an active agent in what is described as ‘popular resistance.’ The question of popular participation has been their crucial concern as they maintain nostalgia for al-intifada al-sha’biyyah al-kubra (the grand popular Intifada). The question that I imagined would be answered by activists was, however, continuously asked back to me: “Why aren’t the people participating in popular resistance today?” To understand the activists’ desire for popular resistance, we need to grasp the concrete meaning for them of who are ‘the people.’

As one thinks about today’s small-scale protests and protest actions taking place in the OPT, the puzzling question of the participation of the people is reflected upon through the past. The two Intifadas have become the prism through which today’s protests are being analyzed and contextualized. Unlike the rhetorical dichotomy of violent/nonviolent that is used by scholars, Western

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147 Anthropologist Ted Swedenburg wrote that mass participation in the first intifada produced a romanticized notion of “the people” in the OPT, yet he did not offer further articulation on this idea. Swedenburg 1990.
media, and the PA, among others, as an analytical framework, the activists I encountered focus on popular participation and its absence. The lens is one of popular participation versus guerrilla tactics, which are restricted to a small number of participants, rather than a violence/nonviolence oppositional binary.

The century-long Zionist-colonial project in Palestine and the variety of anti-colonial practices used over the years opens up a space for historical analogies. The resistance tradition undertaken in previous eras offers rich material for Palestinians to make use of their past for the aim of answering today’s questions. What makes the two intifadas prominent is not only their historical and national significance but also their proximity in time. A number of leading activists have lived through the first intifada, while the majority experienced the second as children and young adults. Additionally, the social and political conditions that preceded and produced each intifada still resonates today, and most importantly the quest of popular participation is fundamental in making the analogy.

In intellectual circles, including research institutions, journalistic accounts, and articles and debates among activists, the act of reflecting on the two intifadas is not for mere historical review, but rather for questioning how to mobilize the population to actively resist the Israeli occupation. Recollecting and analyzing the past is thus not a historical or intellectual exercise, but rather a strategic task to answer a contemporary question. Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered several perspectives on the reason why the second Intifada (unlike the first) lacked popular participation. Below I discuss three major arguments.
1. Being A Reaction

A main argument to explain the lack of mass participation revolves around the use of arms by Palestinians. A common reasoning I encountered during my fieldwork is that the Israeli establishment intentionally pushed Palestinians into a second Intifada characterized by armed clashes. This argument cites the Israeli media and the one million-bullet policy. In the first month of October 2000, thousands of young Palestinian men marched in the streets toward the Israeli checkpoints that encapsulate Palestinian cities. Demonstrations and stone-throwing resulted in blood for Palestinians with hundreds of deaths and thousands injured. Activists cite the head of Israeli military intelligence at the time who claimed that Israeli forces fired more than 1,300,000 bullets in the OPT in the first month alone. According to this argument, the Israeli army defined the terms of the confrontation implicitly declaring that a popular uprising was not permissible.

This argument was used in conversation with a forty-year-old activist from Bethlehem, who recalled his imprisonment during the first intifada. He said: “We [Palestinians] have always been a people of reaction; they [Israelis] plan everything and we follow according to their plan.” Although a generalization of the Palestinian people and Palestinian politics, such a feeling of being crippled in the face of a stronger opponent could be sensed in most encounters with


Palestinians as they narrate personal experiences with the colonial mechanism of control. A feeling of frustration arising from the inability to make change on the ground most often redirects blame onto the group, i.e. the people, rather than to individual actors. Thus, the I/subject is hardly visible with regards to responsibility, and replaced by the “we” as a collective representation of the Palestinian people. Denial of the self in favor of collective blame furthermore induces desire for popular participation and capitalization on the notion of popularity in imagining an anti-colonial emancipatory project.

On another occasion, a younger activist challenged the previous analysis, stating while smiling: “That is what we are good at, blaming the occupation for our failures.” He added rhetorically: “Our streets are not clean because of the occupation?” As his sarcasm located responsibility with the Palestinians and not the occupation, it also endorsed a collective lens through which to view the situation. In other words, seeking popular participation is not a mere strategic or pragmatic goal, but rather a central national cultural value for activists that solidify the sense of nationhood. In the post-Oslo OPTs, activists express their feeling of frustration as such: “En-Nas mish farqa ma’hom” (it doesn’t matter to people) or “el-Ihbat el-‘Am” (collective depression). What activists perceive as “La mobalah” (indifference) on the part of the majority of the population today translates into a source of anxiety, producing a retroactive reading of the past, particularly from the first and second intifadas, looking for guidance and answers to the question of popular participation.
The notion of ‘reaction’ itself is another form of anxiety. In narrating the political history of Palestinians, many activists stressed the lack of agency, strategy, and taking initiative, the ‘just being a response’ to particular Israeli policies. As an example, one activist highlighted the protest-oriented form of activism as a dominant modality of resistance among Palestinians:

The tunnel intifada was a reaction to the Israeli act of making a tunnel under Al Aqsa mosque; the second intifada was a response to the failure of the peace process and Sharon’s provocative visit to Al Aqsa; today’s popular resistance is in response to the building of the Wall. It’s the same with the protests in solidarity with prisoners in Israeli jails and with the people of Gaza. The only time we had initiative was in the first intifada.

What is important to note here is not the historical accuracy of such an account, but the way of narrating history via the angle of agency and the unpleasant anxiety of its absence. As today’s practice is informed by the past in numerous ways, the question of agency remains a central component in Palestinian political culture and (collective) self-reflection.

2. Inter/intra Border Mimicry

Although it has became conventional wisdom in interpretative analysis of political and cultural practices to think about the linkages, flux of ideas, peoples and information in a rapidly globalizing world, Middle East political culture is still dominantly thought through the prism of the postcolonial nation-state of fixed borders. What has been described as the Arab revolts, or ‘Arab spring,’ disrupts such understanding and reopens a window to address the region that has a long
history of overarching ideological, political, and cultural connections.\textsuperscript{150}

Specifically with regards to Palestine, the network of relations with the Arab world extends to include the presence of millions of Palestinian refugees, the formation of the PLO as an exile revolutionary movement, the role of pan-Arab nationalism and the overall Third World national liberation imaginary. Such connections are not just the result of ideology, political events or cultural practices, but also of a series of mimicking processes of what are perceived as successful experiences.

When I asked Muhammad, who describes himself as an Arafat Fateh member not a Mahmoud Abbas one (to demonstrate that he is not in favor of the Fateh leadership today) about popular participation and unarmed mass-based resistance in the OPT, I heard the following story:

We were marching in the village of Beit Jala going to the house of a martyr who was shot while throwing stones at the Israeli army. As we were walking and passed by two PA police cars, someone in the back of the march started chanting: “Ya Sulta dakheel Allah, ta’lame min Hizbullah” (For the sake of God, PA learn from Hizbullah). For us it [the experience of Hizbullah] is a model if we want to achieve some kind of victory.

The use of arms in the OPT during the second intifada has not only been a political decision\textsuperscript{151} but also a strong demand from the people in the streets based on the inspiration drawn from south Lebanon.

\textsuperscript{150} Although it has been argued that pan-Arabism ideology ceased to exist after the 1967 war, one can trace the similarities in slogans being used in the new wave of popular uprisings in the Arab world showing that a pan-Arab collective imaginary still crosses national borders.

\textsuperscript{151} The Israeli political and military establishment accused Yasser Arafat of being behind the second intifada and labeled him with terrorism.
In the summer of 2000, Palestinians witnessed the Israeli forced withdrawal from south Lebanon. In the words of the young activist cited above: “For us [Palestinians], it was an inspiring event. We believed that armed struggle was what would liberate us and we didn’t think of its consequences.” Hizbullah, a Lebanese armed organization and political party that was established in the mid-1980s, engaged in guerilla warfare with the Israeli army and its collaborative militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Israel subsequently was forced to withdraw from the lands it occupied since 1982. Palestinians and the majority of the Arab world saw the event as a major victory over Israel. That same summer saw the PLO and Israel engaging in what is known as the “final status negotiations” in Camp David. In stark contrast to the success of Hizbullah’s guerilla warfare resistance that resulted in the liberation of Israeli-occupied south Lebanon, Camp David, which was a result of eight years of negotiations between the PLO and the state of Israel, did not result in achieving any political rights for the Palestinians. The use of arms thus became a prevailing argument in the OPT.

It is important to note that Hizbullah was not perceived as an organization external to Palestine and the Palestinians. Not only does Palestine constitute a central component in Hizbullah’s political imaginary, but also because Hizbullah itself is part of the Palestinian national narrative. I was told by a number of activists with pride how Fateh and other PLO factions had trained Hizbullah fighters in the 1980s, with one activist stating: “We were partly responsible for their victory in 2000.” The connection is a product of the history of south Lebanon in Palestinian national imaginations. Since the early 1970s, south
Lebanon was the PLO major stronghold. Not only were many Palestinian refugee camps located there, but also major para-military training camps for all PLO factions. Also of significance was the hospitable social and cultural environment for Palestinians, and the fact that the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was a war against the Palestinians based there. Hizbullah’s victory was “finishing something we [the Palestinians] had started,” according to one activist.

*caption: Al Manar, Hizbulla TV reproduces PLO songs of the 1970s. The image is from a video clip of a song titled “Oh, the Masses in the Occupied Land.”*

According to many scholars and activists, the victory of Hizbullah was a major source of encouragement for Palestinians to engage in armed resistance inside the OPTs. Hizbullah also offered material support to some Palestinian factions in the form of weaponry and money. The image above is from a music video made by Hizbullah and broadcast on their official TV station, Al Manar. It presents a series of visuals for a PLO song made in the early ’70s calling for the

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152 Sayigh 1997a.
153 Pearlman 2011.
people in the OPT to revolt. Nearly thirty years later in 2000 Hizbullah broadcast the song for the same purpose, this time with the added imagery of armed Palestinian militants engaged in clashes with the Israeli army.

While the use of arms proved successful in the case of Hizbullah, it did not enable mass-based participation in the second intifada. On the one hand, the limited availability of weaponry in the OPT resulted in the exclusion of the majority of the population from being able to actively engage in the struggle. On the other hand, there was no overarching organizational structure to mobilize and coordinate the use of arms. The PA played an ambiguous role, appearing as if in confrontation with the colonial power, and yet maintaining control over society and the monopoly of using arms. As the use of arms was glorified, other forms of participation were not given equal value. This can be seen in the use of the American-produced M16 (which is used by the Israeli army) for the logo of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade (a Fateh-affiliated militant organization) instead of the traditionally-used symbol of Palestinian and most of the Third World national liberation armed struggles, the Soviet AK-47.

