Remembering Past(s), Imagining Futures: The Politics of Hope in Palestine

By

Noa Tova Shaindlinger

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

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2016

Abstract

Using hope as a category of experience, this dissertation explores the ways Palestinians and their Israeli-Jewish allies undermine urban spatial expropriations under Israeli-settler-colonialism. Focusing on the city of Jaffa, I analyze the ways in which the Israeli state and the Tel Aviv municipality succeeded in ‘burying’ histories of mass expulsions, organized violence and appropriations of private and public spaces. I then follow the fortunes of Palestinians – those who remained in Jaffa and became a minority under regimes of neoliberalization and Judaicization, and those who were expelled, found themselves de-nationalized and precarious refugees, some confined to decrepit camps, while others pursued opportunities for meaningful political engagement and armed struggle. The dissertation ends with a powerful gesture towards a future that undermines the colonial present and its attendant sense of hopelessness: I explore how both Palestinians and Israeli-Jews engage with the ideas of reconciliation and “living together” in the “Jaffa of tomorrow.”

My focus on hope as a category of experience hinges on two main intersecting axes: temporality and place. Just as political identities are rooted in the refugee camp experience and informed by the quotidian and the present, on the one hand, and memory and absence on the other, so, I argue, is Palestinians’ understanding of the local. Rather than accepting normative assertions that
define the local as a bounded place that is both community-making and exclusive of those outside of it, I wish to suggest that locality, and attachment to it, is much more multi-directional, dispersed in time and space. This understanding brings to our line of sight those people who are geographically external to place, in this case Jaffa, but have nonetheless powerful attachment to it. In many ways, then, Palestinians are fighting for the right to belong against submerged histories of ethnic cleansing and entrenched colonial denial of their attachments to places they were expelled from.
Acknowledgments

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Hamed al-Sa’id, a refugee from Jaffa, who died in exile, in Balata camp, and to all the Palestinian refugees who have suffered the pangs of longing for the homeland.

This project would not have been completed without the immense help I have received from Palestinians in Jaffa and in Nablus, in particular all the refugees, young and old, that I met at the camps and who shared their personal histories with me. “Tell them we are still here, in these overcrowded and crumbling camps. Don’t let the world forget about us,” they pleaded with me time and again. This project was carried out, then, with an eye to echo the voices of the refugees, to demand the world does not abandon them to their fate and side with their oppressors. In Balata, I am particularly thankful to the al-Sa’id family, my generous hosts and most intimate interlocutors and companions; to Muhammad ‘Ayash for spending so much of his precious time introducing me to countless people and sitting in on interviews; to the staff of the Yafa Cultural Centre and the young men who kept me company each morning, greeting me with coffee and cigarettes.

This dissertation would not have been written if it were not for the mentorship and guidance of Jens Hanssen, a diligent and caring supervisor, who, with lots of tough love helped me through writer’s blocks and other hurdles, constantly challenging and demanding better from me. I hope some day I will do unto others what he has done for me. Amira Mittermaier introduced me to anthropological thinking and to rigorous ethnographic methodologies, and continued to challenge me, offering her critique of my chapters, forcing me to rethink that which I had taken for granted or at face value. Ato Quayson welcomed me to the Diaspora and Transnational Studies collaborative program, introducing me to a whole body of scholarship I previously was
not familiar with, and constantly asking me questions, challenging my analytical framework to make it more resilient. Alejandro Paz offered extensive review of my completed project, providing me with several excellent new trajectories for my book manuscript. Serving as an external reviewer, Julie Peteet has been supportive of my research from the first time I presented from it at the AAAs through the defence process, pressing me on a few of my most fundamental questions.

In Palestine, I owe a debt of gratitude to many for their hospitality, companionship and assistance: Haim Schwarczenbrg, Chen Misgav, Lizi Sagie, Neria Biala, Tamar Freed, Ronnie Barkan, Yudit Ilani, Sami Abu Shehadeh, Iris and Yoav Bar, Shosh Kahn, Tali Shapira, Halleli Pinson, Moran Barir, Ami Asher and so many others. Daniel Monterescu who has been a friend and a scholarly collaborator while in the field, and my cheerleader during the long write-up period. Eitan Bronstein Aparicio and Eleonore Merza-Bronstein for the many hours of discussing the Nakba, the right of Return, and the response of Israelis. The entire staff at Zochrot, especially ‘Umar al-Ghubari and Liat Rosenberg, for bringing me into the fold and allowing me to participate and to ask so many questions. To my friends at Badil for their companionship and insight, as well as all the wonderful people we met in Cape Town, especially Heidi Grunebaum and Aslam Levy. Salman Abu Sitta was an immense help providing me with raw statistical data about the refugees.

Back in Toronto, I must thank my friends for their continued support over the years: Susan Benson-Sokmen, Oscar Jarzmik, Mathew Gagne, Ian Costa and Usman Hamid. I would have never made it through those long years of writing if it weren’t for your friendship. To the wonderful and dedicated administrative staff at NMC, especially Anna Sousa, who works tirelessly behind the scenes and making sure our graduate experience is a pleasant and productive
one. This research was supported through generous funding from SGS at the University of Toronto, OGS (Ontario Graduate Scholarship), SSHRC (the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) doctoral awards, Charles and Andrea Bronfman Award for Israeli Studies and Friends of Hebrew University Travel Grant.

Finally, many heartfelt thanks to my family: my parents, Klara and Hillel, and my sister Liron for their continued support, material included, for repeatedly picking me up and dropping me off at the airport, and for hosting me for so long while doing fieldwork. To my feline companions Sookie, Shlomo and Jon Snow for the most welcome distractions and for keeping me sane.
Table of Contents

Remembering Past(s), Imagining Futures: The Politics of Hope in Palestine ....................................................... i

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................................................................. iv

Table of Contents.................................................................................................................................................................... vii

List of Tables........................................................................................................................................................................... x

List of Figures........................................................................................................................................................................... xi

Introduction: Who’s Afraid of the Right of Return? .......................................................... 1

   Salvaging Hope.............................................................................................................................................................................. 3

   The Right of Return and International Law .......................................................................................................................... 15

   Zionist conceptions of “Return” .................................................................................................................................................. 18

   The Return in the context of Palestinian State-Building ......................................................................................................... 24

   The Right to Belong..................................................................................................................................................................... 30

   Fieldwork .................................................................................................................................................................................. 33

   The Outline of the Dissertation ................................................................................................................................................. 38

Chapter One: Jaffa from the Blushing “Bride of Palestine” to the Shamed “Mother of Strangers” .....43

   Jaffa: A Hub of Modernity............................................................................................................................................................ 44

   The Zionist Colonial Logic of Separation.................................................................................................................................... 49

   The White City and “Mixing” ....................................................................................................................................................... 50

   Disaster ...................................................................................................................................................................................... 56

   The Fall of Jaffa .......................................................................................................................................................................... 58

   Understanding the Demographics of the Refugees ...................................................................................................................... 65

   Conclusion................................................................................................................................................................................... 75

Chapter Two: The “New Normal” .................................................................................. 77

   The “New Normal” ...................................................................................................................................................................... 77

   State-Sanctioned Looting.............................................................................................................................................................. 81

   Beyond the Barbed Wires of Ajami ............................................................................................................................................. 86

   Conclusion................................................................................................................................................................................... 102

Chapter Three: Point of No Return ......................................................................... 103

   Eliminating the Native, Indigenizing the Settler ..................................................................................................................... 103
Chapter Four: Itineraries of Exile ................................................................. 134
  Literature of resistance ........................................................................ 140
  From a Revolutionary to a Diplomat .................................................. 148
  From Quiet Exile to Public Intellectual ............................................... 156
  Living in Memory: Exile and the Burden of the Future ....................... 162
  “Running out of Space” in Nablus-Area Refugee Camps ...................... 168
  Diasporic Silences .............................................................................. 178
  Conclusion ......................................................................................... 183

Chapter Five: Broken Tiles and Phantom Houses: Urban Intervention in Tel Aviv-Jaffa Now ........ 185
  Spatial Resistance .............................................................................. 189
  Bibi’s House and other Phantoms ...................................................... 196
  Lived spaces and “Haunting” .............................................................. 202
  Arab Homes for Sale ......................................................................... 210
  Conclusion: Between Jaffa and Gaza .................................................. 220

Chapter Six: Feeling Palestine in South Africa ...................................... 224
  The Commensurability of Apartheid .................................................. 227
  Planning as Resistance ...................................................................... 231
  ‘Joint Action’ across the Colonial Divide ............................................ 233
  Optimism and Melancholia in Cape Town ........................................... 238
  District Six seen through Palestinian Eyes .......................................... 245
  Conclusion ......................................................................................... 258

Chapter Seven: The Palestine of Tomorrow ......................................... 261
  A Return to the Homeland ................................................................. 270
  Returning to Jaffa .............................................................................. 280
  The New Manshiyyeh ....................................................................... 287
  The Closing of the Path .................................................................... 293
  From Balata to Jaffa? ....................................................................... 296
Conclusion: The Way Home .................................................. 303

Bibliography ........................................................................ 313

Copyright Acknowledgements ............................................ 338
List of Tables

Table 1.1: Palestinian and Jewish populations in the greater Jaffa area before 1948.

Table 1.2: Estimated numbers of the Jaffa area refugees, according to their places of exile.
List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Jaffa’s pre-1948 neighbourhoods superimposed on a current map of the city.

Figure 1.2: Map showing the Jaffa-area villages.

Figure 1.3: Map depicting the dispersal of Palestinian refugees in 1948.

Figure 4.1: Nahr al-Bared refugee camp near Tripoli, Lebanon.

Figure 4.2: “Football with the martyrs”: Children playing football in the narrow alleys of Balata refugee camp.

Figure 4.3: A mural inside the Yafa Cultural Centre, Balata Refugee Camp.

Figure 5.1: A screenshot from an Israeli manufacturer of “Jaffa style” decorative tiles.

Figure 5.2: Derekh Hasafa, a visual dictionary: Jaffa, Yefet street, December 2009.

Figure 5.3: Jaffa 2030 “Map no. 1” showcasing Palestinian Jaffa.

Figure 5.4: The Bibi family house on Gaza Street, Jaffa, April 2016.

Figure 5.5: Bibi’s House “My Jaffa” installation.

Figure 5.6: “Pedagogic Acts”: Miniature Arab architecture in Charles Clore Park, formerly Manshiyyeh.

Figure 5.7: A student’s design for Bibi’s house after the return.

Figure 5.8: “Arab Homes for Sale” at Platform art fair.

Figure 5.9: Miniature Arab houses, glued to a piece of broken arabesque-style floor tile.
Figure 5.10: “For Sand thou art, and unto Dust shalt thou Return”: Fishermen village / Tel Aviv-Gaza, 1948-2014.

Figure 6.1: District Six memory map covering the floor of the museum.

Figure 6.2: The inscription “a’idun” on the ruins of District Six.

Figure 6.3: Waving the Palestinian flag in District Six.

Figure 7.1: Members of the Dajani family with an activist from Zochrot.

Figure 7.2: The “green house” at the heart of Ajami, currently used as military court.

Figure 7.3: “Beit Gidi” – the Etzel (Irgun) Museum in Irshid.

Figure 8.1: Umar introducing the history of demise of Manshiyyeh in front of Beit Gidi.

Figure 8.2: The sign at the Israeli-Lebanese northwestern border in Ras al-Naqurah.
Introduction: Who’s Afraid of the Right of Return?

We will return
that is not a threat
not a wish
a hope
or a dream
but a promise.

Remi Kanazi, “Nakba” 1

On 15 May, 2011, hundreds of Palestinians gathered on the Syrian border with the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights to protest the 63rd anniversary of the Nakba (Arabic: catastrophe), the mass expulsion of Palestinian-Arabs from those parts of mandatory Palestine that became Israel. 2

One man, whose parents exiled from Jaffa back in 1948, managed to evade the Israeli army and hitchhike his way to his ancestral city, where he attempted to locate his family’s house and reconnect with his lost homeland. He then voluntarily surrendered himself to the police, not before being interviewed by Israeli journalists. Israeli news outlets considered the affair an embarrassment for the state, as mixture of shock, fear and disgust echoed through social media

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1 Remi Kanazi, Before the Next Bomb Drops: Rising up from Brooklyn to Palestine (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2015), p. 4.

2 On the Nakba and its aftermath, see below in this introduction. That day, four demonstrators were killed when the Israeli army opened fire on the demonstrators. See Karma Nabulsi, “Nakba Day: We Waited 63 Years for This,” The Guardian, 19 May, 2011 http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/may/19/nakba-day-palestinian-summer
Last accessed 26 May, 2016; less than a month later, on 5 June, 2011, another march, this time marking the Naksa, or the 1967 Arab defeat, ended in tragedy when the IDF shot and killed 23 demonstrators.
online and in conversations on the streets and on buses. Hijazi’s daring return journey was widely and immediately dismissed as an attempt to “infiltrate” the country by a Syrian, obscuring his Palestinianess and his profound affective connection to a homeland that he had only heard of from his exiled parents.

Denouncing Palestinian returnees as “infiltrators” is not a new practice. In fact, Palestinians who attempted to return to their villages and towns after the formation of the Israeli state, even before the creation of the armistice lines in 1949, were called mistanenim (Hebrew, “infiltrators”), denoting their illegal status as non-citizens and as a security threat that must be removed. The fear of being engulfed by Palestinian returnees marching through Israel’s borders is also not a novelty. In fact, in 1952, only four years after the Nakba, Israeli security apparatus was alarmed by reports of a potential “march of the refugees,” which was understood as an “insidious plot” against the state of Israel by Arab governments. Internal correspondence stressed that

We must reiterate that we view the march of the refugees as a political and security threat. Preventing the return of the refugees is a question of life and death to our state. Of particular danger are those refugees who wish to enter with the intention of being a fifth column… our response to the “march” will have to be attempting to stop it at any cost.

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4 Palestinians attempted to enter Israel throughout the 1950s for various reasons, see chapter 3 as well as Benny Morris, Israel’s Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

5 ISA “March of the Refugees,” 20 November 1952, GL 17117/28
The Palestinian right of return has remained a specter of Israeli political discourse; its presence lingers even several decades after the *Nakba* and the establishment of the state though it is rarely publicly discussed. However, occasionally it resurfaces to invoke fear and mobilize the Jewish masses against such possibility. Recently, in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Europe and calls to allow a limited number into the country, opposition MK member Yair Lapid explicitly claimed that admitting Syrian refugees would be “opening a backdoor to the right of return for the Palestinian refugees,” revealing once again the deeply ingrained fear of being engulfed and perhaps “submerged” by returnees.6

This project is about the ghostly presence of the Palestinian refugees in the spaces they were expelled from, just as they keep haunting Israeli society with their glaring absence. At the same time, I will also explore the experiences of these refugees in exile and the invocation of their right to return to their places of origin, within and around the city of Jaffa.

**Salvaging Hope**

Focusing on traumatic memories of displacement and on subsequent aspirations of repatriation, this dissertation draws on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Jaffa, among Palestinians and Israeli-Jews and in West Bank refugee camps. Additionally, I have studied histories of expulsion and state-led expropriations, as well as those of survival and armed struggle that inform the ways my interlocutors’ situate themselves within these histories and engage with futurity. The description of this project as an exploration of the politics of hope in Palestine often tends to

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elicit a rather predictable response: “is there any?” While often meant as a rhetorical question, cynically commenting on the perceived hopelessness of the situation, this project decidedly treats this question in all seriousness, interrogating the ways in which Palestinians understand hope and engage with a sense of hopefulness in meaningful ways. Informed by Ernst Bloch’s lengthy ontological study of hope within Western cultural and political canon, this project’s core objective is to locate, situate, and follow hope as a category of experience in Palestine, and particularly among Palestinians living in Jaffa and its refugees.

Bloch was interested in hope as an affective state of mind that propels humans to “venture beyond” the here and now and “throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong.” By saying that I am interested in hope as a category of experience, my concern is with the ways in which Palestinians understand hope as a core political concept, re-fashion and imbue it with particular meaning, and deploy it for their own liberatory projects. In this way, I am trying to avoid pre-conceived notions of hope with their own Eurocentric and Christian genealogies, that Bloch traces, and instead attempting to gage how hopefulness is contingently produced on the ground, through mundane social encounters, and people’s own understandings of their positionality within existing power structures. Approaching hope as a category of experience helped me to be attuned to the particular contexts in which Palestinians cope and venture beyond the here and now.

The contingency of hope eschews ideas about the difference between optimism, as an attitude towards the mundane and the immediate, and hope as relating to more ambitious visions

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for structural changes. In the particular context of the Palestinian lives I study, I noticed that my interlocutors refused a binary between the “small” acts in the present and revolutionary “grand gestures” that are designed to overhaul reality. Their social interactions are informed by what they view as viable possibilities for their future. The visibility of these possibilities is what imbuces forms of sociability and courses of action with meaning.

This approach has a clear temporal dimension: if hope is future-oriented, and actions are informed by ideas about what can be, then, as Bloch himself argued, everyone lives in the future. To tweak William Faulkner’s oft-misquoted aphorism “the past is not dead; it is not even past”: the present is not even present. When Bloch claimed that we all live in the future, he meant that a broad array of human emotions that guide our choices, be it fear, hope or desire, are always oriented towards what might be. Thus our actions only make sense when considered against what we see as viable possibilities for our future, both those we favour and the outcome we wish to avoid. In this sense, we are in constant process of becoming, or rather, trying to become. This horizon is also not “mysterious,” distant or unknown, but rooted in and emanating from the conditions of the present, the vantage point from which we cast our gaze.

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8 See Joel Pearl, The Question of Time: Freud in the Light of Heidegger’s Temporality (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013), pp. 51-53; Claude Romano, Event and World, trans. Shane Mackinlay (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009); Bloch himself eschews the divide between a more distant future and the “darkness so near it of the just lived moment” (p. 12), locating hopefulness in the immediate and the tangible.


For Palestinians, this vantage point is the realities of settler-colonialism and dispossession, differentially experienced across class, gender and political divides. As subordinates in a colonial state, let alone as stateless refugees, Palestinians actively strive to carve out their horizon against the designs of the Israeli state, aimed to cement the status quo and foreclose potential subversive ideas and avenues for political engagement. Under these conditions, Palestinians (and their Israeli-Jewish allies I also discuss here), seek to invoke both that which is “no longer conscious” and, more importantly, what Bloch calls the “not yet conscious,” the “forward dawning” of Jaffa’s (and Palestine’s) future that unsettles the colonial order and its project of the new normal.

Bloch defined the no longer conscious as “old content that has merely sunk below the threshold and may cross it again by a more or less straightforward process of being remembered.”11 This “old content,” in the Palestinian context, is histories of violent displacement and spatial elisions, through which the state has attempted to de-Arabize Palestine in their stead. It is not just a question of remembering these histories, as both refugees and those Palestinians who remained in Jaffa have not simply “forgotten” about the circumstances that created statelessness and second class citizenship. For Palestinians, the act of remembrance is not confined to the private realm, nor does it entail merely internal processes of reminiscence of the past. Put differently, Palestinians take up the conscious act of recollection, which denotes “a way of destroying or eradicating”12 what the Zionist state attempts hard to preserve, namely the normalization of occupation and its own self-identification as a liberal-democratic nation-state.


Rather, the effect of the act of recollection undertaken by Palestinians elucidates the settler-colonial nature of the state and falsifies its founding myths. In the context of settler-colonialism and violent spatial expropriations, remembrance as recollection is politically-charged active engagement in public, openly challenging Israeli narratives of national rights over place. Invoking the-no-longer-conscious in public spaces is therefore intended to elicit responses from Israeli-Jews and solicit new and contingent forms of political engagement.

While Bloch’s main concern was to interrogate the manifold ways through which humans engage with the future, Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” pointed to the failure of the European left to stand up to fascism and find inspiration in revolutionary traditions. Benjamin’s sense of urgency and obvious despondency are evident throughout the essay: The Theses were written in early 1940, even before the fall of France and the Vichy regime, but after the disastrous Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 1939, which, for the time being, left the USSR outside of the war and moreover, abandoned European anti-Fascists to their fate. Already in exile in France, Benjamin was sensing the storm heading his way, as vast sections of the continent fell into Nazi hands. In his “moment of danger,” Benjamin voiced his scathing critique of his generation and its fascination with “progress” as a teleological understanding of human history. According to that logic, fascism is a mere exception in what is otherwise a progress of humanity towards a glorious future. In fact, Benjamin warns, this outlook, which had plagued the Weimer social democracts, had pawned the well-being of the oppressed classes for the promise of future liberation, which had not come. Benjamin implied that the modernist obsession with the future was, in the final analysis, what gave rise to Nazism and its attendant

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horrors, because the German Social Democrats and their ilk neglected to tackle fascism head on and study its appeal to the masses. Fascism on its different variants, then, was not an exception to modernity but part and parcel of it.

Walter Benjamin, then, was much more interested in the dialectical relationship between the past and the present, than with the future. The key to undermining the destructive “progress” narrative is through illuminating the dark corners of history that the victors willed into oblivion: failed uprisings as well as moments of unspeakable loss. The politics of remembrance-as-recollection operates to, in the words of Walter Benjamin, “fan the spark of hope in the past”\(^\text{14}\): Palestinians who consciously and publicly dredge up that which Israelis refuse to remember, histories of mass expulsion, the ugliness of occupation, with its attendant act of violence and looting – strive to reconcile the disappointments of the past. The failures of the past also inhabit the seed of future salvation, and it is to the past that the oppressed turn to find unfulfilled hope and “seize hold of a memory as it flashes up in the moment of danger.”\(^\text{15}\) That memory, of failed struggles and trauma, but also of tremendous resilience and creativity, is brought up to bear on the present and point the way towards a future that rectifies the “maimed present.”\(^\text{16}\) For Palestinians, that “moment of danger” is the present, as it has been since the 1948 Nakba.

Benjamin reminded us that for the oppressed, there is no “state of emergency” that is somehow the exception to the rule, as the history of the victors’ claims. The act of “fanning the spark of hope,” then, is designed to undermine that illusion of “exception,” and, like Angelus Novus


\(^\text{15}\) Ibid.

facing the destructive form of progress, stand at the threshold of the future while at the same time paying homage to the past.\(^{17}\) The appearance of the angel in Benjamin’s text writes human agency back into history: the angel may be forced to leave the pile of ruins behind, since the storm is mightier than his wings, but critical historians and oppressed peoples themselves are able to make the past a transformative force in the present. As Benjamin warned us, the Israeli state threatens even the dead: on the one hand, since 1948, Israel has systematically destroyed the physical remains of Palestine, through massive demolitions of Palestinian villages and towns and transforming them into Jewish settlements. On the other hand, Israeli historians have been producing hegemonic narratives that celebrate the state as a bastion of democracy and Zionism as a liberatory force for oppressed Jews. As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, Palestinians and their Israeli-Jewish allies have fighting to wrest history away from the state by staging spatial interventions in expropriated urban spaces and through the recollection of Palestine’s pre-1948 past and its traumatic loss.

Thes acts of remembrance is also not spontaneous, and are precipitated by the invocation of the yet to become:

The Not-Yet-Conscious itself must become conscious in its act, known in its content, as the process of dawning on the one hand, as what is dawning on the other. And so the point is reached where hope itself, this authentic expectant emotion in the forward dream, no longer just appears as a merely self-based mental feeling... but in a conscious-known way as utopian function.\(^{18}\)

My research clearly demonstrates that the past and the future are not mutually exclusive in the context of the struggle for liberation as Benjamin might have argued. Indeed, already in the Theses, the futuristic dimension is invoked through Benjamin’s engagement with the concept of

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p. 83; Benjamin’s image of the angel of history appears in “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” p. 258.

\(^{18}\) Bloch, *Hope*, p. 144.
redemption, as he implies at the end of his essay. The future is not predictable, especially if we eschew the modernist teleological approach to history. Yet our understanding the past, and through it our potential for revolution and liberation creates opportunities for a future redemption.\(^\text{19}\) In the context of Palestine, the new horizon of possibilities that emerges despite the Israeli state’s efforts at foreclosure also elicits memories of a forgotten and submerged past that reinforce and bring visions of a redeemed world into focus. What is perhaps new here is the fissures of linear temporality: it is not that past memories make the future knowable, nor is it a simple call for a return to real or imagined “golden age”; rather, the forward dawning, or the drive to create a better world is what unearths that which was suppressed or made forgotten, because it was inconvenient or too traumatic, and imbues these memories with new meaning and purpose: overcome forced removals on the one hand, and the denial of rights by the settler-colonial state. Hope as a utopian function and as a politically mobilizing force operates as a way to imagine a better world and provide Palestinians an avenue for concrete actions designed to “overwhelm,” re-make reality and reclaim the homeland.

The horizon, argued Reinhart Koselleck, “is that line behind which a new space of experience will open, but which cannot yet be seen.”\(^\text{20}\) Koselleck’s main concern here is the vexed relationship between the past and the future, memory and hope, and experience and expectation. Futurity is produced within the tension between these categories: The space of experience, the “present past,” is the totality of human action, “within which many layers of

\(^{19}\) Benjamin, “Theses,” p. 264.

earlier times are simultaneously present.” The horizon of expectation, the “future made present,” is oriented towards the “not-yet,” but at the same time, has a dialectical relationship with experience: although one cannot predict one’s future based on the past, still, the layers of human experience provide guidance or “counsel” what we may expect to happen to us next. Nevertheless, Koselleck clearly leaves ample space for human agency and for the possibility that things may turn out completely different than what we expect, based on past experiences. This is what he means when he stresses that the future “is scattered among an infinity of temporal extensions.” The “tradition of the oppressed,” or the “space of experience” (to return to Benjamin) for Palestinians provide the layered historical memory they need in order to generate new visions, raise new hopes or anxieties from which a new space of horizon will open up. As I will show in chapter six, the resources my interlocutors draw on extend beyond the history of the Palestinian liberation struggle, and include other experiences of collective struggle against forms of oppression that occurred elsewhere, but that nevertheless are familiar to Palestinians.

Finally, my choice to interrogate hope as a category of experience is clearly a political one. Hope as a category of analysis and as an anthropological object has come under criticism. First, Bloch’s ontology of hope is based exclusively on the archaeology of Western cultural canon, which produces a highly Eurocentric understanding of hope which might not make sense from different “loci of enunciation,” to quote Mignolo, and their own histories of knowledge production and meaning-making practices. Second, in recent decades, hope seems to have been

22 Ibid.
hijacked by neoliberal promise of happiness and prosperity. Consider, for instance, President Barack Obama’s “audacity to hope” in an age of de-regulation, climate erosion, border policing and high-tech warfare. Obama’s hopeful visions seem to address the American (mostly white) middle-class who consider the election of an African-American for the grandest position a sign of utopian social progress and overcoming race. Yet his hopefulness would be greeted with ample cynicism from outside its intended audience and from different corners of empire: consider, for instance, African-American working class and the rise of the Black Lives Matter at the height of Obama’s presidency. It is no coincidence so many black organizers and protesters sense they were left beyond the pale of the president’s hopeful fantasies, abandoned to fend for themselves against police brutality and systemic violence in dystopic inner cities. Other useful examples to the utter sense of abandonment by Obama’s hope would be the president’s authorized drone attacks in Yemen, and his carte blanche for Israel, thus carrying on the policy of his predecessors.

Viewed from within a Eurocentric and Christian tradition, hope has been identified as the “passive counterpart” of desire, a human affective disposition that espouses “constraint and resignation” and therefore abdicates human agency in favour of an outside intervention, be it a deity or just fate.24 If we follow the logic of this critique, hope can become a category devoid of politics, with a feeble articulation of a wish or vague optimism in its stead. Similarly, feminist critics remind us that hope is a fragile project, and that furthermore, patriarchy might couch sexist and oppressive projects in the language of hope and further undermine emancipatory

visions for women. As recent scholarship already demonstrated, the circulation of the neoliberal valences of hope from the US into the Arab world through massive PR campaigns was designed to depoliticize and divert the attention of their intended audiences from political economy to “culture talk” as a strategy to maintain the status quo and avoid popular uprisings.

The Palestinian Authority (PA), especially under former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, embraced its own local variant of crony capitalism that benefits a small group of Palestinian businessmen and their Israeli counterparts, and undermines effective resistance to military occupation. The PA markets its neoliberal regime to West Bank Palestinians as an “economic miracle” of growth (despite staggering poverty rates, food insecurity and land loss) and as a phase of state-building that would lead to liberation. This neoliberal pipe dreams of hope is pushed by the PA and capitalist elite active promotion of “economic peace” with Israel (through, among other means, the NGO industry) that would eventually “trickle down” and benefit broader sectors in Palestinian society, while in reality, this strategy only serves the political status quo.

I chose to focus on the ways in which Palestinians salvage hope from neoliberalism and counterinsurgency and reproduce it in concrete and meaningful terms as part of future-oriented, liberatory vocabulary and practices. Hope in this context is not a “pie in the sky,” a faint gesture of optimism or resignation to fate, but a clear articulation of a goal – the end of exile and a return to the homeland – that produces a set of practices and strategies designed to achieve it. Under


these circumstances, *sumud* (Arabic, “steadfastness”), a term that has become synonymous with the moral fortitude that enables Palestinians to cope with the precarity of refugeehood, statelessness and continued marginality, is reconfigured to denote the sheer creativity and the ability to shift tactics with the changing circumstances.

Contingencies and unknowability that are wound up in hopeful practices have shifted hegemonic discourses among Palestinians back to international law. If in the first few years after the Nakba international pressure and diplomacy were resources of hopeful anticipation for repatriation, these soon dissipated with staunch Israeli intransigence (see chapter 3), and replaced with the resurgence of Palestinian nationalism, ready to confront the occupier through armed struggle. As my fourth chapter demonstrates, the era of Palestinian “global offensive” with the support of newly-formed third-world nations came to a close by the end of the 1970s, and the armed struggle option was rolled back in the wake of the Israeli offensive in Beirut and the ousting of the resistance. After the Madrid Summit in 1991, the spectacular failure of the Oslo Accords (see below in this introduction) and the massive devastation of the Second Intifada, Palestinians resorted to international law to stake their claims to place against an increasingly repressive military occupation. Their success in obtaining an International Court of Justice ruling against the separation barrier in 2004\(^{28}\) fueled the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, a rights-based global campaign couched in international law that stipulates three basic demands, one of which is respecting the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

ongoing campaign has been gaining ground in the past several years, as it has gradually earned global recognition and support.\textsuperscript{29}

The Right of Return and International Law

On 11 December 1948, the UN General Assembly voted in favor of resolution 194, which, among other things, explicitly called for the repatriation of the Palestinian refugees. Section 11

\textit{Resolves} that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.\textsuperscript{30}

Although UNGA resolutions are non-binding, they are crafted to reflect existing legal norms and principles that were already binding. In chapter three I will discuss the resolution in greater detail in order to dissect the Israeli interpretation. Here I just wish to briefly lay out those principles in international law that are consistent with resolution 194 and point to the specific requirements which Israel was expected to abide by.

The passage does not explicitly mention Israel, however it does state clearly where the refugees are expected to return, i.e. their homes. Since those homes were, at the time of the drafting of the resolution, under Israeli control, it is clear that the obligation to readmit them is directed at the Israeli government. It is also clear that return is conditional on individual choice, and those refugees who opt not to repatriate should be compensated for the property they left

\textsuperscript{29} The Boycott National Committee (BNC) has documented the campaign’s successes, as well as its appeals and other public notices: \url{https://bdsmovement.net/}

\textsuperscript{30} UN A/RES/194 (III).
behind. And finally, the resolution answers the “when” question, by clearly stipulating that repatriation is not conditional on final peace agreements between Israel and its neighbouring Arab countries and that refugees are to return “at the earliest practicable date.”

Resolution 194 conformed to binding norms of international law that existed at the time. The law of nationality, for instance, safeguards the status of individuals vis-à-vis a state against any attempt to de-nationalize them, or strip them of citizenship in the country where they habitually reside. Thus, when a territory undergoes a change of sovereignty, as parts of Palestine passed from the British Mandate (as “custodian”) to Israel in 1948, the successor state was obliged to confer nationality to all habitual residents, whether or not they were present at the time. This means that Israel was in violation of international law when it refused to readmit the Palestinian refugees, including those who fled their homes across the borders under threat of violence.

Moreover, international law explicitly prohibits states to design their nationality laws in ways that exclude certain ethnic groups. Israel’s 1952 nationality law makes clear distinctions between Jews, who may acquire citizenship as such, even if they have no immediate ancestral links to the country, and non-Jews, who may qualify only if they resided in mandatory Palestine.

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32 Brief 8, no page numbers.
and remained in Israeli-controlled territories afterwards.\textsuperscript{34} Although international law allows states to define their own criteria for conferring nationality and the right to refuse admission, it also limits states’ sovereignty by proscribing discriminatory practices as well as state-to-state obligations. In the case of Palestinian refugees, Israel’s refusal to readmit them is considered an imposition on other states, in particular surrounding Arab states that were burdened with hosting large numbers of refugees.\textsuperscript{35}

The right of return is directly based on humanitarian law, as it has been clearly established in both the Hague convention (1907) and the Geneva Civilians Convention (1949, to which Israel is a signatory) that displaced persons, irrespective of the circumstances of their displacement, be allowed to return to their homes after the cessation of hostilities.\textsuperscript{36} In the case of the Palestinians, Israel has committed a dual violation, since humanitarian law also strongly prohibits mass expulsion of populations.\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, even if one disputes the assertion that Palestinians were ethnically cleansed by Zionist paramilitary forces and the Israeli army, the legal norms are clear about repatriation as a basic human right. And finally, the right of return is also enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly a mere day before resolution 194. Article 13(2) explicitly stipulates “everyone

\textsuperscript{34} Nationality Law, \textit{Laws of the State of Israel: Authorized Translation from the Hebrew, Volume 22} (Jerusalem: Government Printer, 1948-1987), pp. 341-44.


\textsuperscript{36} The right of return, then, is reserved to every person who was forced to flee or expelled whether during an international or internal conflict, see Quigley, “Displaced Palestinians,” pp. 215-216.

\textsuperscript{37} The prohibition against the use of violence against civilian populations, including their expulsion, is even older than that. See Kattan, \textit{Coexistence}, pp. 203-208.
has a right to leave any country, including his own, and return to his country.”

Later, in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966, to which Israel is a signatory), article 12(4), this right was reasserted, this time emphasizing the state’s obligation: “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.” It is the question of the right to place that I will now turn, as I examine the Zionist claim to Palestine.

**Zionist conceptions of “Return”**

The opening paragraphs of Israel’s Declaration of Independence state that

Eretz Israel [Hebrew, The Land of Israel, Palestine] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here the spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

In this foundational document, read at the former home of Meir Dizengoff (1861-1936), the first mayor of Tel Aviv, in Tel Aviv on 14 May 1948, just a few hours before the formal end of the British Mandate, the state of Israel lays claim to Palestine. The fulfillment of the Zionist project was premised on the expulsion and dispossession of Palestinians. The declaration’s drafters make two inter-connected arguments: first, they claim Jewish indigeneity to Palestine, from

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39 [http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx) ; this article should be understood broadly to include those people who have been stripped of nationality, including second-, third- and forth- generation refugees whose reentry into their country has been blocked by Israel, in violation of international law (see brief 8 for further discussion).

40 *Official Gazette*, Number 1, Tel Aviv, 5 Iyar 5708, 14.5.1948, page 1.

41 The text went through several revisions, in light of fundamental disagreements about the explicit mention of god. The final text was drafted by a committee helmed by Ben Gurion himself.
which follows a “natural” right to return to the land after centuries of forced dispersion. This “right of return” however does not emanate from international law but rather from distinct religious traditions with messianic, mythical undertones.

The opening sentence of the declaration directly links Jewishness to place – Eretz Israel, presumably the biblical name of Palestine, although Jewish learned tradition is deeply divided over its precise physical boundaries. Identifying the Jewish place of origin is crucial for the Zionist claim, since, the argument goes, the formation of Jewish nationhood is profoundly linked to the space of Eretz Israel as identity-endowing by divine decree. Biblical stories such as those of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) in the book of Genesis and the conquest of Canaan, described in the book of Joshua, highlight the mythical and unbreakable bond between the Israelites and Eretz Israel: it was their territorialization in the Land of Israel that shaped Jewish nationhood just as the divine promise to endow the Land to the Jews that made Canaan consecrated. It is also not a coincidence that the historical turn to monotheism occurred in Eretz Israel, although scholars dispute the biblical claim that trace monotheism to Abraham, and instead argue that the shift took place much later, during the reign of Josiah (641-609 BC), king of Judah.


This connection between nationhood, origins and place is crucial to understanding Zionist claims and the centrality of the bible to them. Indeed, Ben Gurion has articulated this connection through the oft-quoted “the bible is our mandate,” thus transforming to status of the bible from a revered religious text to a land title deed. In his early writings, Ben Gurion was explicit about this link between nationhood and land:

We aspire to make Eretz Israel into an Israeli country, and the Hebrew people, to the people of Eretz Israel. We aspire to plant the people in their homeland and return the land to the people. The unification of people and land, the creation of life in the homeland – this is the soul, the inner essence and core of our aspirations.

The bible, therefore, was instrumental in the reinvention of Palestine as Eretz Israel, the lost homeland and place of origin. At the same time it facilitated the crystallization of modern notions of Jewish nationhood. Migrants from Poland, Russia and Germany were reimagined as dispersed communities of a primordial nation. The bible endowed Zionists with newly-crafted sense of a single genealogical, biological origin of Jews that excised the long and diverse history of Judaism as a set of common religious, cultural or spiritual identities and practices. The imagined Jewish nation was mapped onto Palestine, which, by virtue of “natural and historic right,” as the Declaration of Independence put it, was to be reclaimed as a homeland and remade into a nation-state.

The return of the nation to its homeland was deemed crucial for the Jewish return to history, the abandonment diaspora existence which pathologized the Jews. Ahad Ha’am (nom de

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45 David Ben Gurion, “Towards the Future,” *Us and Our Neighbours* (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1931), p. 4. [Hebrew]

plume of Asher Zvi Hirch Ginsberg, 1856-1927), who was a foundational Zionist intellectual, argued that Judaism

seeks to return to its historic centre, where it will be able to live a life developing in a natural way, to bring its powers into play in every department of human culture, to broaden and perfect those national possessions which is has acquired up to now, and thus to contribute to the common stock of humanity, in the future as it has in the past.\(^{47}\)

Once Jews take spiritual possession of their ancient homeland, argues Ahad Ha’am, they would cease being an anomaly in a world divided into nation-states and become part of history.

Mapping the historical nation onto a territory was, according to this logic, the pre-requisite to modernity and therefore a return to history. The spiritual (re)unification of Jews and Eretz Israel was therefore a return into history. This is what Ahad Ha’am meant when he asserted that Jewish “return to [their] historic centre” was necessary in order for Jews to reclaim their leading role as cultural producers and historical actors.\(^{48}\) Most other Zionist leaders and intellectuals lacked Ahad Ha’am’s subtleties and were more explicit, sidelining, even eliding Jewish diasporic existence as culturally productive and historically meaningful. Jacob Klatzkin (1882-1948), for instance, argued that the *galut* (Hebrew, “diaspora”) was not worthy of survival, since it corrupts the soul of both nation and the individual:

\begin{align*}
\text{Galut can only drag out the disgrace of our people and sustain the existence of a people disfigured in both body and soul – in a word, of a horror. At the very most it can maintain us in a state of national impurity and breed some sort of outlandish creature in an environment of disintegration of cultures and darkening spiritual horizons. The result will be something neither Jew nor gentile – in any case, not a pure national type.}^{49}\n\end{align*}


\(^{48}\) Significantly, though, Ahad Ha’am was also critical of the early Zionist colonization in the 1880s, and considered it too chaotic and disorganized. See Alan Dowty, "Much Ado about Little: Ahad Ha'am's 'Truth from Eretz Yisrael,' Zionism, and the Arabs." *Israel Studies* 5.2 (2000): 154-181.