154 This succeeded in the West Bank, while failing in Gaza, end up with Hamas seized full control of Gaza in 2007.
When I asked an ex-Al Aqsa militant on why the M16 was chosen as a symbol although it was used by the Israeli army, he smiled and said: “It is stronger.” The signification of power overruled the signification of revolution. The question of power became the central understanding of what it meant to resist, another reason that alienated the majority of the population who were unarmed and thus not directly considered part of the resistance.

The existence of the PA produced three realities: less direct contact with the colonial control apparatus in Palestinian urban centers and therefore less possibilities of popular participation in the type of actions used in the first intifada; an increase in availability of firearms that invoked the urge among the population to make use of them in the face of Israeli assaults\textsuperscript{155}; and the

\textsuperscript{155} Firearms exist in the hands of approximately forty thousand PA police and security personnel, in addition to being present in the market.
recapitalization on the long cultural signification of armed struggle (1965-1993).^{156}

At the close of Yasser Arafat’s speech to the United Nations General Assembly in 1974, he said: “Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter’s gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand. I repeat: do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.” Echoing these words, Palestinians used the following chant during demonstrations in the second Intifada: “Down with the olive branch, long live the machine gun.” The dichotomy between the olive branch and the gun in the OPTs at that time took on a different logic than in the 1970s. The olive branch symbolized the seemingly endless and futile ‘peace’ negotiations, unlike Arafat’s meaning of the project of decolonization, whereas the gun became the symbol of armed struggle in opposition to a nativist authority under colonial control. Such a binary opposition of submission and armed revolt that dominated local understandings closed the way for a third option of unarmed mass-based resistance in the OPTs.

3. Back to the Future: The Quest for a Strategy

Pre-Oslo and pre-PA, the history of the Palestinian national liberation movement was based on incorporating the majority of Palestinians in the liberation struggle. Organizing the ‘masses’ and arming the people was seen as an emancipatory response to the twenty years (1948-1967) of dependency on Arab

^{156} Al Sharif 1995.
states to liberate Palestine that climaxed with the 1967 defeat of the Arab states and Israeli annexation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{157} Locating power in the hands of the people was a strong driving force in PLO political culture. Organizing and arming the refugee populations in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria were part of the grand vision of liberation, and the notion of a people’s war was a major conceptual and political project dating to the formation of PLO factions in exile. Within only a few years, however, the PLO developed a more hierarchical, less democratic form of organizing in the form of a state-like bureaucracy, and the political project that started with national liberation and self-determination slowly shifted toward creating a political entity in the form of a state.\textsuperscript{158}

Approaches to mass organization differed between the PLO in exile and pro-PLO activists in the OPTs. In the OPTs, activists organized sectors of society in an effort to create parallel social institutions to the ones controlled by the colonial authority. In other words, the focus lay on creating a self-reliant organizational structure with emancipatory political consciousness that would transform into daily resistance practice in the first Intifada.\textsuperscript{159} This routinized mass-based resistance practice functioned on the symbolical and structural levels to challenge the colonial modality of control. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, however, several economic and political structural changes and a

\textsuperscript{157} Baumgarten 2006.

\textsuperscript{158} Hilal 2013.

\textsuperscript{159} Tabar and Alazzeh 2014.
discursive paradigm shift regarding the notion of ‘the people’ obstructed mass-based mobilizations.

Mass organizing in the OPTs started in the early 1970s with voluntary work committees, voluntary professional organizations, labor unions that included workers and professionals, women and students organizations.\(^{160}\) In the 1980s, PLO factions capitalized on these organizations, known as *al-Munathamat al-Jamahiriyya* (mass organizations) or *al-Munathamat al-Democratiyya* (democratic organizations), as they were more accessible to the local population, in contrast to the party organizations which were more selective at that time. These self-reliant organizations and networks paved the way for the first Intifada through a process of political consciousness-raising and most importantly building an organizational structure for a sustainable Intifada.\(^{161}\) As Nasser Aruri accurately wrote, the first Intifada’s goal was not to “out-fight” Israel but to “out-administer” the population.\(^{162}\) Self-rule was a practice to dismantle the modality of control over society in the OPTs.

Throughout my fieldwork and discussions with first Intifada activists, and in reviewing the rhetorical devices used in the *bayanat* (communiqués) of the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada (UNLI), I noticed the recurrent use of military terminologies and references to war. I believe it is useful, therefore, to analogize processes of mass mobilization of the first intifada with war strategy


\(^{161}\) Tabar and Alazzez 2014.

\(^{162}\) Aruri 1989.
drawing on Antonio Gramsci, paying particular attention to how society is understood. Organizers, activists, and intellectuals of the first intifada viewed each sector of society as playing a particular role that had both resistant and constructive dimensions: resistance by way of challenging the modality of control and demolishing colonial governmentality; and constructive in the practice of replacing colonial control with self-rule, what activists describe as exercising people’s power on the ground.\(^{163}\)

Commenting on Indian decolonization resistance, Gramsci wrote:

“Gandhi’s passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a war of movement, and at others underground warfare. Boycotts are a form of war of position, strikes of war of movement.”\(^{164}\) While “war of movement,” he writes, “refers to a swift, frontal and direct attack on the enemy with the aim of winning quickly and decisively,” “war of position involves a long, protracted and uneven struggle over the hegemony of the dominant group and its eventual replacement by the hegemony of the subordinate groups fighting for power and the revolutionary transformation of society. This is a war of retrenchment waged primarily through the institutions of civil society.”\(^{165}\)

Locating “civil society” institutions in the OPTs involves first conceptualizing and identifying the sectors of society and the modality of control over them. In the first intifada, accordingly, each sector of Palestinian society was assigned a

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\(^{163}\) Ibid: 38. Tamari 1990.

\(^{164}\) Gramsci 1992: 481.

particular tactic by the national movement in a multi-tactical strategy. Sectors where mass organizations and participation were strong provide us with an understanding of how society was conceptualized then mobilized in the struggle.

Included in nearly every bayan of the UNLI is a taxonomy of the people. The classification starts with the shabab as the primary visible element in the resistance struggle, the workers (often referred to as the working class), the peasants, students, women, and merchants, and makes use of a glorifying language to urge each sector to step up in their mission. This conceptualization of society is also reflected in Palestinian scholarship, wherein common understandings among the political leadership and intellectual circles reflected the dominant ideology of Marxist and Third World dependency theory in analyzing society.

Following the Oslo Accords, the formation of the PA and indirect colonial rule, and the new political economy, such discursive formations disappeared from the political lexicon and scholarship, being replaced with parallel structural conceptualizations of Palestinian society. This new taxonomy and scholarship was fashioned in accordance with a neoliberal framework including such a lexicon that included state-building, the private sector, businessmen and investors, elite and middle classes, civil society and NGOs, gender and development. The new modality of control, discursive practice, and structural shifts following the Oslo

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166 See for example Nassar and Heacock 1990 and Aruri 1989, among many others.
Accords reflect the ways in which popular participation experiences of the first intifada failed in the second and are failing in contemporary activism.

For Gramsci, the war of positions takes place on an ideological front between dominant class hegemony and subordinate classes counter-hegemony. As Clifford Geertz noticed, ideology is laden with cultural signs and symbolism that play a key role in the psychosocial comprehending and sensing of the world.\textsuperscript{167} In national ideologies, signs and thus significations are found in objects, causes, and ritualistic practices. In the OPTs during the first intifada, enormous investment went into making use of symbolism, the power of which was strengthened because the Israeli military government banned any form of Palestinian nationalism or symbolism.

Acts of resistance capitalized on actualizing and spreading national signifiers such as the map of Palestine, the Palestinian flag, pictures of Arafat and other PLO leaders. Methods of distribution included graffiti, paintings, and music. I was told that displaying a Palestinian flag or even the mere colors of the flag was considered under Israeli military law a violation punishable up to one year in prison.\textsuperscript{168} Practices such as reading banned books, participating in cultural events, and membership in labor unions were seen by Palestinians as satisfactory acts of resistance. After the formation of the PA, the majority of national symbols were declared non-threatening to Israel and no longer banned. A major shift in the strategies of the first Intifada to the second until today is one based on cultural

\textsuperscript{167} Geertz 1973.

\textsuperscript{168} Hallaj 1982.
meanings and the use of national liberation symbols. The shift in the resonance of national symbolism was such that one activist commented: “We were willing to die for having raised a Palestinian flag on a pole, where today it is everywhere and nearly meaningless.” A striking similarity can be seen in Frantz Fanon’s discussion of national culture in the anti-colonial struggle: “The bourgeois leaders of underdeveloped countries imprison national consciousness in sterile formalism. It is only when men and women are included on a vast scale in enlightened and fruitful work that form and body are given to that consciousness. Then the flag and the palace where sits the government cease to be the symbols of the nation.”

The cultural signification of national symbols shifted from liberating icons to images claiming authority yet without actual self-determination or political independence. Today, most of the symbols used in demonstrations are directed outward beyond Palestine, in contrast to the first that were largely directed inward toward the local population. In making a contrast between the two intifadas’ experiences, one activist said: “In the first Intifada you barely heard any slogan or saw any graffiti written in English. Look what you see and hear today.” A similar process can be traced in the self-portrayal of the PLO leadership, where the revolutionary nicknames of Abu X, like Abu Jihad and Abu ‘Amar, were replaced by authoritative titles like Minister and General. Such shifts in political culture marked a distinct shift from national liberation to ‘state-building’ endeavor.

169 Fanon 1963: 204.
170 Hilal 1998.
Commercial strikes as practiced in the first Intifada were fundamentally symbolic. The act of closing a shop in accordance with calls from the political leadership was part of a process of delegitimizing the Occupation authority. Recognizing the PLO as the people’s legitimate leadership in direct refusal of colonial rule was the underlying essence of these strikes, in a context also where Israel and other regional powers were still attempting to create or support alternative non-nationalist leaders.\textsuperscript{171} By the second Intifada, the goal of establishing a national authority in the OPTs, however curbed in its ability to function as such, had been realized. Although the first Intifada experience greatly informs the ways in which Palestinians conceive of resistance in the second intifada and today, acts such as workers’ strikes no longer have symbolic significance. While strikes were supported at the outbreak of the second Intifada, they were quickly abandoned after the first few months, and few alternative effective acts of civil disobedience were imagined in accordance within the new sociopolitical landscape in the OPTs.\textsuperscript{172} Today, the notion of civil disobedience has largely disappeared from activists’ rhetoric.

Civil disobedience activities, such as worker and commercial strikes, the refusal to pay taxes, and the boycotting of Israeli products also lost its economic impact on the colonial modality of control following Oslo. Since the occupation

\textsuperscript{171} Since the early 1970s there were several attempts to bypass the PLO and create an alternative co-opted leadership in the OPT; Israel, for instance, attempted to erect a leadership of collaborators and Jordan attempted to do the same through traditional family structures.