In a language reminiscent of anti-Semitic tracts of the late 19th and early 20th century, then, Klatzkin argues that the key to be admitted into the civilized world (i.e. Europe) would be to accept and mimic the national logic, which necessitated ethnic and racial homogeneity within clearly delineated territory. Undermining the national logic would result in “rootless and restless” existence that is neither here nor there and is therefore a threat, or “a horror.”

The territorialization of Jewishness was bound to encounter the reality of Palestinian-Arab existence in the so-called Land of Israel. Zionist commitment to ethnic homogeneity was challenged by the rise of Arab nationalism and persistent attempts by Palestinians to resist settler-colonialism. In 1929, shortly after the August riots that resulted in hundreds of casualties at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, Labour Zionist activist and journalist, Moshe Beilinson (1889-1936) tackled the burning question of the right over the land:

There is a foundational and decisive difference between the Eretz Israel Arabs as a nation and the Jews as a nation. The Arabs do not need Eretz Israel in terms of nationalism. They are attached to other centres. There – in Syria, Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula – is the Arab homeland. Even if Eretz Israel is annexed to these countries, it will not add anything. An additional small province amongst vast tracts of land – nothing more. And if they lose it – they will not lose a thing. We, the Jews, have no other homeland, no other centre in the world, and if we lose this country, we lose all. One cannot ignore this fact, in the context of a discussion of Eretz Israel and its form of government. In light of the worthlessness of Eretz Israel to the Arab nation, and the pivotal worth of the same land to the Hebrew nation, we have the right to demand from the Arabs, as a nation, a small “concession” for the sake of our existence, and we have the right to demand the whole world assist us in implementing this demand.50

Zionist settlers’ claim to indigeneity was premised on the denial of the rootedness of Palestinian Arab. In the decades leading up to the declaration of independence, the Zionist leadership was increasingly concerned with how to implement the Jewish “right of return.” From the 1930s, Zionists began to openly entertain the ideal of “transfer,” or the expulsion of the Palestinians.

they resorted to force culminating in the 1948 mass expulsion of Palestinians.\textsuperscript{51} Palestinians who remained in Israel and became citizens have experienced a sense of precarity that emanated from their status as non-Jews in a Jewish state that claims the land as its exclusive national patrimony.\textsuperscript{52}

To return to the Israeli Declaration of Independence, it should be clear why the text emphasizes the status of Eretz Israel as the Jewish homeland and the “ingathering of the exiles.” Its establishment as the Jewish nation-state dictates a commitment to a demographic Jewish-majority, primarily through immigration. This is why the “law of return” (1950) grants automatic citizenship to any Jew that wishes to settle in Israel. Although the original text simply states that “every Jew has the right to come to this country as an oleh,”\textsuperscript{53} a 1970 amendment expended the automatic conferral of Israeli citizenship to “a child and a grandchild of a Jew, the spouse of a Jew, the spouse of a child of a Jew and the spouse of a grandchild of a Jew.” Under this amendment, even those who are not considered Jewish by the \textit{Halakha} (Jewish law) are granted Israeli citizenship, since, in the eyes of the state, they serve as a counter-measure against the Arab “demographic threat.” The political context of this perceived “magnanimity” is Golda Meir’s (the then Prime Minister) notorious anxiety over the birth of “Arab babies,” and apparent


\textsuperscript{52} Nur Masalha, \textit{A Land without a People: Israel, Transfer and the Palestinians, 1949-96} (London: Faber and Faber, 1997).

\textsuperscript{53} For the full original text: \url{http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm}

\textit{Oleh} means “ascender” in Hebrew and refers to immigrant to [Eretz] Israel, but only in the case of Jews. Naturalized non-Jews are simply referred to as \textit{mehagrim} (immigrants).
relief upon the arrival of Polish and Russian Jews in the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of them assimilated with non-Jewish family members in tow.54

For Palestinians, the discursive indigenation of Jews meant denying their attachment to the country. Zionist ideologues and politicians have insisted on the externality of Palestinians, indicating that as “Arabs” they are not only rooted elsewhere, but that they are recent migrants to Eretz Israel, contrary to Jewish “returnees.” Palestinians have become an “Arab minority” in their own country, and as the Israeli Declaration of Independence stipulates, all citizens will be granted “complete equality of social and political rights… irrespective of religion, race or sex,” conspicuously excluding nationality, they are therefore denied the right for national self-identification. Conceding the indigeneity of Palestinians and/or acknowledging Palestinianness as a distinct, territorialized form of identification would be in direct collision course with the core ideology of the Zionist state.

The Return in the context of Palestinian State-Building

The political question about the future of Palestine is not new. During World War I, it was a subject of contention between Arab nationalists, Zionist lobbyists and competing British and French imperial powers. The creation of the Palestine mandate in 1922 only postponed the inevitable confrontation over the question of sovereignty and the creation of an independent state, which was temporarily resolved through the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the formation of a Zionist settler-colonial state.55 The reason I emphasize its temporariness is because the

54 Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian women in Israel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 44.

55 In a remarkable document published by the Arab office in London in response to the partition plan(s), Palestinians eschewed the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine, envisioning an Arab state in its stead that would nonetheless respect
underlying issue of contention since 1948 has been the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, that, despite Israel’s repeated attempts at dismissing or resolving through resettlement elsewhere (see chapter 3), has never disappeared and even intensified.

The project of imagining the return, I argue, is fundamentally different from historical and ongoing debates about the nature of Palestine’s political formation, also known as the one/two-states debate. With the majority of Palestinians displaced from their places of origin, the experience of prolonged exile has been identity-endowing and has provided the most concrete understandings of national liberation.

At the same time, however, the Palestinian state-building project has grappled with the idea of repatriation as it evolved since the inception of the PLO in 1964 as an Arab League-sponsored organization. Since its takeover by Yasser Arafat’s Fatah faction in 1969, the PLO has gradually shifted the Palestinian revolution from the struggle of return to state-building. Although the idea of return was, for a time, foregrounded in official rhetoric, no concrete plans have been drawn by the PLO leadership to facilitate discussion about its practicability. My project offers a departure from questions of state-building, and instead focuses on people’s affective attachment to place and concomitant concrete ideas about re-making micro-realities and lived places, that put negotiations and geopolitical concerns into perspective.


In the foundational Palestinian National Charter of 1968, state-building project was articulated as intimately linked to a particular and clearly defined ethno-national identity (Palestinians are “Arab nationals who, until 1967, normally resided in Palestine"\(^ {57}\) and their descendants). It calls for the restoration of a status quo ante. Liberation, in this formulation, consisted of the “elimination of Zionism” and “re-establish[ing] peace and security.”\(^ {58}\) The implication of the totality (but also vagueness) of Palestinian liberation meant a return, not just in the sense of physical repatriation of exiles, but also reversing the effects of settler-colonialism. The Charter further distinguished between Jews who resided in Palestine before “the beginning of the Zionist invasion” and were part of the envisaged Palestinian state, and those who settled as a consequence were not and, presumably, would be forced to leave.\(^ {59}\)

Israel has created certain realities on the ground, in the form of millions of Jewish newcomers (and those born there over the years), whose presence makes the idea of a return to status quo ante moot. By 1970, liberation for the PLO meant the liquidation of the Zionist polity, replacing it with a democratic and secular state “whose citizens will enjoy equal rights irrespective of their religion.”\(^ {60}\) The Jew qua Zionist, though still construed as the enemy, could


\(^{58}\) Ibid, p. 118.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, p. 117. The cut-off date of this putative indigeneity after which Jewish cannot be considered authentically Palestinian was left vague, perhaps on purpose, and has been interpreted as 1917 (Before the Balfour Declaration), though it can definitely be read by some as prior to the first wave of Zionist migration, 1881-2. More on the “Jewish settlers” debate: Alain Gresh, *The PLO, the Struggle Within: Towards an Independent Palestinian State* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1988), pp. 30-52; On the democratic state of Palestine, see David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 289-294; Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), pp. 190-193.

\(^{60}\) “Fatah: The Seven Points (January 1969), The Israeli-Arab Reader, p. 131.
theoretically find inclusion in the future polity, once he or she renounced Zionism. While the
drafters of this proposal for a democratic state effectively signalled that neither turning back the
clock nor retribution were any longer the objective of the Palestinian struggle, they avoided
fleshing out more concretely the shape of their utopia. Furthermore, although democratic
Palestine was explicitly an Arab state, therefore reproducing previous principles, this vision
never addressed the question of those not self-identifying as Arabs and their status within it.61

In the aftermath of the 1973 October War, and its concomitant transformation of the
delay of the balance in the region, the PLO leadership was forced to recalibrate its understanding of
liberation without alienating more radical factions within the revolution, in particular George
Habash’s PFLP. The result was the 1974 Palestinian National Council (PNC) resolution. On the
one hand, it repeated its previous rejection of UN Security Council 242 and its “land for peace”
formula.62 On the other hand, it introduced the idea of a mini state “in every part of the Palestine
territory which will be liberated.” Even though this truncated territory would serve as a
launching pad for the continuous revolution “until victory”63, the document was the first
articulation of the idea widely known as the “two states solution.” At the time it was considered a
tactic that allowed the Arafat’s PLO to reposition itself on the global diplomatic stage as the


62 The resolution calls on Israel to withdraw its armed forces from “territories occupied in the recent conflict,” and furthermore stresses “respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force” (22 November, 1967, S/RES/242). Accepting the Security Council’s recommendations would have put the PLO in an impossible position vis-à-vis the masses of refugees, whose return was not guaranteed through this resolution. Moreover, accepting resolution 242 would have meant both de-facto and de-jure recognition of the state of Israel as a legitimate polity and renouncing armed struggle.

legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people intent on coming to terms with their occupier and bitter enemy. Speaking to his comrades within the resistance movement, Arafat was wielding the gun, maintaining the revolutionary posture in line with the Charter and his previous declarations against recognition of Israel or abandoning the right of return. Externally, and especially in the west, he was waving the olive branch, to paraphrase the famed reference from Arafat’s UN address (November 13, 1974), making explicit overtures to Israeli-Jews, as equal citizens in the “Palestine of tomorrow.”

This idea that replaced the previous inclusive vision with a narrower notion of Palestinian nation-state, remained on the backburner during the bitter defeat during the Lebanese Civil War, exile to Tunisia in 1982 and the PLO’s ill-conceived backing of Saddam Hussein’s occupation of Kuwait in 1990. When the US finally acknowledged the idea of a Palestinian state to end the first Intifada (1987-1991), Arafat pushed for formal negotiations with Israel in Madrid, Washington DC and Oslo. The Declaration of Independence (1988), a remarkable document of diasporic politics penned by two towering Palestinian exiles (Mahmoud Darwish and Edward Said, Arabic and English versions respectively), represented the acceptance of political realities which by the late 1980s seemed incontestable: that the state of Israel is there to stay for the foreseeable future. In order to make gains on the international stage, the PLO needed to present itself as “pragmatic,” renounce armed struggle and accept a political solution based on Security Council Resolution 242 (although it refrained from explicit reference to it). The height of the popularity of the two-states solution vision was, no doubt, during the 1990s and the “Oslo Process,” that

64 Though under extremely uneven pre-conditions imposed by the US and Israel’s Yitzhak Shamir. See Rashid Khalidi, Brokers of Deceit: How the US has Undermined Peace in the Middle East (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), pp. 29-65.
hailed the Palestinian Authority as a state-in-waiting and witnessed the return of thousands of Palestinian political functionaries and neoliberal entrepreneurs into the West Bank and Gaza.65 These returnees, allowed back at the sufferance of Israel, served as the enablers of the continued occupation under the guise of the “process”: many were absorbed into the Palestinian security apparatus, a myriad of policing institutions whose authority was undermined by the virtue of internal feuds over any semblance of power they enjoyed and externally – by severe constraints imposed by Israel. Under the Oslo Process, the question of the refugees was indefinitely deferred to “final status” negotiations that never materialized. Unsurprisingly, the most vociferous opposition to Oslo came from 48 refugees, especially in Lebanon, who sensed that their right of return was traded for the PLO’s building of a state in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the event, the Oslo process failed to deliver on the promise of national sovereignty. The disastrous results of the second Intifada (2000-2005), the unabated expansion of Israel’s settlements in the West Bank and the recurrent deadly assaults on the besieged Gaza Strip, eroded the allure of the two-states solution.66 The so-called “two-states solution” continued to feature in formal diplomatic platitudes, with American and European officials paying lip service to the idea that a viable solution is just around the corner if the peace process could be implemented. Unlike the hollow gesture of western diplomacy toward the two-states solution, the Israeli liberal-Zionist left (sometimes self-identified as the “peace camp”) deployed the partition discourse out of fear that the Palestinian population would soon outnumber the Jews between the

65 On these returnees and the tensions with the local population in Gaza, see, for instance, David Hirst, “Shameless in Gaza,” The Guardian Weekly, 21 April, 1997.

66 For the post-Oslo era, the escalation of violence and the breakdown of the prospects for peace, see As’ad Ghanem, Palestinian Politics after Arafat: A Failed National Movement (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), especially chapters 1, 2 and 6.
Jordan river and the Mediterranean. This discourse of demographic panic was not coincidentally reminiscent of age-old colonial fear of engulfment. My research project was conceived, researched and penned between 2008 and 2016, at time when the PLO’s state-building process ran its course, and new actors mobilized around the right of return and a single democratic state.

The Right to Belong

Palestinian refugees have been the ghosts of peace diplomacy haunting every configuration of liberation-as-state-building that I briefly outlined above. Discussions of their fate have been relegated to the need for “pragmatism” or excised at the insistence of Israel and American “honest brokers.” But the refugees, in particular camp dwellers, have long been the objects of scholarship. In the past two decades, the figure of the refugee has attracted anthropologists who have increasingly been interested in disaggregating refugees, previously configured as enumerable subjects. The political cultures in which refugees have found themselves in are interrogated as ‘complex’ and ‘fluid.’ The ethnographic “arrival” of Palestinians reconfigured the refugee as a political agent, and focused on questions of memory, place-making, and identity formation at multiple intersections, including gender, generation, class and specific historical contexts. On the other hand, the emergence of anthropological scholarship that treats hope as


an analytical category has been rather incremental: Vincent Crapanzano began to explore the viability of hope deployed ethnographically and its pitfalls, Ghassan Hage argued that a “caring” society distributes hope more effectively than a paranoid and defensive one, and Hirokazu Miyazaki treated hope as a “method” that ties together different practices over time.69

My work draws on these shifts, and further expands on the intersection of place-making, forms of belonging and futurity. I am interested in the ways in which Palestinians articulate their understanding of belonging to “home” as a displaced place through their relation to temporality: how are return and place-(re)making imagined differentially under conditions of settler-colonialism, military occupation and forced dispersion? While I concur with Diana Allan’s argument that anthropologists have largely neglected refugees’ everyday camp experiences and community-building, foregrounding the idea of Palestine in their stead,70 my fieldwork notes and recordings illustrate refugees’ attachment to the idea of return and the temporariness of camp life. Following Peteet’s work on Shatila, Lebanon, and her focus on the agency and creativity of refugees as contingent on their immediate political contexts, I also concluded that living so long under perennially temporary international aid regimes means that refugees constantly reconfigure

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69 Crapanzano, “Reflections on Hope”; Ghassan Hage, Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society (Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press Australia: 2003); Hirokazu Miyazaki, The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy and Fijian Knowledge (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). The deployment of hope as an analytical category in the anthropology of the Middle East is still a work in progress: Schielke traces iterations of hope in contemporary Egypt to the Islamic revival, juxtaposing hope with experience, see Samuli Schielke, Egypt in the Future Tense: Hope, Frustration, and Ambivalence before and After 2011 (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015). In November 2015 Daniel Monterescu and I organized three panels on the anthropology of hope across two conferences, the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual meetings concurrently held in Denver. The papers presented in these panels demonstrate a growing interest in hope as a viable anthropological subject, and those works in progress will no doubt emerge in the coming years.

70 See Allan, Refugees of the Revolution.
their forms of belonging and understanding of temporality. Balata residents I interviewed constantly referred to themselves as being from “here,” the camp, distinctly identifying with its particular intimate community. Self-identification as being from Ahl Balata often functions as a form of reference, signaling others that one can be trusted and invited into others’ homes. Identifying as being from ahl Balata also elicits follow-up questions, often an inquiry about one’s male elders and village of origin. Recognition prompts mentioning names of relatives and immediate neighbours, thus mapping the camp’s intimate landscapes.

Attention to the spatial dimension in the mundane life of refugees reveals that the camp experience is intimately linked to Palestinians’ understanding of their past, commemorating and actively maintaining displaced communities while simultaneously forming new attachments in the lived reality of the camps. Furthermore, a spatial analysis of camp community-building also complicates understandings of temporality, since refugees articulate their various forms of belongings through temporal idioms – the idyllic “lost” village, life at the camp (representing an indefinite present tense) and future return and liberation. In this way, remembering the past bears on the present and future, as it lingers and inhabits everyday lived spaces and forms of identification – being both of ahl Balata and yafawiin, the descendants of those expelled from Jaffa in 1948.

My focus on hope as a category of experience hinges on two main intersecting axes: temporality and place. Just as political identities are rooted in the refugee camp experience and informed by the quotidian and the present, on the one hand, and memory and absence on the other, so, I argue, is Palestinians’ understanding of the local. Rather than accepting normative assertions that define the local as a bounded place that is both community-making and exclusive of those outside of it, I wish to suggest that locality, and attachment to it, is much more multi-
directional, dispersed in time and space. This understanding brings into our line of sight those people who are geographically external to place, in this case Jaffa, but have nonetheless powerful attachment to it. Dismissing these affective attachment as “romantic nostalgia” would do immense violence to refugees whose identity is strongly bound to places they have been excluded from. In many ways, then, Palestinians are fighting for the right to belong against submerged histories of ethnic cleansing and entrenched colonial denial of their attachments to places they were expelled from. This insistence on their right to belong to Jaffa (and elsewhere in historic Palestine) avails us of new insights into the ways refugees reconfigure the local through spatial practices that highlight the “elasticity” of place, imaginatively claiming Jaffa, the camp and the space in between. Palestinian articulations of their right to belong also challenges the figure of the refugee within the logic of international aid regimes as a “problem” and as groups of people who do not belong in existing nation-state. Furthermore, discourses circulating in the media about the current “crisis” of Syrian refugees in Europe and North America elucidate the centrality of the question of belonging; the refugee is constantly suspected of not fitting in with “our” values, posing an imminent threat to “our” way of life, freedom and physical wellbeing (as evident from the frequent accusations of sexual violence by refugees).

Fieldwork

Although I began my fieldwork in Jaffa, I soon realized my project could not be completed without spending time among some of those whose absence was painfully felt by the remaining Palestinians the city. Being an Israeli-Jew who grew up in Tel Aviv, and who spent her early years on the grounds of Salameh, formerly the largest village in the district of Jaffa, it proved challenging to engage with the people who were displaced from the very place that has formed, to this day, the core of my sense of self and belonging. Tel Aviv and Jaffa are places that I am
not only intimately familiar with and attached to, but also landscapes whose transformations are bound in my mind with my personal history. My fieldwork in Jaffa, and especially the Palestinian community in Ajami and Jabaliyyeh, forced me to undergo a process of de-familiarization with the places I grew up in. Doing fieldwork in my own “back yard,” so to speak, required me to consider my position as a settler not in relation to West Bank Palestinians, but vis-à-vis those who are, at least nominally, my fellow citizens. The question of what it means for Palestinians in Jaffa to claim “a right to the city” in light of decades of ghettoization and de-development, challenges my above claim of Jaffa as Tel Aviv’s “back yard.” How does ethnicity map onto urban belonging? Moreover, what do these claims mean when articulated by those Palestinians who are exiled and not allowed to return?

These questions shaped by a new understanding of hope of return and memory of displacement affected my understanding of locality and also challenges the scholarship that treats the “mixed” city as a normative place identifiable by its geographic location and particular social dynamics. Instead, the local is remapped through claims of belonging that have been denied and silenced. In this configuration, the local is understood as more than a physical place: Jaffa is not just the sum of its built environment and the people who live in them and traverse its public spaces; it is a city that is claimed by and is related to by those who are absent but continue to have attachment to it. In other words, I attempt here to think beyond roots (and those who are rooted) and consider routes as meaningful for Palestinian self-identifications as well as imaginaries of the future.

For me to explore these forms of attachment necessitated conducting research in a Palestinian refugee camp. I came to the conclusion the best site, and probably most easily accessible one in Palestine, was Balata refugee camp in Nablus. The question of accessibility
proved more challenging than I originally thought: first, as an Israeli-Jew, I was not permitted, by law, to enter those areas designated by the Oslo Accords as “area A” and furthermore, there was no easy means of transportation to get to Nablus. The other, more complicated issue was the acknowledgment that Israelis are generally unwelcome in places like refugee camps. Nonetheless, opportunity to visit Balata presented itself, when a British volunteer introduced me online to a young Palestinian woman from the camp, who, after consulting with her parents, extended an invitation for a visit.

I boarded a shared taxi to Jerusalem, where I met my British companion. We then hopped on the number 18 bus to Ramallah at the depot close to Damascus Gate, as other passengers gazed upon us with barely contained curiosity. In Ramallah, we transferred to another bus at the city centre that slowly made its way, partially through bumpy side roads and hillside villages, to Nablus. Having traveled before on route 60, which stretches north along the West Bank, in a vehicle with Israeli license plates this time the journey was taking much longer. Unlike Israeli settlers, Palestinians are forced to take extensive detours that considerably prolong their journey time. These detours are also, I was told, quite unpredictable, depending on the army’s movements, semi-permanent checkpoints and road closures.

Eventually, we arrived in Balata late afternoon on a scorching hot summer day, and our Palestinian interlocutor met us at the edge of the camp and led us through its narrow alleyways to her family’s home. The house was located in the camp’s older section, where sewage was flowing in the streets and structures seemed to have been built hodgepodge adjacent to and on top of one another. We were greeted by the extended family in the living room, where we were offered cold drinks and later, after sundown, invited for dinner. As we gathered around the table, struggling to transcend language barriers (especially around the British volunteer who could only
speak English) and the awkward presence of an Israeli-Jew (who can converse in Arabic), one of the family’s other daughters returned from work. Her police uniform startled me at first, since PA security personnel are formally instructed to detain any Israeli-Jew who enters Area A and transfer them to the IDF or Israeli police in a nearby checkpoint or settlement. But on that day, the young policewoman assuaged my nervousness with a smile and an explanation: she had anticipated my arrival and is looking forward to chatting with me. Then she paused, carefully surveying my face and exclaimed: “I know you.” I dismissed her claim, since I had never visited Nablus before, nor did I recall meeting her. But she insisted, and for the duration of the meal, she was preoccupied presumably searching me on her laptop. Suddenly, she cried out: “I knew it!” we all huddled behind her, as she triumphantly pointed to a few images taken at a demonstration in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh months before. “There you are!” For the rest of the evening, and the following days, I was being introduced to people as the “Jewish woman who supports us and goes to demonstrations.”

Pretty quickly I was beginning to be recognized as the “foreign woman who asks about the Nakba,” and as such, I was introduced to a few of the camp’s elders, carefully selected by my hosts and their neighbours. One such fraught encounter brought me on a warm evening to the modest home of an old Haj, who was obviously respected by local Palestinians, three of them accompanying me on this visit, and his own extended family, as evident by his young grandchildren meekly kissing his hands upon entering the room. The Haj obliged my request to speak of his youth in his village of origin, then embarked on a prolonged and what seemed like pre-rehearsed political speech about national rights and the justifiable ongoing struggle against Israeli occupation. We all listened quietly and patiently out of respect, until it seemed he was done. After a brief moment of silence, the Haj took out two small passport size photos from his pockets and show them to me. As I was gazing at the faces of two young men, he explained:
“these are my sons. They detonated explosives and killed many Israelis.” A tense silence fell in the room; all eyes on me, trying to anticipate my response. I merely said *Allah yerhamhom* (Arabic, “God have mercy on them,” a customary response when one announces or speaks of the deceased loved ones). Acknowledging the complexities of anticolonial resistance, I was not inclined to argue with a grieving father, who also happens to be a stateless refugee.

The significance of these vignettes and the reason I chose to recall them here, is that for Palestinians, my presence at the camp as an Israeli-Jew was always fraught and needed validation through political and professional forms of identification, but also through social interactions. Those people I encountered constantly reminded themselves and others that although I was an Israeli from Tel Aviv (and therefore a representative of the occupation of their lands, since most originated from the Jaffa region), I was also referred to as *Yahudiyeh Muhtaram* (Arabic, “respectable Jew”), an idiomatic cliché denoting an anti-Zionist Israeli-Jew. My ability to conduct research very much hinged on the ways my would-be interlocutors perceived me and the validity of my work.

One way to partially overcome this vulnerability was to ally myself with a local “fixer” who functioned as a field assistant of sorts. Enter Ahmad, a young man I was introduced to at the Yafa Cultural Centre, who was known to arrange visits for internationals and also lead tours of Nablus’ old city for them. Ahmad spoke English well, and his family was well respected in Balata and beyond. He quickly took over my schedule, arranging for me to meet with various people: elderly refugees who recounted their memories of 1948, unemployed youth whom he convinced to speak to, me and informal meetings with activists, Palestinians visiting from abroad and other acquaintances. Ahmad himself was highly interested in Nakba memories, and I noticed that at times even recorded many of my interviews for his own purposes. We spent most of our
time visiting people in their homes or meeting with them in a café at a Nablus hotel. After a brief introduction, I would begin asking questions, then Ahmad would take over the exchange and insist on conducting the interview himself and translate for me, even though I made it clear early on that I understood the Arabic. Although I was personally bothered by this dynamics, I also understood that for the people we encounter, the sight of a non-veiled ajnabiye (Arabic, “foreigner”), let alone Israeli-Jewish woman with an unmarried Palestinian man in tow would be frowned upon; by reproducing a legible patriarchal order, Ahmad not only put potential interlocutors at ease, but also facilitated a broad acceptance of my presence there by staging a familiar form of gendered social interaction.

**The Outline of the Dissertation**

Oscillating between two main sites of ethnographic fieldwork made visible the significance of place and distance to from it. This project, therefore, interrogates received wisdom about home as clearly bounded and identifiable, and “mixed cities” as places where racialized subjects (uncritically referred to as “minorities”) are “trapped.” Broadening the scope of my discussion of the local facilitates an ethnographic exploration into claims of belonging that challenge not only normative thinking about place, but about temporality as well. Furthermore, insisting that Palestinians in “mixed cities” (itself a highly problematic concept) are “members of a municipal minority as well as a national one” who happen to be “trapped in the political and cultural cross-fire between their state and their nation” works to obfuscate the working of settler-colonialism.

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that produced these urban spaces to begin with. Indeed, Daniel Monterescu’s recent ethnographic monograph on Jaffa as a “mixed city” develops a “relational analysis” to reveal not only mutually constitutive urban identities that displace sectarianism and nationalism, but are also productive of vibrant binational spaces that defy state-imposed ethnocracy. Stressing forms of binational sociality works to reify Palestinians and Jews as national subjects rather than undermine it, and moreover, reproduces the illusion, advocated by apologists of the Zionist state, that rather than settler-colonialism, there is “conflict” between two territorial national movements warring over land. Stressing binationalism and using the language of “national minority,” then, obfuscate histories of dispossession and articulations of belonging from Palestinians who were forced to remain in exile.

Using hope as a category of experience, I ask: how do Palestinians defy the settler-colonial order, deploy and maintain hope for their return, especially in the context of their ongoing displacement and marginalization in Jaffa? How do Palestinian refugees from Jaffa articulate their sense of belonging to the city, even if they had never lived in it, in a meaningful way? My work aims to point to the ways in which the settler-colonial state has obfuscated and foreclosed on this hope of return, and the creative responses of Palestinians and their Israeli-Jewish allies that challenge and unsettle the present. I argue that by strategically unearthing traces of the “no longer conscious” past and memories of violent displacement in addition to crafting imaginaries for the “not yet conscious” future, Palestinians critique and challenge the

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73 Daniel Monterescu, Jaffa, Shared and Shattered: Contrived Coexistence in Israel/Palestine (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015).
colonial experience of the here and now. Moreover, this hopeful engagement with the future contracts the confining present, broadens the horizons of possibilities and works to mobilize others to action for world-remaking and –reordering.

The structure of this dissertation reflects the imperfect tense and the pluperfect in the Jaffa refugees’ experience. My first chapter offers a brief history of Jaffa up to the fall of the city in May 1948. I highlight the linkages between spatial practices as productive of urban identity and attachment, and the ways the lived experiences of the city’s growing population and the social relations they were imbricated in were profoundly shaped by Jaffa’s modernization impetus and its attendant transformation. Explicating this history will set the stage for my discussion of the “new normal” in chapter two and subsequent, later efforts to displace it and open up new possibilities in its stead.

The next two chapters deal with the immediate post-Nakba period, and are based on extensive research in the colonial archives in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Chapter two seeks to flesh out the ways in which the new Israeli state enabled processes of public forgetfulness. I analyse how state institutions conquered urban spaces and the ability to “bury” histories of mass expulsion, organized violence and en masse appropriation of material goods, houses and lands, on the other. My concern in this chapter is to explore how this violent transformation assumed the guise of sanitized, inexorable normality. The making of the “new normal” in Jaffa, then, constitutes routinizing occupation, in ways that convincingly submerged the “newness” of a rapid and radical urban transformation.

Chapter three shifts the discussion from Jaffa to broader state practices, and considers the Nakba as an opportunity for the emerging settler-colonial state to consolidate its hold on the lands of the indigenous people by blocking their return. Israel’s efforts at making the absence of
the Palestinians permanent were challenged by international law and by the state’s desire to be accepted as a “normal” liberal-democracy. The chapter examines in detail the ways in which the Israeli state enshrined itself as the “only democracy in the Middle East” in popular political imagination of the west on the one hand, while successfully eliding itself from the brutal annals of colonialism, on the other.

Chapter four represents the chronological bridge between the first three historical chapters and the rest of the thesis. As I trace the Jaffa refugees along the different routes they have taken since 1948, I argue that these itineraries are far from being predictable: many refugees found themselves de-nationalized and precarious, confined to decrepit camps, while others pursued opportunities for meaningful political engagement and armed struggle. Based on a variety of textual sources and ethnographic interviews with refugees in the Nablus area, the focus of this chapter is the ways in which hope was constantly re-defined and remade along experiences of exile and itineraries of displacement.

Chapter five is based on rich ethnographic material, and zooms in on the artwork of Israeli-Jewish artist Gil Mu’alem-Doron and his urban intervention in public spaces in Jaffa and Tel Aviv. My discussion of Doron’s artistic engagement with realities of the continued displacement of Jaffa’s Palestinians highlights the ways in which he seeks to provoke Israeli-Jews’ willful amnesia and undermine the state project of the “new normal.” My discussion points to Doron’s creative deployment of “haunting” as a strategy to invoke the uncanny, or the “no longer conscious,” sedimented histories of violence and trauma.

My sixth chapter is based on extensive participant-observation of a project launched by two NGOs, a Palestinian and an Israeli, the highlight of which was a study visit to South Africa that meant to provide lessons relevant to the future of Palestine, and chart a shared vision for
reality after the return of the refugees. These lessons, and the visions they engender, I argue, are contingent, in flux, and result of multiple encounters and itineraries and the affective processes they are steeped in. Participants in this project pointed to commensurability of the current settler-colonial realities in Palestine and apartheid South Africa. These identifications are largely divorced from structural comparisons and instead rooted in the realm of the affective and experiencing the uncanny and the eerily familiar by Israeli and Palestinian participants.

My seventh and final chapter draws on Jacques Derrida’s engagement with the idea of “living together,” and seeks to explore visions for the future of Jaffa and the tangible imaginaries they produce. This chapter offers in-depth analysis of three sets of articulations: the “Cape Town documents” that resulted from the project I described in the previous chapter, literary explorations of future-tense Jaffa by a Palestinian and an Israeli, and a tension-fraught workshop I conducted in the Balata refugee camp with young Palestinians who stake their claim to Jaffa and Tel Aviv, articulate their understanding of belonging and imagine the realities of return while at the same time, casting doubt over the possibility of a postcolonial “shared homeland.”
Chapter One: Jaffa from the Blushing “Bride of Palestine” to the Shamed “Mother of Strangers”

No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark.
You only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.
Warsan Shire, “Home” 74

In the annals of history, Jaffa is often written as a coveted prize, a terra irredenta, an object of desire for warlords and invading armies. 75 The city has been claimed by almost every conqueror that set his eyes on Palestine as a loot of war. Its current status as a real estate boomtown for Israeli developers can be read as yet another chain in that long history. 76 Yet, reducing Jaffa’s history to a chain of military conquest, however formative those have been for the city, elides its

people and their lived experiences, and obscures how humans have constantly redefined their relationship to its changing urban landscapes. Narrating the long-dureé history of Jaffa as a site of military victories and defeats ultimately serves the interests of the Israeli state and its claims to the city as wartime conquest, sidestepping the human catastrophe of mass displacement and the continued attachment of Jaffa’s refugee to their lost homes.

Drawing mostly on secondary sources, this chapter traces the history of Jaffa in the modern age until its fall in the spring of 1948. Despite the perceived linearity of this chapter, its purpose is to provide a counter-narrative to Israeli ones that position the founding of the state and the judaicizing of the city as their telos. Instead, this chapter reminds us of that which is “no longer conscious,” the local history suppressed and silenced by the state, a story with Palestinians as its agents, highlighting their creativity and resourcefulness, as well as suffering and eventual expulsion.

**Jaffa: A Hub of Modernity**

In the wake of the short-lived Napoleonic conquest and devastation (1799), and Ahmed al-Jazzar’s ensuing revolt against the Ottoman government (1799-1800), Jaffa entered a new phase of reconstruction and rapid growth. Under the rule of Muhammad Abu Nabbut, governor of Gaza and Jaffa (1807-1818), the city’s walls were fortified, the Mahmoudiyah mosque renovated, and public fountains and new marketplaces were constructed. Efforts at urban renewal continued and intensified during Egyptian rule (1831-1840). The *Tanzimat*, or the period of state reforms in

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the Ottoman Empire, slowly began to impact the Syrian provinces, and with the consistent presence of garrisons along the coastline and on major roads, security of trade routes improved, which also intensified the commercial activity in the city. By the mid-19th century, Jaffa’s significance as Palestine’s main port and a commercial hub accelerated the movement of people and commodities in and out of the city, as the country’s agriculture became integrated into global markets.78

Jaffa’s port, however, was not just a commercial gateway of an emerging economy. It was also the primary entryway into the booming city that attracted settlers, investors and European and American missionaries. If at the end of the Egyptian occupation and the dawn of the Tanzimat, Jaffa’s population numbered around 10,000, at the close of the 19th century, its number increased fourfold.79 Immigrants were attracted to Jaffa as a city of opportunity: merchants from Lebanon identified the potential as a global trade centre; peasants from as far as Egypt and from the Palestinian interior opted to settle outside the city proper and cultivate the land; American missionaries, for instance, believed one of their objectives was to teach modern agricultural techniques to the Jews, so that the latter would inherit the earth and bring about the second coming.80 The German Templars, who replaced the Americans in 1868 after the spectacular failure of their nascent colony and subsequent hurried departure, prospered as both

79 Kark, *Evolution*, pp. 146-152.
80 Ibid, p. 76.
farmers (in Sarona) and industrialists (Valhallah), using imported farming machinery operated by local labourers.

Jaffa’s demographic boom brought about the city’s rapid spatial expansion in all directions, but especially to the north (Irshid and Manshiyyeh) and the south (‘Ajami and Jabbaliyeh) as the old city walls were demolished in 1888.81 East of the old city, the modern quarter of Nuzha was developed, and later, a European boulevard planted as the urban was creeping into the hinterland. Nevertheless, as Mark LeVine correctly noted, while the old city can be perceived as Jaffa’s urban core, the boundaries between town and country were much blurrier, as the two spheres, the urban and the rural constantly cut across each other and formed symbiotic co-dependency.82 This porosity is also reflected in interviews I conducted with elderly refugees from the villages around Jaffa and who to this day, proudly self-identify as yafawiin.83

The late Ottoman era also signaled a slow transformation of Jaffa’s urban social relations. With the swelling of the population and the inevitable expansion beyond the city’s old walls, there was a concomitant process of sectarianization of urban space. Thus, for instance, Christian Maronites constructed their own quarter, while the Sephardic and Maghrebi Jews ventured north and founded Neveh Tsedek (1887) and Neveh Shalom (1890).84 Yet although it seems sectarian belonging was the organizing principle of the new modern quarters, inhabitants of Jaffa espoused a sense of shared identity, Ottomanism, and local pride and they collaborated to address concerns

81 Kark, *Evolution*, p. 100-101
83 See chapter 4 below.
about public good (for instance, a planned tramway that would pass through Jaffa’s major
neighbourhoods). What is clear from the sources we have is that Jaffa’s emerging inter-
confessional middle class consisted of entrepreneurs, merchants and builders who seized the
opportunity to purchase lands and develop new housing and business quarters.

The local Jewish community, made up of Maghrebi migrants, such as the Chelouch and
Moyal families, and old Sephardi families (Amzaleg) who left Jerusalem for Jaffa despite an age
old rabbinical ban. These families not only became community leaders, but also shared much in
common with their class counterparts across confessional lines. This is evident, among other
things, from the memoirs of Yosef Eliyahu Chelouch, who self-identifies as a “son of this land,”
just like his Muslim and Christian counterparts, and, like his generation, was culturally
integrated, spoke Arabic and worked, with other community members (such as renowned
journalist Nissim Malul), to quell any sign of sectarian strife. The life histories of the Maghrebi
Jewish community of Jaffa are filled with anecdotes that demonstrate forms of belonging to
locality that is decidedly Arab and that later Zionist histories attempted to erase. These
Maghrebi and Sephardi Jews oscillated towards Zionism very gradually in light of the failed
universalism of Ottomanist ideas, and even then, they remained on the peripheries of Zionist
activity, partly because they were perceived as “ideologically suspicious.”


87 See Yosef Eliyahu Chelouch, *The Story of my Life* (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2005) [Hebrew]; Mordekhai Elkayam, for
another instance, emphasized the affinity between the Maghrebi Jews of Jaffa and their Muslim neighbours, which
were clearly demonstrated through everyday forms of sociability and reciprocity. See Mordekhai Elkayam, *Jaffa – Neve Tzedek* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1990), pp. 121-122, 140-141. [Hebrew]

88 Campos, *Brotherhood*, p. 198 as well as Michelle U. Campos, “Between ‘Beloved Ottomania’ and ‘The Land of
Israel’: The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine’s Sephardi Jews, 1908-1913,” *International
With the commencement of Zionist migration into the country, Jaffa became the movement’s launching pad and base of operations. As young idealists disembarked in Jaffa, divided into groups of “pioneers” before heading out to the new agricultural colonies (Petah Tikva, Gedera, Rishon LeZion), Jaffa became the seat of Zionist institutions and local leadership and the centre of the movement’s educational, economic and political activities, until later on these were relocated to Tel Aviv. The ambitions of the newcomers did not go unnoticed by the Arabic-language media. Palestinian notables and other members of the political and cultural elite proceeded to petition the sublime porte, organize anti-Zionist societies and publish numerous op-eds about the potential menace of Zionist colonization in Palestine. By the beginning of World War I, Palestinian Arabs, and urbanites in particular, were well informed about the aims of Zionism, and, perhaps mirroring similar attitudes among Sephardi Jews, gravitated towards local patriotism and nascent forms of Arab nationalism. After the Young Turks Revolution (1908), and with the rise of suspicions that Zionism ultimately sought to establish a state in Palestine, Jewish migration to the country was restricted.