\textsuperscript{172} A few small-scale exceptions will be discussed in chapter 3.
of 1967, for instance, the Israeli process of proletarianization of the Palestinians resulted in 120,000 workers from the OPT working for Israeli employers in 1988 and 160,000 by 1992. Palestinian workers were made into cheap laborers for the Israeli labor market. Though this offered some income to Palestinian families, it deepened the dependency relationship between the colonizers and the colonized and maintained the underdevelopment of the OPT. Palestinian workers were phased out with Israeli implementation of a closure regime around Palestinians that continues to accelerate in accordance with the logic of Oslo. By 1996 the number of Palestinian workers in Israel dropped to 26,000.\textsuperscript{173} Unlike other settler colonial contexts like South Africa where the native population was needed as laborers and thus offered some form of welfare, the post-1990 political economy of the state of Israel no longer viewed Palestinians as a service for the colonial power but rather as a burden. By the time the second Intifada broke out, the resistance practice of workers’ strikes had little impact on the Israeli economy, instead detrimentally affecting the Palestinians. The latter became replaceable with foreign workers mainly from Southeast Asia. Today, in contrast to the workers’ strike, the PA calls on Israel to give more work permits to Palestinian workers and markets the increased number of work permits as an achievement.\textsuperscript{174}

The tactic of refusing to pay taxes resulted in a similar fate. During the first intifada it was considered a major tactic and described by Salim Tamari as a

\textsuperscript{173} Farsakh 2005.

\textsuperscript{174} As of 2013, sixty to seventy thousands of Palestinians work inside Israel.
revolt of the petite bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{175} Because the PA now collects taxes, withholding them only weakens the PA’s ability to provide services. Boycotting Israeli products, however, still remains a front where both symbolic and economic leverage can exist. Symbolically, it maintains its validity because it advocates an alternative policy of supporting Palestinian products and Palestinian self-sufficiency. Economically, the OPTs are the largest ‘foreign’ market for Israeli products. Nonetheless, the ability to create Palestinian alternatives to Israeli products in the context of an entirely captive Palestinian economy is severely crippled.\textsuperscript{176} Moreover, the creation of a dependent economic Palestinian class under the Oslo Accords and its economic arrangements (known as the Paris protocol of 1995) further hinders these efforts. Palestinian businessmen benefit from the economic relations between the PA and Israel and are materially disinterested in losing distribution of Israeli products in the West Bank and Gaza.

A final arena to discuss is geography. Again, the Oslo Accords played a main role in the lack of participation in the resistance. Following eight years of negotiations starting in 1992 with Israel, the OPTs were divided into three areas designated A, B, and C. The majority of the Palestinian population in the OPTs is located in Area A, which is under the administration of the PA. Area A comprises 18\% of the total land of Palestine occupied by Israel in 1967 and consists of urban centers with more than 55\% of the population where Israeli armed forces do not enter on a daily basis but rather encircle them with military checkpoints. Area B,

\textsuperscript{175} Tamari 1990.

\textsuperscript{176} Botmeh 2013.
under Israeli military control and the civilian administration of the PA, comprises approximately 21% of the West Bank and includes 40% of the population. Today, most of the demonstrations and symbolic acts of resistance in the OPTs take place in Area B. Area C, fully under Israeli military control and administration, comprises 60% of the land and holds 5% of the population. This new territorial segregation enables the state of Israel to exert control over the Palestinian population in the OPTs from afar.\textsuperscript{177} Palestinian cites and towns are isolated from each other, and the Israeli army controls the roads between localities, instituting a regime of checkpoints and sniper towers. This regime of control intensified following the start of the second Intifada, justifying its policies as a necessary form of counter-resistance and ‘security’ control. Geographic enclaving of the OPTs severely fragments the Palestinian population even further, hindering movement and coordinated actions across the OPTs.

Among activists, there is a strong nostalgia for the first intifada and the desire to reproduce its experiences in the OPTs today. Throughout my fieldwork, I understood the great anxiety held by activists to revolve around the lack of popular participation in the resistance struggle. The significant changes in the OPTs after the signing of the Oslo Accords between the PLO and the State of Israel in 1993 were not only structural (symbolism, political representation, political economy, and geography), but also included shifts in the dominant paradigms present in political rationale and academic scholarship, particularly in conceptualizing ‘the people’ from a Third Worldlist and Marxist lens to a

\textsuperscript{177} Weizman 2012.
neoliberal paradigm with an altered taxonomy. Thinking through the ways in which Palestinians understood their emancipatory role during the first intifada is comparable to a Gramscian-articulated war strategy. Accordingly, obstacles to mass participation lie in the way in which activists understand the notion of ‘the people’ and the relationship between different sectors of society within the colonial modality of control. Mass-based tactics used in the first intifada thus failed in the second and have not been effective today. With the lack of strategy to successfully incorporate the majority of the population, activists have reduced the first intifada experience into a matter of stone throwing and spectacle-based demonstrations.
Chapter III

Fragmented Resistance

*We do what prisoners do, we do what the unemployed do: we cultivate hope.*

*(Mahmoud Darwish, A State of Siege)*

Patrick Wolfe analyzes settler colonialism as a struggle over territorial expansion of the settler colonial society at the expense of the native population. The fundamental site of conflict is the land, and land equals life for the native indigenous population. The territorial conquest is a process of eliminating the native population, where “elimination refers to more than the summary liquidation of Indigenous people.” Wolfe describes “the logic of elimination” as a “complex social formation and as continuity through time . . . a structure rather than an event.”

History of the colonization of Palestine is a visible case of settler colonialism that continues to exist today through “the logic of elimination.”

Starting from the way the settler society was constructed on the land of Palestine, territorial refashioning has been ongoing: from the construction of the first Zionist settlements in the late 19th century to the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population in the mid 20th century (known as the Nakba in Arabic, meaning “catastrophe”) to the “matrix of control” exercised by the military occupation to the enclavization of the remaining members of the indigenous

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178 Wolfe 2006.

179 Halper 2009.
population.\textsuperscript{180} Long process of “attempt to secure a sense of Jewish national homeliness involves an endless process of covering over, removing, or managing a stubbornly persistent Palestinian presence”.\textsuperscript{181} Israeli building of the Wall in 2002 has been referred to by many activists as another \textit{Nakba}. This referencing exemplifies the activists’ knowledge of the logic of elimination, understanding settler colonialism as a process. Similarly, local commemoration of the Nakba is articulated as “ongoing,” something that is still being lived. To counter the process of elimination, Palestinian resistance over the years has been exercised over the land: the right of return, the contesting of Israeli settlement building, and the notion of \textit{sumoud} (the steadfast remaining on the land), as basic examples. Land Day,\textsuperscript{182} which commemorates the killing of Palestinians in the north who were demonstrating against Israeli state appropriation of their lands in 1976, is a central event that symbolizes the unity of the Palestinian people and the concrete imagined space that they belong to, which constitutes the native as such. In contemporary political activism, the land remains the center of gravity.

\textsuperscript{180} Once must not forget that more than 70\% of the Palestinians are refugees who are denied the right of return to their homes. Taraki 2008.

\textsuperscript{181} Makdisi 2010.

Against the Wall: Between Grassroots and Institutionalization

In June 2002, in the wake of Israel’s military invasion of the West Bank and its Palestinian political, civil, and social institutions, Israeli bulldozers started digging the first trench to erect the Wall near the northern West Bank towns of Jenin and Qalqilia. In less than one month, the first local town meeting issued its first statement against the construction of the Wall. The immediate local response came long before PA officials paid attention to the danger of the Wall’s construction on Palestinian self-determination, as it divided and confiscated

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Local committees under the name of “land defense committees” formed in most West Bank localities in response to the Wall’s construction on Palestinian village lands. Because of the intense military operations at the time, it was not clear what exactly could be done to effectively challenge the Wall’s construction.
Palestinian lands within the West Bank, further encroaching on the feasibility of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. In the following few months, the grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (also known as Stop the Wall) was founded as part of the Palestinian Environmental NGO Network (PENGON) to mobilize affected communities and attract international attention.\textsuperscript{184}

PENGON is a network of Palestinian NGOs which were previously grassroots organizations working in marginalized communities, such as villages and refugee camps, to enable self-sufficiency and the building of an alternative economy to reduce local dependency on the colonial administration’s formal economy. It was composed of two main bodies, the organizational structure and the popular base they served that was organized in the form of committees. To take as one example, the Agricultural Development Association (PARC) started as a voluntary grassroots committee called the Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees in 1983 with the primary goal of protecting “Palestinian land from confiscation by the Israeli occupation.”\textsuperscript{185} The shift in from committee to association, from relief to development, and from voluntary grassroots to institution seeking the ISO certification exemplifies the NGOization of grassroots organizing, a product of the 1990s formation of the PA and its institutionalization of Palestinian society.

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\textsuperscript{184} See \url{http://www.pengon.org/} [last accessed April 16, 2014].

\textsuperscript{185} See \url{http://www.pal-arc.org/history.html} [last accessed April 16, 2014].
During the 2002 Israeli incursions, activists recall the more than 250 bulldozers simultaneously working in the northern West Bank districts of Jenin, Tulkarem, and Qalqilya to bulldoze the land for the building of the Wall. As one activist described that moment:

the people living in those areas would contact us [PENGON], screaming in panic for us to do something. “The PA is not here,” they would say. “It seems they betrayed us. We feel alone. Our land is being taken. It is a new Nakba.” I felt immense responsibility at that moment that we had to come up with a plan of action . . . Building on our pre-Oslo network of people who we used to work with, such as those inside Israeli prisons during the first intifada, and others who were interested in joining our action, we started the campaign of organizing around one goal: to stop the Wall and protect the land.

In nearly every locality impacted by the Wall, a new Popular Committee was formed, some building upon existing political structures such as political party factions and village councils, others starting as initiatives by local youth without official intervention by any formal political structure. In the words of one activist: “The land unified us. As villagers, it is our life and as Palestinians, it is our future.” Many of the Popular Committees against the Wall referred to themselves as the Committees for the Defense of the Land. By 2003 there was fifty-four Popular Committees across the West Bank. Their primary goal was to mobilize local populations in localities affected by the Wall to obstruct the building of the Wall.

186 My use of the word “popular” here is referring to how local committees describe themselves.
In most villages, the Popular Committee formed immediately as Israeli surveyors came to their land and demonstrations took place. From their inception, the aims of the Popular Committees have been to stop the bulldozers in any way possible, by replanting the bulldozed areas, demonstrations, stone-throwing, sit-ins, and destroying the construction equipment. Such actions brought an Israeli response of repressive military campaigns of arrest, the targeting and shooting of demonstrators where bombardment with tear-gas and rubber-coated metal bullets was a lenient way of confronting the demonstrations. The protest actions of the localities impacted by the Wall were the direct and immediate response by a community under threat, inspired by national imaginations but primarily functioning as local initiatives against particular colonial policies on a local level. As an elderly woman explained: “Bil‘in was a quiet village . . . today we are connected to people from other villages in the West Bank, and we have a voice. The majority of us are 1948 refugees. We were horrified by that experience and feared the same would happen to us in 2005. Thus we resisted in order to stay on our land.”

Social and anthropological knowledge informs us that communities under attack by external forces restructure themselves in order to maintain social cohesiveness and confront challenges. The emergence of social movements in any community “separates its participants from existing social structures and locates them in a liminal situation,” to use the terminology of sociologist Guobin Yang.187

According to Yang, defining characteristics of this liminal situation, “freedom, egalitarianism, communion, and creativity—provide the conditions for personal change.” In the small communities of the OPTs, the liminal nature of the moment of building the Wall that instigated a response from the local communities, not only transformed individual activists but also the overall community. The active engagement of the majority of the village and townships was perceived by activists as a shift from the guerilla tactics of the second intifada to a more mass-based form of resistance.

In 2004 a national committee was formed to serve as an umbrella for mobilizing and expanding the popular participation and activism against the construction of the Wall. It took on a more popular structure outside the PA official governing institutions, and was thus seen as an initiative to reclaim political decision-making on the ground. This effort collapsed in a PA policy of re-institutionalizing grassroots movements. With the resumption of international funding of the PA, after being blocked after Hamas’ election in 2006, a new ministry was formed called The Ministry of Settlement Affairs and the Wall. Although NGO-ization and the PA as institution has great presence in the Palestinian social and political scene, it is important to note that at moments when there is a need for grassroots activism, activists capitalize on the pre-Oslo network that was maintained through personal connections rather than institutional ones.

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188 Ibid.

189 It was called the National Committee for the Defense of the Land.
As the PA has heavily invested in reshaping grassroots initiatives through the appropriation of a violence/nonviolence binary,\textsuperscript{190} activism against the Wall has become more institutionalized. In the few villages where activism still takes places, the protest demonstrations have become a ceremonial weekly event. The umbrella body for activism in localities impacted by the Wall called The Popular Struggle Coordination Committee is now registered as an NGO and receives money from the PA and international NGOs. The level of popular participation in demonstrations against the Wall has been declining.

\textit{Building a City}

The notion of an “ongoing Nakba” is a common theme in Palestinian narration of the present. It is not used rhetorically but rather exemplifies an understanding of the logic of settler colonialism. The presence of the Nakba as a traumatic rupture in Palestinian national history and continuous Israeli policies of Palestinian dispossession are intertwined in the production of today’s forms of activism in the OPTs. Edward Said noted that perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged is the one over the right to a remembered presence.\textsuperscript{191} The exercise of presence has taken several forms; one of which is to exercise the right to narrate.

One of the tens of literary texts written about the Nakba is the well-known novel \textit{Bab al-Shams} (The Gate of the Sun) by Elias Khoury. In narrating a history

\textsuperscript{190} See chapter 1.

\textsuperscript{191} Said 2002.
of dispositions, love, and resistance, the novel narrates the story of the Nakba. In early January 2013, Palestinians were caught by surprise, as the local news and Facebook pages circulated the name of a new city that had been built for and by Palestinians named “Bab al-Shams” after Khoury’s novel. It was located al-‘Ezariyya between Jerusalem and Jericho, land that was confiscated by an Israeli plan called E1 that aims to divide the West Bank into two separate areas, north and south, adding more settlement blocs and intensifying the matrix of control through territorial refashioning of Palestine. Hundreds of young activists installed tents in an area subject for confiscation by the state of Israel for the purpose of building new settlement.

One activist asking me to join a cultural camping gathering for youth called me, three days before the news on Bab al-Shams. He refused to give me more information saying: it will be fun; people are coming from all over the west bank and 48 areas. I think you would be interested as it is import for your research and academic work”. The youth camp was in fact a cover for the plan of building Bab al-Shams. As youth boarded the buses, thinking they were participating in a cultural gathering, the few activists in charge announced the plan of building a Palestinian city and reclaiming Palestinian ownership of Israeli-confiscated land. Those who did not want to be part of the project were free to dismount the buses. I was told that no one chose to get off the bus.

192 Khoury 1998.

193 For information on the E1 plan, see Btselem human rights organization: http://www.btselem.org/settlements/20121202_e1_human_rights_ramifications [last accessed April 16, 2014].
Immediately after the installment of the tents, Israel declared the entire area a closed military zone; no one was aloud to enter or to leave. I was therefore not able to enter the area, although some activists were able to join the site by taking a mountainous walking route avoiding main roads. I constantly received phone calls from the activists updating me on the experiences, including intellectual lectures on resistance and politics and debates over the future of Palestine. The last time I was contact with the activists was ten minutes prior to the Israeli army’s raid on the city and forced evacuation of the activists.

According to the activists, approximately one thousand Israeli soldiers surrounded the two hundred ‘residents’ of the ‘city.’ Each activist was carried away by four soldiers, and many were beaten and arrested although released shortly afterwards.

The Bab al-Shams experience, which was a surprise for the participants, the media, the Israeli authorities, and the majority of the Palestinian population. Once the tents went up, the action was heavily covered and many others joined, coming from diverse areas in the West Bank and from inside ’48. The experience triggered the building of other Palestinian ‘cities’ on confiscated land in the West Bank. As one example, a few weeks following the evacuation of Bab al-Shams, another city was built the same activists and locals from the Palestinian village of Beit Ikisa, near Jerusalem. It was called al-Karama (dignity). Again it was forcibly taken down by the Israeli army. In the same area where Bab al-Shams once stood, a neighborhood called “Younis’ Grandsons” was erected, as if an extension of an existing city. The name again referenced Khoury’s novel. Younis, the protagonist of the novel, left his wife in 1948 to go to Lebanon to join the
resistance. He would smuggle himself back into Palestine to meet his wife in a
cave referred to as Bab al-Shams. As a result of those meetings over the years, his
wife gave birth to ten children and Younis eventually had fifteen grandchildren.

The agency in the right of narration is not a mere literary product as in the
novel. In the city of Bab al-Shams, it is the transformation of the novel into a
symbol that materialized as an action to reclaim the land. As if two parallel
processes are working together: the first with regards to the narration of history to
inform the present, and the second takes place in the present to reclaim the past.

_A Hole in the Wall_

Two intertwined elements that reveal the politics of Israel’s construction
of the Wall is the process of invisibilization of the Palestinians and that of
territorial separation. At the same time, in place of the absent Palestinian, state-
sponsored paintings on the Wall depicting groves of olives trees and unpopulated
villages work to make the concrete division invisible by showing an unbroken,
flowing landscape.\textsuperscript{194} On the Palestinian side, the Wall is the most visible sign of
segregation, land annexation, and exercise of power.\textsuperscript{195}

\textsuperscript{194} Bishara 2004.

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
The Wall is built to be invincible. A well-known example of breaking the Wall symbolically are a series of paintings by the British artist Banksy. All are images painted directly onto the Wall on the side of the Palestinians that evoke the idea of breaking through the Wall to a Palestine represented as blue skies and children safely playing. The freedom symbolized in these images is metonymic for the land. The act of breaking the Wall is not conceivable for the Wall is heavily fortified by armed sniper towers and constant army patrols, but most importantly is its concrete construction that makes the idea of breaking through nearly impossible.

However, there are a few known cases where Palestinians were able to make a hole in the Wall literally. In the village of Abu Dis, east of Jerusalem, tens of the local residents worked together with manual demolition hammers to make a
hole in the Wall. Such collective effort was celebrated as a major achievement, proving the possibility of bringing down the Wall. Another creative action to confront the Wall took place in Aida camp in the Bethlehem area. A local journalist who witnessed the event told me the story. Youth in the camp gathered a collection of old car tires up against a section of the Wall, which stands at the edge of the camp. What appeared as a dumpster for car tires, growing over a few days, was a planned strategy for breaking through. The tires were set on fire and left to burn for hours in order to weaken the concrete. The following day, the youth were able to push through the concrete making a hole. Although Israeli soldiers who monitor the Wall were aware of the fire, they did not take any action under the assumption that the Wall was ‘invincible.’

These attempts to make a hole in the Wall were repeated in other localities, showing how the Wall was not only a site for the exercise of colonial power, but also a site of resistance and celebrated as such. The Wall as a symbol and concrete manifestation of Israeli land appropriation became a target for Palestinian activists. The small achievement of making a small opening in the Wall of approximately half a meter is perceived as a major victory. These fragmented forms of activism—demonstrations against the Wall, building a ‘city’ on confiscated land, and making holes in the Wall—make clear the core issue of land for both the settler-colonial society and the native population.

My Stomach is My Weapon
As I was organizing my thoughts for this section, a piece of news came from Qalqiliyya, a town in the northern West Bank that is entirely enclosed by the Wall. A model example of the process of ghettoization and isolation practiced by the colonial power in the OPTs, its approximately fifty thousand residents enter and exit through one gate controlled by the Israeli army. The news that broke through my thoughts announced the kidnapping and killing of an Israeli soldier by a forty-two year old Palestinian resident. As the story unfolded, it was reported that the Palestinian knew the soldier (for they worked together in the same store in Tel Aviv) and was able to convince him to come to Qalqiliyya for a visit. He planned the kidnapping as a prisoner exchange for his brother who was imprisoned by Israel since 2003.196

The story of kidnapping was not a surprise, for the issue of prisoners, like land, is one of the most tangible sites upon which the modality of colonial control is practiced in Palestine. What stood out in the news from Qalqiliyya was its individualistic nature, the demand of an individual for an individual. In contrast to being a national question, the burden has shifted to individuals and families to raise the issue of political prisoners in the OPTs. Particularly in the spring of 2012 when many solidarity demonstrations and political events took place in the West Bank around the case of political prisoners, I encountered numerous family members and particularly mothers of prisoners describing how their children have been neglected and forgotten by the PA and the political parties. One mother

articulated her frustration as such: “We [the family of prisoners] are left alone. The Authority [PA] transformed us into beggars, [political] parties do nothing for us or our sons, and the rest of the people are asleep.” She concluded with the rhetorical question: “Is Palestine for us alone?” Using the prison as a paradigm is useful in thinking through the position of the prisoner (and the prisoners’ family) to the nation and the relationship between the subject and the collectivity with regards to Palestinian confrontational politics today.