89 A prominent example was the “Gate of Zion” hospital in Jaffa, see Shifra Shvarts, “B’nai B’rith-Sha’ar Zion Hospital in Jaffa (1891-1921): The First Jewish Community Hospital in Palestine,” Judaism, 47.3 (Summer, 1998), pp. 358-370.

The Zionist Colonial Logic of Separation

The threat that Zionism posed for indigenous Palestinians lay in its particular nature as an exclusivist settler-colonial nationalist movement that, despite humble beginnings and relative weakness at the outset, capitalized on certain vulnerabilities of Palestinian-Arab society. As sociologist Gershon Shafir argues, Zionists acted “with the express purpose of allowing the formation of a pure or national settlement society, aimed at the reshaping of the land and labor markets.”

Even though the conditions in Palestine and the nature of the Zionist movement were not favorable for the creation of a pure plantation colony, Zionist politicians and leaders carved out a project that entailed the creation of an exclusive national society explicitly through the “conquest of land.” The discourse of “conquest of land” reveals that although the Zionist colonial project lacked a metropolitan state or an occupying army, its leadership understood the link between nation-building in Europe and acquiring colonial possessions. Zionist desire to liberate the Jews from subordination and discrimination necessitated, in this view, proof that they were, after all, just as European and white as other nations. Zionism then, was premised on turning the idea of an ancestral land into an extra-European settler-colony. Similarly, the “conquest of labour” was also a means to an end: ending the dependency of Jews and its concomitant culture of lobbying (Hebrew: shtadlanut) with foreign rulers or benefactors, which was deemed demeaning and unworthy of white Europeans. Coming to one’s own as a nation meant, therefore, economic and political independence that could only be achieved through exclusivist Jewish takeover of all economic activity.

91 Shafir, Land, p. 19
Stressing the two-pronged conquest of Palestine also reveals the intentions of Zionists to permanently settle the land with European Jews, as a means to be acknowledged as a civilized nation. The desired permanence of the Zionist project in Palestine meant that this particular formation of settler-colonialism was forced to engage with the land’s indigenous population from the outset. Although agricultural colonies in particular extensively employed Palestinian labourers, Zionist leadership promoted and attempted to enforce ideas of labour exclusivity. In other words, rather than subordinate the indigenous populations, the Zionist variant of settler-colonialism aspired to eliminate and replace them.\(^{92}\)

**The White City and “Mixing”**

This segregationist inclination was demonstrated through the establishment and further expansion of Tel Aviv. Originally named Ahuzat Bayit, Tel Aviv had a humble beginning as an exclusively Jewish suburb of Jaffa, just north of the city, on plots of land purchased by middle class Sephardi and Zionist activists. The impetus for Tel Aviv’s establishment, however, was its founders’ nationalist fervour, and what they considered as the need for Jews to be separated from the *goyim* (Hebrew, “non-Jews”) in order to fully develop nationalist consciousness and the spirit of the “new Jew,” divorced from his past in the diaspora as a weak and subordinated other. Only

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in an exclusively-Jewish suburb would Jews be able to learn and speak Hebrew and acquire the kind of education needed for the development of the nation.93

Stories circulated about the emergence of the “first Hebrew city” often neglect to mention that in the years prior to the establishment of Tel Aviv, several Jewish neighbourhoods sprung up in its immediate vicinity, like Yefeh Nof (1897), Mahaneh Yosef (1904), Kerem Hateymanim (1905) and Ohel Moshe (1906).94 What set the new suburb apart was its designation as a modern quarter that is inherently different, indeed, the opposite, of its forerunners, that, after all, resembled the unplanned and “unsanitary” “oriental” city. Ahuzat Bayit, then, staked its claim to modernity and to becoming everything that Jaffa was not, in the eyes of its founders.95 The discourse of cleanliness and the link between urban planning and health already circulated in Europe at the time, and Tel Aviv was originally intended to become a “garden city,” a concept developed by Ebenezer Howard. Howard’s Garden Cities were small suburbs in the countryside, consisting of single-family houses surrounded by greenery and arranged along wide avenues. This rationally planned new city, which is the opposite of the overcrowded industrial metropolis, was to develop healthier bodies and more disciplined, productive and morally improved citizens and workers.96 Around the same time, and even into the first World War, Jaffa also went into a

94 This criticism was leveled round the centennial celebrations, mostly online, in website such as Tel Aviv 100, the Urban Encyclopedia, written and edited by Dani Recht https://sites.google.com/a/tlv100.net/tlv100/home/about [Hebrew]; See, for instance, the website commemorating the original 66 families of Tel Aviv’s founders, that advocates for public commemoration http://www.ahuzatbait.org.il/7777-2/ [Hebrew]; For the history of pre-Ahuzat Bayit Jewish neighbourhoods, see Hanna Ram, The Jewish Community in Jaffa from Sephardic Community to Zionist Center (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1996) [Hebrew].
95 See Sharon Rotbard, White City, Black City (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2005), p. 112; 126-127. [Hebrew]
96 Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of To-Morrow (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902); See also Paul Rabinow, French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press,
phase of urban modernization, led by the local Ottoman authorities (and in particular governor Hassan Bey) and middle class Palestinian entrepreneurs. Jamal Pasha Boulevard (later renamed King George), lined with median trees, was a prominent result of that modernization impetus. On the eve of World War I, Jaffa was a modern cosmopolitan city of 40,000 where one could comfortably get around speaking a mixture of languages, from Arabic and Ottoman Turkish to Yiddish and French, and where religious holidays often transformed into opportunities for popular celebrations for all.

Despite the depravation of World War I, and the fact that many residents of Jaffa were forcibly removed by Jamal Pasha, the modernization impetus only increased once the country was taken over by the British. Everyday urban lifestyle and forms of sociability also transformed, partly as a result of the encounters between civilians and British military personnel: men spent increasingly more time with their peers in coffee shops rather than entertain in the privacy of their homes; nightclubs and bordellos sprung up, particularly around the port area and in the

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99 About this brief “first exodus,” see Yusuf Heikal and Imad el-Haj, “Jaffa… as it was,” Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer, 1984), pp. 3-21.
vicinity of military barracks and bases. No wonder contemporaries lamented the visible “deterioration of morals” inside the bustling metropolis.\(^{100}\)

Under the British Mandate, the Zionist colonial logic of separation operated on several levels: Zionist institutions, for instance, continued to mobilize against all forms of “mixing”: from sharing lived spaces to moral panic over inter-ethnic sexual relations. The Histadrut, the Zionist labour federation in Palestine, was at once committed to the “conquest of labour,” advocating preference of Jewish workers over their Palestinian counterparts, but also, at least in theory, class over nationalist or confessional solidarities. The solution the Histadrut leaders found was supposed to reflect this duality: the organization prioritized its commitment to Zionism, which meant filling a major role not only in the so-called “battle” to “conquer labour” but in the greater struggle to create a modern Jewish nation in Palestine. To this end, the Histadrut established a Hebrew-language newspaper and publishing house (Davar), theatre (Ohel), a bank (Hapoalim) and a construction company that built housing projects for Jewish labourers.\(^{101}\) On the other hand, the Histadrut made some efforts to appeal to Palestinian workers, stressing class solidarity against their exploitative employers and nationalist propaganda, which, ostensibly, aimed at distracting them from everyday survival struggles they share with their Jewish comrades. But instead of incorporating Palestinian comrades into its structures, the Histadrut opted to establish separate agencies to serve them, like Arabic-language newspapers that pontificated the benefits of Zionism for Palestinian-Arabs and the country’s

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prosperity. In 1932, the Histadrut established the Palestine Labour League (PLL), its own Arab union which was highly active in organizing Palestinians in Jaffa, especially around the port. The PLL was moderately successful in Jaffa, partly because the Histadrut identified a vacuum in labour organizing in the city and managed to insinuate itself into local struggles, such as the municipal employees’ strike in the early 1940s. PLL was finally forced out of Jaffa in mid-1944, and the following year a Palestinian labour conference was held in the city, that brought former PLL members back into the national fold.  

The British mandatory authorities themselves were keen on ethnic and confessional demarcations. In May 1921, the British High Commissioner transformed Tel Aviv into an autonomous township. From that point on, the Tel Aviv local council and its mayor Meir Dizengoff, tirelessly lobbied the British to make Tel Aviv into an independent municipality and argued for the expansion of its official boundaries to include other Jewish and mixed neighbourhoods.

These urban borderlands between Jaffa and Tel Aviv were also sites of violent flare-ups, especially in the inter-communal strife of 1921, 1929 and 1936. At the same time, these contact zones were also sites of everyday encounters and cooperation that cut across confessional and ethnic lines, defied official practices of border-making and belied nationalist histories of

103 Although the majority of the Zionists agreed that municipal separation would benefit Tel Aviv and the Zionist project in Palestine, some had doubts about turning Tel Aviv into an autonomous township, since, despite its impressive growth, the town was still depending on Jaffa. See Hart, “Double Prism,” pp. 94-95. [Hebrew]
In many ways, the Mandate years should be perceived as the continuation of Jaffa’s modernization surge. Despite financial fluctuations, the municipality carried on projects of construction, widening streets to improve traffic thoroughfare, garbage collection and disposal and other urban infrastructure. The city’s population continued to swell, mainly as a result of internal migration and rapid urbanization, that led many to seek better opportunities in Jaffa, the bustling core of commercial activity in Palestine. In the last few years of the mandate, plans for the construction of a new “garden city” (on its southern frontiers, close to the Jewish settlement of Holon) were drawn up, as well as ideas for enlarging and improving the port. The Jaffa port was considered the city’s economic base and a national symbol of longevity and rootedness. It is no wonder, then, that much of the popular mobilization in the late 1930s focused on the port: keeping it Arab (i.e. resisting Zionist attempts to integrate more Jewish workers) and rejecting Tel Aviv’s demands to build its own port. The 1936 Palestinian uprising and the strike that shut down all commercial activity at the port resulted in the construction of a jetty and then a more permanent dock in northern Tel Aviv; soon after, commercial liners began unloading wares off the new port. Even after the reopening of the Jaffa port, imports and exports were falling, and attempts in subsequent years were unsuccessful in reviving port traffic to pre-1936 levels.

In terms of Jaffa’s social make-up, while it is true that the middle and upper classes (many of whom made their fortunes in the citrus business) dominated the city’s political,
economic and cultural life, endowing it with a cosmopolitan allure, this rapid urbanization also
carried the seeds of Jaffa’s defeat in 1948. Recently, Israeli historian Itamar Radai, concluded
that the gaping disparity between the rich and influential yafawiin and the poor and marginalized
newcomers that settled in the city’s margins resulted in a catastrophic absence of broad social
base of urban resilience in the face of the encroaching enemy. This, Radai argues, explains the
difference between the utter collapse of Jaffa in 1948 and the partial resilience of Arab
Jerusalem.109

In retrospect, then, the Mandate era was fortuitous for the exponential growth of Tel
Aviv; by the mid-1940s, its population reached 166,000 (see below). At the same time, Jaffa’s
fortunes were on the decline; first, with the loss of territory to Tel Aviv, and gradually to other
Jewish settlements that, by 1947, surrounded it on three sides; the 1936 revolt resulted in the
prolonged closure of the port and the loss of business to Haifa and then to the newly established
Tel Aviv port.110 The British penalized Jaffa for its popular support of the revolt with aerial raids
that demolished substantial sections of the old city. Still reeling from the violent reprisals of the
great revolt and plagued by financial troubles and surrounded by Jewish settlements that stunted
its growth, Jaffa’s residents were forced to watch on as the UN voted to partition Palestine and
make Jaffa an Arab enclave inside a Jewish state.

Disaster

109 Itamar Radai, Between Two Cities: Palestinian Arabs in Jerusalem and Jaffa (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University
Press, 2015) [Hebrew].

110 On the rise of the Haifa port, see Jacob Norris, Land of Progress: Palestine in the Age of Colonial Development,
The most widely-circulated term to describe the catastrophic Arab defeat of 1948 and its concomitant mass expulsions of Palestinians is \textit{al-Nakba} (Arabic, “the disaster”). It was coined by Syrian intellectual Constantine Zureiq while hostilities were still ongoing, even before several localities were completely depopulated. In \textit{The Meaning of Disaster}, Zureiq warned his readers to look inward and locate the blame for the loss of Palestine in the corruption and ignorance of the Arab nation, and its inability to mobilize the masses and convince them of the danger of Zionist colonization. It is not just that the Jews held superior military power, he argued, but that they were able to wage total war that encompasses every sphere of human lives, while the Arabs espoused outdated approaches to war as battlefield action.\footnote{Constantine Zureiq, \textit{The Meaning of Disaster}, trans. R. Bayly Winder (Beirut: Khayat’s College Book Cooperative, 1956), p. 21. A year later, Musa al-Alami, son and grandson of former mayors of Jerusalem, published his own analysis of the causes for the disaster, indicating that the Zionist side was engaged in total war, which the Palestinians were not ready for: Musa Alami, “The Lesson of Palestine,” \textit{Middle East Journal}, Vol. 3, No. 4 (October, 1949), pp. 373-405. Alami mentions total war on page 374; see also Moshe Naor, “Israel’s 1948 War of Independence as a Total War,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary History}, Vol. 43 (2), 2008, pp. 241-257; Adel Manaa, “The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions,” \textit{Israel Studies}, Vol. 18, No. 2, Summer 2003, pp. 86-99; Anaheed al-Hardan, “Al-Nakbah in Arab Thought: The Transformation of a Concept,” \textit{Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East}, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2015, pp. 622-638.}

For the Palestinians, the Nakba means the systematic and brutal removal of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the destruction of villages, towns and urban areas and their local cultures by Zionist troops. This expulsion and deliberate depopulation of whole regions were executed before the invasion of the regular Arab armies; moreover, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was not done haphazardly, but followed a military blueprint known as Plan Dalet which in many ways capped the Zionist settler-colonial ambition of previous decades.\footnote{Walid Khalidi, “Plan Dalet: The Zionist Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine,” \textit{Middle East Forum}, 37 (9), 1961, 22-28; Walid Khalidi, “Why did the Palestinians Leave? Revisited,” \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies}, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Winter, 2005), pp. 42-54.} In other words: the Zionist political and military leadership brought the process of “conquest of the land”
to its logical conclusion through the removal of the indigenous population (or as many of them as they possibly could) and replacing it with Jewish settlers.

The dire outcomes of the Nakba are still experienced to this day: about half of the Palestinian-Arab population of mandatory Palestine and 85% of the territory that came under Israeli control were displaced, ending up as refugees in neighbouring Arab countries, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and globally. Hundreds of villages, in addition to towns and urban neighbourhoods were either demolished to make way for new Jewish-only settlements or were repopulated with (in most cases) Jews newcomers.\(^{113}\)

**The Fall of Jaffa**

UN resolution 181 of 29 November, 1947 set an expiry date for the British Mandate in Palestine for May 15, 1948.\(^{114}\) The resolution also stipulated the partition of Palestine and consigned Jaffa, the bustling cultural and economic urban centre of the Palestinian coast, to complete encirclement by Jewish settlements. In fact, the UN resolution effectively cut the city off its agricultural hinterland, as well as its satellite towns of Lydd and Ramla and the nearby religious site of Nabi Rubin. The immediate response of the Palestinians was to declare four days of general strike, as the Jewish Yishuv erupted in spontaneous celebrations. Soon however, tensions exploded as the first in the series of hostilities broke out between Tel Aviv and Jaffa.


\(^{114}\) UN A/RES/181 (II)
In the first few weeks following the UN resolution, violence mostly took the form of regular exchange of fire along the municipal boundaries of Jaffa, targeting some of the main
traffic thoroughfares, in particular the road connecting Jaffa and Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, located between Arab Abu-Kabir and the end of Tel Aviv’s Herzl Street. These long and winding boundary lines thus became the battlefronts in the weeks following the UN partition resolution.

From the west, the densely populated Arab-majority suburbs of Manshiyyeh and Irshid stood between the older mainly Jewish quarters of just north of Jaffa, Neve Shalom, Neve Tsedek, and the Mediterranean coast. Bordering with the southern working class neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv was Abu Kabir and its adjoining orange groves. The southeastern neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv (e.g. Hatikva and Yad Eliyahu) overlooked Salameh, the largest Palestinian village of the Jaffa region. The northern suburbs of Tel Aviv bordered with the villages of Sumayl, al-Shaykh Muwanis Jerisha and al-Jalil, the latter three along the ‘Awja river; and from the south, Jabbaliyah, which flourished along al-Hilweh road and was a natural continuation of Ajami, a mixed suburb of Jaffa built in the late 19th century which came to border with the Jewish municipality of Bat Yam during the Mandate period. Finally, Tel al-Rish, which consisted mostly of small agricultural landholdings, overlooked the Jewish township of Holon. Over the course of British rule, Jaffa became an Arab enclave besieged by Jewish settlements. Most importantly, Tel Aviv was a centre of significant military power in the form of the Hagana (est. 1920, the mainstream Zionist paramilitary organization during the British Mandate), the Irgun (est. 1931, a breakaway guerilla group based on Jabotinsky’s revisionist Zionism) and the Stern Gang (est. 1940 following a split from the Irgun).

The fighting along the Jaffa-Tel Aviv borderlands targeted vehicles traveling on these roads, and both sides made conscious attempts to bring traffic to a halt. Armed Palestinian militiamen based in Jaffa took positions in the tallest buildings along the municipal borders in order to fire onto adjoining Jewish neighbourhoods and beyond, and to cause panic among the
civilian population that was fleeing the conflict zones. The memory of Palestinian snipers gunning down pedestrians in Hakarmel Market from the Hasan Bek minaret is periodically invoked during times of increased tensions between Jews and Palestinians in the city. Jewish militants, particularly the Irgun and the Stern Gang, captured strategic sites along main routes in order to target vehicle and pedestrian traffic and wreak havoc among the Palestinian civilian population. One strategically positioned Jewish sniper even managed to hit the white jeep owned by Hasan Salameh, the commander of the Arab militias in the Jaffa area. In addition, Jewish militants also made extensive use of explosives along the border areas, particularly in the Manshiyyeh-Neve Shalom frontier, in order to remove buildings that obstructed their view or were deemed valuable for the Palestinian militias. Considering the superior firepower of the Jewish militias and the internal fissures among the local Palestinian leadership, and despite the claims of Zionist historians and politicians, as well as memoirs by veteran militants, Jaffa did not pose a real existential threat to Tel Aviv.

The Hagana avoided a direct assault on the city of Jaffa, opting instead to secure their control over its suburbs and hinterland, imposing a tight siege on the Palestinian enclave. Their


116 In June 2001, following a suicide bombing in a night club across the street, a large Jewish mob surrounded the mosque, invoking its history of “murder” and attempted to set it on fire. See Ali Waked and Yuval Peys. “Severe Rampage around the Hasan Bek Mosque and ‘Abulafiya,” Ynet, 3 June, 2001 [Hebrew]. Last accessed 26 May, 2016


118 For a discussion of the disputes between Salameh and Yousef Haykal, the last mayor of Jaffa, regarding the course of action vis-à-vis Tel Aviv, see Michael Palumbo, Catastrophe, p. 84. For an assessment of the threat Jaffa posed for Tel Aviv see Benny Morris, Palestinian Refugees, p. 135 and Sharon Rotbard, White City, Black City (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2005), p. 174. [Hebrew]
working assumption was that under such conditions, Jaffa would eventually fall once the British Mandate expired. The Hagana’s Kiryati brigade which was in charge of the central region and based in Tel Aviv, focused instead on repelling attacks on Jewish settlements and neighbourhoods in the outskirts of Tel Aviv. One such battle over Hatikva, a working class Mizrahi suburb, took place on December 8, 1947 and ended when the Palestinian militiamen retreated back into nearby Salameh, aided by British forces which provided them cover while the Palestinian attackers evacuated their casualties.

The Irgun and the Stern Gang pursued a different course of action than the official Hagana. The first major attack at the heart of Jaffa was perpetrated by the Stern Gang. On January 4, 1948, two militants disguised as Arabs parked a truck full of explosives hidden under a pile of oranges next to the new Seray, which housed the municipal offices as well as meetings of the local Arab committee. The dignitaries were not in the building when the truck exploded. Instead, scores of children who were being fed on the premises were killed in the blast.

Isma’il Abu Shehadeh, who was working nearby shared his memory:

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120 Ben-Zion Nachmias, *Tel Aviv as a Frontier and its Commander Michael Ben-Gal* (Tel Aviv: Irgun Havrey Hahagana, 1998), p. 46-47. [Hebrew]


122 See Palumbo, *Catastrophe*, p. 83-84; Radai argues no children were in the building at the time since the blast occurred on a Sunday, when the welfare kitchen did not operate. See Radai, “Jaffa, 1948,” p. 28. Palestinian historian al-Dabbagh does not mention any children welfare recipients, but argued that at least 30 people perished in the blast, among them “quite a few of Jaffa’s educated youth,” see Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Our Country Palestine, Volume 4, Part 2: The Jaffa Area* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali‘ah, 1972), p. 278 [Arabic]. Ibrahim Abu Lughod was nearby when the bomb detonated. He remembered the exact number of casualties: sixty-nine, nine adults and the rest were “juvenile delinquents” cared for by the Social Affairs Department, which was located in the Seray. See Hisham Ahmed-Farajeh, *Ibrahim Abu Lughod: Resistance, Exile and Return* (Birzeit, Palestine: Ibrahim Abu Lughod Institute of International Studies, 2003), p. 46.
The place was destroyed on Sunday at nine a.m. in the morning, during breakfast. Not all of them died, some were injured… it was raining. A vehicle came and parked by the Seray and detonated… when the building collapsed we heard the people scream; I saw boys and girls with broken legs and exposed bones. When I saw them I fainted.\(^{123}\)

Meanwhile, the Irgun, began planning for a takeover Jaffa in January 1948.\(^{124}\) Unlike the Hagana, the Irgun’s leadership, which included future prime minister Menachem Begin, considered Jaffa a strategic threat and therefore prioritized the military occupation of the city. The Irgun launched its assault on Jaffa from the north, targeting Manshiyyeh, on April 24, 1948. After three days of nonstop shelling of Jaffa, the Jewish militants invaded the city and pushed their way to the sea. The horrors of Manshiyyeh’s destruction and the violence experienced by civilians reverberate in the memories of survivors. Iftikhar Turk recalled later how, when the last few families were advised to leave for fear of atrocities,

\[\text{[a]n elderly woman by the name of Sa’dyah Shakir and her daughter drove with us in the car from Manshiyyeh. The daughter and I were in the same class at school. We began driving towards Jaffa, when Sa’dyah said she left her money at her house and she must return there. The women in the car told her that if she does, the Jews would kill her, and she replied ‘they won’t touch me. I am elderly.’ Sa’dyah left and the Jews shot and killed her. Her body remained in the house three days and could not be retrieved. Later, a few people from Jaffa drove there, tied the body with rope and dragged her all the way to Jaffa because they could not reach there [to Manshiyyeh] by car.}\(^{125}\)

After months of siege and growing anxiety about the future of the city, the Irgun’s shelling was probably the most significant factor that led to the collapse of the Palestinian defense of Jaffa. In previous months, many of the city’s notables, the well-off and much of the bourgeoisie trickled out of the city, mostly to Lebanon. Now, with horrors of the Irgun’s shelling and the alarming

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125 Eyewitness testimony by Iftikhar Turk, *Remembering al-Manshiyyeh (Jaffa)* (Tel Aviv: Zochrot, 2010). [Hebrew and Arabic]
amount of civilian casualties, the terrified population was by and large trying to find ways out of the city in search of safety. Prisoners captured by the Irgun testified that as shells exploded all over the city, hotels became makeshift hospitals, and in their panic, many civilians attempted to board boats at the port. Young Salah Khalaf, who was not yet 15 at the time, witness a huge mass of men, women, old people and children, struggling under the weight of suitcases or bundles, making their way painfully down to the wharfs of Jaffa in a sinister tumult. Cries mingled with moaning and sobs, all punctuated by deafening explosions.

The horror of this mass flight is reflected in Khalaf’s memory of the “piercing cries” of a woman who lost one of her children in the commotion and subsequently jumped into the sea and drowned, her husband following suit. Salah Khalaf grew up to become of the most prominent leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement. I will return to his story in chapter four.

Even the British-initiated agreement forcing the Irgun to retreat from Manshiyyeh and allow the Hagana to take over its positions there did not persuade the Palestinians to stay, as they knew what was apparent to the Hagana all along: that the city would fall to Jewish hands as soon as the Mandate ended. The panicked exodus of civilians continued through early May. Even Jaffa’s mayor, Yousef Haykal, departed “without bidding goodbye,” complained one British official.

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128 Basil ‘Anab testified that the price of renting a vehicle to flee the city rose from 10 to 100 dinar. His testimony appears in *Remembering Jaffa’s al-Afami Neighbourhood* (Tel Aviv: Zochrot, 2007), p. 45.

129 Ibid, p. 142.
A couple aspects of the battle for Jaffa are important for understanding the mechanisms through which the Israeli state absorbed Jaffa into Tel Aviv’s orbit in the first two years after the conquest, the subject of my next chapter: First, Jewish militants established facts on the ground that contravened UN resolution 181 and induced the panicked flight of the Palestinian population of Jaffa. Second, the city’s precarious position to begin with and the fact it that was surrounded by Jewish settlements provided the Zionist leadership ample time to plan for the days after Jaffa’s imminent fall.

Understanding the Demographics of the Refugees

A year after the hostilities ceased, while Palestinian refugees were waiting in makeshift camps, dependent on international aid, the UN resolution 302 brought into being the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Although UNRWA probably has the most comprehensive historical and current quantitative data on Palestinian refugees, the organization has never carried out a census, by which I mean a systematic data collection through house to house survey. In addition, there are substantial populations that are not under UNRWA’s purview and as a result, we know considerably less about them, among them Palestinians inside 1949 Israeli armistice lines, refugees that were first displaced in 1967 and those displaced in 1948 but are not registered by UNRWA.

130 See UN A/RES/302 (IV). UNRWA was to replace international charitable organizations such as the Red Cross and the American Friends Service Committee that up until that point took up the task of supplying refugees with basic necessities. UNRWA began operation on 1 May 1950. On UNRWA’s history, see Benjamin N. Schiff, “Between Occupier and Occupied: UNRWA in the West Bank and Gaza,” Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring, 1989), pp. 60-75 and his Refugees unto the Third Generation: UN Aid to Palestinians (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

131 On the statistical limitations of the data provided by UNRWA, see Survey of Palestinian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, 2010-2012, Volume VII (Bethlehem, Palestine: Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, 2012), pp. 24-25. It is also vital to note that registration with UNRWA merely reflects one’s
With this in mind, we do have reliable information about Palestinian refugees beginning in 1951, based on those who voluntarily registered for aid with the agency. According to several estimates, the data covers roughly 75% of the refugees. In 1949, the number of aid recipient was around 910,000, according to internal correspondence of the Conciliation Commission, although the document ultimately points to 650,000 refugees to be repatriated or resettled. By 1950, UNRWA registered 914,221 refugees, while 304,740 remained unregistered.

The Palestinian NGO Badil estimates firmly established that the majority of refugees were of (sedentary) rural origins (53%), while urbanites made up about 34% and nomadic Bedouins – 13%. This means that 66% of Palestinian refugees are of non-urban origin. Crucially, a relative minority (17%) of those former urban refugees is registered with UNRWA while 56% of refugees of rural origins are registered.

Estimating the numbers of refugees from the Jaffa area is based, first and foremost, on a comprehensive survey prepared in 1945 by the Office of Statistics and the Department of Lands of the British Mandate Government for the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on Palestine. The following is a summary of its data for the Jaffa sub-district. For the sake of status as a displaced Palestinian, and does not represent receipt of aid or camp dwelling. In 1953, UNRWA began registering children, a practice that the agency still continues today, based on birth certificates provided by the parents.

133 Badil Survey, p.4
135 Table based on data extracted from here: http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/General/Story2707.html Last accessed 30 October, 2015; See also Sami Hadawi, Village Statistics, 1945: A Classification of Land and Area Ownership in Palestine (Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Center, 1970) as well as Supplement to
clarity, I took out the Jewish-only settlements and left only those places in which Palestinian resided, including “mixed” communities. Perhaps the most surprising element that the data reflect is the degree to which Jews and Arabs actually lived side by side, whether in Palestinian villages (Fajja, Kafr ‘Ana) or in what has been remembered as exclusively Jewish settlements such as Petah Tiqva (the first Zionist moshava in Palestine, established 1878) and Tel Aviv (dubbed “the first Hebrew city”). Jaffa itself, although memorialized by both Zionist and Palestinian-nationalist literature as the quintessential Arab city, also included a large Jewish population, though by the mid-1940s, concentrated in the outlying Jewish neighbourhoods.

<table>
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<th>Village</th>
<th>Arabs</th>
<th>Jews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>al-‘Abasiyya</td>
<td>5,650</td>
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<td>Jaffa</td>
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<table>
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<th>Jarisha</th>
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<td>Rantiyya</td>
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<td>al-Safiriyya</td>
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<td><strong>Jaffa Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>264,100</strong></td>
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Table 1.1: Palestinian and Jewish populations in the greater Jaffa area before 1948.
We do not have detailed statistics to determine reliable estimates for the distribution of refugees in their places of exile and their places of origin. For this reason, it is difficult to present here, with any amount of certainty, the exact number of Jaffa-area refugees in their respective places of exile in the early 1950s. All we have are aggregate numbers, and those are also disputed. For instance, the Israelis provided the Conciliation Commission the following breakdown:

- Syria 80,000
- Lebanon 100,000
- Iraq 5,000
- Egypt 15,000
- Transjordan 80,000
- Gaza 140,000
UNRWA reported that 875,998 people were registered with the agency as refugees according to the following distribution:

- Lebanon 106,753
- Syria 80,499
- Jordan 465,450
- Gaza 199,789
- Israel 23,507

136 These numbers are quoted in “Reply of the Delegation of Israel to the Questionnaire of 19 May 1949,” 12 June 1949, UN A/AC.25/ComGen/3. Note that the total number of Palestinian refugees, according to the Israelis, was 600,000, a low estimate that reflected the state of mind of Israeli officials and their intention to underestimate the effect of displacement and the level of their culpability. I am deliberately using this number here as the very minimum estimate, while UN officials estimated the number of refugees was 726,000 (“Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East,” 28 December 1949, UN A/AC.25/6/Part.1) and 711,000 (see “General Progress Report and Supplementary Report on the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine,” 23 October 1950, UN A/1367/Rev. 1). Salman Abu Sitta provides the highest estimate: 935,000 refugees, see Salman Abu Sitta, “Al Nakba Anatomy,” From Refugees to Citizens at Home http://www.plands.org/en/books-reports/books/right-of-return-sacred-legal-and-possible Last accessed 26 May, 2016.

In the meantime, a group of notables and middle class exiles from Jaffa, several of whom linked to the citrus industry, who resided in Beirut, formed the Jaffa District Inhabitants committee. Although Lebanon did not absorb the largest number of refugees from Jaffa, it was the preferred destination for Jaffa’s middle and upper classes that began their exodus in the wake of the UN partition vote. Drafted by Edward Beirouti, the letters of this committee reflect the main interests of its members: alongside the demand to repatriate all Palestinians, especially those they purport to represent, the committee requested that those engaged in the citrus industry
are prioritized. Thus, they provide us with estimates as to the number of people employed in this industry:

- Individual owners 7,000
- Labourers for cultivation, irrigation and upkeep 23,000
- Specialists for motors, pipes and other repairs 3,000
- An average of 4 dependents for each of the above 132,000
- The total number of person required 165,000  

Despite repeated correspondence with the conciliation commission, Beirouti’s efforts came to naught. I do not have any data that indicates how many Yaffawiin were expelled to Lebanon, but what we do have is current statistics that suggests that Lebanon did not become a place of exile to a very large group of Palestinian refugees from Jaffa.  

Although in the UNRWA data, Jaffa is subsumed under the Lydd district, there is a distinct pattern: of the five fields in which UNRWA operates, Jordan hosts the largest group (40%) of refugees from the Lydd district (which includes the Jaffa sub-district), followed by the Gaza strip (33%), and the West Bank (30%). Lebanon hosts merely 8.5% of refugees originally from the Lydd district, and finally, Syria, before the current civil war, hosted only 7.3%. Overall, refugees from Lydd district

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139 Although her study does not zoom in on the exodus on yaffawiin, Jihane Sfeir stresses the wave of urban Palestinian bourgeoisie moving into Lebanon in the early months of 1948. See Jihane Sfeir, L’exil Palestinien au Liban: Le Temps des Origines (1947-1952), (Paris: Karthala, 2008), pp. 37-42.

140 According to Salman Abu Sitta (private communication), Beirut’s quarters of Museitbe is perhaps the exception, with 13,530 Palestinian refugees, likely those who arrived by sea. The largest concentrations of Refugees from the
make up 30% of the general population of Palestinian refugees. This corresponds with the fact that approximately 40% (2,047,367) of all UNRWA-registered refugees resided in Jordan by the end of 2011.

It is also noteworthy that most Palestinian refugees today reside outside of UNRWA camps, which also contributes to the challenges of enumeration. As long as these refugees are registered with UNRWA, further demographic detail can be gathered about them. It is clear that the Palestinian refugee population is young: 27% (both males and females) are children under the age of 15, and around 20% are young adults (15-24). Therefore, there are just as many young people (infants to 24) as there are adults (25-64). The elderly population, however, makes up a fraction of the refugees (7.9% for males and 9.1% for females) which might indicate food insecurity and restricted access to healthcare.

Finally, estimating the current number of refugees for the Jaffa area, let alone providing a detailed breakdown that includes both their village and town of origin and place of exile is rather

Jaffa area, according to Abu Sitta, are in Jordan (Muzdar, 9,190 and Amman’s Wihdat 12,100). Another sizeable group of refugees from the Jaffa area reside in Khan Younis, in the Gaza Strip (7,560). In addition, there are just as many refugees from Jaffa in Nablus outside the camps as there are in Balata and ‘Askar.

142 Badil 2012 survey, p. 6. Overall, there are 5,115,755 registered refugees. There are also close to 2,000,000 unregistered refugees according to Salman Abu Sitta’s estimates. In 2002, according to Badil, there were 1,537,681 unregistered Palestinian refugees.
143 Ibid, p. 10, 14. In 2011, only 31% (or 1,485,598 people) resided in UNRWA’s 58 refugee camps.
144 Ibid, p. 15. In terms of food insecurity, all we have are the records of refugees who rely on UNRWA’s special hardship assistant program. According to the data, 5.7% (293,718) of registered refugees were recipients of assistance in 2011. But when we combine these numbers with those reflecting unemployment, the picture is much grimmer. It is clear that refugees suffer unemployment more than non-refugee Palestinians, and that their share in the labour force is smaller, especially when it comes to women. See pages 17-18 in the Badil 2012 survey.
challenging because of the limitations of the data available. Salman Abu Sitta provided the following partial data for 2008:  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-District</th>
<th>Locale</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza</th>
<th>Lebanon</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Jordan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>al-Haram (Sayyidna 'Ali)</td>
<td>2,580</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,696</td>
<td>4,368</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>al-Jammasin al-Gharbi</td>
<td>4,452</td>
<td>1,987</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,746</td>
<td>9,185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>al-Jammasin al-Sharqi</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>1,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Abu Kishk</td>
<td>7,149</td>
<td>844</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10,165</td>
<td>18,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>al-Sawalima</td>
<td>3,313</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,852</td>
<td>5,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Sheikh Muwannis</td>
<td>5,827</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>5,915</td>
<td>12,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Ijil al-Shamaliyya</td>
<td>1,148</td>
<td>528</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,887</td>
<td>3,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Biyar ‘Adas</td>
<td>2,575</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>4,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Bayt Dajan</td>
<td>2,814</td>
<td>1,134</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>21,990</td>
<td>26,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Kafr ‘Ana</td>
<td>2,083</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15,096</td>
<td>17,385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>al-Khayriyya</td>
<td>2,187</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5,677</td>
<td>8,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Salama</td>
<td>7,291</td>
<td>12,641</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>25,538</td>
<td>45,855</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

145 Personal communication. The list is still partial, and several villages are missing. Interestingly, several Palestinian sources put the total number of refugees from the Jaffa area at approximately 800,000 but state the number of depopulated localities was 25. See, for instance http://www.bahethcenter.net/english/essaydetails.php?eid=981&cid=56 and http://www.robat.scl.net/content/NAD/resolve_conflict/refugees/refug5.php. The problem with this assertion, is that Jaffa was a sub-district that did not include 25 localities, and that perhaps over the years, it has ahistorically became a category of enumeration that subsumed both Ramle and Lydd, the latter being the district city. Salman Abu Sitta provides a smaller number for 1998: if we add the numbers of refugees for Jaffa, Lydd and Ramle, we arrive at 654,954 (based on “The Logistics of Return,” From Refugees to Citizens at Home http://www.plands.org/books/book%2001-12.html). Abu Sitta recently recalculated his estimates and now he posits the number of refugees from the entire Jaffa sub-district is 1,216,218. This high figure is partially based on the relatively low share of registered urban (vs rural) refugees. Therefore, the registered refugees amount to 795,139 and the rest are unregistered.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jaffa</th>
<th>Saqiya</th>
<th>1,310</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>-</th>
<th>6,375</th>
<th>7,768</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>48,633</td>
<td>137,376</td>
<td>32,968</td>
<td>20,006</td>
<td>149,769</td>
<td>388,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Jarisha</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>1,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaffa</td>
<td>Yazur</td>
<td>4,662</td>
<td>1,707</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>18,116</td>
<td>24,822</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\begin{array}{ccccccc}
97,476 & 158,473 & 33,181 & 21,252 & 268,500 & 576,303
\end{array}
\]

Table 1.2: Estimated numbers of the Jaffa area refugees, according to their places of exile.

**Conclusion**

The modern history of Jaffa and the yaffawiin that I charted in broad strokes in this chapter flies in the face of received wisdom about “the oriental city” ostensibly on an impending collision course with the vibrant and modern “white city” next door. These histories of inevitable nationalist contestation are too often uncritically reproduced and disseminated, cementing processes of elision and silence imposed by the settler colonial state apparatus.

If anything, attentiveness to the lived experiences of people who lived in Jaffa, Palestinians, Jews and otherwise, complicate these narratives of conflict and demonstrates that Tel Aviv, touted as multicultural prosperous haven, benefitted from the wreckage of Jaffa and the catastrophe that befell upon its people. Displacing Zionist narratives of progress on the one hand, and of conflict on the other reveals multi-directional and complex histories of urban identities and attachments made and unmade, and their intricate relationship to spatial practices, political economy and the contingencies of social dynamics. In the following chapters, I will zoom into the life histories of yafawiin and their post-Nakba careers, as well as the experiences of the small Palestinian community that remained in the city and endured military rule, further displacement and political and economic marginalization.
Finally, studying pre- and post-Nakba Palestinian demographics is crucial for any political project that is committed to the right of return. No Zionist reader can deny that Palestinians were not only present, but formed the majority in both the urban and rural sectors of the country, and that their removal was a direct result of military action by Zionist militias and the IDF. Furthermore, the data clearly demonstrates that despite the hegemonic Zionist discourse and logic of separation, Jews and Palestinians shared lived spaces, and that experiences of “living together” were diverse and reflected multiple and contingent social dynamics rather than just straight-up intercommunal conflict. But perhaps most importantly, both historical and current data are vital for the politics of hope that this dissertation hinges on: it provides concreteness and even a sense of materiality to imaginaries about future forms of “living together” that are the radical others of the present. Maps, census data and images are traditionally the registers of governmentality and the toolkit of the state; undermining the settler-colonial state’s project of the “new normal,” which I discuss in the next chapter, necessitates reclaiming and repurposing these forms of knowledge.
Chapter Two: The “New Normal”

It is advisable to include the smallest possible number of Arab residents and the biggest possible number of Jewish residents in the Jewish state. (“The Jaffa enclave”) 146

The transformation of Jaffa was rapid and revolutionary. A new Hebrew seal has been impressed over the old Arab landscape. It seems that a giant hand was rocking the city, awakening it into new life… in the streets the west has come to rule; it is lively, tumultuous and full of movement. The shops’ windows and commercial ads make it [the street] look completely European. Yet cast your eyes upward to the buildings’ upper stories and see the markers of an oriental city: shaded balconies, barred windows, and here and there old Arabic inscriptions, half faded, but their impression still remains.147

History has not known a case more just and more obvious than this: A country is snatched from its people to be made into a national home for remnants of mankind who settle on it from the various regions of the world and who erected a state in it despite its inhabitants and the millions of their brethren in the neighboring regions. Despite the pure right of the Arab’s case, the potentialities of their land, and the interests of other nations have in it… the Arabs stand alone in the international arena. 148

The “New Normal”

In May of 2013, while I was conducting fieldwork in Jaffa, hundreds of human remains were discovered in a mass grave at the local Muslim cemetery. As the news of the grim discovery circulated in the city, many residents turned to their elders for answers to the question on everyone’s mind: who are those buried in these nameless tombs? and how did they get there?