The concreteness of the prison paradigm can be attributed to both qualitative and quantitative experiences of imprisonment for Palestinians. Palestinian anthropologist Esmael Nashif argues that prison represents a totality of the body of Palestine and Palestinians. In other words, in addition to the actual tangible experiences of imprisonment, the overall structure of colonial control (including the Wall and the elaborate checkpoint system), in effect, forces Palestinians to live in a large prison system in a fragmented geography. In the OPTs, more than 750,000 Palestinians (20% of the population) have experienced imprisonment in Israeli jails. Taking into consideration the families of those prisoners, the high percentage of Palestinians impacted by imprisonment establishes it a site of shared national experience, as it is a visible site for colonial control. The tangibility of imprisonment makes political activism on the issue of prisoners an important location where resistance is expected and practiced.

Long-term prisoner Walid Dakka describes the prison apparatus as generating a condition of impotence for prisoners where captivity disables one’s

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197 Nashif 2011.
ability to make sense of the world\textsuperscript{198}. This feeling, according to Dakka however, is not exclusive to prisoners but rather encapsulates the overall Palestinian condition where Palestinians outside prison not only experience the oppression of living in a fragmented geography of catons and ghettoization, but are also subject to the orders of their captors (i.e. the Israeli colonial state) with the goal of “breaking their consciousness.” This notion of consciousness for Dakka means an emancipatory vision and ability to resist colonial control. The prison thus becomes the exemplary laboratory the Israeli establishment uses to take total control over body and mind of the Palestinians in order to prevent any form of resistance and destroy a sense of collectivity.

Although the qualitative and quantitative experience of imprisonment is very visible, the PA has not given much weight to the question of prisoners in official PA policies vis-à-vis Israel. In the Oslo Accords, for instance, the question of prisoners was not at all addressed, as PA negotiators claimed that the issue was implicitly understood within the signing the agreement. Subsequently, there has been no serious effort on the part of the PA to release the prisoners. However, a process of institutionalization has taken place to address the question. A Ministry of Prisoners was formed and a law for prisoners was put into effect that was based on the ‘rehabilitation’ of prisoners through job employment, university education, and monthly salaries. In the 2006 amendment to the law, a categorization hierarchy was established for prisoners based on their period of imprisonment. For example, a five to seven-year imprisonment (the lowest

\textsuperscript{198} Dakka 2010.
category) was equated to a Department Head in a civilian ranking and an Officer in a military ranking. A twenty-five year and above imprisonment (the highest category) was equated to a Minister’s Deputy or a General. In accordance with each category, a lump sum of money was issued to the prisoner, in addition to the monthly salary. This process of institutionalization, treats prisoners as part of the PA bureaucracy, on the one hand, and an object of social and psychological rehabilitation, on the other. Such treatment does not situate them within a system of national signification, but rather locates them as a social case, alongside the poor and the disabled, for example.\(^{199}\) Both the bureaucratic system and the psychological categorization of prisoners transformed the issue of imprisonment into an individual question\(^{200}\).

One such example is the case of Khader Adnan, a Palestinian prisoner who in December 2011 declared a hunger strike to protest his imprisonment for the eighth time under Israeli administration detention.\(^{201}\) Adnan was released after sixty-six days of hunger strike, which has been described as a heroic act by Palestinian media and activists. He offered an example for other prisoners to protest their detention through the practice of a hunger strike. The focus on individual demands of release rather than the collective issues of prisoners—improving the overall quality of life in prisons, demanding more family visits,

\(^{199}\) Riyahi 2007.

\(^{200}\) Meari 2012.

\(^{201}\) Administrative detention is a form of detention without charge or trial that is authorized by military administrative order while ‘legally’ based on secret evidence offered by the Israeli General Security Service.
preventing solitary confinement, the right to education, and requesting meetings with lawyers and the Red Cross—stands in contrast to the use of such a strategy in the Palestinian struggle in the past which was always collective.

The institutionalization and individualization of the prisoner issue is entangled with the proliferation of a human rights and international legal discourse in Palestine, that have been subject to debate and critique and cynicism in Palestine.\textsuperscript{202} The term ‘dignity’ (karameh in Arabic), for example, which has long been used in Palestinian national signification to refer to the collective national dignity is now relocated in the individual. Karameh is now often used to invoke the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (UDHR) use of the term. The notion of human dignity, among other political and civic rights for Palestinians, being identified as an individualistic category stems from the liberal framing of the UDHR, which lists dignity first in a list as an “inherent” and “inalienable right(s) of all members of the human family” and a “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”\textsuperscript{203} In the past few years, when many Palestinian prisoners engaged in hunger strikes, the words of Adnan—“My dignity is more precious than food”—became a popular slogan.

Since Adnan achieved his release, the practice of hunger striking continued as an individual itinerary of many prisoners and solidarity actions emerged across the West Bank. Around a solidarity tent erected in the center of Ramallah, activists, prisoners’ family members, and political party representatives

\textsuperscript{202} Allen 2013.

\textsuperscript{203} The Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948.
gathered every evening for weeks. In a conversation with one activist, he stressed that prisoners’ hunger strikes, and particularly Khader Adanan’s, represented a shift in the “prisoner position from being forgotten to being a leader, as it used to be in [Palestinian] national culture, from being a source of suffering for the family to a sense of pride and dignity.” Another young activists furthered the depiction with his pointed words: “Look around you, people are shopping as if nothing is happening. We [those outside the prisons] are the prisoners. Those inside [the jails] are freer than us. At least they have dignity.” Terms and phrases such as ‘inspiration,’ ‘dignity,’ ‘steadfastness,’ and ‘hunger for freedom’ were part of the dialogue in all the encounters I had with activists and families addressing prisoners. One daughter of a prisoner described her sick father’s decision to enter into a hunger strike that included the refusal of his medication as such: “Man lives once: either to live in dignity, or to die for it.” On several occasions in the last two years, many Palestinians have engaged in solidarity hunger strikes with those inside prisons. The fiercest confrontations I attended since the beginning of my fieldwork were actions of solidarity with prisoners.

Allen Feldman, building on Foucault, points out that the body “as terminal locus of power also defines the place for the redirection and reversal of power.” As such, the processes of institutionalization and individualization also created a space for resistance, and particularly an individual space exercised through the body. Hunger as an act of resistance is the modality of deviation of power from the hand of the prison guards onto the subject. It reverses the location

\[204\] Feldman 1991: 178.
of power externally to internally and reconfigures the body as an object of power into a site of power, into a subject.

In the settler colonial context of Palestine, the ‘dignified’ man is not a mere individual but rather a locus of power and a source of inspiration, a model for others. Therefore, although the position of Palestinian prisoners shifted from being a leading element in the national movement to that of institutionalized individuals, the space of an individualistic form of resistance demonstrates how the tangible modality of control over bodies also creates a new site of political activism. The tangibility of the prison experience as a continuing and visible mode of control is a major site of confrontational political activism like the land. Despite the process of individualization, hunger striking was perceived not as an individual act but rather a solidification of the collective through the body of an individual.

An image circulated on social media and various websites (see below) depicts a multilayered juxtaposition of the face of Adnan and his words (“My dignity is more precious than food”) on a poster held by an unknown Palestinian. The statement below the poster reads: “For every gram [of actual weight] you lose, we gain a thousand grams of dignity.”
Building on Hegel’s argument on the relation between death and the “becoming subject” through the negation of nature, Achille Mbembe states that the “human being truly becomes a subject—that is, separated from the animal—in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death.” In other words, becoming a subject involves the negation of the natural being, i.e. the body. Foucault treats the law before modernity as an extension of the sovereign’s body, which transforms into the sovereignty of the state in modernity. The criminal body that is subject to the law thus becomes an object of punishment. The act of negating the body, as in prisoners’ hunger strikes, negates the law’s ability to exercise its power and thus challenges the state’s sovereignty. Such an act, while constituting becoming a subject, in the anti-colonial context of Palestine, is perceived as representing the collective body.

205 Mbembe 2003.
Consciousness

In 1988 in the midst of the first Intifada, a sister and brother in their twenties arrived at their father’s small grocery store located in a West Bank refugee camp. They took a box of twenty-four containers of Israeli-produced yogurt and destroyed them in the center of the camp. The father did not respond, only watched the action. I was told that his feeling of guilt for buying and selling Israeli products made him implicitly accept his children’s action despite his dominating personality and the financial loss. According to the sister and brother, they attribute their act of destroying an Israeli product to a moment of subject formation, where political consciousness arose from the totality of acts of resistance beyond those of stone-throwing and demonstrations. A major economic and symbolic tactic at that time was the call to boycott Israeli products and invest in local production.

Throughout the years between 2000 and 2012, many NGOs and local activists engaged in boycott campaigns of Israeli products, yet the majority of these efforts failed. A 27-year-old female activist analyzed the failure as such:

We started with a general campaign all over the West Bank, hanging posters on walls and organizing media appearances on local television and radio stations asking people to boycott Israeli products that had Palestinian or imported substitutes. We then started campaigning store-owners, who always justify the reason for selling Israeli goods to buyers’ demand. As you know, many Palestinians believe that Israeli goods are of better quality. We were confused who to target first, because merchants blame consumers and consumers blame the local products’ quality. We therefore decided to focus on children as they are more open to
developing their positions. We went to summer camps and schools to raise the new generations’ consciousness. . . . I think the failure can be attributed to the general failure of the national movement and the lack of trust and meaning in the act of boycott. People always asked us if boycotting Israeli products would create any tangible change in reality.

The sense of frustration in this account speaks to the forms of political activism practiced in the OPTs today, which are subject to processes of institutionalization and individualization. While the logic of boycott in the first account during the first intifada is located within subject formation through a collective emancipatory imaginary, the second logic of the second begins with the subject to formulate a collective response. Additionally, the first is based on a logic of enforcement directed at the collective, i.e. refraining from buying/selling, that was perceived as legitimate even for someone financially impacted by the loss. The second, however, is more of an appeal for voluntary action by individuals, a request in a ‘free market’ where price and utility of goods is what constitutes subjective behavior of consumption.

The degree of individualization in boycott as an act of resistance is clearly visible in a campaign organized by the PA that targeted Israeli settlements products in the West Bank, not Israeli products in general. Started in 2010 with a massive media effort that included numerous billboards and multiple appearances of Prime Minister Fayyad burning a pile of Israeli settlement food products, the campaign was called Karameh. Evoking the notion of dignity, this new Karameh campaign placed dignity in the consumption behavior of the individual subject. The following slogans were adopted by the campaign: “Enta Wa Damirak” (You
and your Conscience) and the rhetorical question “[Hal] Damirak Mirtah?” ([Is] your conscience comfortable?).

As the idea of boycott is contradictory to the PA’s adherence to the logic of a free market economy and the two-state solution, the boycott was limited to settlements’ products and framed within a lexicon of international law. According to the one of the PA employee who woks for the campaign: “The products are produced illegally in illegal settlements . . . and therefore we [the PA] did not violate any previously signed agreements.” The separation between settlement and ‘normal’ Israeli products elides the fact that settlements are an integral part of the Israeli state-sponsored project, which subsidizes settlement housing and the manufacturing of products. A Palestinian customs authority officer reflected on the campaign, after stating that this was off the record (“hada al haki benna”): “This is a stupid campaign, for we all know that a factory can easily change the packaging and production label to sell its products to us. This is basically a media campaign with no serious effort on the ground.” The campaign lost momentum over the year and the billboards in the streets of the West Bank also faded out of mind and sight.

The failure in mobilizing the public toward an effective boycott campaign was in part due to the kind of political consciousness in the post-Oslo period that was shaped by the state apparatus and neoliberal market economy. Subject formation primarily focused on the individual as a rational consumer, on the one hand, and an apolitical subject, on the other. The professionalization of politics through the work of NGOs, in addition to the monopoly over the production of
political discourse by the PA and its rival Hamas, worked to prevent an alternative political discourse from emerging.

A political initiative outside of the political parties’ structures did emerge, however, on the level of shaping a political consciousness. The call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) is a campaign that started as a call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel (PACBI) in 2004.\(^\text{206}\) One of the people in the initiative at the time described it as being a result of two years of discussions and smaller initiatives starting in 2002. The Israeli invasion of the West Bank in 2002 was destructive and devastating for Palestinians, imposing a feeling of lack of agency in the face of the overwhelming amount of violence that was used. For some academics, the PACBI initiative arose in response as a way to take action and hold Israel accountable. The following year, the call for BDS was given momentum from the International Court of Justice’s advisory opinion on the Wall, which was an international recognition of Israel’s colonial violence. The BDS call was thus framed through a lens of international legal terminology, which also expanded the discourse to include the rights of Palestinians living inside the Israeli state and those in the diaspora.

The BDS initiative functions on the level of shaping political consciousness and in developing a strategy through an apartheid analogy. In contrast to other forms of confrontational political activism that are territorially based, BDS as a strategy focuses on the role of international political solidarity,

thus deterritorializing the sites of resistance. This deterritorialization is compatible with the dispersal of the Palestinian population and experience beyond the land of Palestine. In a similar way, the focus on shaping political consciousness, in contrast to the tangible sites of the land and body, is based on emphasizing the foundational roots of settler-colonialism in all of Palestine and using an apartheid analogy to configure an alternative conception of what decolonization would entail.

Another shift in local political consciousness arose out of the contemporary uprisings across the Arab world that affirmed the role of youth in creating political change. Throughout the West Bank, several small initiatives of youth began to organize largely targeting internal politics, such as the split between Fateh and Hamas. Their discourse slowly developed to target the Israeli military occupation and into a political vision to unify Palestinians and reform the PLO as a representative body for all Palestinians. The umbrella organization for the various youth groups is called “Palestinians for Dignity,” viewing the politicization of the people through confrontation with the colonial and native authorities as a means for regaining dignity.

Outside of the binary of violence/nonviolence that primarily locates the issue in the means of political struggle, the kinds of confrontation politics that exist in the OPTs today function in opposition to the logic of settler colonialism. The issue is not one of means versus ends, but rather on the sites upon which colonial control is exercised and from which resistance emerges. As the primary focus of colonial subjugation is located in the land, on the body, and in political
consciousness, confrontational politics build on these sites and are interconnected through the notion of dignity and the primacy of the land. Not formulated into a larger national vision of decolonization, this mode of resistance is fragmented and localized.
Chapter IV

The Echo of Body and Arms

“If my voice vanishes, your throats will not. If the singer departed, songs stay to unify the broken and suffering hearts”

(Words by Naji Al Ali, sung by Samih Shqeir)

excerpt from: Hand Grenade

Hand grenade, hand grenade at my waist,
and a Kalashnikov in my hand. The world’s on fire
Airplanes angrily throwing death
Throwing it upon us and no help comes
We responded as we could
and confronted the canon with a handgun
Oh Beirut, be our witness

excerpt from: My Weapons come from my Wounds

My weapons come from my wounds
Oh our revolution. My weapons come
And there’s no power in the world
That can tear away my weapons from my hand

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207 Al-Ali, one of the most important cartoonists in the Arab world, was assassinated in London in 1987.

208 Shqeir, a Syrian singer and composer known for his leftist and revolutionary songs, is very popular in Palestine.

209 A song by Shqeir was sung after the siege of PLO fighters in Beirut, Lebanon in 1982.

210 The author of the lyrics is Salah Eldin Al Husini and was sung by the PLO Central Band in the late 1960s.
As long as the weapons of the revolution are in my hand

I impose my presence


The link between body and arms and particularly the emergence of weapons from the wounded body of the Palestinian is part of PLO political rhetoric on why Palestinians need engage in armed revolution. In Fateh’s main vision of what is a revolution, it states:

The years pass by our people, increasing the depth and width and poison in the wound of our tragedy. . . . The human consciousness [the world] was asleep and did not listen to our weeping and our screams for help . . . and just supported the crime of creating their [the Zionist] state and its growth on the shreds of our body. . . . And in this horrifying reality, and the
accumulation of pain and the waves of misery and bitterness, and in the search for existence and dignity, our people must mobilize. . . . The revolution is the solution. . . . The revolution is the only route, imposed by the hardships of our peoples’ lives and dictated by the logic of history and the natural development of our reality and our cause.²¹¹

The body as a metaphor is prominent in this foundational document for Fateh, which influenced other PLO factions who adopted a similar line. The logic of regaining dignity from the wounded body of Palestine and Palestinians continues to be a dominant trope in representing the meaning of armed struggle. As humiliation is also articulated as a wound, the revolution is an act of re-dignifying the Palestinian, a psycho-social venue for creating a new man where the wound is transformed into a weapon, becoming an extension of the body. This image is further exemplified in the lyrics of a song by the PLO’s Central Band: “Pull out your bones as daggers and strike with me.”

Not only in popular songs of the revolution but also in literature and poetry was the metaphor of the body used in relation to the gun. In a collection of stories by Ghassan Kanafani titled On Men and Rifles, he writes in the dedication: “Here are nine paintings through which I wanted to draw the horizon where men and rifles arise and together will draw the missing painting from this collection.” In the stories, the rifle is not just an object that the fighter carries but becomes a subject in itself. Taking on its own logic, the rifle is a subject that knows its

²¹¹ Haikal Al Bina’ al Thawry (the revolutionary structure) Fateh movement, unknown year.
direction, identity, and function. At times in the stories, man talks to the gun as if it is a living being. Such elevation of the gun from being a tool to being a part of the body (in PLO rhetoric) to being a subject in itself shows the fascination with armed struggle and the desire to regain dignity.

Similarly, the first intifada, which is now depicted as a model of nonviolent resistance, was replete with imagery and discourse that depicted stones in the hands of youth as a site of power. One of the most prominent slogans chanted during demonstrations translates as such: “Why be afraid? The stone has become a Kalashnikov.” The stone, here replacing the rifle, is an extension of the body and a marker of belonging to the nation. In the second intifada with the practice of suicide attacks, the body and the weapon became inseparable, as the body alone became the bomb. A song of the second intifada begins with the line: “I’ll throw my body and make my bones shrapnel to break my prison.” Referencing such imagery and symbolisms of armed struggle, young activists today draw on past signifiers in their contemporary practices.
As a representative example, a group of young activists gathered in a tent in the landmark center of Ramallah, mimicking and inspired by the Egyptian uprising in 2011 that overthrew President Mubarak. Their aim was to create a public space for people to enact political change, a space to compensate for the weakness of the political parties and any effective organizational structure, in effect, to reclaim the right to Politics. The approximately twenty young men and women sat in a circle and sang Palestinian nationalistic songs from the late 1960s through the ’80s by PLO Al Firqa Al-Markaziyya [The Central Band],

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212 Tabar and Alazzeh 2014.
Firqat Aghani Al-Ashaqeen (The Songs of the Lovers Band), among others\footnote{For more on Palestinian liberation music, see: Massad 2003 and Puig 2010.}. As their bodies moved to the rhythm of the songs, metaphors rose from the lyrics glorifying armed struggle. This younger generation of activists had memorized the lyrics of nearly every song. As I sat with them listening to the songs, the imagery of bodies and arms signaled itself as an important site of investigation on contemporary Palestinian political activism.

Joseph Massad accurately noted that “the history of songs dealing with the Palestinian struggle parallels in many ways the history of the Palestinian struggle itself.”\footnote{Massad 2003.} And yet in Ramallah of 2011, the singing of these revolutionary songs, particularly those that glorified armed struggle and sacrifice, appeared contradictory to the structuring and fashioning of contemporary forms of political activism. As a student of mine at Birzeit University articulated in one of his term papers: “Part of the pacification of the Palestinian population took place with the replacement of our [Palestinian] famous slogan: ‘We die for Palestine to live’ with ‘We live for Palestine to live’ in conjunction with a line from the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish: ‘On this earth is what is worth living for.’”

The contradiction made itself clear in the car of an activist in his late 30s who was present in every demonstration and political event that I attended. Holding a B.A. in Psychology and Sociology and an M.A. in Human Rights and Development Studies, he was one of the few activists I encountered who firmly believed in nonviolence as a strategy and lifestyle for Palestine and Palestinians.
He insisted on using the term ‘nonviolence’ in both English and Arabic, making his commitment to the concept of nonviolence clear and not merely as a linguistic strategy. The music that happened to be playing in his car as he gave me a lift home was the same genre of revolutionary songs sung by the young activists who set up tent in the center of Ramallah.

I asked him if he thought this music was compatible with his belief in nonviolence. He looked at me and smiled, and then turned the music off and said: “I have been asking myself the same question.” Expecting me to offer him an answer, I returned the question to him. His response was not a mere moment of self-reflection, but rather was situated within his present experiences and his background in psychology: “When I’m in the car with foreign nonviolence solidarity activists, I am glad that they don’t understand Arabic, as I’m not sure how they would respond to hearing words like ‘bullets,’ ‘rifle,’ and ‘bombs’ from my radio.” Beyond awareness of the self in front of an international audience, he then offered a psychological contextualization of the individual subject within the history of national revolutionary imagery. He added with a serious tone: “What dictates human behavior is not the visible part of the psyche, but the deep subconscious. We [Palestinians] have the desire to be revolutionaries and to confront the violence inflicted upon us. These songs arise from and play with our suppressed subconscious.”