The consensus reached by Palestinian historians, dignitaries and Islamic movement officials is that the remains should be traced back to 1948, to the period just before and following the fall of the city to Zionist forces and the mass exodus of its residents. While some of those bodies would have been of combatants, volunteers from as far as Bosnia and Iraq, the bulk of the dead would

146 ISA 23.8.1948 G 5670/32
147 Lazar, The Occupation of Jaffa, p. 250. [Hebrew]
have been civilians, either buried alive under the ruins of their homes during the massive shelling or massacred by Zionist forces in the chaos that followed the occupation of the city.149

The outpouring of emotions percolating around Ajami, Jaffa’s Arab-majority quarter, indicated many were shocked by the news. A press conference at the local office of Tajamu’ party was well attended, as people flocked to hear more about the mass graves, many learning about the fate of the city for the first time. While some Israelis also expressed their dismay, and accepted the need to reassess nationalist histories of victory and urban ‘reunification,’ others opted to profess doubt, denial, and refusal to engage with the discovery, its meaning and possible political implications. Doubters claimed that it was impossible that a local story of massacre remained hidden and unknown so long in this age of ‘free flowing information’ and the opening up of public access to knowledge about the past. Indeed, just like the skeletons, this buried material and mental history of catastrophe and trauma had to be excavated and revealed in order to become the subject of public review.

The mere act of excavation forces witnesses to face that which is “no longer conscious,” to deal with a sedimented history that challenges the pacified past and the reproductive normativity of the present.150 In this context of survival under a colonial regime as second class


citizens\textsuperscript{151}, material evidence as well as archival sources work to reveal the “unthinkable” history buried and silenced by various sites of historical reproduction: school textbooks and ceremonies, state-sanctioned commemorative rituals, monuments in public spaces and popular and semi-scholarly historical monographs.\textsuperscript{152} In this chapter, the discovery of the skeletons and the array of emotions they elicited serve to index the potential for shifting political grounds, and for undermining the historical processes that sustained the “new normal” in the aftermath of the Zionist conquest of Jaffa.

This chapter is about the ways in which in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba (1948-1949) the Israeli state enabled these processes of public forgetfulness that produced, on the one hand, a tangible reality of occupied urban spaces and the ability to “bury” (or silence, as Trouillot would phrase it) histories of mass expulsion, organized violence and en masse appropriation of material goods, houses and lands, on the other. That these processes reconstituted Jaffa as a decrepit, Jewish-majority suburb of Tel Aviv is relatively well-known in critical scholarship.\textsuperscript{153} My concern in this chapter is to explore how this violent transformation


assumed the guise of sanitized, inexorable normality. The making of the “new normal” in Jaffa, then, constitutes normalizing occupation, in ways that convincingly submerged the “newness” of a rapid and radical urban transformation. The state project of creating this new normal was so successful, that even when I asked Palestinian residents in Jaffa about the prospects of the return of the city’s refugees, my interlocutors expressed their doubts, or even outright rejection of the idea, citing the current urban reality of over-crowdedness, acute housing shortages and creeping gentrification. In other words, the work that the “new normal” does is turning urban residents into active agents in maintaining the status quo on behalf of the state; at the same time, this project also aims to foreclose alternative visions for the city and its people.

In what follows, I chart out the ways in which the state, following the conquest of Jaffa, managed to produce this “new normal,” through the appropriation and then redistribution of urban landscapes, goods, and of people themselves. In order to recreate Jaffa in its image and remake it into a Jewish city, the state of Israel used its military and legal apparatuses to facilitate a rapid takeover of everything and everyone that was previously under the jurisdiction of the Jaffa municipality. At the same time, Israel also had to manage the remaining Palestinian-Arab population by cordoning them off into what became the “Arab quarter” of Ajami, and create a physical separation between Arabs and the influx of incoming Jews.

**State-Sanctioned Looting**

On 13 May 1948, following months of continuous shelling of the besieged city of Jaffa and the desperate flight of most of its population, four of the remaining local dignitaries were self-
appointed as an ad-hoc ‘emergency committee,’ acting as the legitimate representatives of the Arab population. These men, Ahmad Abu Laban, Salah al-Nazir, Amin Andraus and Ahmad Abd al-Rahim, were forced to drive to the centre of Tel Aviv to the Hagana headquarters and publicly sign a humiliating agreement, which constituted them as the only Palestinian authority respected by the remaining Arab population. On the one hand, as such, they were responsible to “preserve and maintain the peace and welfare of the Arabs” in Jaffa. Whereas this part of the committee’s authority remains vague, the next section of the agreement is quite clear: they were entrusted with the task to “carry out all instructions given to be given by the Commander of the Hagana Tel Aviv, District, and / or by any officer designated and / or authorized by him, today [or] at any further date.”

It is this latter stipulation that clarified the first: the intention of Jaffa’s new occupiers was to constitute the committee as its rubber stamp, lending a veneer of respectability and even consent to the military’s new arrangements in the city. By signing this “agreement” which was effectively a decree of capitulation, the reluctant committee members handed over to what the very next day became the Israeli state complete control over the fate of what used to be one of the most vibrant cities in the Eastern Mediterranean and the lives of its remaining inhabitants.

The May 13 agreement has left traces, indeed – verbatim reproductions - among countless archival files. Both sides – the Israeli military apparatus and the Palestinians of Jaffa – keep conjuring the document, but offering contrasting readings of it. Military officials, for their part, stressed the section specifying the purpose of the document is to “preserve and maintain the peace and welfare of the Arabs.” Thus, in a letter dated 26 August 1948, the military governor

154 IDF 1-1860-1950
rebuked the committee for addressing the international community and for relaying their plight and their sense of the realities on the ground because the communication had contravened the May 13 agreement as well as international law. Moreover, argued the second governor of Jaffa Meir Laniado, by turning to the outside world, it seemed the committee was doing its best to undermine his efforts at restoring “normal life” in Jaffa. 155

Laniado’s consistent appeal to “normal life” in official correspondence draws our attention to tangible realities in the city at the time. Although his authority was not uncontested, either by the Tel Aviv municipal bureaucracy or various governmental agencies, it was the military governor who was the ultimate policy maker in Jaffa. The policies contained in the ‘agreement’ quickly altered the city’s physical and human geographies as well as its daily rhythms, and they reflected the governor’s interpretation of the more abstract principles of rule guiding the newly-installed Israeli provisional government.

As soon as the newly-formed IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) took over from the Hagana and installed Itzhak Chizik as Jaffa’s first military governor, the army deployed heavily-guarded checkpoints along the boundaries with neighbouring Jewish municipalities (Tel Aviv and Bat Yam), scrutinizing anyone wishing to enter the city, which was allowed only upon obtaining a special permit. Policing the city’s boundaries and access to it was intended, among other things, to keep the small Palestinian population still trapped inside Jaffa from exiting the city, and those who had fled or remained in other towns and villages in the area and had maintained commercial, cultural and familial ties to the city from entering.

155 IDF 1-1860-1950
Cordonning off the city and turning it into a closed military zone provided the IDF with the means and opportunity to suspend not only every aspect of civilian life but also what is considered in liberal democracies the very basic tenets of individual liberties, all under the guise of “security.” In the meantime, Jaffa became the site of a mass expropriation operation sanctioned by the military governor and the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Special storage facilities were set up in order to house the immense amounts of commodities, machineries and raw materials earmarked for confiscation by the governor’s appointed inspectors. These facilities were then used to supply numerous government agencies, police stations and military bases and offices. The archives are replete with instances of such requisites; for instance, on July 11 1948, the department of Arab properties at the Ministry of Minority Affairs requested the military storage facilities “confiscate from Jaffa […] a clock, a radio set, telephone switchboard, four fans and an electric refrigerator.”156 In another instance, Gad Makhnes, general director of the Ministry of Minority Affairs specified that his office needed “two good-quality German-manufactured English-language typewriters and two Arabic-language ones.” In another instance, Makhnes stressed that the “borrowing-confiscation [of a paper cutting machine from a local print shop] should be executed in the friendliest possible manner.” The ambiguity of his wording perhaps reflects a moment of moral hesitation; he is aware that the requested machine is the private property of another, but at the same time, he feels compelled to prioritize what he deemed as the interest of the nation over respect for private property or basic human decency.

Governor Chizik himself made a distinction between the confiscation of equipment needed for the war effort and simple looting, and repeatedly complained that “unauthorized

156 ISA G 306/76
personnel” was removing furniture from private dwellings. The latter, he claimed, would pose challenges if Palestinians who “fled” Jaffa were allowed to return, since “it is necessary that returnees find their apartments more or less in an acceptable condition, or else – the government will be forced to compensate them.” His concern for the image of Israel in the eyes of the international community echoes through correspondence as he ordered to cease the confiscation of furniture while the Red Cross and UN delegations were visiting the city during the first ceasefire (11 June – 9 July, 1948). Chizik could not prevent the looting of Palestinian property and the general chaos in the city, and resigned shortly thereafter. Under the command of the next military governor, Laniado, the project of mass expropriations continued.

Both the random (‘unauthorized’) and systematic, state-sanctioned looting should be understood as part and parcel of the ‘new normal.’ The theft of movable properties from homes, businesses, public offices and storage facilities reflected a more generalized attitude among Israel’s leadership. Although officially Ben Gurion and his administration were committed to international mediation which left the question of the return of the refugees open for discussions, recently-declassified correspondence reveals that posturing notwithstanding, the Israelis had no intention of letting the Palestinians return to the cities, villages and properties they left behind. As early as 26 June, the emergency committee provided a list of Jaffa residents who, at the time, were outside of the city, whether in areas under Israeli control (Lydd, Ramla), elsewhere in historic Palestine (Gaza, Ramallah) or across the border (Beirut, Saida), wishing to return to the

157 A report by the Emergency Committee provides greater detail about the extent of the looting which was perpetrated by military personnel as well as Jewish civilians. Looters are described as breaking into public offices and businesses (stressing the destruction of the local orange industry in the process), in addition as private residences, grabbing anything that could be carried away into a truck in broad daylight. Whatever they could not carry, such as heavy furniture, they smashed and damaged (IDF 71-1860-1950).
city to the office of Bechor Chetrit, minister of Minority Affairs. Chetrit forwarded the request to Prime Minister Ben Gurion, who annotated the document himself:

\[\text{As long as the war is not over, and it isn’t, and the enemy is at the gates of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa, we cannot allow the return of Arabs to Jaffa, Haifa or anywhere else, unless there is an explicit decision by the whole government (to which I shall vehemently object).}^{158}\]

Moreover, ongoing discussions about the possibility of return reveal that Ben Gurion was not alone in his utter rejection of the idea of repatriation. In a letter addressed to Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok, Yaacov Shimoni from the Middle East Department in the Foreign Ministry candidly opined that while the government can openly object to the return of conscription-age males without repercussions in the international arena, “our natural inclination” is to make the return of Arab refugees as difficult as possible. He went on to explain that the refugee problem would become a significant issue in future peace talks and suggested that Israel should not tip its hand and allow expatriation. Furthermore, he added, returnees would most probably refuse to sign an oath of allegiance to the Jewish state, and therefore, if allowed back in, could become a fifth column.\[^{159}\] Internal discussions about the possibility of repatriation to Jaffa ended when in early October, the city’s military governor decided that “for the time being, for security reasons,” all attempts to repatriate former Jaffa residents should cease immediately “and would be resumed

\[^{158}\] ISA GL 17103/35. Interestingly, the official response (of 5 July), signed by the government’s secretary S. Kedar, omitted Ben Gurion’s personal objection to the return of the Palestinians, and just stated that no return would be possible as long as war was still raging.

\[^{159}\] ISA G 307/51. Shimoni’s rejection of the possibility of a mass repatriation to Jaffa also hinged on an abortive plan to remove around 6500 Palestinians from Acre and about 150 of the residents of Abu Ghosh (a village near Jerusalem whose inhabitants refused to cooperate with the resistance and therefore allowed to remain) to Jaffa. The plan was abandoned since the city was already earmarked for the resettlement of Jews, as I will discuss below. Bechor Chetrit also added that displacing a whole city (in the case of Acre) would only cause unneeded hardship and suffering to its civilian population and therefore should be avoided.
when the situation improves.” With the exception of very few individuals allowed back over the
course of the following year, the vast majority of Yaffawis remain in exile to this very day.

In light of this principled rejection of the possibility of return we should read and
understand the particular course of action undertaken by the state of Israel in Jaffa, which
ultimately produced the “new normal.” The removal of moveable properties and enclosing the
city with checkpoints allowed the military governor to refashion the urban landscapes and de-
Arabize “the Mother of the Stranger” (Arabic, umm al-gharib, a popular reference to Jaffa)
through the redistribution of people through the city and by creating clearly demarcated ethnic
(and physical) boundaries before allowing civilian life to resume. This process took place
through two mutually constitutive elements: ghettoisation of the Palestinian population and
judaicizing the rest of the city.

**Beyond the Barbed Wires of Ajami**

On Saturday morning in present-day Jaffa one would try in vain to find an empty parking spot.
Israelis from Tel Aviv, Bat Yam, Holon and other satellite cities crowd Jaffa’s narrow streets
enjoying a sunny weekend before heading back to the busy everyday routines. Groups of tourists
in wide-brim hats, cameras at hand, are led by guides through the alleyways, listening to stories
of the city’s distant past told in every language under the sun. Others visit the countless tiny art
galleries that offer Judaica artifacts as well as paintings of romantic orientalized landscapes. The
old flea market is teeming with Israeli-Jews, strolling about after a satisfying meal in a trendy
bistro. Traffic along Yefet Street (formerly al-Hilweh) comes to a halt as incoming Jews and

\[160\] See, for instance, Hazan and Monterescu, *Sundown*, p. 52.
tourists stop to stock up on pita with za’tar in the tremendously popular bakery owned by Abulafia family near clock tower square or drive up towards Ajami for hummus and falafel in one of the many ‘authentic’ Arab restaurants along the thoroughfare.

For the contemporary visitor, Jaffa has “always” served as a playground of sorts for Israeli-Jews, a destination for those seeking a taste of an authentic Middle Eastern flavour close to home. As far as Israeli-Jews are concerned, local histories of military occupation and mass displacement have been relegated to the depth of collective amnesia as newer urban identities, including those of the hummus-serving Arabs and “contrived coexistence” have flourished in their stead.\(^{161}\) The remainder of this chapter seeks to highlight the processes by which, during military rule (1948-1949), these profound transformations produced Jaffa as a weekend getaway tourist site for Israeli-Jews.

Military governor Laniado’s “Operation Nine” ordered the removal and forced transfer of the Palestinian population into an enclosed “security zone” in mid-August 1948.\(^{162}\) This was a military operation, devised by Ben Gurion himself,\(^{163}\) and conducted by supervisors appointed by the governor and IDF soldiers who were ordered to raid and search private residences – both those vacated and repopulated within “the ghetto.” The new exclusively ‘Arab’ area, clearly referred to as the ‘ghetto,’ earmarked for this operation was the neighbourhood of Ajami, which was established in the late 19th century as an extramural residential area by well-to-do Maronite

\(^{161}\) Monterescu, *Jaffa*.

\(^{162}\) Governor Laniado exempted eleven notable Palestinian families who were allowed to remain in their homes and were provided with special permits (IDF G 96/306).

\(^{163}\) See Akiva Persitz’s testimony, IDF 5-1860-1950.
By 1948, Ajami had expanded along al-Hilweh street to its east, becoming a lively heterogeneous commercial and residential centre, home to both Christians and Muslims. After the terrified flight of most Palestinians from Jaffa, Ajami was considered a prime location for such a ‘ghetto’ since most of its houses were uninhabited and because its western boundary was the Mediterranean. Moreover, Jabbaliyeh, the neighbourhood just to its south, bordered on the Jewish municipality of Bat Yam, and was therefore considered a potential ‘security risk’ by the Israeli military and political leadership.

“Operation Nine” created a new reality for the divided city: Ajami, surrounded by barbed wires and armed guards, became “Arab Jaffa” whereas the rest of the city was rapidly transformed into “Jewish Jaffa.” This new division also produced new ethnicity-based modes of governance, which will be discussed below. The decision to concentrate the Palestinian population in an enclosed area did not pass without resistance. The Emergency Committee appealed to Chetrit, minister of Minority Affairs, about the forced uprooting of civilians from their homes. But there were also minority voices within the Zionist political establishment that articulated unease at the creation of the Ajami ghetto. Moshe Erem (née Kazanovzky), a member of the Israeli Kenesset from the socialist MAPAM party, warned that the barbed wires around Ajami “would make it look like a closed and sealed ghetto. It is difficult to accept that, since the idea is associated with enough atrocities.” Erem referenced the Holocaust, which ended merely three years prior as well as the British internment camps for Jewish refugees in Cyprus. A counter example is Haifa, where the remaining Palestinian population was indeed concentrated

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164 See chapter1.
165 IDF 1-1860-1950
in Wadi Nisnas yet there was no need for barbed wires, walls or fences.\textsuperscript{166} If we go ahead with this plan, claimed Erem, there will be far-reaching consequences in terms of inter-communal relations: “Why is it necessary to pile on obstacles which will root bitterness, resentment and eternal hatred in the hearts of the Arabs?” And as for the Jews, barbed wires would serve as tangible markers of occupation and would amplify a sense of ethnic superiority, which may have ‘undesirable’ consequences.\textsuperscript{167} Erem may have remained cryptic on this point, but in the very next paragraph he mentioned the “official” pretext for the governor’s policy of segregation – an appeal to the safety and security, not of the Jewish newcomers or even the state, but of the Palestinian residents themselves.

Erem was in complete denial of the mere possibility that Jews were capable of committing violent acts towards a minority population under occupation. However, there are multiple archival traces that confirm official concerns about the safety of Jaffa’s Palestinians and shed some light over the vulnerability and precarity of Palestinians lives under Israeli occupation. These traces of everyday acts of unprovoked state violence indicate that Palestinians experienced a constant sense of vulnerability both before and after they were forced behind barbed wires in Ajami.

A formal complaint filed by the Emergency Committee mentions numerous cases of random assaults on Palestinians in the city’s streets, as Israeli soldiers hurled insults at them and


robbed them of their belongings. The same report details an arrest of a Palestinian man immediately after going through “serious surgery” while others were shot and killed while in Israeli custody even though they posed no security threat.\(^{168}\) The reported discovery of several dead bodies led medical examiners to the conclusion they were executed by Jewish forces after the formal capitulation and were left to rot without proper burial. The committee also complained about their exclusion from hearings for suspects arrested by “various Jewish units” and about unnecessary searches and raids in private homes, without accountability. These raids occasionally resulted in sexual assault of women and girls in the presence of male family members, and the deliberate disgracing of unmarried girls (“virgins”), particularly targeting those from “reputable families,” by ordering them to accompany soldiers at night.\(^{169}\)

Violence became a fact of life for the Palestinians who remained in Jaffa. Workers were afraid to leave their homes lest occasional Jewish invaders rob them of their meager possessions.\(^{170}\) Local Palestinian leaders reported countless incidents of violence perpetrated by Jewish immigrants, often Mizrahim from Iraq and North Africa who were being settled on the urban frontiers until well after military rule in the city ended. Between June 1951 and January 1952 tensions rose between Palestinians and Jewish-Iraqis recently-resettled in Jaffa. Following the 1951 Baghdad riots, Palestinians had “good reason to fear attacks from Mizrahi Jews, and that these well-founded concerns have led them to avoid leaving their homes alone after

\(^{168}\) IDF 71-1860-1950.

\(^{169}\) Ibid.

\(^{170}\) See IDF Letter from M. Shneorson, 24.2.1946, 2-1860-1950. The problem obviously persisted, since in a letter dated 23.6.1949, the Emergency Committee is complaining that both Jewish soldiers and civilians entertain the idea that Arabs and their properties “have to right to be in Israel.” (IDF 3-1860-1950)
dark.” It is not inconceivable that the scope of the violence was much greater than its archival traces, first and foremost, because these are state archives, in charge of the narrativization of history and therefore producing its built-in silences. The plight of the Palestinians in Jaffa was acknowledged just enough in the archives to reify the “new normal”: as chaotic as it was in the “early days,” the restrained security apparatus of Israel made the city safe and livable for everyone.

It is also highly likely that many Palestinians refrained from filing formal complaints, especially against members of the armed and police forces, fearing reprisals and sensing that Jews, and especially state agents, enjoyed impunity that rendered complaints futile. Women in particular are vulnerable to public disclosure of sexual violence perpetrated against them, as they had to face stigma, shame, and potential forms of community ostracism or risk their and their family’s ‘good name’ and marriage prospects.

In this context of elisions and silences in the archives, a handwritten document from late May 1948, a fortnight after the fall of Jaffa, is indicative of the level of “acceptable” violence and impunity. The document mentions a testimony by an Israeli policeman, who reported to his superior about a Palestinian man who had called him for help as he was being robbed by Israelis. According to the policeman, his superior’s response was to tell him he “should have

171 ISA GL 17115/23. For earlier incidents, see for instance a letter sent by religious leaders to the military governor, citing violence by Jewish newcomers (IDF 9.6.1949, 3-1860-1950).
172 See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, pp. 48-49.
173 Indeed, the Emergency Committee’s reports specifically mentions that perpetrators of violence towards Palestinians have gone unpunished.
174 Judging by the context, detailing looting by Israeli police and military personnel, we can assume the robbers were members of the armed forces.
shot that Arab,” presumably to silence a potential witness and save the state an embarrassment.\textsuperscript{175} It attests to the level of impunity provided to perpetrators as well as to the extent of precarity experienced by Palestinians.

By October 1948, Laniado was reporting a sense of “restrained discipline” (Hebrew \textit{mishma’at ‘atzura}) among the ghettoized Palestinians in Jaffa.\textsuperscript{176} His choice of words seems a little strange, even redundant. But by flagging his methods as “restrained” Laniado implied to his superiors as much as to his historians that he could have been much harsher with the occupied population had he wished. Lurking underneath this official’s magnanimity and (temporary) successful pacification remained undercurrents of self-doubt and insurgency that could erupt at any time.

While “Arab Jaffa” was being forged behind barbed wires in Ajami, the rest of the city was rapidly transforming: on the one hand, state-sanctioned processes of repurposing of private and public buildings as military bases and residences for “authorized personnel”; simultaneously, many Jewish newcomers began to invade vacant apartments. The fictionalized memoir \textit{The Bulgarians of Jaffa}\textsuperscript{177} is suggestive of the real experiences of Bulgarian-Jews upon their arrival to Israel, and the mass appropriation of Palestinian properties in the newly-Jewish parts of Jaffa. The protagonist’s cousin explains the new realities on the ground:

\begin{quote}
Jaffa is located near Tel Aviv… the two cities share a border and a few streets. Thousands of Arabs escaped from it after its liberation, and almost all the houses are empty. Come, we occupied a two-bedroom apartment and locked the door, one room for you and the other for us.\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{175} ISA G 77/306.
\textsuperscript{176} See the military governor’s weekly report from 13.10.1948, ISA G 77/306.
\textsuperscript{177} Rozalyah Pasi, \textit{The Bulgarians of Jaffa} (Tel Aviv: Misrad Habitahon, 1993). [Hebrew]
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid, p.14.
In the Hebrew source, “occupied” (*tafasnu*, literally “we caught”) is instructive, since it suggests more than just settling an empty apartment, but squatting, invading the space of others without the owner’s permission. Like a civilian occupation army, the Bulgarian immigrants stormed Jaffa: “Hurry! People are wandering around, and when they see an empty apartment, they break the lock and occupy it. Then try to argue with them. Hurry, don’t delay.”

The military governor and his staff treated those “unauthorized” Jewish newcomers who captured apartments on their own initiative as squatters that should be evicted. The military governor, as well as Defense Ministry officials and Akiva Persitz, who facilitated the resettlement of soldiers in ‘abandoned’ Palestinian houses, were incensed upon the revelation that migrants squatted in a group of buildings in Nuzha earmarked for repopulation by families of military personnel. The governor even actively sought to redeploy forces to both reinforce the checkpoints to stop further incursions as well as evict as many of these “unauthorized” squatters. In a related instance, when a group of soldiers violently evicted Jewish women from houses in Jabbaliyeh, the governor sent soldiers under his command to remove the invaders.

These squabbles over living quarters in Jaffa were repeated again and again throughout the first year of occupation. The archives are replete with reports of battalions taking over buildings from other units, often moving in with their families. One such incident occurred in September 1948, when six military vehicles driven by men from the Kiryati brigade forced their way into buildings occupied by the air force,

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179 Ibid, p.17.

180 Persitz is identified in these documents as the newly-appointed chairman of the national expropriation committee. He demanded the Jaffa office of the Custodian of Abandoned Properties that vacant apartments be allocated to soldiers and their families rather than occupied by Jewish migrants. The ensuing furious inter-ministry dispute over those buildings left a long trail of documents in the IDF archives.

181 IDF 5-1860-1950.
“shoved the guards, hurling slurs such as ‘draft-dodgers and parasites’ and brought women, children and their belongings with them into the houses.”\textsuperscript{182} Apparently, the Kiryati squatters felt their war efforts gave them greater entitlement to the loot than the air force, which had made less sacrifices in 1948.

The army seems to have won the day. For decades following these disputes, Jaffa was dotted with military bases, from Galey Tzahal, the IDF’s radio mouthpiece, the military museum next to the Ottoman railway station in Manshiyyeh, to 8200 elite intelligence unit. Later on, the military court sequestered the home of Shaykh Ali in the heart of Ajami. On the one hand, the priority given to IDF units and individual soldiers in the process of dividing up the spoils of occupation reflects the military’s sway over political life in Israel, as well as the blurring of the lines between military and civilian occupation. On the other hand, the archival documents that detail the disputes over the allocation of buildings in “Jewish Jaffa” also reveal an emerging anxiety about the potential of rank-and-file IDF soldiers to mutiny and even to perpetrate violence against superior officers or high-ranking state agents. Indeed, the leadership of the fledgling Israeli state was well aware of the possibility of armed resistance by military factions, including former militants from the Irgun and the Stern Gang.\textsuperscript{183}

\textsuperscript{182} IDF 10.9.1948, 5-1860-1950.

\textsuperscript{183} The fear of an armed mutiny against the state had some basis in reality. Just five weeks after the creation of Israel, the Altalena, a ship carrying arms for the Irgun arrived near the coast of Tel Aviv. The refusal of the Irgun to surrender the massive amounts of arms on board to the IDF resulted in a battle with scores of casualties and the destruction of the ship. See Shlomo Nakdimon, \textit{Altalena} (Tel Aviv: Idanim 1978); Menachem Begin, \textit{The Revolt} (Jerusalem: Achiasaf, 1950). [Hebrew]
As we have seen at the beginning of this chapter, the UN partition plan originally allocated Jaffa to the Arab state. The new reality of occupation, necessitated legislative and bureaucratic ‘adjustments’ that furnished the annexation of Jaffa with the veneer of legality. First, the pre-1948 Jewish neighbourhoods were to form their own local municipality and would receive essential services from Tel Aviv, while the rest of the city came under a committee appointed by the Minister of Interior Affairs. In practice, though, the city’s affairs were directed by the office of the military governor until that position was dissolved in 1949 and Jaffa officially and legally was annexed to Tel Aviv a year later. The security apparatus, as well as civilian authorities were adamant that the “situation of Arabs is different than that of the Jews” and therefore it was “impossible” to reconstitute the Jaffa municipality as it existed before the occupation. However, the real motivation behind this refusal was a vehement objection by Major General Elimelekh Avner, the Commander of Military Rule nationwide and Laniado, the local military governor, to include Palestinians in decision-making processes in the city, which would loosen their ability to control and surveil the Arab population. The consensus among the security establishment was that even if a local committee of municipal affairs was to be formed for “Arab Jaffa” it would have to be headed by a Jewish military officer. The “new normal” for “Arab Jaffa” was therefore based

184 UN A/RES/181 (III).
185 ISA 7.9.1948, G 5670/32
186 In October 1949, the Israeli government decided on the annexation of Jaffa to Tel Aviv. This decision created controversy, as it stipulated the new municipality would be renamed “Jaffa-Tel Aviv.” Israel Rokah, then Tel Aviv mayor, resented the decision to add Jaffa before Tel Aviv, not only because this decision was made without consulting him, but also because he felt it sidelines what he considered a symbol of the Zionist project. Eventually, though, a compromise was reached, and on June 1950 the municipality officially announced the annexation as well as its new name “Tel Aviv-Jaffa.” (See TAMA Yedirot Iryat Tel Aviv, 5-6, 1949, p. 74)
on their ambiguous presence: they eventually were to become Israeli citizens, yet marked as an occupied population in constant need of military and police surveillance.

The logic of separation between Jewish and Arab Jaffa was inscribed onto each aspect of everyday life. Avner declared that the impending demilitarization of Jaffa would take different forms for the Jews and Arabs in the city. Normalcy in “Jewish Jaffa” meant receiving certain municipal services, such as electricity, water and sewage, from Tel Aviv as the city’s affairs were to be overseen by the committee, while a civilian police force was to replace the military as the arbiter of public order. The military governor and his superiors were adamant that “Jewish Jaffa” would be rapidly normalized and facilitated the establishment of mundane services that served as the markers of normalcy: postal and bus services that linked the city beyond the barbed wires to nearby (Jewish) municipalities.

In the meantime, the Palestinians in “Arab Jaffa” were confined to the ghetto, and their ability to communicate with the outside restricted: telephone services were unavailable, letters were collected and distributed only through the Red Cross and the office of the military governor were heavily censored; the permits system, which required each Palestinian leaving the enclosure for any purpose to be scrutinized by the Israeli security apparatus in order to determine the level of threat they posed to the state further restricted mobility.

The Israeli security apparatus envisioned a different form of “normalcy” for “Arab Jaffa.” In October 1948, the military governor announced that owners of residential- or business “real

\[\text{\textsuperscript{188} IDF 20.9.1948, 1-1860-1950.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{189} The military governor proposed a centrally-located mail box for all incoming and outgoing letters that would be collected by the postal service and transferred to the office of the military governor for inspection and censorship before shipping (ISA 11.10.1948 G 306/97).}\]
estate properties within the Jaffa city limits” were to provide proof of their ownership to a committee in charge of registering such properties, ostensibly for the purpose of taxation. The registry prepared by the office of the military governor was, indeed, used to impose new taxes on the Palestinian population and thus fund its own operations. But this extensive registration project also served another purpose: keeping an inventory of valuables owned by Palestinians. For this purpose, Laniado also requested that the ownership of each radio set, automobile “and other commodities” by Palestinians would require a special license, which, as he admitted in his weekly report, would provide him with the most accurate information about the contents of each household, and allow him to assert control over the ways Palestinians spend their leisure time.190

Around the same time, Laniado also ordered the closure of several Palestinian-owned coffee shops “for obvious reasons.” If we consider the already severe restrictions on movement including that of the leadership, whom Laniado constantly suspected of “meddling in politics,” the closure of coffee shops, registration of radio sets and the censorship over mail and publications, it is clear that the Israeli security services intended to curtail any attempt at civil society formation – as much as political mobilization.

Stranded in the city without an effective leadership and locked up under Israeli occupation, Palestinians were painfully aware of their precarious position. The Emergency Committee was, for the most part, powerless in the face of the state’s security establishment, and its members were periodically subjected to detention and house arrest. Nevertheless, they continued to voice their opposition to the harsh measures of suppression imposed on them by the military governor: forced evictions and ghettoization, expropriation of properties, and severe restrictions on their movement.

190 ISA 20.9.1948, G 306/77.
They invoked the colonial past and present when they protested: “[You] should not treat us as if we were negroes in Africa. The Jewish people have suffered enough persecution, it cannot become the oppressor.”\textsuperscript{191} This polivalent statement should be read first within the immediate historical context of decolonization: The UN recognized Israel only a few months prior to this letter of protest; the Indian subcontinent was partitioned into the independent states of India and Pakistan the year before, while the end of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon just a few years prior (1946 and 1943 respectively) heralded the age of formal independence in the region. Not only were the old colonial powers perceived to be on the decline, but the ideologies that had conferred legitimacy over European rule in Africa and Asia were rapidly losing respect and appeal. By invoking colonial rule in Africa, the Palestinian leadership in Jaffa attempted to shame their Israeli readers for their tolerance of racism.

Yet this statement is curious when one reads it against the intellectual climate of the period. By the close of the age of what Albert Hourani glossed as the liberal age unself-reflexive ideas of race and civilization were popular among Arab intellectuals. Many of them turned the American and European missionaries’ racial hierarchy in the ‘family of mankind’ into a developmentalist understanding of Arabness and Arab culture as halfway between white Europeans and black Africans and brown Asians. The Mandate System in the Levant, reflected this ideological geopolitical one-upmanship: whereas British and French colonial rule in Africa and south and east Asia effectively continued, the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were “subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able

\textsuperscript{191} ISA 4.1.1949, G 306/77.
to stand alone.”

Read in that context, the invocation of colonial rule over Africans, then, was meant to do more than just shaming the Israelis. It was a reminder that the authors of the letter, who are Arabs, should not be treated like colonized black subjects because they had, after all, already proved the required level of civilization. For all intents and purposes, the Palestinian leadership reminded the European Jew, Laniado, that they should be treated as equals. After all, until recently European Jews were considered racially suspect, and as a result, persecuted, too.

The Emergency Committee also voiced its protest over the mass expropriation of houses in the city. In a letter dated 21 February 1949, the committee argued that since Jaffa was not allocated to the Jewish state to begin with, the seizure of properties was illegal, given the “state … claims to be … democratic.” Moreover, the Custodian of Absentee Properties could not, neither morally nor legally, take possession of properties of Palestinians who were absent. This right should be reserved either to the relatives of absentees or to the committee itself. Moreover, they charged the state with deliberate discrimination against the occupied Arab population by granting impunity to looters, whether they happened to be government agents or civilians.

In addition to formal protest, Palestinians also devised other, less direct ways, to challenge Israel’s attempts at appropriations and pacification through feet dragging, undermining procedures or finding alternative spaces for political engagement. For instance, when the military governor ordered the Arab population to submit documentation attesting ownership of properties, many refused to comply or to leave their documents at the Jaffa offices, fearing the occupying authorities would expropriate them and then deny their ownership rights. When the military governor realized

192 Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 22.

193 ISA G 5670/32.
this, he ordered his subordinates to prepare copies of these documents and return the original to
their owners in order to allay such fears. 194 In another instance, Nicola Saba a member of the
Emergency Committee, used his limited authority to register Palestinians as Israeli citizens in order
to also register “infiltrators,” or Palestinians returning without obtaining the permission of the
Israeli security apparatus. When his actions were revealed by an informant, an investigation
launched into the affair discovered he may have registered several “infiltrators.” Saba was
promptly replaced by a Jewish clerk. 195 Finally, the popularity of the communist weekly
newspaper al-Ittihad was understood by the security authorities as a Palestinian response to their
subordinate position, since it launched “unrestrained attacks against the government. The Arab
citizen derives pleasure from these attacks, as he blames the Israeli government for his bad
situation, whether such blame is justified or not.” Palestinians found venues to articulate their
opposition to the state and register their frustration at their subordinate position, whether through
the publication and reading of such newspapers, or, as the same report noted anxiously, by meeting
in local coffee shops engaging in political work with acquaintances and neighbours. 196

In July 1949, military rule was abolished in major coastal cities. In its stead, the department
of Arab Affairs at the Ministry of Internal Affairs appointed Aharon Chelouche as the regional
officer for the Palestinians of Jaffa, Ramla and Lydd. 197 Chelouche (1921-2004) was the grandson
of Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche and the great-grandson of his namesake, Aharon Chelouche, who
immigrated from Oran in French-occupied Algeria to become one of the leaders of the pre-Zionist

194 ISA 8.11.48, G 77/306.
195 ISA GL 171103/44.
196 ISA n.d. GL 17111/29.
Jewish-Maghrebi community in Jaffa and, with his son, founding father of Tel Aviv.\textsuperscript{198} Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche (1870-1934) considered himself Arab and Jewish, both a native of the country (like the Palestinians) and a Zionist, but also chided the Zionist leadership for mistreating the Palestinians and slighting the Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews.\textsuperscript{199} His grandson Aharon, however, managed to integrate into the state’s security apparatus when he was appointed the regional officer, and served in this and other roles related to minority affairs within the Israeli police until his retirement in 1973.

The end of military rule in Jaffa entailed the removal of the barbed wire fences around Ajami. One Israeli newspaper’s report that the “Arabs are generally glad” as “many have not left the area during the era of military rule” omitted to mention the strict permit regime and the heavily armed guards along the fences. The reporter also claimed that since “we are all Israeli now, there is no [legal] distinction between citizens”.\textsuperscript{200} The removal of physical barriers and relaxing restrictions on movements were tangible signs of returning to civilian life and the reunification of the “two Jaffas,” the Arab and Jewish ones. Palestinians were now able to seek employment, shop and partake in the everyday cultures of leisure that developed in Tel Aviv. Yet, the “new normal” of the Palestinians in Jaffa also entailed being closely surveilled by the regional officer, who produced detailed monthly reports about every aspect of everyday life in Jaffa, Ramla and Lydd. These reports reflect the interest of the Israeli security apparatus not only in economic, political or

\textsuperscript{198} Mordekhai Elkayam, \textit{Jaffa, Neve Tsedek: The Beginnings of Tel Aviv} (Tel Aviv: Misrad Habitahon, 1990). [Hebrew]; Aharon Chelouch, \textit{From Jalabia to Kova Tembel} (Tel Aviv, 1991). [Hebrew]

\textsuperscript{199} Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche, \textit{The Story of my Life} (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2005). [Hebrew]

\textsuperscript{200} IDF n.d. 55-1255-1953.
cultural activities of Palestinians, but also mundane social interactions, like idle conversations at local coffee shops.

In spite of the liberalization of the state and the formal abolition of military rule in 1966, the close surveillance of Palestinians in Jaffa (and elsewhere) has only become more technologically and logistically sophisticated over the years and continues to this day. The notorious SHABAK (Hebrew acronym of the General Security Services or GSS) routinely detains and interrogates local activists who organize and participate in protests against state actions. This was the case during the Israeli assault in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, operations Cast Lead in the Gaza strip (2008-9) and Protective Edge (2014). No wonder, then, that an elderly Palestinian interlocutor refused to provide direct answers to my questions about his experiences in 1948, because, as he apologetically explained to me, anyone can be a state agent and if he dares utter any criticism, he might lose his pension and benefits.