To confirm my observation on the contemporary use of such symbolisms and metaphors among activists, I asked if he could call this a phenomenon. In affirmation, he replied: “It is, even among the middle class kids of Ramallah.” He
then told me a story from his childhood: “When I was about ten years old, a friend of my father asked me what I want to be when I grow up. Childishly, I answered that I wanted to be a policeman, since I had this new toy that resembled a police car. My father who was there, yelled at me: ‘Say you will be a *fida’i* (freedom-fighter)!’ I did not know what a *fida’i* was but as I recalled my father’s face whenever I was asked that question, I made sure to respond with this new ‘profession.’ In short, since we can’t practice armed struggle today, we compensate through songs and symbolism.”

The actions of the young activists singing by the tent and this committed nonviolence activist can be attributed to personal subject formation. And yet, the remarkable diffusion of the imagery and icons of the national liberation struggle demonstrate its persistence and popularity beyond an individualist’s subjectivity. In addition to protest activities directed at the colonial authority, university campuses are another visible and auditory site of revolutionary imagery. As students strike in protest of increased tuition fees, campaign for student elections, welcome new students for orientation day, and commemorate national markers such as the Nakba, Land Day, and Prisoners Day, among others, loudspeakers project the same genre of patriotic and revolutionary songs.

The broadcasting and singing of such songs are not limited to live gatherings, but are also widely circulated in social media and local radio stations. In 2009, a new satellite station was launched in Amman that solely broadcast revolutionary songs accompanied by a newsfeed bar. On youtube, one finds several video clips for each revolutionary song, each one comprising a visual
slideshow of contemporary imagery. Several online libraries of music with accompanying lyrics have been created carrying such titles as “Songs of the Revolution,” “Resistance Songs,” and “Resistance Literature.” These examples speak to the currency revolutionary songs hold for Palestinian youth activists today, even though they did not experience the era of their production. The songs have become a vocal artifact that continues to be reproduced through the diffusion of media sources and technologies, becoming a rhetorical device in the present. As the scale of reproducing and reiterating armed resistance symbolism appears ill-fitting with contemporary forms of activism practiced in the OPTs, it puts into question the relationship between a Palestinian tradition of depicting bodies and arms as a marker of the nation and the official discourse of nonviolence.

In the West Bank under PA-control, the option of armed resistance against the Israeli colonial power was pushed into the unforeseeable. A paradox emerged between the imagery and rhetoric of violence that circulates and the ‘normalization’ of life under military occupation accompanied by the hegemony of the nonviolence regime of truth. This paradox can be located in the history of the Palestinians and their relationship to armed struggle. As Yezid Sayigh argued, during the height of Palestinian armed resistance, there was a disparity between the functionality/actual use of armed struggle and the level of rhetorical glorification of it\(^\text{215}\), as he put it\(^\text{216}\):

\(^{215}\) Sayigh 1997a.

\(^{216}\) Sayigh 1997b.
Throughout their evolution the guerrilla groups composing the PLO consistently described armed struggle as the principal, even the exclusive, means of liberating Palestine. Yet their military effort never exceeded a certain level in terms of scale and impact and certainly failed to approach the Chinese and Vietnamese models of people's war frequently cited. Whatever the individual sacrifices of the Palestinian rank and file or the strength of their convictions, the movement as a whole lacked the single-minded determination to take the practice of armed struggle to the elevated position it occupied in formal ideology.

The discrepancy between practice and the rhetorical voice can be contextualized within the constraint of regional politics in the history of the PLO in exile. Eventually, whether due to ideological and/or pragmatic reasoning, by the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, armed struggle was no longer adopted by the official political leadership. The second intifada was not an anomaly, for armed resistance was practiced and accompanied by the same rhetoric, and yet it was not conceived of as a strategy of liberation by official PA leadership. Rather it was a direct response to the failure of negotiations and instrumentally used by the PA to gain a better negotiating position with Israel. The option of armed struggle was firmly dropped by Mahmoud Abbas’s presidential election in 2005.

Despite the lack of armed struggle, its symbolism and rhetoric continued through cultural re-production. Art was a fundamental element in the PLO’s effort to mobilize the majority of the Palestinian population for a people’s war. Art organizations were created within the PLO, such as music and theatre groups,
cinema initiatives, fine arts and writers’ unions, where cultural production was perceived and practiced as a constitutive part of the revolutionary struggle. Major political figures in PLO history have contributed to cultural production in the forms of novels, painting, poetry, and theatre, exemplifying art as a popular practice in armed resistance. As the place of art was considered formative in the movement for national liberation, the evocation of its symbols continues to resonate strongly.

Understanding the strength of this resonance, during the launch of the PA campaign to mobilize around Palestinian state recognition from the UN General Assembly in 2011, *Firqat Aghani Al-Ashaqeen* were brought to perform in the West Bank. A band that played a central role in the production of national songs, cassette recordings of their songs were banned by Israeli authorities in the ’80s. Local media celebrated their performances and youth gathered to meet members of the band. They performed in all West Bank cities, singing their songs that laud PLO steadfastness in Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, young fighters’ heroic battles, the wounded bodies, the martyrs, and the weaponry. In the main event in Ramallah, shouts of requests for songs could be heard coming from all corners of the large outdoor arena. When I met the lead singer of the band, I asked him about the contradiction between PA politics and the songs they sing. He responded, affirming that “we are the ‘real’ voice, not the voice of negotiations. We are the voice of the masses and the voice that people want to

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217 The visit of the band, which was reestablished in 2009 in London after twenty years of its members being dispersed in several countries in the world, was celebrated by media and Palestinians in the West Bank.
hear.” Apart from the PA’s use of the band as a source of legitimacy, the act of bringing them speaks to the complex relations between practice and rhetoric, what it means to appeal to popular sentiment and capitalize on cultural history.

Also mobilizing around the imageries and songs of armed resistance was a performance organized by a 2011 initiative of young activists in Ramallah, based on the notion of voluntary work that was practiced in the ’70s and ’80s, on the one hand, and funding-free cultural events to confront the NGO-ization of culture and politics, on the other. The performance, under the title of “The Stones Sang,” brought a troupe from Nazareth to Ramallah to sing revolutionary songs. The idea, according to the organizers, was to re-produce the culture of the revolution among Palestinians today to celebrate and re-produce a revolutionary moment. Although the performance event was intended as a mobilizing effort, the context in which it was produced and framed through commodified the action. Paying money to hear such songs, being enclosed in a windowless auditorium space, and the media coverage present framed the rhetoric as a cultural sign without a practice. Within the auditorium, the enthusiasm created by the songs came to an end as audience members reflected on the event, focusing on the aesthetics of the performance, the vocals of the singers, and the basic staged setting of a few stones, tires, and barbed wire meant to recall the confrontations of the first intifada. It was clear that the event was not about the practice of armed resistance or first intifada confrontational demonstrations, but rather about its glorification, an attempt to experience it solely through vocal artifacts and rhetorics.

218 Taraki 1989.
Other instances of such commodification of armed struggle iconography include the display of revolutionary Palestinian poster art, re-produced as an aesthetic in local bars and restaurants. The *kuffiyeh*, as a nationalist symbol that became a signifier of revolts going back to 1936,\(^{219}\) has also been commodified. Artist Amer Shomali re-produced one of the iconic images of the Palestinian armed struggle as an art piece to directly critique the transformation of revolutionary icons into products to be consumed. Using 3,500 lipsticks of different shades, he depicted the iconic image of Leila Khaled\(^{220}\) holding a Kalashnikov and wearing a kuffiyeh and a ring she made from a bullet and the pin of a hand grenade. In his commentary, he writes that commercial advertisement employs “popular visual elements as a method to associate companies with our collective memory, marketing the companies as a national capital, and its profit as collective national achievement, using the same visuals despite the fact that the national goal nowadays is economical, in contradiction with the ’70s aspiration for ‘freedom.’”\(^{221}\) As Shomali makes use of visual imagery of the Palestinian armed resistance to critique local capitalization of national iconography, local activists have used revolutionary rhetoric to critique the neoliberal economy of the West Bank by spray painting song lyrics on billboard advertisements.

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\(^{219}\) Swedenburg 1995.

\(^{220}\) A member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), she was known for the hijacking of TWA Flight 840 in 1969.

The above photograph, taken during the 2012 Israeli bombardment of Gaza, is one example. The Arabic spray painted text in red translates as “Stand up for revolution and take revenge.” It is excerpted from an ’80s revolutionary song. The Arabic spray painted text in black means “resistance.” The juxtaposed contrast between revolution and security, resistance and ‘softness’ on the wallet, visually depicts the space between the use of revolutionary rhetoric and today’s dominant mode of economy. The rhetoric is used to confront PA policies of security and the Israeli occupying power. Another issue that stands out in this particular billboard is the word “security.” Although it is directed toward computers in the advertisement, it references a larger context in my discussion of

222 The white-outed area behind the Arabic text indicates that this is not the first time the text has been written. Taken on road between Ramallah and town of Birzeit. Photograph taken by Hyad News Agency.
the PA’s monopoly of using violence under the title of security, a security not of the Palestinians but rather of the colonial system.

Such critique is furthered in Khaled ‘Odatallah’s 2013 published collection of short stories, widely distributed among activists in the West Bank. ‘Odatallah, using a style that resembles Kanafani’s early literary writing, also takes the body and rifle as a central motif. In a story titled “DCO,” referencing the Israeli-Palestinian military coordination office established as part of the Oslo Accords, a Palestinian and Israeli officer meet for the second time. As the Israeli officer checks and marks the Kalashnikov rifles to be handed over to the Palestinians, the Palestinian officer recognizes the tattoo on the Israeli officer’s arm. He recalls the time he spent in Israeli prison thirty years ago, when he was raped with a police stick by an Israeli interrogator who had the same tattoo. After being released in a prisoners’ exchange between Israel and the PLO, he would recite the phrase, “Everything can be tolerated for Palestine,” which functioned as an anesthesia mechanism for his pain. At the story’s end, following the scene at the DCO, the Palestinian officer puts on his military uniform the next morning. He sprays cologne bought from the duty free²²³ and takes painkillers before going to work. The words that used to heal were no longer effective. The guns became a sign of complicity with the colonial power rather than a revolt against it. What remained was the wound of a body being treated by drugs.

²²³ Odatallah 2013. The idea of commercialization can also be seen in Odatellah’s story, where he references duty free, which in Arabic translates as “free market.”

The story narrates the resentment of a wounded body that can no longer be healed through arms, as in the revolutionary imagination of the PLO, or through the rhetoric of patriotism. Furthermore, the rifle that became a subject in Kanfani’s stories becomes again an object, ‘given’ to the Palestinians by the colonial authority as a self-disciplinary tool. The depiction of the masculinized Palestinian revolutionary in the history of Palestinian representation is here emasculated, creating a rupture in the image of the past, an image of body and arms.

The presence of the past as a set of signifiers is dominant in daily life and contemporary activism in the OPTs, informing debate on the means of struggle. In a recent facebook exchange between three Palestinians, they debate the
symbolism of armed resistance. Two are novelists and activists and one is a journalist. Their locations—one in Haifa (‘48 lands), one in Ramallah (OPT), and one in Amman (diaspora)—and their age differences (from the early twenties to mid-fifties)—reveal the ongoing discussion among Palestinians regarding the struggle regardless of place of residency and generation. I cite the conversation at length:

AY: I have recently noticed a shift from the belief in popular, peaceful struggle against the occupation to a belief in militarized resistance. It’s interesting to note that the shift happened quickly and is only on the level of rhetoric with regards to armed struggle. I believe that popular resistance is a thousand times more effective than the rhetoric of arms, which produces a passive audience waiting for a mythical creature to hunt or kidnap [an Israeli] soldier. The taganni (mantra) of the rifle will never fill the empty magazine.

JR: There are admirable experiences of peaceful struggle in South Africa and India. The problem for Palestinians lies in the lack of leadership, a program, and a goal. The slogan of the official leadership for two states is a means for them to maintain their interests and privileges and a willingness to make us pay for the cost of our future with Palestinian blood. Peaceful struggle requires a complete change in political structure and goals that would lead to a bi-national state that confronts the exclusivity and racism of the Jewish state.

MA: There is no contradiction between popular struggle, which has been labeled as ‘peaceful’ struggle, and the mantra of the rifle. I do not see anything wrong in praising the gun’s magazine, even if it is empty. With these mantras, the fighter finds depth, and from this depth the carriers of the guns will emerge. . . . I’m not

224 The conversation is slightly edited to read smoothly.
talking about a popular resistance that creates a rupture between what is popular and armed struggle, as Abu Mazen [PA president Mahmoud Abbas] does. I refuse the notion of ‘peaceful’ resistance that is based on the illusion that the PA are teachers of democracy. I refuse to play the victim in front of the cameras with the Wall behind me.

The exchange raises a number of issues embedded in the debate over Palestinian resistance as discussed in this dissertation: what is effective, what is popular, the level of representation and of practice, and the desired goals. The use of the word taganni with regards to the mantra of the rifle emphasizes the site of song and the metaphor of voice in this debate. The vocal practice of evoking imagery of armed struggle is a relevant and accurate way of thinking through the circulation of these symbolisms and how the evocation of armed struggle has been described through the act of singing. Armed struggle has been used effectively as an aural mobilizing tool rather than a practiced strategy in the history of the PLO. In contemporary Palestinian political discourse, where armed struggle is deemed irrational and a punishable act, armed struggle is the echo of a voice from the past in the present.

In Greek mythology, Echo ("Sound") is a mountain nymph who loved her own voice. She tricked Zeus’ wife and as punishment, her voice was taken away. All that was left to her was the ability to repeat another’s words, to echo. In the case of Palestine, the voice of armed struggle, a punishable act, has become an echo of a voice that emerged from the past, reflected off a
wall of impossibility. Its diffusion and reproduction creates multiple reflections of the echo, a rhetoric of body and arms.
Postscript
Reflection on Nonviolence

The first time it was reported that our friends were being butchered there was a cry of horror. Then a hundred were butchered. But when a thousand were butchered and there was no end to the butchery, a blanket of silence spread. . . .

When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in summer.

(Bertolt Brecht, “When Evil-Doing Comes Like Falling Rain”)

The anecdote that instigated my fieldwork several years ago—the story of Raed who once wore a bullet around his neck—reoccurred serendipitously the day I finished writing the draft of this ethnography. I went with my family to a small cafe in Ramallah that carries a French name and is frequented largely by internationals and middle-class Palestinians. My two-year-old daughter began smiling to everyone there to attract attention, and as one young woman in her early twenties smiled back, her necklace reflected the sunlight. A bullet hung suspended around her neck alongside the image of an olive tree and the map of Palestine, three symbols of the Palestinian struggle standing together. I approached the young Palestinian woman and asked her about her choice of necklace. Without hesitation, she answered: armed struggle. I asked her if there was one taking place now in Palestine. Her response: “Ana mish insaneh ‘aneefeh” [I am not a violent person].

The issue at stake in her response was the location of violence and nonviolence in the category of the human as a subject. Foucault’s articulation of
ethics as the relationship of the self to itself, \(^{225}\) what can be called ethical subjectification, is a process of self-refashioning through which the human turns itself into a subject within a regime of power. It is the internalization of a true discourse into a practice and exercise of oneself on oneself. \(^{226}\) In the midst of violence or the extreme violence of settler-colonialism where the subject lives, experiences, and witnesses violence, the question of nonviolence becomes a space of subjective struggle, an ethical position, a continuum between possibility and impossibility, a necessity and a luxury. Nonviolence carries an ambiguous position between retribution and forgiveness, resentment and tolerance, a position located in transcendental morality that Levinas articulates as not belonging to culture but rather enabling one to judge culture. \(^{227}\)

Following the young woman’s denial of being a violent human subject, she continued saying: “You know, I believe in Gandhi’s work. But still it’s all about the will to carry arms and to have a little bit of power. It seems that neither peaceful nor armed resistance is working in our [Palestinian] case.” Her response expresses a sense of powerlessness and confusion in the contemporary Palestine colonial context, the ambiguity and struggle of the subject within an entangled web of physical, symbolic and structural violence. In the young woman’s terms, she equates power with violence and yet also negates the violent subject. As Hannah Arendt argues in her critique of Sartre’s instrumentalization of violence

\(^{225}\) Faubian 2011.

\(^{226}\) Rabinow 1984.

in political struggles, the opposite of violence is not nonviolence but rather power, i.e., with the existence of absolute power, violence ceases to exist. My question regarding the necklace opened into a longer conversation about her life and politics: Born a refugee, both her parents experienced imprisonment in Israeli jails, and currently her brother-in-law has been imprisoned by Israel for two years. She works for an international human rights NGO and lives a middle class consumption lifestyle in Ramallah. Switching between Arabic and English in her speech, she said she doesn’t always wear the bullet, as if oscillating between political and fashion statement. Today, she said, she doesn’t know exactly why she put it on. The randomness of the bullet around her neck stood in contrast to the iconic figure of Leila Khaled wearing a ring that she made of a bullet encircled by the pin of a hand grenade, the first she held during military training. Khaled’s ring represents the moment young Palestinians unhesitatingly viewed the violence of armed resistance as a formative instrument in transforming them into subjects after being objects of colonial violence. Each framing of the self I heard from the young woman spoke of the multiple forms of colonial violence enacted on the Palestinian subject today—from direct physical violence and the fear it instills to invisible structural violence to the symbolic violence of mimicry and self-fashioning—that all play into the formation of subjectivity.

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228 Sartre’s forward to *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon 1963.

229 Arendt 1970.
In the midst of the decolonization era, Sartre offered a reading of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, insisting that only through the act of violence does the colonized regain his humanity. Sartre was speaking to a European colonialist audience to question Western humanism of modernity, in part to call for a different European subject. Fanon, on the other hand, speaks to Third World colonized objects stating that decolonization through violence transforms them into a subject worthy of life. In Fanon’s words, during decolonization, “the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.”

In the Manichaeism of the colonialist-colonized in Fanon’s characterization of power, violence is positioned in a linear relationship and the act of colonized counter-violence forms a new subject, i.e. creates a new man. This ‘man’ is capable of self-understanding and self-representation for a better humanity. The shift from being an object to being a subject in Fanon resembles the Cartesian agency of the subject, an agency that is located outside social normativity, ideological, discursive, and institutional constrains. It also resembles the existential free-willed subject of Sartre. Such agency, if conceptualized on the mundane level of the secular, echoes the bourgeois philosophy that perceives the self (ego) as a mathematical point.

Homi Bhabha describes Fanon’s articulation of the new man—who is constructed through violence and subsequently re-fashions himself through

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230 Fanon 1963: 37.

231 Fanon makes use of the Hegelian dialectic, seeing decolonization as part of the *History* toward a better humanity.

232 Horkheimer 1972.
violence to counter colonial violence—as an ethical and political project.\(^{233}\)

Fanon’s emancipatory vision for the History of humanity need be seen within the parameters of Hegelian History. Fanon’s ethical-political project envisions a historical future that is enabled through violence but with the fundamental aim to negate violence as a whole, and thus arrive at the end of History.

Judith Butler writes of a claim of nonviolence “as an ethical ‘call’ [that] could not be understood if it were not for the violence involved in the making and sustaining of the subject. There would be no struggle, no obligation, and no difficulty. The point is not to eradicate the conditions of one's own production, but only to assume responsibility for living a life that contests the determining power of that production.”\(^{234}\) If the claim for a nonviolence ethics in the face of violence is “the act by which a subject seeks to reinstall its mastery and unity, then nonviolence may well follow from living the persistent challenge to mastery that our obligations to others require.”\(^{235}\) The question of subject formation therefore is based on the obligation toward the self and “others,” an ethical responsibility.

Alan Feldman’s analysis of violence and imprisonment in Ireland shows how violence is mimetic, reproducing itself, which puts into question the locating of violence in absolute terms. The agency and burden of responsibility of the subject to negate his/her own formation through violence can only be understood as a transcendent process.

\(^{233}\) Bhabha 1991.

\(^{234}\) Butler 2009.

\(^{235}\) Butler 2005.
Catherine Mills questions Butler’s subject-position vis-à-vis nonviolence ethics prioritizing the role of violence in forming the subject, stating “if the appearance of the ethical subject is itself productively constrained by social norms and is thus dependent on violence, then it is unclear in what sense an ethics could be nonviolent. Or in other words, when the subject of responsibility—keeping in mind the different valences of that phrase—only appears through the violent operations of normative regulation, violence is not easily expunged from ethics.” Butler responds to Mills arguing that the claim for nonviolence is not a Gandhian self-purification from violence, “neither a virtue nor a position and certainly not a set of principles that are to be applied universally,” but rather an ethical call for a new site of struggle where the subject confronts its own formation as the process of formation is constantly recurring. What Butler is calling for has a similar logic to Levinas when he thinks of morality outside of culture.

Balibar addresses the relationship between politics and violence, stating that “the possibility of politics is essentially bound within the practice of resistance” to violence and domination. He therefore locates the resistance to violence, regardless of means, as the site of subject formation and collective solidarity. To think of violence as part of the mundane, the eradication of violence remains in the domain of the transcendental. My research over the last three years was an investigation in the realm of the mundane to find the

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236 Ibid.
237 Balibar 2009.
transcendental. What I encountered was an extreme violence that becomes invisible. To think through Brecht’s words, which open this closing reflection, gives one the ability to feel and to live the affect of the screams without being able to write about them. This is the moment that the voice disappears while the echoes of the past persist, the dreams of resistance prevail, and the call for nonviolence remain just a call.
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