**Conclusion**

Despite its relative brevity, the era of post-occupation military rule was a formative one in the lives of Palestinians in Jaffa. 1948-1949 marks a watershed not only terms of their minoritization and the precarity of an expendable colonized population under the direct rule of the military; the making of the “new normal” meant a rapid transformation of familiar urban landscapes into unfamiliar and even hostile ones. And finally, these processes were also designed to sediment the “no-longer-conscious,” and accelerate collective forgetfulness of the past, not only of pre-1948, but also that of loss, trauma and mass expulsion. These elisions that worked to normalize and reproduce the realities of occupation and subordination also foreclosed the potential to overcome the new normal and open up avenues for utopian imaginary and desire.
Chapter Three: Point of No Return

The exiles don’t look back when leaving
One place of exile – for more exile
Lies ahead, they’ve become familiar
With the circular road, nothing to the front
Or to the rear or north or south. (Mahmoud Darwish)

Nobody can foresee how a war will alter the lives of persons and nations. The refugee problem, like other refugee problems, is the bitter fruit of war. Those who started it cannot now cast the blame upon the United Nations, the great powers, Israel or everyone else. But for the Arabs’ fateful decision, there would never have been a single refugee. (Michael Comay, Israeli Ambassador to Canada)

Eliminating the Native, Indigenizing the Settler

The mass exodus of the Palestinians created an opportunity for the nascent Israeli state. For the first time since Roman times, Jews constituted the majority group in Palestine. But the Zionist leadership was aware that this particular achievement could be short-lived, since Israel found itself under tremendous pressure by the international community to repatriate the Palestinian refugees. This chapter is about the conundrum faced by a state that, to this day, insists on its ‘normality’ as a legitimate liberal democracy but at the same time, has repeatedly sought exemptions from international law. While the previous chapter zoomed in on the city of Jaffa and the formation of the “new normal,” the current chapter shifts the scale of the discussion from the micro-politics of the local to the level of the state. Thus, I am responding to a recent call to

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“analyse Zionism’s structural continuities and the ideology that informs Israeli policies and practices… toward Palestinians everywhere.” As I alluded in the previous chapter, the military governor of Jaffa acted in consultation with the Israeli government when petitioned by Palestinians to permit their kin to return to the city. In other words, Israel’s policies and tactics aimed at preventing the return of the refugees were consistent across the board. As I will demonstrate primarily through a close reading of an Israeli government sociologist’s report and another inter-disciplinary document advocating Palestinian resettlement outside Israel, the state mobilized its resources, in particular various forms of knowledge production, in order to legitimate its actions employing what Patrick Wolfe called “the organizing grammar of race.”

Wolfe’s argument demands that we take settlers’ claims about race with a grain of salt. In the Israeli context, as I demonstrate below, state officials repeatedly insisted that Palestinians disrupt Israel’s cultural – read racial – homogeneity and should therefore not be allowed to return. Under this pretext, Israel also proposed their absorption among “their kind” in neighbouring Arab countries. However, if we take up Wolfe’s suggestion that the primary motive for the “elimination of the native” is access to territory, then the Israeli argument that Palestinians are “out of place” refers not to their purported racial / cultural otherness within the Jewish state, but rather that it is their emplacement that is disruptive to the Zionist project. In other words, we should perceive the events of the Nakba and its aftermath not as an exception and a “watershed,” but interrogate them as a formative event that laid the legislative and legal...


205 See discussion below.
infrastructure for the removal of the Palestinians en masse from the Jewish state. Those Palestinians who remained and became Israeli citizens were also subjected to these policies of elimination; since 1948, the Palestinian population of Israel has increased nine fold, but only has access to 3.5% percent of public lands. The Israeli legal system has effectively blocked Palestinians from acquiring or leasing land. Moreover, the mass expropriations of Palestinian-owned lands (the properties of refugees, ‘present absentees’ or surviving communities) since 1948 were designed for- and have benefitted Jewish settlers. In fact, while Israel has assured its newly acquired territories would be quickly dotted with Jewish settlements, and continues to do so today, the natural expansion of Palestinian villages and towns has been deliberately stunted while cities such as Nazareth and Tarshiha have been encircled by adjacent urban Jewish settlements (Nazareth Ilit and Ma’alot respectively), while and no new viable urban centres have been planned and built.206

The Nakba, therefore, should be analyzed as productive of the settler colonial structure that persists to this day. The contingencies of conquest and mass flight provided conditions that made it possible for the Zionist state to consolidate and expand the settler colonial structure in the territories under its control. This structure undergirds and sustains the Zionist project that

aimed to create a new Jewish society on a mythical ancestral land. In order to be able to claim indigeneity, the Israeli leadership first had to tend to the presence of the country’s actual indigenous population and their ownership of most of the lands.\textsuperscript{207} The Absentee Property Law of 1950 effectively transferred the lands and other properties from Palestinians who do not reside in territories under Israeli jurisdiction to the state. The law was also productive of the “absentee,” a legal category specific to Palestinians, applied to anyone who fled or was expelled from the country.\textsuperscript{208} Thus the indigenous Palestinians were designated as those who were absent, not in place, while the settlers, by contrast, become present and emplaced. A third interim category of ‘present absentees’ came to designate those Palestinians who remained but were not present on their lands and therefore declared legally absent despite their physical presence within the state’s de-facto borders. The present absentees are those whose indigeneity the state could not

\textsuperscript{207} For the contested notions of indigeneity in Palestine, see my discussion of the right of return in the introduction.

\textsuperscript{208} The law defines absentee thus:

(1) a person who, at any time during the period between the 16th Kislev, 5708 (29th November, 1947) and the day on which a declaration is published, under section 9(d) of the Law and Administration Ordinance, 5708-1948(1), that the state of emergency declared by the Provisional Council of State on the 10th Iyar, 5708 (19th May, 1948) (2) has ceased to exist, was a legal owner of any property situated in the area of Israel or enjoyed or held it, whether by himself or through another, and who, at any time during the said period –

(i) was a national or citizen of the Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Trans-Jordan, Iraq or the Yemen, or

(ii) was in one of these countries or in any part of Palestine outside the area of Israel, or

(iii) was a Palestinian citizen and left his ordinary place of residence in Palestine

(a) for a place outside Palestine before the 27th Av, 5708 (1st September, 1948); or

(b) for a place in Palestine held at the time by forces which sought to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel or which fought against it after its establishment;

(2) a body of persons which, at any time during the period specified in paragraph (1), was a legal owner of any property situated in the area of Israel or enjoyed or held such property, whether by itself or through another, and all the members, partners, shareholders, directors or managers of which are absentees within the meaning of paragraph (1), or the management of the business of which is otherwise decisively controlled by such absentees, or all the capital of which is in the hands of such absentees.
completely deny, yet their lands, the settlers’ object of desire, were targeted for systematic confiscation.209

Against the backdrop of this legal framework, the current chapter proposes to consider the Nakba as an opportunity seized by the emerging settler colonial state to consolidate its hold on the lands of the indigenous people by blocking their return. Israel’s efforts at making the absence of the Palestinians permanent were challenged by international law and by state leaders’ desire to be accepted as a “normal” liberal democracy. The discussion below examines in detail the ways in which the Israeli state overcame these twin challenges and in the process, enshrined itself as the “only democracy in the Middle East” in popular political imagination of the west on the one hand, while successfully eliding itself from the annals of colonialism, on the other.

**Israel and UN Resolution 194**

As I showed in my introduction, the right of return of the Palestinian refugees has been widely debated and studied since the Nakba. For Palestinians themselves, return has been regarded as an existential and unalienable collective right. Those uprooted from their homes demanded to be allowed repatriation in the months following their forced departure. This demand was also recognized and supported by many of the diplomatic luminaries of the era, such as the UN-appointed mediator Folke Bernadotte, who, in a progress report filed just a day before the Stern Gang assassinated him, made a strong statement in favour of repatriation:

> The immediate solution of the problem appeared to be the return to their homes of those refugees who desired to return. Even though in many localities their homes had been destroyed, and their furniture and assets dispersed, it was obvious that a solution for their difficulties could be more readily found there than elsewhere.

I accordingly submitted to the Provisional Government of Israel, on 26 July, a proposal that, without prejudice to the question of the ultimate right of all Arab refugees to return to their homes in Jewish-controlled Palestine if they desired, the principle be accepted that a limited number, determined by consultation, might be permitted to return to their homes as from 15 August 1948, differentiation being made in recognition of security considerations. I also stated that I would undertake to enlist the aid of appropriate international organizations and agencies in the resettlement and, economic and social rehabilitation of the returning refugees.  

Bernadotte’s professed commitment to pressure Israel to allow the refugees to return, later echoed through the United Nations General Assembly resolution 194 (11 December 1948). In fact, clear traces of Bernadotte’s wording survived to the final draft, which was voted into a formal resolution, and in particular section 11, directly addressing the question of the refugees:

*Resolves* that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.  

On the surface, this section reads like a clear commitment to the spirit of Bernadotte’s report, which means that the just solution to the refugee problem was repatriation and / or reparations. However, subsequent Israeli responses, both for internal and external consumption, to the mounting international pressure to repatriate the refugees were framed specifically to address this UN resolution and to offer contending interpretations of its wording.

Israeli diplomats, like Michael Comay I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, highlighted the impracticability of repatriation as a result of the disappearance of the economic base of Palestinian existence and the fact that Jewish migrants were settled in their ‘abandoned’

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210 ISA GL 17116/9. Over the summer of 1948, Bernadotte attempted to propose a gradual return, beginning almost immediately, of Palestinians from Jaffa and Haifa. The Israelis summarily rejected his proposal, arguing that these very cities are “vulnerable point” and “centres of grave menace to Jewish security.”

211 UN A/RES/194 (III).
properties. Moreover, not only would a wave of returnees compete with the state’s project of mass Jewish immigration, but that it would undermine with Israel’s interest of racial, ethnic and religious homogeneity and produce a class of political undesirables and potential “fifth column.”212

The phrase “wishing to… live in peace” was left rather opaque bereft of a legal definition of “peaceful coexistence”: Could one possibly consider pre-1947 inter-communal interaction as “peaceful,” or does this refer to a utopian model of Jewish-Arab cohabitation? One should also interrogate the reference to “neighbours” here: would those be the pre-state Jews (old or new “Yishuv”) or perhaps those drafting the resolution already accounted for the waves of Jewish migration that was Israel’s primary concern?213

Indeed, Israel’s legal experts in the diplomatic service exploited this ambivalence, and from the beginning (even before UN resolution 194, but more vocally thereafter), insisted that the question of the “Arab refugees” is a matter to be resolved through a peace agreement between Israel and neighbouring Arab states, and that, in fact, the phrase was one in a series of qualifications to the right of return. In other words, repatriation, according to the official Israeli interpretation, was not an absolute and a-priori right of the Palestinians (usually referred to simply as “Arabs”); in this reading, a comprehensive peace agreement which acknowledges Israel as a Jewish state was a pre-requisite for any kind of arrangement in which refugees return to their homeland. The refugees therefore became pawns in a zero-sum diplomacy, where their

212 See, for instance, ISA GL 17116/13 and GL 17116/5.
fate and their basic right to return to their homes was a bargaining chip in a process that continues to take place over their heads between states; as non-state actors, they were rendered absolutely voiceless in this context. Ironically, one Israeli diplomat commented that the refugees are utterly sidelined by the Arab states, and claimed that

[Demanding the return of the refugees emanates from an intention to pressure Israel and extort political concessions, as well as the intention to just harass it. In any case it is quite obvious that the above demand does not reflect an intention to ease the suffering of the refugees, since any delay of the final solution only makes their situation more difficult.]

Numerous classified reports by various Israeli government agencies dwelled on the hardships experienced by refugees - less out of concern for their well-being, but rather in the context of assessing the stability of neighbouring regimes and their ability to control the refugee population. These reports repeatedly pointed out Arab states’ willful neglect of their refugee camps, an approach they detected was aimed at pressuring Israel and the international community towards repatriation. The reports’ charge of Arab governments’ callous lack of charity towards the Palestinian refugees deflected from Israel’s legal obligations to resolve the problem, of course. In another interpretative shift, the absence of Arab unity contrasted with a sense of global and intra-Israeli Jewish solidarity based on the ethno-religious homogeneity of the Israeli state.

Israel also exploited the vagueness of UN resolution 194’s reference to “governments or authorities responsible,” which did not specifically mention those responsible, nor did it

\[^{214}\text{ISA 20.4.1949, GL 17116/9.}\]
\[^{215}\text{It is also crucial to note that by and large, Arab states were also using the refugees as bargaining chips while at the same time maintaining the latter’s precarious existence as non-nationals bereft of civil rights. Even in Jordan, where official policies sought to absorb Palestinians, the Hashemite regime has continued to consider them a possible threat and resorted to careful surveillance and at times political repression. See, for instance, Abbas Shiblak, “Residency Status and Civil Rights of Palestinian Refugees in Arab Countries,” Journal of Palestine Studies, 25, no. 3 (spring, 1996), pp. 36-45.}\]
elaborate on the extent of their purported responsibility. This enabled Israeli delegates in the international arena to claim that, in fact, Israel bore no blame for the mass uprooting of Palestinians, and that rather it was Arab leaders who lured them away from their homes with false promises of ridding themselves of the colonial intruders. Moreover, often Israeli officials blamed refugees for their own plight, claiming they were “active participants or passive collaborators in the attack on Israel. They were vocal or silent partners in the scheme to ‘drive the Jews into the sea’. “

This type of argument echoes today as a justification for collective punishment against Palestinian populations, whether in the besieged Gaza strip or the West Bank. It was also used by the British to justify similar punitive measures against Palestinians and Jews, in retribution for acts of sabotage and subversion. In a speech before the UN general assembly (26.9.1949), famed diplomat and politician Abba Eban went even further, arguing not only should Israel not be held responsible for the human catastrophe of the uprooted, but that instead, it was an eternal victim of other, much more powerful states:

Having already taken from the shoulders of the international community the major burden of the refugee problem bequeathed by the racial persecution of Nazism, the government of Israel has now become the first government to make a tangible offer towards the solution of another humanitarian problem produced by the military action of other states.

The “tangible offer” Eban was referring to was Israel’s proposal to

\[\text{\footnotesize 216 Internally, though, confidential reports admitted the flight of the Palestinians was a “blessed” result of deliberate military action, expulsions, threats and ultimatums and “whisper campaigns.” One such report was authored in June 1948 by the Haganah intelligence unit (SHAI); Although the uprooting was framed as “migration” in the title, and the analysis spoke of the Arab population that “left” and the Bedouins that “wandered” (Hebrew Nadedu, as nomadic peoples do), the appendix listed every Palestinian village and town occupied by that point and the reason for the “migration” of their inhabitants. With rare candour, the report explicitly mentioned expulsions, ultimatums and “our action” as the direct cause of the mass flight of Palestinians, which stands in stark contrast with the narrative espoused and disseminated by government officials and state historians.}

\[\text{\footnotesize 217 ISA GL 17116/9.}\]
contribute to the United Nations relief fund, to reunite Arab families separated by war and also to undertake a specific commitment for facilitating a solution by a measure of repatriation to be carried out in the context of peaceful relations and as part of a regional programme of resettlement. 218

Other than the issue of family reunification (which, by September of 1949, was partly resolved through granting of entry permits or by illegal reentry into the country), the final point of this proposal deliberately remained vague. During previous discussions in the UN, when confronted with the question of repatriation, Eban denied that his government espoused an anti-return policy, and instead, reiterated an official position that demanded peace agreements as precondition for the possibility of a return. At the same time, Eban, as well as other formal representatives of the state, also referred to resolution 194 as the source for other solutions for the refugee problem. The resolution specifically mentioned the option of compensation, which officially, the Israeli government did not reject, but at the same time, demanded Arab states also compensate Israel for damages to or destruction of properties owned by its citizens during the military invasion (which was launched mid-May 1948). Although not spelled out, the resolution also referred to refugees not wishing to return; conversely, to follow the Israeli reading of the resolution, there were those Palestinians unwilling to live in peace with their neighbours. The subtext here is resettlement elsewhere in the Arab world as a ‘logical’ and ‘tangible’ solution for the majority of refugees, since all other conditions and qualifications (a comprehensive peace agreement, Israel’s security concerns, and the loss of Palestinian-Arab economic and social base) had not materialized or rendered repatriation impractical.

218 ISA GL 17116/9.
This reading of resolution 194 as qualified and conditioned was developed mainly for external audiences in the international arena, as outrage over the wretched living conditions of the refugees and a concomitant pressure to repatriate them grew by the end of 1948 and early 1949. Internally though, the tone and tenor of archived correspondence and reports was much more candid specifying official policies regarding the refugees.

These policies, and the ways in which they were publicly reflected (internally and externally), required their own rationalization. Externally, as I already discussed, the rationale for the anti-return policies ostensibly emanated from the Israeli government’s exploitation of the vagueness of UN resolution 194. Internally, however, it was a completely different story: as I will show, state agencies deployed particular assemblages of knowledge in order to (re)produce the logic of settler-colonial “elimination of the native.”

**Sociology at the Service of the State**

It is well-established in critical scholarship that the developments of modern social sciences (particularly history, anthropology and sociology) were dialectically linked to race-thinking and colonial governmentality, and to anti-humanism. Newly-occupied territories offered scholars along with adventurers, missionaries, and soldiers vast living laboratories. Uneven colonial relations, and Western military superiority allowed social scientists to make colonized peoples into scientific objects to be gazed at, studied and experimented upon. Scholarship was enabled by

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colonialism, as it deployed as another mechanism of population control, whether as a means to entrench colonial rule “out there” or as a tool of social engineering “back home” in the metropole. Human subjects were made intelligible, researchable and predictable, by way of classification into racial and ethnic categories, identified as distinct “cultures.” The cultural unit was deemed not only easily identifiable but more significantly – immutable. At the same time, these categories were positioned along a linear timeline of human progress, with an imagined European West as a historical referent and telos of modernity.220

The idea of European “cultural superiority” came to justify colonialism and some of Europe’s most anti-humanist foundations: the “native” as an unruly child in need of discipline; or, conversely, the “native” as a “savage” who has not yet overcome a brutish past and mastered the sublimation of violent urges.221 This space-time distribution of culture, modernity and progress was not necessarily stable. However, the idea of bounded cultural units ensured that the equality of the non-European would be indefinitely deferred.222


222 Uday Singh Mehta, Liberalism and Empire; a Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought (Chicago: University Press, 1999).
Under the auspices of Zionism, in particular in the pre-1948 era, social sciences in Palestine were developed along similar lines. Colonized, politically marginalized and racially marked communities served as the objects of study and, in turn, of government social engineering projects and experimentation. Palestinian-Arabs were also classified as a particular “culture,” the radical other of the dominant Jewish-Ashkenazi sector (from which social scientists and political leaders came); however, immediately following the Nakba, the social sciences were deployed not to argue for population control under the guise of colonial tutelage but rather, for the necessity of racial / ethnic homogeneity in the new state. In other words, “culture” was used to argue against the return of the refugees; In this logic, cultural boundaries were to serve as geopolitical borders, an impregnable “iron wall” between colonizer and colonized and between the uprooted and their places of origin.

A prime example of sociology in the service of the state is a Hebrew-language document compiled in 1949 by Tuvia Arazi. Not much is known about Arazi or his secretive ilk. He was trained as a scholar of Arabic and Islam trained at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the American University in Beirut and the Sorbonne in Paris. He became an undercover intelligence officer and served as a Hagana SHAI commander in Haifa during the expulsion of the Palestinian population. In 1949, he reinvented himself as one of Israel’s foremost diplomats, and

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started working for the Israeli UN delegate, Abba Eban.\(^{225}\) In the pre-state era, Arabists like Arazi cultivated networks of Palestinian informers and collaborators that facilitated land sales and provided information about particular locales, such as clan rivalries, number of trained and armed men etc.\(^{226}\) However, with the collapse of these networks during the Nakba, and the formation of the state security apparatus, these Arabists found themselves in a precarious position, fighting with academic orientalists over a sphere of influence in security matters, especially in regards to the maintenance of Israel’s border area. In the early years of the state, these borderlands, around the armistice lines, were rather fuzzy and permeable, and constantly shifted as Israel literally set facts on the ground. This struggle over their authority as “experts of Arab affairs” undergirded the tone and tenor of internal debates about the framing of the refugee problem. Arabists like Arazi (and Josh Palmon, Ben Gurion’s adviser on Arab affairs) argued that intimate knowledge about Arab societies is crucial for effective projection of state power in the borderlands and ultimately to control the Palestinian population on both sides of the armistice line.\(^{227}\) The document under scrutiny is a prime example of this approach, and the way this

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\(^{227}\) See Gil Eyal, *Disenchantment of the Orient*, chapter 4.
intimate knowledge should be deployed, according to the Arabists’ logic, to prevent the return of the refugees and cement the state’s power over the territories it captured.

Arazi’s document is comprised of what seems to be an “expert opinion” by “Eshel,” (a unit’s codename) on the sociological aspects of the refugee problem. Eshel’s analysis was bookended by Arazi: In the introduction, he charted the *apriori* conclusion of the study, which was the radical incommensurability of Arabs and Jews as the rationale for disallowing repatriation of the refugees. Arazi appended his own analysis to supplement Eshel’s report and reinforce its conclusions (and purpose): the “necessity” of resettling the Palestinians in Arab states rather than allow them to return.

Eshel’s sociological survey opened with its rationale; contrary to arguments provided by Israeli diplomats to UN officials and foreign delegates, economic or administrative aspects were secondary whereas the decisive element was sociological in nature. In other words, it was the fundamental cultural differences between Arabs and Jews that should dictate the solution to the refugee problem, namely, their resettlement in neighbouring countries. Using the colonial trope of temporal gap, the author deployed “culture” as a synonym for race: the “retardation” of the Arabs positions them in the “middle ages” (except for the Bedouins, who he identified with the “biblical era”). This “retardation” was not only reflected through pre-modern agricultural techniques and socio-economic formations (e.g. “feudalism”) which, in theory, could be overcome; rather, the “retardation” of the Arabs is inherent and unchangeable, because they obstinately refuse to accept modernity and the cultural superiority of the Jews, whom he called “the living ideal” (Hebrew, *Hamofet Hahai*). In fact, neither the proximity to the modern Jews nor actual attempts to modernize had made any impact on the Arab masses, according to the author, because of said ingrained “retardation.”
There is no need to describe the acute contrast between this ancient world, slumbering for many generations, and the new dynamic and creative world of the Jewish population, which brings together modern, scientific, mechanized and planned agriculture and vast industry, that aspires to reach the height of European and American achievements, espousing progressive social norms based on the principles of the liberty, dignity and equality of men, and a sovereign democratic government.\footnote{ISA GL 17114/9.}

But the real problem was not merely a matter of “temporal gap” between Jewish and Palestinian-Arab societies prior to 1948.\footnote{Lila Abu Lughod, “Zone of Theory in the Anthropology of the Arab World,” \textit{Annual Review of Anthropology} Vol. 18 (1989), pp. 267-306.} The problem was the type of “slumber” one cannot simply be awoken from, for instance, even if the new state had undertaken a forced modernization campaign targeting Arabs. The author made it clear that the acute differences between these two societies were inherent to their cultures, which he systematically conflates with race and ethnicity. The report deployed the standard prisms, or tropes, through which western-educated scholars have studied Middle Eastern societies: kinship, tribal society and religion (Islam) as organizing principles through which Middle Easterners could be made intelligible.\footnote{The “dual society model,” canonized by Eisenstadt in his \textit{Israeli Society} (New York: Basic Books, 1967), persists in Israeli scholarship to this day: For a critique, see Fayez Sayegh, “Zionist Colonialism in Palestine (1965),” \textit{Settler Colonial Studies} 2, 1 (2012), pp. 206-225; Elia Zureik, “The Economics of Dispossession: the Palestinians,” \textit{Third World Quarterly} Volume 5, Issue 4 (1983), pp. 775-790; Gershon Shafir, \textit{Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif: University of California Press, 1996); Nahla Zu’bi, “The Development of Capitalism in Palestine: The Expropriation of the Palestinian Direct Producers,” \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies} Vol. 13, No. 4 (Summer, 1984), pp. 88-109; Gabriel Piterberg, \textit{The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel} (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 63-64.} The absolute hold that Islamic leaders were said to have over the flock of believers not just turned them away from modernity (and incidentally, into rabid Jew-haters), but was considered irreversible, since, the author claimed, Muslims had been under the sway of religious “fanaticism” for so long, that religion had become “an acute boundary between populations.”
Tuvia Arazi’s notes expanded on the issue of gender inequality, stressing that the inferior position imposed on Muslim women rendered the gap between them and their Jewish counterparts much greater than between Jewish and Muslim males. The patriarchal nature of Muslim and Arab societies (Arazi conflated the two) also flows from the “feudal” sociopolitical order, in which the clan (Arabic, *hamula*), or rather the powerful males within it, determined the course of life for its individuals. On the other hand, Arazi argued, Arabs had a particular aversion to centralized political power structure and to the rule of law, and that, in fact, subversion made up an important component of their “character.”

The authors (Arazi and “Eshel”) agreed that for these glaring cultural differences the refugees should not be allowed to return, as any attempt to integrate these two radically distinct societies would end up with the regression of the Jews rather than the betterment and modernization of the Arabs. Their conclusion was that any attempts at reforming the Palestinians should be made elsewhere:

Under the conditions of accelerated rehabilitation in the State of Israel, there is no room for a return to the past; from here on out there is only one option of Israeli economy and of Israeli society and culture. Those retarded elements, incapable to march forward to the rhythm of progress are like shackles to the development of the state. And vice versa – if they wish to continue their social mores and their previous structure, they cannot do so within the new state. They must join their own people, with whom they share religion and language, in the nearby countries, where the social and cultural norms they hold onto are in effect.  

It is really this final paragraph of Eshel’s report that reveals the ways in which “culture” stood in for race and ethnicity. While the radical differences between Arabs and Jews were to be considered impregnable barriers and impediment for integration, the perceived sameness

231 ISA GL 17114/9.
between Palestinians and other Arabs naturalized their state as refugees, since they were now deemed as strangers to the Jewish state.

Interestingly, similar tropes were also deployed vis-à-vis the Jewish migrants from Arab and Muslim countries. In both cases the social sciences played a major role in the racialised knowledge production and dissemination for government agencies. However, while cultural differences and the temporal gap were used to argue against the (re)integration of Palestinian refugees, these same arguments were made in favour of a carefully calibrated integration of Mizrahi Jews into Israeli society. Under the watchful eyes of the hegemonic Ashkenazi elites, these non-European Jews were consistently treated as culturally inferior, and relegated to the geographical, economic and social peripheries of the state. Among the roles imposed on them was resettling areas bordering on the 1949 armistice lines and/or properties formerly owned and inhabited by Palestinians. Part of Israel’s “new normal,” then, was the creation of an “iron wall” between itself and the refugees, a physical barrier in the form of vast frontiers, manned by another marginalized Jewish group. It is this “wall” that the exiles in the Darwish excerpt I quoted earlier that hindered the exile’s longing gazes back, to the place from which they were forced to flee and forbidden to return.

I will now turn to the other component of this “iron wall,” and look at the way in which Israel expanded its imagination of the “new normal” to include the entire region.

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Planning the Resettlement of the Palestinian Refugees

As Benny Morris has established long ago, the work of the first and second Israeli transfer committees effectively blocked the return of the refugees and advocated for their resettlement elsewhere. But it took several more months before officials devised their grand scheme for the mass resettlement of Palestinians in the Arab world. The most detailed version of this scheme appears in an anonymous Hebrew-language document titled “Memo – On the Arrangement of the Arab Refugees,” preserved in its draft form inside an archival folder dated 1949. This 28-page document, typed with handwritten edits, was clearly a collective effort of a group of anonymous experts of diplomacy, history, demography and economics. The convergence of different forms of knowledge production brought into existence a document is remarkably attentive to details and offers lengthy quantitative deliberation. This memo, in its draft version, served as the source for countless other memos, correspondence and proposals produced by official delegates of Israel to address the question of the Palestinian refugees. The extensive

233 Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 185-191; Benny Morris, “Yosef Weitz and the Transfer Committees, 1948-9,” Middle Eastern Studies Vol. 22, No. 4 (October, 1986), pp. 522-561. Yosef Weitz, who was the dominant figure in these committees, used his official position as director of Land and Afforestation Department at the Jewish National Fund to demolish several Palestinian villages; Weitz also enjoyed direct access to the state’s leadership and counseled them on what he considered to be the best ways to prevent refugees from returning. For more on Weitz, see Tom Segev, 1949, the First Israelis (New York: The Free Press, 1986), pp. 29-30.

234 The authors of this document mentioned in passing that it had been three months of “truce,” and since fighting ceased by early November 1948, it is reasonable to assume that this report was written in the early months of 1949. However, since the text also mentions that the “rainy season is upon us” it is also entirely possible that the original typed version was produced towards the end of the second truce (July 18 – October 15) and that the handwritten edits were made a few months later, in 1949. ISA GL 17116/13

235 For instance, a long summary of the Hebrew-language memo was reproduced in English in a formal letter from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Pablo Azcarate, secretary Of the UN Conciliation Committee for Palestine, dated March 17, 1949 (ISA GL 17116/9); another 9-page English-language summary of the memorandum “on principles guiding the resettlement of the Arab refugees,” authored by Gershon Meron (Head of the economic department at the foreign ministry), submitted to the technical committee of the UN Conciliation Commission by the Israeli foreign ministry on 28 July 1949 (ISA GL 17116/5).
quantitative analysis of Palestinian properties, especially land, and the meticulous enumeration of refugees, accounting for current location based on the most updated sources were subsequently repeatedly quoted. The second half of the quantitative analysis is devoted wholly to proving, using existing scholarship on the economic sustainability of the region, that the most “rational” solution to the problem at hand (i.e. the plight of the refugees) and the key to the future prosperity of the Fertile Crescent lies at the resettlement of Palestinians in those areas already earmarked for development. The memo ends with a section that charts out the means and manner in which the resettlement scheme can and should be implemented.

Against considerable international pressure and the albeit vague UN resolution 194 to repatriate the refugees, Israel’s leaders felt compelled to produce an alternate solution to the refugee crisis, and present it in a manner that was the exact opposite of the ambiguity of the resolution. In fact, this memo was a blueprint for the grand scheme of Palestinian resettlement outside of Israel. The aura of scientific expertise lent the document’s proposals an academic incontrovertibility that its intended government readership readily considered, the report’s authority rested on its expertly “pragmaticism” and stood in sharp distinction to the UN resolution’s language of legality and rights. In other words, Israeli officials sought to shift a rights-based discourse to a possible/impossible binary. Their line of argument at the UN, the Lausanne conference or addressing the UNCCP revolved around precisely this binary: since it was “impossible” to allow the refugees to return to their homes (for reasons of security, economy, cultural incommensurability or because these homes were razed or resettled with Jewish migrants), then it stood to reason that the only feasible solution would be to rehabilitate them elsewhere, i.e. in neighbouring Arab states.
Similar to other documents, this memo on the “arrangement for the Arab Refugees” also revealed an internal contradiction its author(s) attempted to reconcile; on the one hand, they insisted that their topic is the “migration of the Arabs” which they compare with other “similar waves of migration.” On the other hand, however, while “migration” invokes a connotation of voluntary and organized movement, the authors were also compelled to admit that the issue at hand is the population in question is that of refugees, i.e. displaced, “out of place,” and bereft of permanent inhabitance and status.

Since the memo’s authors were not, ultimately, able to deny the existence of a large population of refugees along its borders, and because Palestinians were displaced from places that became Israeli territories, the document proceeded to chart the exceptionality of this particular population of refugees. First, this “mass migration” was the result of a war initiated by “the Arabs of the country [i.e. Palestine] and neighbouring countries” against the Jews, in order to overturn the UN partition resolution from 1947. The choice of language here, pitting several Arab populations against Jews, was meant to invoke the connotation of persecution and reinforce the claim that the war for Palestine was, in fact, one of the many (Arabs) against the few (the Jews), and thus weaken the Palestinian claim of expulsion and forced migration, and in this way, undermine the rights-based discourse around the refugees problem.

This subtle counter-claim can also be read through the section comparing the “migration of the Arabs” with other “similar” waves of “spontaneous migration of populations” in the first half of the 20th century: the Assyrians, Armenians, Greeks and Turks (through the Balkan War and in the aftermath of World War I), European Jews, and the disastrous partition of the South-Asian subcontinent. In all of those cases, argued the author(s), the majority persecuted a national, ethnic or religious minority through various means, from exclusionary laws to violent
expulsions. However, that was not what transpired in Palestine and resulted in the creation of the refugee problem:

The Jews did not persecute the Arabs for reasons of nationality, religion, race or economy, and did not force them to migrate. They did not declare war on the Arabs and following victory expelled them from their land. The Arabs who were the majority in the country are the ones who provoked the Jews, a minority, and attacked them. And the Arabs of neighbouring countries, driven to aggression through the incitement and propaganda by the leaders, are those who started the war on the Jews, intending to exterminate them. 236

On the contrary, continues the memo: Even though it was presumably the Arabs who were the aggressors, the Jews attempted to persuade their neighbours to stay and not abandon their villages. The authors mentioned Abu Qishq and Shaykh Muwannis, both located just north of Tel Aviv, on the opposite bank of the Awja River. Although, as the author(s) argued, the Hagana offered the locals protection, and despite cordial relations between the communities prior to 1948, the promise of protection failed to materialize when militant Zionists abducted a few Palestinian men and thus instilled panic among the remaining villagers, hastening their abrupt departure. 237 The officials who authored this report also failed to mention that this was the pattern in several other locations, and that this failure to protect Palestinians despite previous alliances, agreements and personal friendships resulted in a mass flight. Moreover, as the SHAI report from June 1948 revealed, spreading rumors about massacres and other acts of brutality was mostly the doing of the Zionist forces rather than the “Arab gangs,” as the author(s) charged. 238 That same report also stressed that, indeed, it was deliberate acts of expulsion and

236 ISA GL 17116/13.
237 See Morris, Refugee Problem, pp. 62, 81, 165.
238 See the SHAI report ISA GL 17116/9.
violence by the Zionist militias that forced the Palestinian population to flee from their homes.

Yet significantly, the anonymous experts’ document made the argument that eventually became widespread and ingrained in public discourse and consciousness:

The Jewish Yishuv, not its civilians, army or government, did not resort to acts of violence outside the ways of war against Arab civilians in order to force them to abandon their homes and lands. 239

Once they established Palestinian refugees’ exceptionality and turned the victim / perpetrator binary on its head - and thereby unsettled the rights-based discourse around the refugees – the memo’s author(s) proceeded to presenting the conundrum.

It is no wonder the heart and minds of refugees yearn to return to their homes and lands, and that they are willing to recognize the state of Israel and its government. Their disappointment from their brethren’s treatment of them, on the one hand, and the hope for a fast rehabilitation in the state of Israel on the other increase their will to return and retake hold of their properties. 240

However, they continued, the Palestinians’ property, whether real estate, machines and tools, livestock or furniture “vanished” – i.e. were looted by Zionists. Furthermore, once the Palestinians departed, properties were resettled with Jewish migrants who made them their home and developed attachment to it. The refugees had nowhere to return to, for the author(s) provided pseudo-scientific arguments to reason that the bond that the newcomers formed with the land was much stronger than that of the people who had resided there before they were forced to flee. At the same time, stressed the report, the living conditions of the refugees were unbearable, mostly because their flight was not planned to be long-term, and the Arab leaders, who enticed

239 ISA GL 17116/13.
240 ISA GL 17116/13.
them to leave – and were therefore responsible for their wretchedness – had abdicated their responsibilities.

Yet despite the utter lack of accountability, stressed the memo’s author(s), these Arab leaders had the chutzpa to demand that the refugees be allowed to return to live under Jewish rule, the very rule they had urged Palestinians to flee a year prior. This, for the author(s) was proof, that it was not the refugees’ welfare that concerned them, but rather Arab leaders wanted to “smear” Israel and the Jews as the aggressors and block any attempt by the state of Israel to reach a “fair” and direct agreement with the refugee population.

At this point, the author(s) recited transfer as the “preferred” and only “rational” solution to a problem “not of our making.” The idea of transfer, they stressed, was not a Zionist initiative, and in fact, its origins can be traced to British colonial officials. Since historical contingencies already brought it about, and the majority of Palestinians were forced to flee outside of Israeli-control territories, the main task of this report was to explain why resettling them beyond the borders of Palestine was a preferable solution and, moreover, to explicate its “why” and “how”.

As a racialized, uprooted other in a purportedly ethno-religiously homogeneous state, the Palestinians were automatically associated with disloyalty, treated as a potential Trojan horse.

241 Contrary to the claims of this memo, existing scholarship has demonstrated the Zionist leadership had been advocating for transfer since at least the 1930s, if not before. See, for instance Nur Masalha, Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of ‘Transfer’ in Zionist Political Thought (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992); Israel Shahak, “A History of the Concept of ‘Transfer’ in Zionism,” Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. 18, No. 3 (Spring, 1989), pp. 22-37; Patrick Wolfe, “Purchase by Other Means: The Palestine Nakba and Zionism’s Conquest of Economics,” Settler Colonial Studies 2, 1 (2012), pp. 133-171.
and a “demographic threat.” Indeed, such scare-mongering and stereotypical tropes have continued to circulate over the decades since, and in fact, have only become more widespread.\textsuperscript{242} Security and demographics become complementary. Palestinians were particularly marked as potential threats not only because of their “non-Jewishness” but also because their indigeneity and rootedness exposed the Jewish migrants’ foreignness, who, the document’s author(s) submitted, had to be prioritized.

The rest – indeed the bulk – of the document was a detailed analysis of the grand scheme that was at the heart of Israeli policy: the Palestinian resettlement in neighbouring Arab countries – a process which the author(s), ironically, considered a “return of a son to his country, his people and his tongue” – would only serve to benefit “the Arab people.” The scope of research requiring such an impressive knowledge production reflects meticulous data collection from various sources by professionals intimately familiar with the specific jargons involved. The report presented data collected from historical sources, geographical surveys, demographic census, macro- and micro-economics that are regionally specific. The team of experts that produced this analysis used particular knowledge, such as the price of chicken in Southern Iraq in order to come up with the amount of funds needed to resettle a family of Palestinian peasants

in sparsely populated areas in Iraq, Transjordan and Syria. The space dedicated to the incredibly extensive and detailed data and analysis indicates that Israeli policy makers intended to make the refugee issue into a financial problem that can be solved rationally, by experts and professionals.

The resettlement scheme attempted to divert attention from the human tragedy of forced uprooting to a simple issue of redistribution of people and resources. In other words: under the guise of a “humane solution,” enumerating Palestinians and monetizing their bare needs, this scheme is more about dehumanizing Palestinians and pathologizing their existence as refugees. Moreover, any attempt at rebuttal, would require equally detailed analysis and scientific authority.

The work that this resettlement scheme attempted to do was to create the “greater new normal.” The state succeeded in keeping the refugees outside its borders while transforming the country, erasing physical vestiges of Palestinian life imbuing the land with a new Jewish identity and history. But this document reveals a much more ambitious vision for the future dreamed up by the state. The Israeli fantasy of the new Middle East, I argue, is both transgressive and constitutive of the armistice lines, Israel’s de facto borders. The state was able to imagine itself as a power able and authorized to redistribute people and resources even beyond its jurisdiction. At the same time, the imaginary produced by the state reconstituted and solidified those same borders, making them impenetrable, keeping out those people whose indigineity the state deemed “undesirable” and “disruptive.” In this “fortress Israel,” porosity, then, is merely racially-selective one-way traffic. For the Palestinian refugees, the construction of the boundaries was
meant as a point of no return.

**Conclusion: The Afterlife of the Right of Return**

The question of the repatriation of the Palestinian refugees lingered through the next two decades in the international arena although gradually sidelined by other concerns. The UN General Assembly resolutions on the Palestinian refugees, although repeatedly citing resolution 194, increasingly stressed a preference for political stability in the region, even at the expense of repatriation. A typical example is resolution 393 of 1950, which focused more on the machination of refugee relief, but also added that it:

> Considers that, without prejudice to the provisions of paragraph 11 of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, the reintegration of the refugees into the economic life of the Near East, either by repatriation or resettlement, is essential in preparation for the time when international assistance is no longer available, and for the realization of conditions of peace and stability in the area.  

Two years after the assassination of Bernadotte and UN resolution 194, the General Assembly seemed to be increasingly interested in “peace and stability,” which, for all intents and purposes meant submission to what Patrick Wolfe called the “tides of history,” or the acceptance of violent expulsions as faits accomplis. The logic behind this approach was that it is easier, after all, to accept and complete a process than work to reverse it. The wording of the resolution also created parity between repatriation and resettlement, the latter favoured by Israel, as

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243 UN A/RES/393 (V), 2 December 1950.
possible solutions to the refugee problem, rather than renew previous pressures on the Zionist state to allow the refugees to return.

This shift marked Israel’s qualified success to redirect the discourse about the Palestinian refugees from rights to pragmatism. The following years saw more UN General Assembly resolutions that focused on the details of relief, the technicalities of refugee assistance, the allocation of funds and the workings of aid regimes. The Palestinian refugees and their plight almost completely disappeared from the international arena and became abstract pathologized masses in need of charity and rehabilitation. The stark exception was a resolution from 1969 that linked the fate of the Palestinian refugees from 1948, to those who suffered displacement and other human rights abuses in the wake of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the June 1967 War. This resolution also marked a departure from the ‘soft’ technical language of its predecessors and stressed that

Recognizing that the problem of the Palestine Arab refugees has arisen from the denial of their inalienable rights under the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. 245

Although the rest of the text directly refers to those Palestinian populations in the occupied territories of the 1967 war, the reference to the refugees as well as the opening line of the text, citing resolution 194 and subsequent resolutions, link the two Palestinian groups – the refugees from the Nakba and the newly colonial subjects in the West Bank and the Gaza strip, many of whom also belonged to the first category. This link becomes even more apparent upon close examination of the text. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.” 246

Indeed, advocates of the Palestinian right of return have been highlighting this Declaration, alongside UN resolution 194, as a means to shame Israel and reignite international pressure to repatriate refugees.

In the 49 years since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the discourse on Palestinians, in the UN as well as in the global activist arena, has shifted to focus on the plight of those Palestinians in the occupied territories, the settlements project and in the past decade – the separation barrier. In 1971, the UN General Assembly added the phrase “self determination” to the set of “inalienable rights” denied to “the people of Palestine” by the state of Israel. From that point on, “self determination” has become a salient feature not only in UN resolutions regarding Palestinians, but eventually also accepted by the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) in the Mid-1970s. By the 1990s, “self determination” came to be understood by some as a Palestinian state alongside Israel, while others, in particular the Israeli government headed by Yitzhak Rabin offered a more vague interpretation that eventually created the feeble Palestinian Authority. Either way, self-determination came to be treated as a rival, not supplement the right of return.

In the first decade after the Nakba, Israel’s political leadership repeatedly articulated its anxiety over the possibility of being forced to implement resolution 194 and repatriate the Palestinian refugees. Thus, for instance, one commentator stated that there is grave concern that the intention [of a recent speech by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles] is to a ‘compromise’ that would advocate the loss of part of Israel’s lands because of its reluctance, that would

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probably be exposed, to absorb a large and exorbitant number of refugees.\textsuperscript{248}

This anxiety of being “found out” remained an Israeli “open secret” as the state’s official delegates to the UN, in particular Abba Eban and Michael Comay, repeatedly stressed Israel’s commitment to achieve a viable peace agreement with its neighbours and settle all outstanding issues, including that of the refugees. Internally, politicians, journalists and other gatekeepers kept advocating for the “fait accompli” of Palestinian refugeeeness and insisted that the real solution necessitated convincing the West to accept their plan of resettlement.\textsuperscript{249} Finally, in 1961, Israel made the “open secret” public, when the Kenesset overwhelmingly supported a resolution that explicitly rejected any possibility of repatriation and advocated the resettlement of the refugees elsewhere. Foreign Minister Golda Mayer famously declared that “there is no refugee problem but a peace problem between Israel and the Arab states,” and that the latter had been using the refugees like weapon against Israel. Once that “peace problem” is resolved, so would the refugee issue, as Arab leaders would finally acknowledge resettlement as the only solution.\textsuperscript{250}

The consensus against the return of the refugees has been further consolidated since 1961 Kenesset resolution. In the absence of a meaningful political force or a party to challenge this consensus, the Palestinian right of return was sidelined for issues of civil rights within Israel, Israeli-Jewish-led movements that called for the withdrawal from the 1967 occupied territories

\textsuperscript{248} David Eshkol, “The Intention: Buying the Arabs,” \textit{Al Hamishmar} 8.6.1953, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{249} See, for instance, a detailed report about a speech by the Foreign Minister Moshe Sharet at the Kenesset, \textit{Davar} 24.1.1951, pp. 1-2. For a detailed history of the Israeli approach to preserve the status quo and prevent the return of the refugees, see Arik Ariel Leibovits, \textit{The Sanctity of the Status Quo: The Palestinian Refugees Issue in Israel Foreign Policy, 1948-1967} (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2015). [Hebrew]

\textsuperscript{250} \textit{Davar} 7.11.1961, pp. 1-2.
and, beginning in the 1980s, for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The question of return and the fate of refugees and internally displaced persons have resurfaced more forcefully in public after the second Intifada, as a largely urban-based younger generation of Palestinian activists, alongside growing participation by Israeli-Jews, began to stage public Nakba commemoration ceremonies and reassert their claim to return to the depopulated villages their parents and grandparents were displaced from.251 The next chapter will shift my discussion to the Jaffa refugees and their accounts of decades of coping with ongoing displacement and exile. Then the following chapters provide ethnographic explorations of this contemporary resurgence of the right of return among Palestinians and Jews in Israel, particularly in the city of Jaffa in the past decade.

Chapter Four: Itineraries of Exile

What we share, no matter where God has placed us on this wretched earth, is the same corner we cry in when we are forced to look into ourselves. Suddenly the name brands drop off, the refugee IDs fade. When we are shoved into it, made to look at ourselves and at our past; when our future is at our back and our past is made into an angle so acute that every family has the same points leading to the same doom; when we hold onto that corner because we do not know how to build ourselves anymore, sustain our dialect, live our traditions, and be free, it is clear: we are running out of space. (Norah al-Bireh)\(^252\)

For me, a return home is not merely the redemption of my family's history and our pain, nor merely the absolute requirement of acknowledgement and apology, but a radicalisation of thought that endeavours to always speak truth to power. (Susan Abulhawa)\(^253\)

In a 1998 essay, Palestinian scholars Salim Tamari and Rema Hamami shared their impressions of multiple visits to Jaffa, the “lost paradise” of their respective families’ histories. The “via dolorosa” of pilgrimage to the ancestral place is literally a source of pain, anger and frustration: Hamami’s aunt, upon recognizing her childhood home in Jabbaliyeh, exhibits an outburst of emotions and refuses to proceed inside; Beshara, Tamari’s son, expresses his anger and frustration at the ongoing displacement of the city’s remaining Palestinians; Tamari himself, however, responds with sarcasm when he meets Shlomo, a Moroccan Jewish man who settled in the city in the wake of the Nakba and the ethnic cleansing of Jaffa’s Palestinians. Although Shlomo inhabits a complex of liminal position of both a colonizer and, as a Mizrahi Jew, a subaltern, in the final analysis, for displaced Palestinians, his presence, despite his self-identification as an Arab, represents his status as a settler and theirs – as refugees. Tamari and


Hamami dub their repeated pilgrimages to Jaffa “virtual returns,” denoting the illusory aspect of the journey: their trip only has the temporary effect of return, in both the temporal and geographical sense, yet by the end of the visit, the phantasmagoria of return dissipates and the reality of refugeehood creeps back.

Tamari, who is Jaffa-born and Hamami, a second-generation yaffawiya, navigate through memories of urban past and present-day realities of rapid gentrification and de-Arabization. Both share a sense of “being burdened by Jaffa,” forced to carry it around, “weighed down by its past and [their] duty to that past.” The repeated “virtual return” pilgrimages are reminiscent of Sisyphean attempts to reconcile fantasies about a golden past and the pain of irrevocable loss.

This chapter scales back from the previous chapter’s national level to the urban level of inquiry, yet expands its scope: the discussion below follows the Jaffa refugees along their routes of displacement by way of a few exemplary life stories. These itineraries of exile are anything but predictable or foreseen; some of these routes represent spatial contraction that led refugees into decrepit camps and decades of confinement that produced the effect of “running out of space.” For others, exile offered opportunities and opened up, rather than foreclosed, potential for self refashioning and meaningful political engagement.

Hamami argues that there are no “former Jaffaites.” Since Palestinians carried their memories of the city everywhere they went, one remains a yaffawi. Over the decades, their descendants, who inherited this burden, have devised creative ways to redefine their relationship

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to Jaffa and find meaningful ways to call themselves *yafawiin*. Embarking on “virtual returns” as a form of emplacement, identity-endowing strategy is one of the salient ways of negotiating family histories of trauma and displacement.

The texts I chose express the transformations over time of how former Jaffa residents dealt with their expulsion and exile and the past visions for the future they project. From the early clandestine infiltrations and isolated acts of revenge against Israeli soldiers and settlers, to organized military resistance against complicit Arab regimes and the production of revolutionary consciousness, the Palestinian authors on view in this chapter participated in one form or another in what Walter Benjamin called “the tradition of the oppressed.” The textual interlocutors – including Ghassan Kanafani’s fictional protagonists – will help me chart the contingent links between their itineraries of exile and forms of self-(re)constitution as political agents. The final section highlights what is new in contemporary expressions of resistance. Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with Jaffa refugees in Nablus-area refugee camps and second-generation Palestinian exiles, I explore how these refugees envisioned their future Palestine, carved out their own horizons of expectations and framed hope (or lack thereof) in relation to the foregone tradition.

**Making Refugees into Revolutionaries**

For Palestinians driven out of their homeland, refugeehood meant finding themselves suddenly cut off from their sources of livelihood and from each other. Over a short period of time, Palestinians turned from a large majority into smaller and vulnerable minority groups dispersed in Arab states

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255 See Tamari and Hamami, p. 67.
bordering with Palestine. Moreover, as most refugees used to be peasants who lived off the land, this sudden transformation into refugees also meant a shift from being producers into international charity recipients, residing in hastily erected tent camps, where Palestinians relied on rations based on calculated “caloric intake,” and subjected to “techniques of discipline and control” such as enumeration and classification as refugees. Palestinian refugees were then forced to endure the trauma of expulsion, the separation from extended family members, friends and neighbours, and the humiliation of their new refugee status, in addition to the harsh conditions of camp life. These camps became “spaces of bereavement,” sites of creative coping with their new situation and places that enacted new collective identities through spatial memorialization of the lost homeland.


258 Peteet, *Landscapes*, p. 95.
Even before the end of hostilities in the fall of 1948, and throughout the 1950s, Israeli authorities repeatedly complained about the problem of “infiltrators,” individual Palestinians who transgressed the 1949 armistice lines into Israel for various reasons: refugees who wished to harvest their crops and reclaim possessions, visit relatives who remained “inside” and return to their village irrespective of the diplomatic stalemate. Several of these cases also involved *fidayeen*, individual or small groups of fighters aiming to exact revenge, sabotage Israeli military installations or newly created border settlements, often on the lands of depopulated villages.\(^{259}\)

The 1950s saw the rebirth of resistance first in the creation of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM), where George Habash (later PFLP leader) and Nayef Hawatma (later DFLP leader) were prominent members. The ANM focused its activities on liberating the corrupt Arab regimes although they emphasized commitment to the liberation of Palestine. Mobilized by their motto “unity, liberation and vengeance,” the movement’s Nasserist commitment dictated its pan-Arabist politics and deferral of armed struggle against the Israelis, with the a few minor exceptions of support for guerilla raids along the Jordanian and Egyptian borders in the late 1950s. The birth of the ANM’s “Palestinian branch” that was highly critical of the movement’s decentering of Palestine and pushed for more towards direct confrontation with the Israelis did not result in a shift towards armed struggle, and eventually brought about the demise of the ANM and the rise of Fatah after 1967, which I will discuss below.260

**Literature of resistance**

The spectacular Arab defeat in the June 1967 war is known as *al-Naksa*, “the setback” in Arabic. After the conquest of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the Israeli government decided to encourage Israeli tourism in the Occupied Territories.261 For many Palestinian refugees and IDPs, this too was a moment of “opening up”: historical Palestine became one

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again, even if under colonial rule, and the 1949 armistice lines were briefly dissolved, offering the promise of spatial expansion. While for Israelis, the 1967 occupation meant physical and territorial expansion, which soon after morphed into the settlements projects, for Palestinians, and for those inside Israel, 1967 represented brief spatial release from the confines of the state and reconnecting with Arab world. Thus, families were thus reunited, friendships rekindled, and many Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza seized the opportunity to cross back into the territories they were forced to leave 19 years earlier and visit their lost homes.

Many Palestinian refugees exiled to the West Bank were eager to head into their places of origin, often retracing the same routes they traveled during the expulsion, except this time, in reverse. These visits, however, were rarely joyous occasions; rather they were fraught with tensions, between refugees and other Palestinians who remained, and between exiles to those inhabiting their homes. Two such bittersweet encounters are at the core of Ghassan Kanafani’s short story *Returning to Haifa* (originally published 1969). Born in Acre and raised in Jaffa, Kanafani (1936-1972) was forced into exile with his family, initially relocating to Damascus, where he was certified as a teacher. His political commitment to ANM and personal affinity with George Habash forced him to abandon Syria for the gulf, and finally for Beirut in Lebanon, where he devoted his time to editing and writing in pan-Arabist and leftist newspapers. From 1969 until his assassination, Kanafani edited PFLP’s weekly magazine *al-Hadaf* (Arabic, the target) in addition to publishing his works of fiction.

*Returning to Haifa* is made up of two separate but interconnected subplots. The long one occurs in post-1967 Haifa: Said and Safiyya, a Palestinian couple who exiled from Haifa to a refugee camp near Ramallah, set out in search of their Halisa home and long-lost infant son, Khaldun. In contrast to the day they left Haifa, where they were literally swept up in the crowd,
“propelled toward the port”\textsuperscript{262}, ostensibly devoid of agency, this time, Said and Safiyya made the decision to make the trip. Moreover, while 19 years earlier they seemed to have no choice but to follow the masses into exile, the couple made the return trip by car, the steering wheel in Said’s hands symbolizes agency and mastery over his itinerary, and as I demonstrate below – his fate.

Said and Safiyya’s fictional ‘return’ to Haifa forces them to confront the demons of their past, in particular, abandoning their infant son Khaled, their home and city. The pangs of guilt they both feel run throughout the story. Said finally articulated his guilt over the abandonment in the narrative lead-up to a peripeteic moment of meeting Dov / Khaled, who returned home wearing his IDF fatigues:

> We shouldn’t have left anything. Not Khaled, not the house, not Haifa!... I felt as though I knew Haifa, yet the city refused to acknowledge me. I had the same feeling in this house, here, in our house. Can you imagine that? That our house would refuse to acknowledge us? Don’t you feel it? I believe the same thing will happen with Khaled. You’ll see\textsuperscript{263}

The commensurability of son, house and city that Said imagined, led him to predict that just as his house and Haifa ‘disowned’ him, so would his flesh and blood, as indeed happened next. Yet only after Khaled/Dov rejected his birth parents and scoffed at what he perceived as the weakness that had precipitated their abandonment, it dawned on Said that homeland does not equal son, house and city. These, for Palestinians who lived through the Nakba, are the things of the past.

Khaled’s disavowal of his parents and of Palestinianess stands in stark contrast to their other son Khalid whom Said had forbidden to join the resistance for fear of losing him, too;


\textsuperscript{263} Kanafani, p. 173
Khalid’s sense of belonging was less locked up in the past than that of his parents. For two decades the painful memories of happy days before the Nakba had impeded political action and produced only despair, mainly because they created a sense of pastness – that which has gone by, lost and irreversible. Moreover, what remained of it disavows the refugee couple, claiming they no longer belong in it. This is where the homeland-as-past had failed refugees, and in fact, reproduced them as stateless anomalies. Since refugees do not fit into existing spatial arrangement of the world as neatly bounded nation-states, they are also outside of the present. With both past and present denied to them, the only salvation lies in the future. Khalid, the son who had never experienced life in Haifa before expulsion and had never met his older brother, and therefore free from the burden of nostalgia, was the first one to understand the role of past as a mobilizing force: Palestinians should emancipate themselves from the stranglehold of nostalgic longings, which only keep them stuck in the past. Instead, memory of injustice should inform their struggle and propel them towards action. Longing for the status quo ante, which will never be restored, and wallowing in self-pity ought to be replaced with new identities that are rooted in the future, in the process of becoming. Kanafani’s Khalid therefore represents the post-Nakba generation of Palestinians who realize that the actual return could only occur after Palestinians take up arms, collectively fight for their homeland, and thereby take ownership of the past in order to remake their futures.

But there is another layer to this realization. Even Khaldun/Dov, who is entirely lost to his parents, intuitively understands this: “man is a cause.” Kanafani puts these words into the mouth of someone who is Palestinian by birth but Jewish-Israeli by choice. In other words, one’s

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264 Kanafani, p. 181. Arabic: al-insan qadiyya. Insan normally means human rather than the gendered “man; “qadiyya” can also be translated as “matter” or “issue” which further clarify the meaning of this statement.
identity is not determined by birth, but by one’s upbringing and more importantly – his (or her) actions. Khaldun makes a conscious decision not to return to a past he had never known and that his birth parents were holding onto; he becomes Dov, because he was brought up as an Israeli, by Israeli parents, in Haifa, a city that was mostly de-Arabized and remade an Israeli space.

The protagonist of the secondary plotline in “Returning to Haifa” is also from Jil Filastin, the generation that experienced the expulsion. Faris al-Lubda, the couple’s neighbour in Ramallah, Said informed his wife, had visited his old house in Jaffa just a week prior. Just like them, Faris arrived to his city of youth in a rental car, almost twenty years after he was forced out by sea. Kanafani knows this area from his own childhood and provides a detailed description of the whereabouts of the house in Ajami, the very quarter that had become the “Arab ghetto” after the Nakba, as we have seen in chapter two, and the site we will return to in chapter seven. Though born in Acre (‘Akka) Kanafani was raised and educated in the modern Jabbaliyeh quarter in Jaffa, and attended the Frères missionary school he mentions in the story, located just across from the former French hospital and the old city.265

The encounter at the core of Faris’ story is between the exiled owner of the house, and another Palestinian from Jaffa who is internally displaced. Unlike Faris, this man is originally from Manshiyyeh, the northern Jaffa neighborhood which, as we have seen in chapter one, was shelled by the Irgun in the spring of 1948 in the opening salvo of the Zionist conquest of Jaffa. This Palestinian, who is never named, had not left the city. He remained and bore the brunt of the

Israeli occupation: made homeless after the destruction of Manshiyyeh, he fled, only to be incarcerated in Israel’s prison camps and return, upon his release, to Jaffa, leasing an absentee’s property from the state. 266 When the door opens and Faris expects to see an Israeli, he goes off in a pre-rehearsed tangent, staking his claim to the house and stating he would return to repossess it “by the power of the sword.” 267 But as it turns out, the man who opened the door was a Palestinian. The current occupants and the house seem to maintain a symbiotic relationship: it is unclear whether the family has taken over the place and made itself at home, or if it is the house that possesses the family. Kanafani makes this suggestion in several ways: for instance, the man had left the house virtually untouched for 19 years since its original owners fled the city; The framed photo of Badr, Faris’ martyred brother remained hanging in the living room and finally, the occupant’s son was named after Badr, a practice that is usually reserved to family members of the deceased, especially if the circumstances of his death are considered honorable ones.

In fact, Badr al-Lubda had become part of the occupant’s family, and when Faris removes the photograph, it immediately leaves a “pale, meaningless rectangle, a disturbing void” not just on the wall, but in the lives of the family who embraced it as their own, as the occupant himself admitted. 268 The ghost of Badr may have possessed his former family home, but its absence, after Faris removes the photo, only produced anguish and anxiety rather than relief, as expected from exorcism, when one rids oneself of ghostly possession. In this case, Badr has not only become an integral part of the family, the house and Jaffa, but the memory of his martyrdom

267 Kanafani, p. 174.
268 Kanafani, p. 177.
serves a source of honour and pride for Palestinians, a symbol and marker of the way to liberation and return. This is, perhaps, what the occupant meant when he identified the photograph as a “bridge” between the refugees and “us,” those who remained in place. Faris realized that collective armed struggle and the will to self-sacrifice are necessary to deliver Palestinian refugees from the humiliation of exile, return to the homeland and earn the right to reclaim past possessions like the photo of his martyred brother.

Returning to Haifa has often been read as a literary piece seeking to gauge the transformative role of the 1967 June war on Palestinian political consciousness and as a didactic piece, seeking to educate the readers and encourage them to take up arms. But in addition, the fraught encounters between the Palestinian returnees and the occupants of their former homes, whether Israeli or Palestinians, highlight potential problems pertinent to the implementation of the right of return. I will return to the very question of the “second occupant” in chapter seven.

While Kanafani’s text may imply that the Palestinian revolutionary turn was abrupt, an unexpected result of the 1967 war, scholars have demonstrated that the transformation of political consciousness and action was in fact much more gradual, as Palestinians gravitated towards forming their own resistance movement in the second half of the 1960s long before the Naksa. The “setback” of June 1967 certainly demonstrated to Palestinians that the Arab regimes were not their best bet if they wish to return to Palestine and end Israeli colonial rule. The revolutionary discourse of Nasser and the Ba’thists in Iraq and Syria amounted to an astounding defeat and a retreat from the promise of Arab socialism and national liberation. Moreover,

269 Muhammad Siddiq, Man is a Cause: Political Consciousness and the Fiction of Ghassan Kanafani (Seattle: University of Washington, 1984), p. 49.
politically, the 1967 Arab defeat meant that these regimes could no longer restrain the Palestinians.\textsuperscript{270}

A key event in the transformation of Palestinian political consciousness was the battle of Karameh on 21 March, 1968, which began as an Israeli cross-border reprisal for continuous PLO operations launched from Jordanian territory. On a tactical level, Israel indeed achieved its goal: the destruction of the Karameh PLO guerilla training camp. But politically, the battle boosted the aura of the PLO and its ability to do what the regular Arab armies failed to achieve less than a year prior: hold its own against the IDF.\textsuperscript{271} The battle also signaled a diplomatic defeat for Israel in the international arena, so much so, that the American ambassador was quoted as saying that in historical perspective, twenty years down the line, the battle of Karameh will be remembered as the beginning of the end for Israel.\textsuperscript{272} Yasser Arafat, the leader of Fateh, concluded:

What we have done is to make the world...realize that the Palestinian is no longer refugee number so and so, but the member of a people who hold the reins of their own destiny and are in a position to determine their own future. \textsuperscript{273}


\textsuperscript{273} Quoted in Hirst, \textit{The Gun and the Olive Branch}, p. 299
Palestinian revolutionary consciousness that emerged at Karameh began to shift to Lebanon where students, trade unions and leftist parties put pressure on the government to facilitate armed struggle from Lebanese soil. The state’s security apparatus had clamped down on political mobilization in the preceding years. A popular protest march on 23 April 1969 was an expression of the profound alienation of Palestinians. Triggered by a series of military assaults by the Lebanese army against the Palestinian guerilla fighters in southern Lebanon it ended the Lebanese military “reign of terror” and brought about self-administration in all the Palestinian refugees camps in Lebanon.\footnote{The march of 23 April 1969 was a response of camp Palestinians to See Rosemary Sayigh, \textit{The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries} (London and New York: Zed Books, 1979), pp. 164-173.} In subsequent years, the Lebanese camps became sites where, in Arafat’s dictum, Palestinian refugees aspired to “hold the reins of their own destiny.” As Julie Peteet has argued, these camps transformed from places that secured bare life into landscapes of hope.\footnote{Julie Peteet, \textit{Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).} This shift from below came to be enshrined in the Cairo Accord of November 1969 in which the Lebanese government bowed to Egyptian government pressure to allow southern Lebanon to become a launching pad for Palestinian armed struggle against Israel.\footnote{Farid el-Khazen, \textit{The Breakdown of the State of Lebanon, 1967-1976} (London: I. B. Tauris and the Centre for Lebanese Studies, 2000).}

This combination of the liberation of the camps and Nasser’s diplomatic pressure encouraged Palestinians and the wider Arab left to imagine their revolution as a project of world-making, refashioning selves from refugees to fighters, and in the process, recreating the image of the homeland as a horizon of liberatory possibilities, for the collective as well as the individual. In this context, Kanafani’s “man is the cause” is more than just didactic aphorism – it invokes the
Palestinian revolutionary project as an empowering alternative to decades of dependency on international aid to Israel’s delegitimization of the refugees’ right of return and the denial of Palestinian national identity. Eventually, Israel came to acknowledge the existence of a Palestinian people, albeit as a “problem.” The right of return, however, remains a taboo in Israeli public discourse. This dissertation aspires to open up the possibility to imagine Palestinian return as a practice.

The remainder of this chapter will follow the ways Palestinians from Jaffa grappled with exile on a spectrum between refugeehood and nostalgia for the past and a future-oriented self-fashioning project. Starting from a shared point of departure, the Nakba, the three autobiographies I selected are by a resistance leader, a public intellectual, and a human rights lawyer. They illuminate the range of responses to the expulsion among first- and second-generation refugees. Next, I will present the life histories of three refugees who also belong to these two generations: I met two of them during my fieldwork in Palestine, while the third interlocutor was born and raised in the diaspora. Chapter seven will introduce third generation perspectives on the practicability of the return of Palestinians

From a Revolutionary to a Diplomat

When the French journalist Eric Rouleau recorded the autobiography of Abu Iyad (nom de guerre of Salah Khalaf, 1933-1991) in 1978, Arafat’s PLO was engaged in a public diplomacy offensive and assumed a role in international politics amidst the intense fighting during the Lebanese Civil War. Abu Iyad’s account of himself charts the transformation from a refugee,

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277 In fact, by 1978, the PLO was already embroiled in both internal and external crises, with dissenting factions (especially the “rejection front”) challenging the Fatah’s leadership as a result of its shift to diplomacy and political compromise, while Egypt was in the midst of seeking a separate peace agreement with Israel, freezing out the
to revolutionary and finally – a reluctant politician, as the initial romanticism of revolution faded for what he, in hindsight, considered as certain necessities of reality. This is also a story of fading hope: in 1958 Khalaf and his comrades (including Yasser Arafat and Khalil al-Wazir, known as Abu Jihad) founded Fatah as a clandestine liberation avant-garde. By the time of the book’s original publication, Fatah had become the dominant group in the PLO that morphed into a heavily bureaucratized organization with a global diplomatic presence. In this process, the political imaginary it offered had also been transformed from Fatah’s vision of one democratic state that included Jews, Muslims and Christians, to accepting what became known as the “two states solution,” which implied a de-facto recognition of the Israeli state and UN resolution 242. For Abu Iyad, becoming a revolutionary entailed an opening up of the horizon of possibilities, imagining ways of making the impossible – possible; not only did he envision the path to national liberation for the Palestinians, but he also advocated, and indeed institutionalized with the PLO, a working democratic structure, which was unique in its regional context. However, the mid-1970s mark the significant shrinking of the horizon of possibility to clearly demarcate the possible from the impossible, as the PLO was institutionalizing and promoted


279 Resolution 242 of 22 November 1967 refers to the aftermath of the 1967 June war and the Israeli military conquest of the West Bank, the Gaza strip and the Golan Heights. Among other stipulations, the resolution also requires the “withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.” (UN S/RES/242 (1967)) This unfortunate wording has produced conflicting interpretations, the minimalist of those, espoused by Israel, claims that the resolution does not, in fact, require Israel withdraws from all the territories it had occupied. See, for instance, Shabtai Rosenne, “On Multi-Lingual Interpretation – UN Security Council Resolution 242,” The Israel Law Review Vol. 6, Issue 3 (1971), pp. 360-366. The maximalist interpretation was espoused by Arab states but rejected by the PLO.
what its leaders, including Abu Iyad, believed to be a “pragmatic” solution, even though they were challenged by Arafat’s rivals.

Khalaf was old enough to remember life before the expulsion. He was a boy of 15 when the collapse of the city of Jaffa prompted his father to leave for Gaza on a makeshift boat. In his autobiography Khalaf stresses that he had multiple social relations with Jews: his father, who owned a small shop in Hakarmel market, which back then was partially within Jaffa’s municipal boundaries, had several Jewish customers and suppliers. Young Salah, who used to relieve his father at the store, also tended to these customers and learned to converse in Hebrew. Hakarmel market area and its surroundings – Manshiyyeh and Kerem Hateymanim, the Yemenite quarter, were contact zones, where Jews and Palestinians interacted daily: some were neighbours, sharing crowded residential neighbourhoods, while others conducted business, selling foodstuff and household wares. Khalaf also recalls that he and a few of his Palestinian friends used to socialize with Jewish boys and teens from his immediate area, since most of them were Yemenis with whom he conversed in Arabic. These forms of everyday sociability started to sour when, shortly after the end of World War II, Khalaf was accused of assaulting Jewish boys even though he claims it was him who was attacked by an angry Jewish mob in Tel Aviv. His former Jewish friends bore false witness against him, leading to his conviction. The adult Abu Iyad, reflecting

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280 One Palestinian woman I interviewed in Jaffa recalls her next door neighbour, a girl her age, who was, until 1948, her best friend. The two in fact shared the same first name, ‘Ayisha in Arabic and Haya Hebrew, both means life; A Jewish couple that still resides in the area recall Palestinian men and women selling eggs and milk in their neighbourhood; Yet another Jewish man was born and raised in a house in the midst of Manshiyyeh, across from the local police station and the famed Baydas mansion. The neighbourhood was referred to in official British and Hebrew correspondence as “Karton,” in northern Manshiyyeh, and according to a 1945 census, it was home to 6,000 Jews and 3,000 Muslims. See Or Aleksandrowicz, “Paper Boundaries: The Erased History of Neveh Shalom,” Theory and Criticism, Vol. 41, Summer 2003, pp. 181-182. [Hebrew]

on that transformative experience, directs his sense of betrayal not at the Jews, but at the Zionist movement that drove a wedge between him and his former friends, and by extension, between Arabs and Jews. As the title of his autobiography suggests, Abu Iyad, a Palestinian leader, projected his personal story onto the collective narrative of national struggle: if Zionism, an alien colonial movement, poisoned social relations in Palestine and produced sectarian schism between Jews and their fellow Muslim and Christian countrymen, then liberation means the elimination of Zionism and creation of a democratic state for all.

At the moment of inception, liberation struggle was conceptualized first and foremost as an armed struggle, which would override the “sterile verbosity” of political ideologies and parties, and instead work as a “catalyst of unity,” critical under the conditions of dispersal and marginalization in the context of the international political arena. Armed struggle was thus not just a major component of the organization, not even merely a liberation tactics; it was perceived in existential terms. Participating in armed anticolonial struggle was to exert Palestinianness against the consistent Israeli denial of its existence, and against Israel’s attempt to reduce Palestinians to a “refugee problem,” to be settled vis-à-vis neighbouring Arab states. This new

284 Ibid, p. 139. The notion of the one democratic state was the topic of a heated debate within the resistance movement, see Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within, Towards an Independent Palestinian State* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1988), pp. 34-42. Thompson argued that his claim that Jews can be persuaded away from Zionism points to his naiveté and perhaps even ignorance about the collective psyche of Israeli society. See Thompson, *Justice Interrupted*.
286 I discussed Israel’s insistence of negotiating the fate of the refugees over the heads of Palestinians in chapter two; For further discussion of the existential dimension of armed struggle see Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, pp. 88-91; On armed struggle as a liberation strategy and its shortcomings, see Jamal R. Nassar, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: From Armed Struggle to the Declaration of Independence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), pp. 98-106; Yasser Arafat addressed the link between the revolution and Israeli denial: “PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat (Abu
phase of the resistance movement broke with the leadership of notable families, that characterized the pre-Nakba nationalist movement; at the same time, the rise of Fatah throughout the 1960s also signified a new way of collective action that differed from previous armed formations of the 1950s, that were more individualistic and clandestine in nature, and from the tutelage of Arab states that stifled Palestinian armed struggle and subordinated its cause to their agenda. For Abu Iyad the founding of Fatah in 1958 was a watershed in Palestinian history, an expression of an essential Palestinian identity and a sense of collectivity that at that moment were not attached to a nation-state, and that moreover, encompassed a population dispersed across multiple borders. Revolutionary violence was to provide Palestinians, both refugees and those under Israeli occupation, forward-looking means of expressing a new form of identity, one that is bound to their places of origin but also forges horizontal forms of attachment and belonging.

The revolutionary moment of post-1967 also represented potentiality: in 1968, Abu Iyad publicly spoke about Fatah’s vision for a democratic state in all of historic Palestine, which would be shared by Muslims, Jews and Christians, just like Jaffa had before Zionism. He acknowledged this vision necessitated “a great deal of courage and boldness” to overcome the victimhood state of mind and open up utopian imagining that reject the political “here and now” for a possible “there and then.” That same year, as Fatah took over the leadership of the PLO, the Palestine National Council (PNC) voted on and ratified its new charter.

287 Abu Iyad, My Home, p. 139.
However, the 1968 Palestinian National Charter is rife with its own problems and contradictions. For instance, its drafters constantly conflated Palestinianness and Arabness, stressing “Arab unity” as a precondition for the liberation of Palestine, and attempting to define Palestinianness through ethnic forms of belonging, i.e. being Arabs. This slippage, which on some levels excluded Jews, Armenians and other non-Arab people who reside in Palestine, and its potential conflict with the notion of the “democratic state” was also picked up by the PLO’s Israeli detractors as well as internally within the Palestinian resistance movement. These contradictions and tensions demonstrate the precarity of imagined futures: that attempting to envision a future that overcomes the present can produce its own internal fissures and contradictions. At the same time, it also points to the fluid and contingent nature of such a project. Thus imagined futures can also transform over time, with the change of circumstances.

Such pivotal transformation occurred in the immediate aftermath of the cataclysmic events of September 1970 in Jordan, in what some in Fatah aptly identified as a “point of no return” (borrowing from Frantz Fanon) in the history of Palestinian armed struggle. With their prestige and confidence boosted following the battle of Karameh, Palestinian resistance fighters

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289 For an Israeli-Zionist critique of the Palestinian conceptualization of the democratic state see Y. Harkabi, “The Meaning of ‘A Democratic Palestinian State,” in The Israel-Arab Reader, pp. 182-194; Harkabi also documented internal disputes within the Palestinian fedayeen organizations regarding the question of the future state’s Arabness vis-à-vis a large Jewish minority and its implications for the participation of Jews in the Palestinian resistance movement which was advocated, among others, by Abu Iyad. For the internal debate as for the role of the Jews in the liberation movement and especially in the future state see Gresh, The Struggle Within, pp. 30-52.

were on a collision course with King Hussayn of Jordan, whose authority was challenged by the PLO and their massive social and military base in the country. In a successful bid to reassert his sovereignty, Hussayn’s army attacked and crushed the Palestinian resistance, with thousands of civilian casualties as “collateral damage.” What became to be known as “Black September” resulted in the regrouping of the *fidayin* in Lebanon and the beginning of a new phase in the armed struggle against Israel. The PLO’s spectacular defeat, however, only enhanced the international support for the Palestinian cause among members of the non-aligned movement, anticolonial forces in Africa, Asia and Latin America and non-state actors, such as the Association of Arab-American University Graduates, where Hisham Sharabi, whose life history will be discussed below, was one of the leading luminaries. Ultimately, the ousting of the PLO fighters from Jordan resulted in Palestinians becoming “a political fact,” recasting the resistance as an important regional player that required political engagement.

The 1973 October War shifted the power relations and diplomatic dynamics in the Middle East. With renewed confidence after relative military successes, the Sadat regime in Egypt and the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan were leaning towards direct negotiations with Israel, as US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger attempted to lure them away from the USSR with renewed confidence after relative military successes, the Sadat regime in Egypt and the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan were leaning towards direct negotiations with Israel, as US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger attempted to lure them away from the USSR

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291 Abu Iyad, who was hiding among civilian population in Amman with other PLO figures, was captured and interrogated by the Jordanian security apparatus before being allowed to depart.

292 Not only did Western states such as the UK and France acknowledge the importance of the PLO, but there were even voices within the US security establishment that proposed to incorporate the more “moderate” factions (notably Fatah) in the Middle East political process and encourage them to accept a negotiated solution to the Palestine problem, be it a “ministate” in the West Bank or a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. However, Kissinger was loathe to engage the PLO and opted instead for the maintenance of the status quo vis-à-vis Jordan and singling out Israel as US’ closest ally in the region and the recipient of the most substantial military aid. See William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict after 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005 [1993]).

293 Specifically, Egypt’s willingness to negotiate with Israel, the 1975 Sinai accords which eventually led to the Camp David peace treaty of 1978.
and into the American fold. Kissinger’s containment strategy aspired to isolate the PLO from its potential allies in the Arab world, and shut out the Palestinians from his planned Geneva peace conference. This specter of marginalization of the PLO was looming just the organization enjoyed respectability in and through the UN, reflected through the acceptance of the PLO in observer capacity, Arafat’s first formal address to the general assembly in 1974 and General Assembly resolutions 3236 (22 November, 1974) and 3379 (10 November 1975). These diplomatic successes of the Palestinian resistance movement were, in hindsight, effects of the non-aligned movement and its third-worldist articulations in the UN, which Kissinger attempted, and, as the 1970s came to a close, succeeded to foreclose.

A seasoned and perceptible leader, Abu Iyad sought to reconstitute the Palestinian revolution in light of what he thought was most feasible to achieve rather than the radical pursuit of a maximalist vision. In his words, the PLO, and in particular the Fatah, began focusing on what it perceived as “pragmatic” or “realistic,” in order to assure the longevity of the Palestinian liberatory project. In this context, Abu Iyad promoted the concept of a Palestinian “ministate” on any part of Palestine to be liberated, ideally by diplomatic means. This was the emergence of

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295 Resolution 3236 “reaffirms the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine,” including their right to national independence and stressing their right to return, which, as I argued in chapter three, had been largely sidelined since 1967. See the text of the resolution A/RES/3236. Resolution 3379 determined that “Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” See A/RES/3379. This resolution was revoked in 1991 as a pre-condition for the Israeli participation in the Madrid peace conference of that year.


297 See, for instance, Abu Iyad, p. 138.
what later became known as the “two states solution,” or a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and the Gaza strip next to the state of Israel.

Abu Iyad, who considered himself a revolutionary leader, argued that his most important role was to inspire hope, which, for him, meant to abandon “dangerous illusions” about the impossible, namely, the liberation of all of Palestine and the return of the refugees to their places of origin. Instead, he proposed:

… our people will bring forth a new revolution. They will engender a movement much more powerful than ours, better armed and thus more dangerous to the Zionists. There is no doubting the irrepressible will of the Palestinian people to pursue their struggle, come what may. It is the nature of things. We are determined to survive as a nation. And one day, we will have a country.298

Abu Iyad offered deferred hope: the present and the “foreseeable” future merge to produce what is available, feasible, and possible. A “full” liberation committed to the larger goal of return and the formation of a democratic state over all of historic Palestine is here postpone to an unknown future, to be carried out by future generations. The hope that Abu Iyad offered Palestinians therefore inhabits an internal irreconcilable tension: between what is desired (full liberation and return to the homeland) and what is “feasible,” between the present and the future and finally – between the possible and the impossible.299

From Quiet Exile to Public Intellectual

Hisham Sharabi (1927-2005) could not have led a more different life than Abu Iyad. Like Khalaf, he was born in Jaffa, with roots elsewhere: his mother hailed from an upper-class Ace


family, while his father’s family originated in Nablus. His privileged upbringing isolated him from those outside the boundaries of his social class, and unlike Khalaf, Sharabi did not socially engage with Jews, even though he too grew up in Manshiyyeh, and based on his description, in close proximity to Jews. Moreover, it seems that Sharabi was less attached to Jaffa than to other places that he linked, in his memoirs, with formative experiences: his grandparents’ lavish house in Acre, where the poor came for alms every Friday, and Beirut, the city of his youth and his early, but significant, political activism. Sharabi was attending the University of Chicago during the Nakba, and yearned to return – to Beirut, where his friends and party members were. His commitment to the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and especially its charismatic and authoritarian leader Antun Sa’deh ended in disappointment and detachment from politics, which Sharabi himself called “quiet exile.” From 1949 until the 1967 June war, he deliberately avoided political engagement and dedicated himself to scholarship, which he considered “apolitical.” Only in the wake of the 1967 “setback” and the rise of the Palestinian resistance, did Sharabi refashion himself as a Palestinian-American public intellectual, a notedponent and critic of the PLO. He explained the rather abrupt transformation:

> We suddenly saw ourselves for what we were in the eyes of the “civilized” world: another species of Third World sub-humanity, existing outside history – the new Red Indians, the blacks of Israel.

Sharabi’s years at University of Chicago and Georgetown detached him from the immediacy of political action. But as the quote suggests, it did provide him with a comparative settler colonial

300 Based on an interview I conducted with Moshe Kashi, Feingold houses and Bella Vista, owned by his family, were across the street from the Baydas mansion and the police station that are also mentioned by Sharabi. On Feingold houses see also Dalia Karpel, “The House in Manta Ray, Corner of Banana Beach,” Haaretz, 2 February, 2012 http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/1.1631243 [Hebrew] Last accessed 26 May, 2016.

framework and the analytical clarity to situate the Palestinian plight. The period of political detachment from the Palestinian struggle, then, allowed Sharabi to observe and form his own intellectual engagement with other liberation struggles, in the third world, and in the US itself, especially the civil rights movement and black liberation, prominent in American campuses in the 1960s.\footnote{Keith Feldman, \textit{A Shadow over Palestine: The Imperial Life of Race in America} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).}

According to Sharabi, the Nakba left Palestinians “outside of history,” easy prey to forces that kept exploiting them: the Israeli occupiers, Arab states, Arab elites and political parties. The idea of return remained at the level of empty rhetoric, “impotent anger, sad longing”\footnote{Sharabi, “Dialectics,” p. 34} devoid of meaningful political action. It took the 1967 defeat for Palestinians to not only launch critiques of the status quo, but to actually engage in meaningful political action that catapulted them back into history; taking up armed struggle was formative of a new Palestinian identity that was at the same time divorced from Arab political rivalries and productive of the new “revolutionary Arab man.”\footnote{Sharabi, “Dialectics,” p. 35.} Sharabi, who was inspired by the 1967 Arab defeat and the rise of armed struggle, was convinced that the Middle East needed to be reformed, but that the Arab intellectual culture was so profoundly flawed and lacking rigour and the ability to innovate, that the only productive source of transformation lies in the west itself, specifically in the liberal philosophical tradition.\footnote{Lawrence Davidson, “Remembering Hisham Sharabi (1927-2005),” \textit{Journal of Palestine Studies}, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Spring, 2005), p. 60.} This tension between a staunch anticolonial stance and a sharp critique of an Arab “lack” is evident in the way in which Sharabi reminisced his years at the American University in
Beirut as intellectually barren, arguing for a profound flaw in Arab culture that is self-reproducing and leaves student unable to critically engage with the world.\textsuperscript{306}

This inherent lack is the cause for the deficiencies of the Palestinian resistance, and the reason it had manifested in “spontaneous, disorganized activity.”\textsuperscript{307} One of the main problems that plagued the movement, postulates Sharabi, was the lagging behind on developing its own revolutionary theory, one that would overhaul exploitative class relations and that would inspire multiple progressive revolutions across the Arab world. His conceptualization of liberation, and therefore hope, is that of a utopian process: continuous revolution until the refugees return to their homeland, and society is made anew. In other words, the purpose of liberation struggle is more than just political; a postcolonial Middle East would be possible only with the refashioning of Arab selfhood and the emergence of the new revolutionary Arab, that did not lag behind the west and that abandoned oppressive cultural norms.\textsuperscript{308}

This was also the reason for Sharabi’s vocal opposition to Abu Iyad’s pragmatic approach. Settling for a ministate was not merely about deferring liberation, but rather, it would work to normalize and cement the very social structure that needed to be overthrown. In fact, he argued, deferring liberation meant in practice abandoning it, since “political settlement surrenders not only fundamental rights but kills the will to fight, putting off indefinitely the

\textsuperscript{306} Sharabi reiterated the acute lack of scholarship and education in the Arab world, something that he had to overcome upon his arrival to Chicago. In fact, he frames his intellectual coming of age as being able to successfully overcoming the disadvantages of Arab education, see Hisham Sharabi, \textit{Embers and Ashes: Memoirs of an Arab Intellectual}, Trans. Issa J. Boullata (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2008), pp. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{307} Sharabi, “Dialectics,” p. 35.

\textsuperscript{308} As opposed to the present, where the masses are “rooted in medieval culture.” Ibid, p. 38.
possibility of liberation.\footnote{Ibid, p. 37. As indeed occurred after the Oslo Accords and the creation of the Palestinian National Authority.} Promoting a political settlement, then, was a de-facto acceptance of the status quo; since revolutionary consciousness was inherently oppositional to the status quo, settlement meant stunting the development of revolutionary consciousness among the Arab masses and keeping the Middle East behind the west.\footnote{Ibid, p. 39.}

Yet, in 1998, in the wake of the Oslo Accords, Sharabi seemed to have warmed to the idea of a political settlement.

I try to remind myself of what sustained all Palestinian refugees over the long years of exile: this land is not a memory, it is not lost, it is out there where it can be seen and touched, a patrimony that can never be given up or taken away. Does this mean that there can be no peaceful solution to the conflict? Does the solution lie in the reversal of what happened 50 years ago and the destruction of Israel? No, the clock cannot be put back, the past cannot be redeemed, Israel’s destruction cannot be the goal. The conflict’s real solution cannot be a zero-sum outcome, but only a political compromise. The legitimate struggle of the Palestinians will seek a solution based on justice, international law, and the imperative need for mutual accommodation and survival. \footnote{Quoted in Davidson, “Remembering,” p. 63.}

Despite his vocal advocacy for the Palestinian right of return, Sharabi imagined his return to his “Arab homeland” of Beirut, a plan foiled by the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. Perhaps his longing for Beirut represented his profound attachment to his formative years at the American University, and the passionate faith in the leader, as he kepts referring to Sa’deh in his autobiography, and the idea of “natural Syria,” encompassing Palestine as its southern province.\footnote{See Sharabi, Embers and Ashes, pp. vi-vii.} But the longing to Beirut also demonstrates the centrality of the city in Palestinian collective memory as a hub of resistance and centre of knowledge production. Maintaining Palestinian archives and research centres, as well as the visibility of resistance leaders in Beirut,
recast the Lebanese capital as the core of the Palestinian state-in-waiting. The prominence of Beirut also featured in Abu Iyad’s autobiography, as the city where Israel could assassinate multiple PLO leaders in one assault.313

Sharabi did return to Jaffa, at least symbolically, to participate in the funeral of another intellectual giant, born and raised in Jaffa’s Manshiyyeh quarter – Ibrahim Abu Lughod, whose own return to his homeland was enabled by the Oslo Accords and his American passport.314 Just like Sharabi, Abu Lughod’s forced departure from Jaffa, just a few days before the city fell, provided him with the opportunity to travel beyond Palestine. Abu Lughod’s newly-discovered mobility took him across the Arab world and finally to the US, where he pursued academic career. Similar to Sharabi, the June 1967 war and spectacular Arab defeat had a profound impact on Abu Lughod: in retrospect, he claimed that he was politicized as a result of the overt racism he experienced in the US, and that the founding of the AAUG was a direct response to the degradation of everything Arab in American public life.315 After 1970s and the death of Nasser, Abu Lughod traded his profound faith in Arab nationalism for commitment to Palestinian liberation, through his engagement with the PLO leadership in Beirut. Abu Lughod resettled in Palestine in the 1990s and, with his death, became Jaffa’s first retuenee. However, the indifference of the local Palestinians to the funeral procession appeared to reveal the cleavages


314 Abu Lughod’s presence in Palestine was made possible only at the sufferance of the Israeli authorities. His burial in his home town of Jaffa was a result of a deal between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, with the latter threatening with last minute cancellation. See Edward Said, “My Guru,” London Review of Books, Vol. 23, No. 24, 13 December 2001, pp. 19-20.

within the Palestinian experience, between the politics of diasporic intellectuals and the mundane survival struggles of those who remained in the city after 1948.\textsuperscript{316} I will return to the Jaffa Palestinian community in the next chapter.

**Living in Memory: Exile and the Burden of the Future**

Unlike Khalaf, Sharabi and Abu Lughod, Raja Shehadeh never experienced life in Jaffa before the Nakba. Born to an affluent Palestinian family three years after they were forced to flee the city to Ramallah, Shehadeh was raised on his grandmother’s memories of Jaffa, and his father’s silent rage at his displacement, dominating his sense of self:

> The elders held the keys to that lost world, the world that gave my life its meaning. Their reminiscences, their evocative descriptions, and nothing else. It was within that narrative of the lost world that I placed myself, defined myself, and assessed where I stood in the world. To be a man was to be the way my father was in Jaffa. The good life was the night life of Tel Aviv. \textsuperscript{317}

During his formative years, the Shehadeh family not only invoked memories of Jaffa among themselves and with friends, but insisted on centering their lives around their lost city. His grandmother, Julia, replicated her old routine of visiting the same former neighbours and friends who also ended up in Ramallah.\textsuperscript{318} The family was in fact living in memory: Julia could “hear” the waves of the Mediterranean and “sense” the familiar breeze on her skin, while Aziz Shehadeh kept staring westward, searching for the urban landscapes and lights.


\textsuperscript{318} Ibid, p. 20.
Living in memory also meant that Shehadeh grew up with an acute sense of uprootedness, of being in the “wrong place.” Ramallah was just a temporary place of residence, a (rather indefinite) interlude before returning to the “real” place of belonging, Jaffa; for a long time, the Shehadehs were staying at the family’s summerhouse, clinging to the hope of returning to their Jaffa home. The refugees’ gaze, fixated on the west in the general direction of Jaffa, symbolically reorganized space: the physical location of the refugees was relegated to the periphery while the object of their gazes, not even visible to them (although they could “sense” its existence) became the core of their being, and, as Shehadeh noted, their sole source of self-identification.

Shehadeh’s masculine ideal revolved around his father, Aziz, a Palestinian self-made man whose identity straddled both cities, Jaffa and Tel Aviv: although both his residence and law office were located in Jaffa, Tel Aviv’s night life beckoned with the promise of revelry and forms of sociability unavailable in Jaffa. Daytime Jaffa offered Aziz the respectability of family, law and the nation while nighttime Tel Aviv undermined the colonial and ethnic divide that positioned it as the “quintessential Jewish town” rival to the Arab city nearby. Aziz’s memories of Tel Aviv’s night life clearly challenge the post-Nakba revisionist histories, both official and popular, that constituted social, ethnic and political boundaries between the two cities, where the paths of Arabs and Jews had never crossed other than in battle.

Twice Aziz Shehadeh returned to Jaffa; the first time, shortly before the fall of the city. His mother-in-law sent him to fetch her expensive furniture, but instead, he spent his brief visit in the nearly empty city regretting ever leaving it. We get a glimpse of what a deserted once bustling city looks like through the eyes of the refugee: streets lose their familiarity with the people gone, stores shuttered and gardens left untended. In the days before its occupation, Jaffa
was suspended between its former animated self and the transformations I described in my second chapter. In the meantime, the city was populated with the ghosts of its departed inhabitants. When Aziz opens the door of his own house, there is a sense of eeriness, and he immediately invokes the ghost-like images of his wife, “in her pink satin dressing gown,” moving, almost floating, in his imagination, “from room to room.”319 This poignant absence led him to decide against removing anything from the house, other than a small decorative Buddha statue; the house should remain as it is, ready to be repopulated after the family’s brief sojourn in Ramallah ends and they are able to return and resume their lives. He returned to Ramallah empty handed, to the chagrin of Julia, and spent the next two decades standing on the hilltops, his gaze fixated in the direction of the city he longed for and the life he wished to resume.

In his son’s account, Aziz Shehadeh’s second visit to Jaffa occurred in the aftermath of the 1967 war, in a manner reminiscent of Kanafani’s fictional refugees seizing the opportunity to make the journey back. He was driven by an old Jewish colleague who served in the occupying army beyond the 1949 armistice lines, and into a territory that had existed in refugees’ memory for twenty years, “traversing abandoned space and regaining lost time, going back through the darkness to where the lights shone every night.”320 For the former Yaffawi attorney, then, the journey was to undo political, spatial and temporal boundaries: while the Nakba resulted in two decades of living in a memory and political inaction for Palestinian refugees like Aziz, the Naksa opened a new horizon of futurity and avenues of political engagement. Aziz’s journey from the

319 Ibid, p. 15.
320 Ibid, p. 57.
hills to the coastal plane, previously blocked to him, symbolized the dissolution of a mental barrier between despair and hope.

This poignant journey made visible all those landscapes that were meticulously preserved in the refugees’ memory. Aziz recognizes every village along the way, and once they enter the city, its landscapes are painfully familiar, but Jaffa is “ruined”; without its people, the city is “but a mere ghost of herself with pale crumpled skin, dead silent.”321 The former bustling Palestinian port city is now teeming with ghosts, as his gaze oscillated between past and present, fantasy and reality. In one afternoon, Aziz Shehadeh transgressed the boundaries between his Ramallah present, Jaffa past and the future, symbolized by the glittering lights of Tel Aviv. Ironically, Aziz realizes that the lights he used to longingly gaze upon from his Ramallah exile were not those of Jaffa. As darkness descended on Jaffa, Tel Aviv’s night-lights invited him to visit the “living town,” forever abandoning his ghosts.

The present, he realized, belongs to those who replaced the Palestinians, Judaicized and modernized the city and left Arab Jaffa behind in the darkness. In the meantime, the jil Filastin, the generation that experienced the expulsion had robbed the young of its future, forcing them to live in memory as they have, impressing them with a life of inaction. The journey to Jaffa was a transformative experience for Aziz Shehadeh and marked a break with the past:

If in the past we were a lamenting people, now we would become dynamic, taking our fate in our own hands. We must begin a new way of life, a new social and spatial organization of our society, not cramped but spread out, using the empty hills to establish new communities where those living in refugee camps could move, where the new Palestinian would be created: a forward-looking, bold, assertive citizen able to come to terms with his history, who would challenge the enemy to make peace on the basis of a new division of the land between the two states living side by side in peace together.322

322 Ibid, p. 66.
Aziz Shehadeh had made the journey from Ramallah to Jaffa and Tel Aviv, but coming back to his hilltop home in the West Bank was not returning to his point of departure; The trip remade Ramallah from a temporary shelter, a mere vantage point to gaze upon one’s “true” home, to a living and livable city, a launching pad for a new modern existence for Palestinians, modeled after Tel Aviv but made in their own image. Instead of living in memories populated by ghosts, Palestinians were to take control of their destiny, and abandon illusions of liberation marketed by both the Arab states and the resistance, both of which he considered futile, dangerous even.

These realizations propelled Aziz Shehadeh into peace activism; Days after his trip he collaborated with men from the Israeli intelligence apparatus to produce a document charting out a vision for post-1967 Palestine, which would be partitioned into two states, Jewish and Palestinians. Palestinians would abandon their demand to return to their former homes in exchange for independence and peace. This idea, which he continued to advocate until his assassination in 1985, was visionary for its time, when Israelis basked in the post-victory euphoria, and the Fatah-led PLO was just beginning to garner popularity among the Palestinian masses. The document also preceded UN resolution 242, as well as later proposals for two states, including those discussed in my introduction and the “ministate” promoted by Abu Iyad and others within the PLO leadership. Although for a while, Shehadeh became a popular speaker among a certain section of the Israeli (Ashkenazi) left, the document was utterly ignored by Israel’s political leadership.323 Over time, Israel has also taken over the re-organization of space in the West Bank, except instead of new Palestinian communities for the uprooted, the

occupation erected countless strategically-positioned exclusively-Jewish settlements, which dot the hills surrounding Ramallah and other urban centres and control connecting roads. This, in addition to the separation barrier and the checkpoints eviscerating the territory Shehadeh envisioned as the core of the nation-state. \textsuperscript{324} Contrary to Aziz Shehadeh’s hopes, the decades following the June 1967 war only saw the West-Bank Palestinians running out of space, as the territory on which they were allowed to live kept contracting with each settlement and military incursion.

For Raja Shehadeh, the “setback” which motivated his father’s peace activism marked the beginning of his own disavowal of politics at all costs, deferring to his father in all things even at the price of social marginality. His profound faith in the universality of human rights and the rule of law constitute the basis for his political engagement with the Israeli military occupation. With the founding of al-Haq (1979), the first Palestinian human rights organization, Raja Shehadeh promoted/expressed the hope that appealing to the rule of law by publicly shaming the occupiers would force them to redress injustice. Shehadeh is a representative a generation of Palestinian activists who, since the late 70s, have worked within the ever-expanding framework of NGOs, depending on and accountable to transnational networks of similar organizations. The NGOization of the West Bank and the Gaza strip, which swelled during the Oslo years, has come under fire in the wake of the second intifada and are often the objects of cynicism and distrust. \textsuperscript{325}

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\textsuperscript{324} For an analysis of the spatial dimension of the Israeli military control of the West Bank, see Eyal Weizman, \textit{Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation} (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2012).

“Running out of Space” in Nablus-Area Refugee Camps

For the majority of Palestinians displaced from territories that became part of Israel in 1948, refugeehood meant coming under the control of international aid regimes, in particular UNRWA. The ability of men like Hisham Sharabi and Abu Iyad to develop political consciousness and engage in meaningful action was constituted, significantly, by their access to resources unavailable to most camp refugees, such as higher education, and especially the ability to travel. Mobility played an important part in their self-fashioning as political agents, as revolutionaries and thinkers.

Since the vast majority of Palestinian refugees cannot afford the luxury of extensive travel and acquiring advanced academic degrees abroad, it is vital to consider the effects of continuous displacement and the ways in which these refugees have been engaging with the idea of return. These are the very people whose available space have been contracting rather than expanding, and who have been languishing in cramped, dilapidated camps for seven decades. With the Israeli 1967 occupation and the brutal suppression of political activity, as well as various forms of popular resistance, these West Bank camp Palestinian have been “running out of space.”

A segment of this population resides in three refugee camps within the Nablus city limits: Balata, Askar and Camp no. 1, locally known as al-‘Ayn. The majority of the refugees in these three camps originated from the Jaffa, Lydd and Haifa districts. Today, they number around 50,000, and forced to live in makeshift structures, built haphazardly as families expanded with
inadequate infrastructure.\textsuperscript{326} In Balata, where I was based, during the summer, there is running water only four days of the week, and sewage flows freely through the narrow alleyways, which, in the absence of playgrounds, are also where the camp’s children spend most of their time, when they are not studying in UNRWA’s overcrowded classrooms.\textsuperscript{327} All three of these camps are extremely cramped, but Balata, which was established in 1950, is infamous for being the most crowded of them, with about 28,000 people living in 0.25 square kilometers.

What drew me to these camps specifically was the relatively high number of refugees from the Jaffa district. As it turned out, the people I spoke with, either in the form of semi-formal interviews or casual conversations in the marketplace or at the Yafa cultural Centre (established 1996), repeatedly articulated their unquestionable attachment to Jaffa, but also stressed that the urbanites “fled to Jordan and left us here in the camp.” For these camp dwellers, being Yaffawi did not necessarily mean tracing one’s origin to the city of Jaffa; rather, urban authenticity was linked to their suffering as camp refugees, and forming communities that are based on a shared sense of belonging: being both “from here” and “from over there.”


\textsuperscript{327} For more on the effects of camp life on Balata’s children, see Alice Rothchild, “In Balata, the Occupation is not just of Body, but of Mind,” \textit{Mondoweiss}, 21 June, 2013 \url{http://mondoweiss.net/2013/06/balata-occupation-body} Last accessed 26 May, 2016; A comprehensive study of Balata’s youth in the post-Intifada (the first one) era, see John Collins, \textit{Occupied by Memory: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency} (New York: New York University Press, 2004).
Figure 4.2: “Football with the martyrs”: Children playing football in the narrow alleys of Balata refugee camp. On the wall behind them there are poster commemorating a local shahid (Arabic, martyr, often referring to fallen resistance fighters); the top of the mural reads awda, return in Arabic. (Photo by the author)
I interviewed ‘Adel at his home in the “new” ‘Askar camp, surrounded by family members. ‘Adel’s home is a rarity in the camps’ landscape: the house was relatively large, surrounded by a greenery-covered fence, allowing its occupants to enjoy privacy, another rare commodity in a refugee camp. He greeted us at the door, leading us to his garden, unheard of in the context of the cramped West Bank camps. ‘Adel proudly walked us through the garden, among the fig trees, grapevines and tomato flowerbed, pointing to the chicken coop – “everything my family needs is here,” he exclaimed. He proceeded to lead us back into the house and we all congregated in the living room. ‘Adel is the maternal uncle of a Balata friend, whose
family graciously invited me to stay in their meager home as long as I conducted my research. It was ‘Adel sister who suggested I pay a visit to her brother, and made sure I was warmly received. His niece volunteers to translate for a British activist and myself, even though I understand the Arabic. As ‘Adel tells his story, his daughters-in-law listen attentively, trying to hush an impatient toddler.

‘Adel was born in Abu Kabir, which, in those years, was a suburb of Jaffa, still drowning in the lush greenery and seductive scent of its orange groves, or bayarat in Arabic. In fact, although ‘Adel spoke Arabic, whenever he referred to the orange groves he used the Hebrew word, pardes (singular) or pardesim (plural). “Life was good at the beginning,” he sighed, everyone who was [in Abu Kabir’s groves] were Arab. We were the owners and not the Jews. The problems began when the Jews who came from abroad, from Europe […] not the local [“original,” asasîn]. They attacked and fired at us.

The “trouble” ‘Adel was referring to is the rapidly growing fire exchanges in early 1948, mainly in the borderland areas, between the Hagannah and local Palestinian militias. The deterioration of the situation was particularly taxing for the local population, the owners and labourers of the groves, and like many others, ‘Adel’s family left for Lydd, where they remained for six months, until “problems started between the Jews and the [Palestinian] resistance.” He was referring to what is known in Israeli military history as “Operation Dani,” the IDF offensive designed to “cleanse” (read ethnically cleanse) the areas southeast of Tel Aviv, especially the road to Jerusalem, although both Lyddy and Ramleh were designated to be part of the UN-

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328 See chapter 1.
proposed Arab state. Nevertheless, once they were abandoned by the Arab Legion, the Palestinian defenders were unable to prevent its fall to Israeli forces on 11 July, 1948. Though a young boy of 12 at the time, ‘Adel clearly remembered the IDF jeeps and armored vehicles pouring into town, and the widespread devastation in their wake.

Soon after the conquest of Lydd, the IDF concentrated the civilian population inside a mosque, soon releasing the elderly, women and children. ‘Adel recalls that the older boys and the men had to remain inside the mosque (misgad, he tells me in Hebrew) and that they were massacred. The rest of the population was told to flee.330 ‘Adel recalls how, at a checkpoint erected by the Israeli army, soldiers ordered his mother to hand her golden jewelry. “They robbed us; we were afraid,” he summed up. From there, civilians were forced to march, in the scorching summer heat, several kilometers, first to the Beit Shemesh (Jewish settlement) area, and from there to Ni’lin, right across what eventually became the 1949 armistice line. Many of the most vulnerable refugees died along the way, while others camped under olive trees and in agricultural lands (“not in houses,” ‘Adel said), exposed to the elements. After a brief stay in Bir Zeit (a town near Ramallah), ‘Adel’s family relocated to Nablus (“we lived on the mountain”) and was finally directed to the newly-created refugee camp. After a few years in a tent, they moved into a more permanent shelter, “four of us in one small room.”


Like many other Palestinian men in the West Bank and the Gaza strip, the 1967 Israeli occupation offered opportunities for low-paying menial jobs, especially in construction and maintenance. This is also the reason why so many men of that generation speak Hebrew so fluently. As ‘Adel shifts the conversation to tell me about his post-1967 fortunes, he also switches to Hebrew. I also change roles with his niece, since, like most of her generation (except for those who spent many years in Israeli prisons), she does not understand a word of Hebrew; I now find myself in the role of Hebrew-to-English translator, for the benefit of the niece and the British visitor. The daughters-in-law, however, who speak no English, quickly lose interest in the conversation, but remain seated out of politeness.

‘Adel had also made a “virtual return” of sorts thanks to the Israeli permits regime that allows those Palestinians thoroughly scrutinized by the state’s security apparatus to seek employment inside Israel as day and seasonal labourers in menial jobs rejected by most Israelis. Ironically, ‘Adel managed to obtained long-term employment with the Tel Aviv-Jaffa municipality as a parks maintenance worker and even, he added, was made a “boss” (ba’al bayit, in colloquial Hebrew) in charge of his own small crew of Palestinian low-waged labourers. The two decades in this position provided him the time and the means to re-acquaint himself with his childhood urban landscapes, occupied and radically transformed by the influx of Jewish migrants. He asked me where I lived, and I name the street. He responds with a smile: “I know, it is right by a city park. Very good neighbourhood.”

His work also produced a few poignant encounters. One of those occurred in recent years, when the IDF placed the camp under curfew. ‘Adel and his family were sitting on the roof when a group of soldiers suddenly appeared, demanding them to retreat into the house. Then, a young soldier looked at ‘Adel and asked him: “is your name ‘Adel and you used to work in Hayarkon
park in Tel Aviv?” ‘Adel realized the stern uniformed man ordering him around used to work in his crew as a teen during the summer holidays.

Just before the beginning of the second Intifada (2000-2005) which terminated his employment, ‘Adel decided to take his elderly father, now deceased, to visit Abu Kabir:

He could not remember a thing. They built a beer factory and a garage for buses near the house. We stood together outside the house and I asked him: where is our house? He answered: not here. I told him this is the house. He could not recognize the place because of the orange groves [they were gone]. They built a second floor. A woman upstairs asked: what are you doing here? We said this was our house. She responded: take me back to Libya and come and have your house.

This anecdote illustrates an intimate knowledge of place: though expelled from Abu Kabir as a young boy, ‘Adel is instantly able to recognize his home, even though the immediate surrounding transformed and urbanized. Unlike his father, ‘Adel’s work permit provided him with the opportunity to observe not only the process of rapid urbanization but also the intra-Jewish dynamics that undergirded it. He is acutely aware that Abu Kabir is part of Tel Aviv’s “black city,” that is, that part of the capital that is relegated to the destitute and working class and therefore has remained underdeveloped.331 When he talked about present-day Abu Kabir, he mentioned its residents were all Mizrahi Jews, like the woman from Libya, and that it was a mixed residential-commercial area, dotted with small factories and auto body shops. This bittersweet story of “virtual return” also provides insight into the fraught encounter between the refugee and the person occupying his home, which we have already seen in Kanafani’s story. This anecdote offers a possibility to consider the implementation of the right of return without expelling the current occupants. In fact, here, the Palestinian refugee himself articulated affinity,

331 The term “black city” was coined and widely circulated after the publication of Sharon Rotbard, White City, Black City (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2005) [Hebrew].
if not sympathy, to the Jewish settler who inhabits his home, opening up a possibility to imagine a resolution that does not result in another displacement. I will return to this question in chapter seven.

Finally, before we parted ways, I asked him whether he had ever considered an actual return. “I don’t know,” he sighed,

Only god can say. There is trouble between Jews and Arabs, so I don’t believe [it would happen]. God willing [In sha’ Allah] there will not be [trouble]. There are many Palestinians in Syria, Jordan, Egypt, America, Europe. Maybe our neighbour from abroad will return as well.

I discovered a similar sense of resignation among other refugees. Decades of poverty and displacement, and the constant threat of violence from the Israeli occupation elicited melancholia. Thus, for instance, when I asked acquaintances at the camp how they were, some responded zīfī (bad, Arabic colloquial). Nevertheless, refugees welcomed my inquiries even when it required them to dredge up painful memories of uprooting.

Most of the refugees who agreed to a semi-formal interviews were male. But on occasion, I chanced upon women who were willing to share their stories. One of those women was Ibtisam, a resident of al-‘Ayn camp, originally from Khayriyya, a village located just 7.5 kilometers east of Jaffa. Though a young girl by the time of her family’s forced departure, Ibtisam vividly remembered the citrus groves surrounding their house, and her happy childhood: “See we were young, but we were attached to it, just like the adults were.” That happiness abruptly ended when Hagannah forces conquered the village during operation Hametz, in the last days of April,
designed to cut off Jaffa from its hinterland and blockade the city. Ibtisam remembered exchange of fire between the raiding Zionist forces and a few local defenders, even though the Israeli military archives have recorded no resistance in the village when it was overtaken by the Hagannah.

Ibtisam proceeds to speak about life at the camp where she is virtually confined – “I do not go places.” Unlike many of the men, she has never been back to her village, as Palestinian women did not become part of the workforce in Israel after 1967, and therefore have had less opportunity for “virtual returns.” Her husband, however, worked in Israel for three years, and reported back to her that he father’s house was demolished, as was the majority of the built area of the village, save for one of the schools, and a few houses. Her speech is steeped in melancholia: “such is the life of refugees… I don’t go to places, and I don’t want to. I’m in pain from this whole world.” Not even the thought of return eases this existential pain; rather, it reminded her of her father, who once said that all he wished for was to die in his own town, even if it meant he would return for one last night. Instead, he was fated to live in squalor as a refugee, and watch his sons and grandchildren brutalized and imprisoned. Like her father, Ibtisam would rather die in her lost village, but since she knows this is impossible, she suffers the pain of

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332 Hametz is the Hebrew word for leavened bread and its byproducts, forbidden for consumption for Jews during the holiday of Passover. Hagannah’s nomenclature indicates the Zionist military leadership’s attitude towards the Palestinians as obstacles to be removed, like Hametz.

333 See Morris, *Palestinian Refugees*, p. 141 [Hebrew]. Ibtisam may have remembered an earlier episode when Palestinian resistance fighters were forced to retreat from Abu Kabir to Khayriyya. Around that time, Palestinian snipers were firing on Ef’al, a Jewish settlement adjacent to Khayriyya.

334 Some of the remaining structures are inhabited while others remain deserted. For decades, Tel Aviv area municipalities used the village’s agricultural lands as a landfill until recently, when it was rehabilitated and turned into a national park, named after Ariel Sharon, infamous for his role in the Qibya (1953) and Sabra and Shatila (1982) massacres. See Walid Khalidi, *All that Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), p. 249.
refugeehood. At the same time though, that same pain is a marker of “authenticity”: most of her relatives left Palestine for Jordan. She complains that exile dissolved the intimacy of kinship (“the younger generation, they don’t know each other”). Ibtisam finishes with an indirect criticism of those Palestinians who left: her grandson, upon his return from a visit in Jordan, told her “grandma, we’ve stayed in Palestine and it’s better for us.”

**Diasporic Silences**

I have known Daniel for several years now. We both travel in similar circles and have several friends in common. However, for several years, he had been rather reluctant to share his life story with me. I knew both his parents were refugees from Jaffa and that they did not wish to discuss their early lives. Daniel himself shared that attitude as well. And then something happened. Daniel made his first “virtual return” to Jaffa, and ever since, he has been trying to redefine his relationship to the city.

Both his parents’ forced departure from Jaffa occurred at a young age. His paternal grandfather, a resident of Ajami and a low-level employee of the British Mandate, coaxed a fisherman to give up his only boat (and the means of escape for the family) for a handsome amount of money, and Daniel’s father, then a small child, sailed to Lebanon with his parents. The realization that this last-minute escape depended on his grandmother’s meager funds only dawned on Daniel when a distant relative in Jaffa told him that only those who could afford to flee did while the poor were left to their fate. “They really thought they were about to be massacred,” Daniel explained to me.

Daniel’s mother, however, was born in now-obliterated Manshiyyeh quarter to a Lebanese mother who still had relatives in Beirut. The family connection proved to be useful
during the mass flight from Jaffa. Although neither of Daniel’s parents were camp refugees, for
the first decade or so after the Nakba, their fortunes could not have been more dissimilar.
Daniel’s mother, who was merely a child, and her family continued their middle-class existence
in Beirut, largely thanks to their existing social network and her father’s education. At the same
time, his father’s family experienced tragedies and squalor. Soon after their arrival to Lebanon,
his mother gave birth and then passed away, probably because her husband could not afford
proper health care. Then Daniel’s paternal grandfather died as well, and his children were
literally left to fend for themselves in the streets of Beirut. They never registered as refugees with
UNRWA, largely due to pride rather than actual need. In those first years, it was Daniel’s uncle
who supported his two younger siblings, making sure they received proper education. It is
perhaps the bitter memories of these tragedies that he traced back to the family’s expulsion from
Jaffa that prompted Daniel’s father’s self-imposed silence. In fact, the only thing he was adamant
about was stressing that they were the only branch of the family left alive, and that everyone else
had perished.

Living through the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) may have exacerbated this silence on
the earlier trauma of the Nakba, given that Palestinians, whose status had already been precarious
even before the war were scapegoated by various factions. These multiple traumatic

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335 The Phalangists, of course, considered the Palestinians obstacles to Lebanese internal peace and security and
vowed to “remove” them by any means possible, especially violence. Their alliance with the Israeli army, which
invaded in 1982, culminated in the Sabra and Shatila massacres. Thereafter, other groups targeted Palestinians, such
as Shiite militant Amal and the Syrians, who, Daniel remembered, dropped barrel bombs on their neighbourhood in
1989. For more on Palestinians during the Lebanese civil war, see Julie Peteet, Landscape of Hope and Despair:
Palestinian Refugee Camps (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Rosemary Sayigh, Too
Many Enemies (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1994); Diana Allen, Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of
Palestinian Exile (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Richard Hudson, “The Palestinian Factor in the
Lebanese Civil War,” Middle East Journal, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Summer, 1978), pp. 261-278; Robert Fisk, Pity the
Nation: Lebanon at War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Rami Siklawi, “The Dynamics of Palestinian
experiences were probably what prompted Daniel’s parents to migrate to Canada, “literally in the middle of the night,” in 1989, before the end of the civil war. By that time, they already had meaningful support networks in Canada in the form of other relatives who had exited Lebanon before.

Daniel himself refers to his refugeeness as a sort of burden, in a similar fashion to Rema Hamami: “it was constantly thrown on you as a child. Continuously victim, victim, victim, the world is terrible and unfair place.” For someone who grew up with the horrors of a civil war, his strangeness always thrown in his face (“you are not really from here”) and the persistent silence of his parents, no wonder Daniel rejected the “Palestinian within” and stayed away from the topic of his lost ancestral land and adopted a Lebanese identity in its stead.

Only a few years ago, Daniel decided he was ready to visit Jaffa. He defines his journey not as “root-searching” but rather as an act born out of the necessity to “fill the gap in my head” and “break the barrier of fear” of confronting one’s silenced past. In hindsight, he argues that he was ready for the possibility of finding “nothing” or not being able to connect with anything, because the city had changed so much since the day his parents left it. Moreover, he was repeatedly told by family members that there was “nothing left” and that Jaffa was completely destroyed under the Israeli occupation. This type of mental effacement of a lost place is not uncommon among diasporic yafawiin; the destruction of Jaffa represents for them a break with trauma and an attempt to make sense of their refugeehood, in a similar manner to Daniel’s parents’ insistence that they were the only surviving family members. The problem, of course, is

that these discourses of erasure, in fact, play into the hands of Israeli state propaganda that seeks to sever Palestinians’ affective attachment to lost places of origin. In addition, these discourses also efface the existence of a viable Palestinian community in the city, and in Daniel’s case, of the many relatives that never left, whom he discovered when he began visiting.

Daniel found a cousin within ten minutes of being left alone to explore the city, and from that moment, he argues, the past just came very close to the surface “so I could look at a place and see something else.” He managed to trace the route his alzheimer’s-ridden uncle used to take from the family’s home to school, even though the uncle’s markers were no longer there – but Palestinians who are intimately familiar with their city were. This practice of counter-mapping, of excavating places through a form of visual archaeology is a form of spatial resistance; against the state’s multiple erasures, de-Arabization and ongoing Judaization-cum-gentrification, whose roots chapter two traced to the post-Nakba “new normal,” Palestinians resort to strategies of remaking space back into the intimately familiar. Based on his uncle’s sensory memories, of having to orient oneself towards the sea from the house’s balcony through a particular bodily movement, he was able to locate the house. Moreover, his uncle’s detailed account of what it felt like to play football on a ramleh (a mound) enabled Daniel to find the particular playground, complete with the same embodied sensation of stepping and running on it.

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336 See chapter 2.

The mixture of exhilaration and shock involved in the emotional process of (re)discovery in the company of a newly-found cousin were complicated further when Daniel attempted to show his father a video that he made documenting his journey. Rather than share his son’s enthusiasm, his father remained obstinate that the city was indeed in ruin and nothing was left, regardless of the mounting evidence to the contrary and his son’s passionate pleas. Finally, he just left the table and refused to even look at the computer’s screen.

Daniel’s parents lost hope of ever returning to Jaffa, he posits, because their entire identity is based on loss and mourning and commitment to the memory of place that “literally, they would lose themselves. They don’t know how to be any other way.” Holding on to deep injury is also a way to restate their commitment to Palestine and address their regret and shame at having left. At the same time, they keep reiterating their faith that their descendants return in their stead. Daniel himself has only considered the possibility of buying property in Jaffa as a form of more concrete (rather than virtual) return before he perished the thought when he considered the political realities of occupation and “Jewish-only and whatever only,” as he puts it.

There is something hopeful about seeing that there are people there, that they remember my grandfather, there’s family and there are kids that are there and there are things that are familiar… there’s something hopeful about the fact that it doesn’t matter how big the effort is, or how big the state is, there are certain things they cannot erase. They cannot erase me.

For Daniel, then, it is the present that is meaningful and to which he formed an attachment, rather than following a trail of memories of loss and mourning. His Palestinianess is therefore tied more to what is there than to what was destroyed or lost. On a certain level, Daniel’s notion of return is delinked from political formations; this is not a question of what kind of a state is currently in charge of things, but a question of how Palestinians find new and meaningful ways
to reattach themselves to place, even as refugees who can only come as virtual returnees at the suffrage of the Israeli state.

Conclusion

When I was working in one of Israel’s military archives, collecting documentation on the expulsion from Jaffa and its environs, I met an older Jewish man, who turned out to be a veteran Hagannah fighter, who boasted active participation in several military operations in 1948 that resulted in the depopulation of villages and towns. “Would you like to know how to make the Arabs run?” he once asked me. His crassness notwithstanding, I wanted to hear the answer. “You surround a village on three sides, leaving one wide open in the direction you wish them to flee, and then you begin firing your gun in the air, to scare them.”

I was reminded of this anecdote as I was writing about itineraries and routes taken by Palestinians in 1948; with so many being forced to flee on foot, their path was prescribed for them as the Zionist forces opened a single escape route (often eastward). Those who left Jaffa by sea did not have multiple options either: with many on overcrowded ships, fishing boats and dinghies, they could only make it safely as far as Lebanon in the north or Gaza in the south.

And yet, the routes ahead were less than predictable. Many Palestinians ended up confined in UNRWA-administered refugee camps, fighting to overcome trauma and survive, running out of space with each violent convulsion of military occupation, civil wars and state counter-insurgency. Others, however, seized opportunities offered by the opening up of new routes to carve new horizons for themselves and for the Palestinian collective, newly imagined. The 1967 Naksa marked a fleeting moment for Palestinians to redefine the meaning of homeland
and their relation to it; that was the moment, to return to a quote that opened this chapter, of radicalization of thought and of political action.

As popular understandings of liberation evolved, so did the meaning of refugeehood: some sought to disavow it, step back into history and reclaim the future. Conversely, for others, refugeehood became a marker of authenticity and a means to heap criticism and those who abandoned them in the camps. At the same time, we would be wise to avoid romanticizing either refugeehood or revolutionary action; Palestinians were forced into “angular” existence through occupation and mass expulsion, hence their insistence on the sanctity of the right of return as a core issue for ending the “conflict.” What this chapter attempted to highlight is some of the myriad ways by which Palestinians make their exilic existence meaningful while reconfiguring their affective relationship with their place of origin.
Chapter Five: Broken Tiles and Phantom Houses - Urban Intervention in Tel Aviv-Jaffa Now

I am walking in their way
Lowering my gaze
Towards the lost village
Leaving a dusty past
Of a ghost city
A city of ruins
Replete with bleeding stones
Grieving stones
A mark to remember
The people of Jaffa.338

In the short film *Rosetta*, first screened at the 2013 Nakba and Return film festival organized by Zochrot,339 a dream-like sequence is showing a young kuffiyeh-clad Palestinian girl walking along the Jaffa beach, among the ruins of Irshid (Arabic for Rosetta), a small neighbourhood that once stood just north of the Clock Tower square area. As the girl recovers a shard of an

338 Sama Shaqra, “I was with Them,” in *Jaffa’s Language*, eds. Yossi Granovsky, Yonatan Kunda and Roman Vater (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2009), p. 158. [Hebrew]

339 Zochrot (“remembering,” Hebrew) is an Israeli NGO, founded in 2002 to promote “acknowledgement and accountability” for the mass expulsion of Palestinians and advocate for the right of return. The organization purposefully targets the Israeli public and has, over the years, launched several educational initiatives to engage Israelis as a means to “generate processes in which Israeli Jews will reflect on and review their identity, history, future” and claim moral responsibility for the Palestinian plight. See the organization’s mission statement: [http://zochrot.org/en/content/17](http://zochrot.org/en/content/17) I will return to Zochrot’s activities in the next chapter.
arabesque-style floor tile, she carefully wraps it in her kuffiyeh, only to use it as the base for a small makeshift model of an Arab home, which she then leaves on a rock nearby.340

The arabesque-style floor tiles are making a comeback these days. Home décor “experts” trace their roots to mid-nineteenth century Europe, another commodity exported to the Middle East via merchants, diplomats and mercenaries that arrived to the region in droves as the Ottoman Empire was rapidly growing weaker and unable to resist these incursions.341 Today, although these tiles are in high demand, the geometrical and floral patterns are no more than mass-produced adhesives, custom designed to match the tastes of buyers, as much as they are made to mimic and resemble the famed “Jaffa style” tiles (figure 5.1). Conversely, Jewish artisans settled in the old city of Jaffa which serves as an “artist colony” offer their own, high end, similar products for those who can afford them.342 Unlike the mimicry, the flooring tiles that adorned Jaffa’s modern houses were hand-painted by local artisans, a craft that, against the claims of latter-day “experts,” has a long history in the Levant.

340 The four-minute film can be viewed here https://youtu.be/-yY6xMZCtLc
While the renewed interest in these “Jaffa tiles” as a colonial and neoliberal commodity attempts to strip them of their Arab history and rootedness in Palestine (and the region), the short film Rosetta reclaimed these tiles and reinscribed them into the history of Jaffa: unlike the mass-produced Israeli mimicry, the tiles in “Rosetta” tell a story of loss and trauma. Found in pieces, buried under the rubble of a demolished Palestinian neighbourhood, they are reclaimed as authentically Arab, wrapped in a kuffiyeh, a symbol of resistance and steadfastness, and used to symbolically rebuild the homeland.

The creator of this short film is Gil Mualem Doron, an Israeli scholar, teacher and artist who resided in Jaffa when we first met in 2011. His deep connection to the city, evident in his artistic work, manifested through his activism within local working-class communities, both
Jewish and Palestinian, most affected by the housing crisis. In the past decade, Jaffa has become the playground for out-of-town Jewish developers, land speculators and gentrifiers, whose extensive incursion into the city has gradually pushed the more vulnerable groups out and into the peripheries. Palestinian in particular have less choices; they are unable to relocate to Jewish-only neighbouring cities like Holon and Bat Yam in large numbers, and the option of moving even farther, to southern development towns or to West Bank settlements is completely blocked to them.

This transformation of Jaffa was, and still is, particularly evident in Yehuda Hayamit Street, where Doron lived at the time. Just across the street from the military radio station building, a huge structure was up for auction, slated for redevelopment designed for affluent Jewish buyers, while the street’s residents, both Palestinians and Jews, were struggling to keep up with the rapidly increasing cost of living. Doron’s affective attachment to his street went beyond his involvement in spontaneous and planned acts of protests against redevelopment and gentrification; until 1948, the street was named after King Faisal, the Hashemite monarch to whom the British awarded Iraq to rule over after their failure to secure his rule over Syria. Ironically, the street reconnected Doron to his own Arabness, as his father, who migrated from Iraq following the deterioration of the status of Jews after the Nakba, Hebraicized his Arab-

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sounding surname, Mualem (teacher) to Doron: “it's a pity. There aren’t many streets in Israel named after Iraqis, not even Iraqi-Jews.”

**Spatial Resistance**

While this chapter focuses on Doron’s artistic projects, it is also noteworthy that he does not operate in a political and creative vacuum. In the wake of the second intifada, which broke out in 2000, and Israeli police violence targeting Palestinian citizens of the state, a young generation of Palestinian activists has made its presence known. Some organized in or alongside institutional NGOs, like *al-Rabita* (The League for Jaffa’s Arabs, est. 1979) while others opted for more loosely organized collective action in informal associations such as *al-shabiba al Yafiyya* (Jaffa youth) or *Darna* (The Popular Committee for Land and Housing Rights, est. 2007).

This new generation of activists has been working to contextualize ongoing challenges of housing, demolitions and evictions that Palestinians in Jaffa (and in Israel in general) faced. In particular, the surge of neoliberalization of real estate and the continuous displacement of Palestinians in and from Jaffa have prompted these activists to creatively link the current urban transformations, its acquisitive motivations and the enduring Nakba. In other words, sedimented collective memories of ethnic cleansing, expropriations and intensive judaicization of the city, what I called “the new normal” (see chapter two), have been unearthed and invoked in public, as

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a means of challenging and undermining the state’s efforts at marginalizing Palestinians and eliding their histories from public spaces.\footnote{Sela, “Waving the Change,” p. 218-219.}

Part of this new surge of Palestinian activism is also articulated through creative interventions in urban landscapes. In Jaffa, for instance, the artistic collective Parrhesia (from Greek, “free speech”, or “daring to speak the truth”\footnote{See Michel Foucault, \textit{Fearless Speech}, ed. Joseph Pearson (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2001).}, in which there were both Jewish and Palestinian members, launched \textit{Derekh Hasafa} (through the language, also literally “the language’s path,” Hebrew), a visual bilingual dictionary that literally reinscribed Arabic in public, through graffiti. Each stencil presented an Arabic word alongside its Hebrew transliteration translation. The words chosen by local communities and stenciled by Parrhesia artists / activists reflected a keen sense of urban and political consciousness: language, border, education, tree, Nakba. The project was designed to mark particular urban paths that narrate local histories and bring the Palestinian presence from the margins to the core of Israeli public consciousness, especially in “mixed” cities like Jerusalem and Jaffa.\footnote{\url{https://osnatbaror.wordpress.com/} [Hebrew]. Originally, the municipality agreed to fund materials needed for the project, provided the artists use erasable paint-spray. In other words, the establishment allowed critique as long as it can be erased just as the Arabic has been. See Hadas Kedar, “The Colour of Money (Washes in Water),” \textit{Hagadah Hasmalit}, 29 June, 2014 \url{http://hagada.org.il/2014/06/29/} [Hebrew] Last accessed 26 May, 2016.}
A different form of public was imagined by the Jaffa-based Ayam collective that created The Jaffa Project – an Autobiography of a City, an interactive website, now defunct, that curated audio and video testimonies from Palestinian elderly about pre-1948 Jaffa, categorized by themes. This remarkable website allowed visitors to produce countless different narratives about the city’s Palestinian past by changing the order of key words they chose to click on. In 2012, the Ayam collective also launched Jaffa 2030, an ambitious project that aspired to encourage public forms of imagination about the future of the city beyond, and in spite of, the limitations of the colonial present. The launch party consisted of artistic installations that narrated Jaffa’s pre-Nakba history alongside other works that teased the audience about the potentialities for transformations within and outside Jaffa: reclaiming the city from colonial and neoliberal powers as a form of a celebration of new liberatory formations of urban binationalism and at the same time, expanding the audience’s horizons of the possible to include the entire region. Against the
Israeli state’s ambitions to project its powers and reshuffle populations throughout the Middle East, these artists defiantly proposed to reconnect Jaffa with Beirut, Damascus and Baghdad, imagining a new postcolonial Middle East. Just like Autobiography of a City, Jaffa 2030’s reimagined public as the virtual realm, where both images and information can circulate in defiance of the Israeli state and its security apparatus that still maintains its control over the Arab education system, media and artistic expression, but is far more limited in its ability to hinder online critiques.

See also their Facebook page: [https://www.facebook.com/JaffaProject.org/?fref=uf](https://www.facebook.com/JaffaProject.org/?fref=uf) Even though the Autobiography of a City website is now defunct, the Jaffa 2030 visitors centres is still online [http://thejaffaproject.com/jaffa-visitor-center/](http://thejaffaproject.com/jaffa-visitor-center/)

I interpret Gil Mualem Doron’s work within these contexts of emerging forms of local, young and creative forms of resistance against the “new normal.” The mere fact that they are defying the state of things attests to the failures of the “new normal” as a state project: born into a colonial reality that was produced in the aftermath of the Nakba and the judaicization of the city, this generation challenges the political status quo by “dredging up” that which is no longer conscious as well as publicly articulating their desire to transgress and overturn the normalized realities of ethnonationalism, occupation and de-Arabization of the urban space. Doron’s work, then, joins a host of other, similar-minded utopian projects that actively negate the here and now and open up horizons of possibility through the work of urban intervention.
This form of intervention, which can be traced back to the 1960s Situationists, encompasses different modes of creative engagement with urban landscapes designed to critique the architectural establishment and its complicity in global capitalist and neoliberalism that have shaped the modern city. Urban intervention works directly on the terrain and landscapes of the city, strives to alter them and radically democratize public spaces and existing power relations.\(^351\) In the context of Palestine, architecture and urban planning have been implicated in municipal and state efforts at creating and maintaining the “new normal,” and have actively participated in processes of eliding the Palestinian past of the city of Jaffa.\(^352\)

My discussion of Doron’s work highlights the dimension of spatial resistance through acts of artistic urban intervention. Specifically, I focus on those projects that defy decades of judaicization and marginalization of Palestinian urban histories by publicly confronting Israeli-Jews with the uncomfortable truth of ethnic cleansing and provoking his audience with imaginaries about the possible future of the return of the Palestinian refugees. These provocations, I argue, are not simply designed to make Israeli-Jews feel bad about their complicity in settler-colonialism. Reinscribing Palestinian Jaffa in colonized and gentrified urban spaces creates the effect of haunting, the eeriness of recognizing the presence of what is

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\(^{352}\) Sharon Rotbard, White City, Black City (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2005). [Hebrew]
seemingly not there. The work of Gil Mualem Doron actively produces what Gil Hochberg recently called “visible invisibility,” that is, forces the Palestinian history of Jaffa into Israeli-Jews’ line of sight despite decades of deliberate elisions and forgetfulness.\(^{353}\) Many Israeli-Jews accept and reproduce official state narratives about the events of 1948, for instance, arguing that Palestinians were never expelled but fled during wartime. In recent years, Zionist right-wing activists have been vocally denying the Nakba ever occurred and have actively attempted to disrupt and block commemoration events.\(^{354}\) The haunting that Doron’s artistic projects effect challenge vocal denial and forceful attempts to suppress public rituals of Nakba commemoration; the specters of Palestinian Jaffa not only force Israeli-Jews to acknowledge their presence, but undermine what has become, over the past several decades, a sense of the familiar or the “homely.” This particular kind of haunting is productive of the uncanny, that which reveals itself to be frightening, even menacing, despite the fact it was “something long known to us, once very familiar.”\(^{355}\)

But this haunting is not designed simply to unearth suppressed colonial anxieties and make Israeli-Jews uncomfortable; For Doron, the significance of his work is its futurity dimension: once the invisible becomes visible again, the process cannot be reversed and the ghosts cannot simply be laid to rest and suppressed back into the collective sub-consciousness.


\(^{354}\) For instance, the *Nakba Kharta* (“Nakba nonsense”) booklet, available for download on the Im Tirtzu website, has become increasingly popular and widely referenced by young Israelis [http://www.imti.org.il/Reports/The_B.S._That_is_the_Nakba.pdf](http://www.imti.org.il/Reports/The_B.S._That_is_the_Nakba.pdf) [Hebrew] and a short video accompanying the booklet [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g818VNH1uM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5g818VNH1uM) [Hebrew, English subtitles].

This encounter, between the Israeli-Jew and Doron’s haunting artwork is productive of political agency; it compels a response, even if unpredictable and contingent. Doron cannot force his audience to embrace his form of political engagement, yet his work inhabits the hope, or subtle promise, that Israeli-Jews are capable of overcoming colonialism and challenge the “new normal” alongside Palestinians. The ghostly possession of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, then, are also symbolic ways of repossessing and decolonizing of space.

**Bibi’s House and other Phantoms**

Doron’s forms of urban intervention are rooted in place and its concrete sedimented histories. His 2010 retrospective exhibition “Bibi’s House” curated projects he led in his double role as a teacher, in both the (now defunct) Arab Democratic School for Science and Technology and the Community Architecture Studio\(^356\) that his students, both elementary-school and college age created. In the context of the exhibition, its location – the school – temporarily became a transhistorical microcosm of the city: what otherwise might be considered another forlorn Ottoman-era ruin out of many, turned into the point of departure for the manifold stories the exhibition narrated, as well as its conclusion.\(^357\)


At the time, the Arab Democratic School inhabited Bibi’s House, on 13 Gaza street, east of al-Nuzha (also known as Jamal Pasha, King George and Jerusalem) Boulevard. At the time of its construction by Haj Ali Bibi, one of the most affluent men in Jaffa, it was known as a bayara (Arabic, well) house, surrounded by lush greenery and orange groves. In the first few decades of the 20th century, this area was Jaffa’s ever-moving frontier, where modern urbanity met the hinterland, and the city’s booming economy was largely dependent on orange growing and exporting. During the siege on Jaffa, the Bibi family fled the city, in the hope to return shortly after hostilities cease. But as I showed in my second chapter, the vast majority of the city’s inhabitants were never allowed to return, and their properties, including the Bibis’ estate were confiscated by the state of Israel and leased out for multiple uses. The Arab Democratic School was one of the house’s recent tenants.
Figure 5.4: The Bibi family house on Gaza Street, Jaffa, April 2016. Currently it is used as an art studio and gallery for Tel Aviv-Based Ankori high school (Photo by Haim Schwarczenberg).

The exhibition symbolically rearranged the urban space by shifting the location of Bibi’s house from the urban margins to its centre. Instead of the commonplace images of the port and the Clock Tower Square, which have largely been occupied and claimed by the dual process of judaicization and gentrification, the exhibition consciously focused on the urban peripheries and former borderlands: Bibi’s house (and adjacent area) and the northern, now demolished, suburb of Manshiyyeh. A large suburb at the periphery of Jaffa by the end of the British mandate, Manshiyyeh was utterly depopulated during the April 1948 onslaught by the Irgun, finally demolished by the 1970s by the municipality to make room for several high-risers and parking lots.

The materiality of the house itself became an artifact to be gazed at and considered rather than an empty “neutral” space where art is exhibited. As part of the larger exhibition, Doron created a sound installation, in which speakers hidden in the house’s walls and well were playing carefully selected parts of an interview with Walid Bibi, who grew up in the house and is currently an exile in Jordan. Those sections of the interview selected for this installation (which was titled “Walls Talk”) focused on Walid Bibi’s bittersweet memories of his childhood and the daily life of his family in the house.

In the context of gentrification and repurposing of Arab homes and refugee properties, the forgotten and silenced history of the house as a site of familial intimacy surface once again, temporarily drowning the outside noises of the judaicizing city, which, by 2010, had long swallowed and taken over the orange groves. Visitors to the installation are invited to ponder the Nakba not just as a story of collective calamity and the destruction of a unique form of Palestinian urbanity, but as a deeply personal loss saturated in affect and a sense of belonging to
a place that exists only in memory. Walid Bibi cannot physically embody his house and tell his story to visitors, but his disembodied recorded voice haunted the room, his phantom-like presence hovers through the walls. Visitors who wandered into the house through the “Open House Tel Aviv” festival, and who were mainly Israeli-Jews, were forced to confront Bibi’s anger and pain, as the room’s walls closed in on them, symbolically trapping them in, imposing Bibi’s presence and the history of Nakba, against denial and deliberate forgetfulness. Moreover, Doron opted to leave the original recording in Arabic without dubbing it to Hebrew, even though his target audience were Israelis. This conscious decision reinscribed Arabic into the soundscapes in the part of the city which had been largely judaicized and reinforced the Arab identity of its owners and architectural style. For Israeli-Jews, most of whom are not Arabic speakers, the experience was designed to elicit a sense of disorientation, as the house and the city’s Arab past were conjured to remind the Jewish visitors of their tenuous sense of strangeness. The longing in Bibi’s voice and the happy childhood memories he recounted reminded the Israeli visitors of that which is no longer conscious: the expulsion of the Palestinians, the military occupation of the city and the subsequent de-Arabization of the city; the visitors are there, in the house, because he, Walid Bibi, is not.

Palestinian visitors, on the other hand, are reminded of their own personal histories of displacement and marginalization, as the haunting phantom of Walid Bibi narrates his own. As I mentioned in my second chapter, most of the families that remained in Jaffa after the Nakba

358 Open House is a local variant of a global architecture and design festival, which entails public visits in private spaces or ‘heritage sites.’ http://www.batim-il.org/DefaultEng.aspx?batim

359 Selected parts of the recorded interview were translated to Hebrew and hung to read on the bare walls. In this way, Doron reverses the politico-linguistic order: it is the Hebrew that is rendered silent while Arabic is foregrounded and dominated the soundscape.
were forced to relocate into what became the Ajami ghetto, losing their houses and becoming internally displaced persons. Moreover, many have relatives who remain in exile, in the Gaza strip, the West Bank or abroad, including Jordan, and have grown accustomed to communicating with them through the telephone or the internet, often only able to hear their disembodied voices. The experience of “Walls Talk,” then, elicited a sense of commonality, intimacy even, with the absent Bibi, recreating the now-disparate urban community across borders. In this sense, Bibi’s “haunted house” was a reflection of the global Palestinian experience that transcends place and affectively links together those who reside in disparate locations, even if they are not able to physically meet.

Another sound installation in a different room maintains the sense of “haunting.” Visitors were sonically accosted by what sounded at first like a cacophony of sounds and an incomprehensible mixture of languages. After a few moments of listening, one could discern two distinct soundtracks playing on top of each other: one was a recording of the school’s sixth-graders singing the famous song *Yafa* (Arabic, Jaffa) by Fairuz and Joseph Azar, spontaneously translating it to Hebrew; the other soundtrack was the original recording of the song, drawn out to fit the length of the children’s singing, until it loses its coherence, “just like a fading memory,” described Doron. This installation, just like the one I described earlier, produced a “haunting” feeling of a disembodied presence. However, this time, the dual soundtrack elicited contradictory, if complementing responses: one the one hand, the song’s original recording was automatically replaying in the background, the lyrics repeating ad nauseum until they lost meaning and the song’s affective intensity subsided. The Jaffa that existed in the song had faded away, like memories of life in the city before the Nakba, and like the Israelis’ refusal to remember the violent occupation of the city. In this sense, the first soundtrack represented that was lost to
time and which is no longer conscious. Fairuz sings of longing to places that are no longer there, are beyond reach or that have transformed beyond recognition: Jaffa, Bissan and Jerusalem.

The second soundtrack though begins incoherently: a group of six-grade art class students attempting to sing in unison. When they finally managed to catch up with one another, each student was tasked with attempting simultaneous translation of the song, which, once again, resulted in jumbled singing, giggling and correcting one another. Unlike most Israeli-Jews, the Palestinians of Jaffa are, by and large, bilingual: they are forced to communicate in Hebrew in addition to their first language. The children’s fledgling attempts to translate a beloved Arabic song reflected the alienation of the majority of Israel’s Jews from the rich tapestry of Arabic culture produced in the region around them. Most Israelis today cannot communicate in Arabic, even if in the case of many, their parents spoke the language. The extent of Arabic, for most Israelis my age, usually does not progress beyond what some call “occupation Arabic,” or the few phrases IDF soldiers commonly use in their daily encounters with Palestinians in the West Bank.

Yet, these children’s haphazard translation re-concretize the song that is “fading” in the background, refocuses the listener who attempts to make sense of the lyrics. The voices of the singing children anchors the image of Jaffa in the present; Jaffa is no longer a “fading memory” of tragedy and loss, but a lively urban community. The phantom presence of the students reminded listeners the survival of the Palestinian community, and moreover, elicited hope for a better future. The aspect of futurity was present through the lack: the empty room and the sounds of children singing and giggling were designed to produce a sense of potentiality, or what could or might occur if one strips the layers of deliberate forgetfulness and denial. The previous “walls talk” installation exhumed a silenced past; this sound recording represented “working through” a
past of individual and communal catastrophe for Palestinians, and a sense of guilt for Israeli-Jews. Finally, the students’ bilinguality, just like Jaffa’s Ana Lou Lou bar or Café Yafa analysed by Monterescu as “binational spaces,”\(^\text{360}\) represents potentiality, a moment that allows us to consider that which is not yet here, another way of being in the world that is decolonial.

**Lived spaces and “Haunting”**

In complete contrast to commonplace focus on Jaffa’s familiar landmarks, such as the port, old city, and the clock tower square, or the hyper gentrified flea market, the exhibition at Bibi’s house highlighted the familiar and intimate for the school’s students. Doron’s project “My Jaffa” featured in the exhibition forced the visiting Israelis to confront the daily realities in Jaffa, experienced by young Palestinians. Instead of sites expropriated from the community by developers, municipality strongmen and the tourism ministry\(^\text{361}\), the Palestinians showcased those places they deemed “their own,” far from the tourists’ beaten path and the prying eyes of Israelis searching to consume their ‘backyard orient.’ The candid photographs, taken by students and selected for the event, reflect everyday experiences of urban marginalization in Jaffa: decrepit houses, under- and de-development, results of decades of deliberate neglect by the municipality; rapid gentrification – new and expensive condominiums, marketed for affluent Jews, next to a patchwork of small shacks, which the state considers ‘illegal’ and earmarks for demolition.

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Yehudit Ilani, a longtime anti-demolition activist and a member of al-Rabita, explains to me the city’s deceptive policies that are designed to gradually remove Jaffa’s Palestinian residents through a strategy of declaring Ottoman- and Mandate-era buildings “architectural heritage sites.” As a result, the municipality prohibits residents to alter them, the population natural growth and families’ need to expand their dwelling. The official proscription over renovations forces Palestinians to either alter their houses by adding new rooms or another floor (and risk demolition) or let their properties become so neglected until the municipality’s engineering department declares them unfit for human habitation and forces their eviction. In any case, most of the Palestinians cannot afford purchasing units in the new developments and are forced out of the city, often to Ramleh or Lydd.

The photographs are displayed on placards wedged into blocks, like those used to build the new gated communities but also like the blocked that make up many of the illegal house extensions and unlike the new condominiums, remain exposed, bereft of the layers of colour and other ornamental elements adorning the recent additions to the city’s skyline. The illegal structures, in fact, are easily recognized by the presence of a mishmash of makeshift building materials: exposed bricks, asbestos, and rusted metal slabs that do not shelter their owners from the winter’s dampness or summer’s scorching heat, and on the other hand, carry everyday intimate household sounds into the public spheres. In this installation, Palestinian children, many of them living in or adjacent to these illegal structures displayed them as lived spaces rather than the ‘eyesore’ Jewish newcomers to Jaffa call them or abstract constructs such as ‘legality’ (or lack thereof) obstructs from view.

The choice of placards was designed to remind visitors of banners and signs held by protesters. The installation, therefore, should be read as a silent protest, displaying Jaffa as a
lived city, undermining the colour chrome brochures available through the municipal tourism bureau that depict pristine oriental urban spaces bereft of human presence. This silent protest foregrounded Jaffa as the victim of recent urban renewal processes, turning the neoliberal logic on its head by aestheticizing the quotidian ‘ugliness’ of illegal structures and positioning gentrification as disruptive of the everyday.

Moreover, this installation also addressed a broader audience, physically absent from the room: the global Palestinian diaspora that posits Jaffa as a “museum of the Nakba” that merely inhabits the ghosts of past residents. The exhibit defied the elision of the current Palestinian community, insisting on telling stories of survival and struggle, of both sumud and everyday hardships. In this way, the students of the Arab Democratic School mitigate their marginalized
position both against Israeli-Jews in general and their counterparts in Tel Aviv in particular as well as diaspora Palestinians for whom Jaffa had become an Arab “paradise lost.”

Defying marginalization and elision, from both Israeli-Zionist and diasporic Palestinian discourses, the students reinscribed Arabness back into urban spaces. “Pedagogic Acts,” a series of short videos screening in another room of the house, documented urban intervention acts that Doron initiated and led, primarily in the area that used to be Manshiyyeh. In a series of direct actions, the students positioned models of buildings typical of turn of the 20th century Arab architecture, glued to shards of arabesque-style tiles. These buildings, the likeness of those once dotting the Manshiyyeh skyline, have not only been demolished by the municipality, but their remains were eventually buried under the Charles Clore Park created along the beach, together with the memory of the Arab neighbourhood that once stood there. Manshiyyeh was erased and annexed to Tel Aviv as its ‘natural’ appendage of modernity. Arab architecture was permitted to survive in Ajami and parts of Jabbaliyeh, where it is marketed for tourists as “quaint” and “oriental” and worse – diluted and selectively reproduced in the mansions overlooking the Mediterranean built for affluent Jews.

362 Monterescu, *Shared and Shattered*, pp. 103-104.
The reincription of Arab architecture in Manshiyyeh, albeit in miniature form, was an action of reclamation of the place’s Arab past, salvaging Manshiyyeh from Tel Aviv and wresting it back to Jaffa; this was a demand to be seen, a refusal to be denied existence or be relegated to the periphery. Gesturing towards reversing the process of dispossession and displacement, this act of urban intervention reclaimed space in the name of the “ghosts” the miniatures represented, but for the living Palestinians, and for those who will return.

The miniature houses did more than physically reappropriate Palestinian-Arab urbanity from the Jewish city; they literally worked to “haunt” people who happened to pass by. The students who planted these ghost houses in Manshiyyeh also interviewed passersby, most of them Jewish, interrogating them about their knowledge of the area and its history, confronting them with a silenced and buried past of forced expulsions and demolitions. The raw footage clearly reflects a certain sense of awkwardness and confusion visible on the faces of random interviewees. The surprise element aside, those interviewed by the students are visibly uncomfortable when confronted by young Palestinians with a camera who pose difficult
questions. The forced recognition of catastrophe is also bookended by attempts to justify violence: “it was wartime,” “they attacked us,” “we had no other choice.”

After exploring other marginalized urban spaces in Jaffa, the exhibition ended with a final installation that brought visitors full circle, back to the home of the Bibis. Yet, if an earlier installation endeavoured to tell the history of the house and its now-exiled owners, the final exhibit put the future on display: Doron’s architecture students were tasked to re-design the house for the post-return era, when Walid Bibi and his family return to Jaffa from their decades of exile in Jordan. Cleverly titled “We Returned to the Land to Build and be Rebuilt,” a reversal of the iconic Zionist anthem that replaced one word “came” with “returned,” the project epitomizes the exhibition. Just like in the earlier installation, the Bibis were not physically present in the room, nor were they available for consultations as the project’s purported “clients.” The house was indeed redesigned for them and on their behalf, yet the family had been absent throughout the entire process, and since the actual return of the refugees has not yet occurred, they are still absent and unable to opine about the variety of design options created for them. Even when, after several attempts of persuasion, Walid Bibi agreed to teleconference with the school’s students just before the exhibition opened, he refused to directly engage with this installation, and only said he would return when “Israel is wiped off the map.”

For both visitors and the students, the Bibis are ghosts inhabiting the house-turned-school confronting them with the uncomfortable history of ethnic cleansing and expropriation. The architecture students themselves, who had no prior knowledge about the Bibis, Jaffa or even the Nakba, were torn between treating this assignment as any other college-related task and, as they termed it, “act professionally,” which for them meant to depoliticize the meaning of “return.” As far as the students were concerned, the assignment was to re-design an existing house that would
serve as residence and a place of business. They were provided minimal instructions, in order to encourage diversity of imaginative responses. Thus, for instance, they were not told what kind of family owned business would be operated on the premises, nor were they informed what part of the Bibi family was expected to resettle in the house.

One of these designs assumed a return of the extended family: Walid Bibi, his wife, son and his family, three generations under one roof. This model (figure 5.7) imagined the Bibi family taking residence in the house, while an underground passage from the well and cistern leads to a gallery that narrates the history of Jaffa and the family, a tale of loss, exile and return. The gallery was designed to resemble a minaret, an element the (Jewish) student figured would be culturally familiar to the family returning to a completely alien city. From the minaret’s top visitors to the gallery would be have a view of post-return Jaffa, thus connecting the city’s past with its transformative present.
Figure 5.7: A student’s design for Bibi’s house after the return. The minaret-like addition would serve as a gallery (photo by the artist).

Another student proposed a dwelling that focuses on the house’s immediate outdoors. This model focused on a football field adjacent to the house, where the Bibi family could watch Arab and Jewish children play from the comfort of their balcony. The football field is partially covered by kaffiyeh-shaped white shades, which remind the viewers of a tent, symbolizing the years of wandering and exile that ended with the family’s return to their home.363

Just like Doron’s ‘pedagogic acts,’ this project was also designed to turn both visitors and students into political agents. The students approached this task with an air of utter depoliticization. But as they admitted later, merely having to think about the return of the Palestinian refugees forced them to (re)consider their role as colonizers. This process confronted one student with the silenced past of her moshav as a Jewish settlement built atop of an ethnically-cleansed Palestinian village. Other students openly articulated their discomfort; two even complained to the college’s administration. A right-Wing Zionist student grappled with the assignment by imagining a childless yuppie couple inhabiting the house and operating a trendy bathhouse for women of all religions, thus stripping the project from the political context of return and mitigating discomfort.

Many of those who came to view the exhibition were drawn to it by its title “Bibi’s house,” erroneously thinking it was an event about Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who owns multiple properties, one of them, is coincidentally located on Gaza street in Jerusalem. Once inside, some 700 people, the bulk of them Jewish, wandered between the different

363 More on the students’ projects see http://zochrot.org/en/article/53177
installations. Doron later reported that many had never heard about the Nakba before, let alone considered the possibility of the return of the Palestinian refugees.

The exhibition was one of the final events at the Arab Democratic School, which closed its doors the following year. The fact that the school explicitly highlighted its Palestinianess and was actively striving to reconstitute and empower the embattled Palestinian community in Jaffa may have played a role in the process that led to its closure, admitted Doron. It is also a reflection of the municipality and the state’s continuous attempts to reinforce the “new normal,” suppress any manifestation of Palestinian nationalism and keep rendering the Arabs voiceless and invisible.

**Arab Homes for Sale**

On a hot summer night, I left my apartment at the heart of Ajami, heading to Jaffa’s historical port. The dark alleyways and narrow, almost nonexistent, sidewalks forced me to slow down, wary of the hurdles on my way, broken pavements and holes in the asphalt the municipality rarely tends to. As I reached the cusp of the Maronite quarter, near the immensely popular Abu-Hassan hummus restaurant, now shuttered for the night, I stopped at my tracks and gazed at the sight unfolding to the north, at the bottom of the hill, where Yehuda Hayamit (formerly Faisal) street curves just past the crumbling walls of old Jewish cemetery. Contrasting, almost taunting, the dark solitude of Ajami was the port, draped in blinding bright lights, the loudness of crowds of revelers drowning the distant hums of the waves. As I made my slow approach, I noticed people promenading about, in and out of the newly refurbished port area, between the immense hangers, which, until 1948, housed inbounding and exported commodities, among the latter were
Jaffa’s famed oranges. These hangers had been renovated by the Tel Aviv municipality in order to serve as commercial spaces, hubs of urban leisurely culture for the Jewish residents of Tel Aviv and tourists. Trendy restaurants and cafes, alongside seafood and grill houses bearing Arab names, claiming ‘authenticity’ now resided in these large spaces, primarily marketed for Israeli-Jews and tourists. This new and improved port was modelled after its now-defunct counterpart in Tel Aviv’s north, which has become in recent years a popular commercial and entertainment district, a favorite on warm summer nights.

As I neared the crowds, the sounds of people conversing was drowned in loud music played through speakers installed in various locations overhead. This was Platform, a municipal-sponsored art fair, featuring craft-makers from all over the country, presenting their wares: children’s toys made out of recycled metals, paper lampshades, and scented candles alongside booths offering magazine subscriptions. Then, among the sweaty fair goers and tired parents chasing after small ice-cream eating children, I noticed Gil Doron’s booth. Doron was seated on a bar stool behind a small table, dressed all white, a round straw hat on his head. Behind him – a large white banner, partially hiding a gigantic colourful mural. The banner featured only two inscription: on the right, “Home Land, home / estate” and a phone number; but what really caught my eye was a curious logo on the upper left-hand side. The logo was made out of two distinct images: an arabesque pattern common in old Arab houses and a silhouette of the old city and the port. At the bottom of the logo the city’s name appeared in three languages (Arabic, Hebrew and English) in a font reminiscent of Arabic calligraphy. This was the only location in the entire event that invoked a distinct Arab presence, despite the recent history of Jaffa as an Arab city and cultural centre, and in spite of a visible Palestinian community living nearby, within walking distance. Indeed, the whole event was very much an Israeli-Jewish affair,
catering to residents of Tel Aviv strolling around in shorts and tank tops, tilting their heads to the rhythm of the rock n’ roll music in the background.

Figure 5.8: “Arab Homes for Sale” at Platform art fair: Gil Mualem Doron making an announcement to the audience (Photo by the artist).

The small table in front of Doron showcased several handmade models of old Palestinian homes and plastic gun-toting soldiers, each model and soldier glued to a shard of arabesque-patterned tile. A small plain sign at the foot of the table stated the ostensible purpose of this display: “Arab Houses for Sale.” He greeted me hurriedly, in order to tend to a middle aged couple slowly approaching the display. “What is the meaning of this?” asked the man, a suspicious expression on his face. “Arab homes for sale,” replied Doron and with an air of a skilled salesman continued: “Who does not wish to live in an Arab home? The high ceilings, the large windows bringing in the sea breeze… why, it is the essence of the Israeli dream!” The man still seemed suspicious, but his wife exhibited some interest. She nodded at the sales pitch and approached even closer to inspect the models up close. Doron, observing her, carried on with his
performance: “These are models of real houses. If you purchase one, I will also provide you with the address so you can go and inspect it yourself. I’m sure it will be to your liking. Then, if you are interested to move ahead with the sale, call this number on the banner behind me.” The couple inquired whether these properties were in the city of Jaffa, and whether they would need serious renovations, since, “as we all know, these are old structures and the Arabs haven’t been taking good care of them.” Doron assured them the houses indeed needed “some” work, but they are utterly habitable. The couple departed, promising to think about it, not before they grabbed a business card with the “agency’s number.”

Figure 5.9: Miniature Arab houses, glued to a piece of broken arabesque-style floor tile (photo by the artist)

After they left, Doron explained the conceit: The models represented Palestinian houses in Manshiyyeh, the northern suburb of Jaffa which was mostly destroyed during the Irgun’s assault and heavy shelling in late April 1948. The surviving structures were later repopulated,
often squatted, by Jewish migrants (many of whom from North Africa) and Jewish “refugees,”
those residents of the former frontier areas affected most by the borderland warfare of winter
1947-1948. The Tel Aviv municipality, that had plans for the area, incrementally evicted these
Jewish squatters during the 1950s by declaring these structures “dangerous for habitation.” The
addresses provided to potential “customers” were no longer existing; when the Tel Aviv
municipality finally demolished the remaining structures and pushed the rubble to the beach, it
made sure to completely obliterate any remnants of the streets layout, in order to avoid
ownership claims by displaced Palestinians. Should Doron’s “potential customers” actually
attempt to locate one of those houses, they would find themselves unable to navigate through
streets that are no longer there.

This act of conjuring phantom-like houses and streets denotes the poignancy of this
settler-colonial context: on the one hand, there is the Israeli desire to own an Arab house that
Doron mentioned to his would-be “customers” – not just in the physical sense of actually
inhabiting one, but also through claiming legitimate ownership. These claims have been made
through eliding the land’s Arab history and recasting an ancient Jewish or Canaanite culture on
depopulated buildings, as had been done in ‘Ayn Hawd / Ein Hod after the Nakba in the process
of creating Marcel Janco’s artists colony. Another way Israel has claimed ownership was by
invoking the “return” of the Jews to “their” homeland and place of origin, from which they
were once displaced.

364 Susan Slymovics, *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia, PA:
365 In this sense, Doron’s choice of Home Land as his fictitious real estate agency is quite astute.
But there is another layer to this act: Israelis may claim their right to the land, but the unexpected reappearance of the phantom houses (like those designed by Doron), aimed to elicit the colonizer’s anxiety, pangs of guilt or fear of engulfment. Moreover – the sudden disorientation in the colonial city, the momentary appearance of the familiar as unfamiliar, and the inability to navigate in space and locate the object of desire (the Arab house) highlight the colonizers’ foreignness, their inability to claim intimate knowledge of place. Organized denial and elision of the Jaffa’s Palestinian-Arab history, and Israeli-Jewish willful ignorance of conquest and displacement render the colonizers’ familiarity with urban landscapes shallow. Doron’s phantom houses expose the city as a palimpsest of histories, and work to de-familiarize these spaces by the performance of alternative memory. The colonizer’s disorientation stands in contrast with the familiarity of Palestinians with space, in the face of destruction and loss. Thus, for instance, Ibrahim Abu Lughod was able to lead his daughter through Manshiyyeh, orienting himself in haunted space and clearly identifying specific locations with which he had been intimately familiar.366

Doron’s careful choice of naming his fictitious real estate agency Home-Land367 reflects a certain tension between the two sections of the hyphen: a forced separation between the two, as ‘home’ denotes an object of desire, a loss of place that nonetheless is constantly invoked. Palestine as a place of belonging is more than particular plots of land, Arab architecture or orange groves; Palestine’s multi-valence as a “home” is refracted through one’s specific position.


367 Although an actual agency (Homeland) with a similar logo does exist and is prominently featured in the current phase of Judaicization / gentrification of Jaffa.
For refugees, especially stateless ones, the idea of return to whence one belongs is, in many ways, a means of survival and projects of world-making. For the internally displaced, Palestine as a “home” may denote hope of liberation from settler-colonial rule and its concomitant status of second class citizens. For Palestinians, therefore, the current separation of the abstract idea of home from the concreteness of land is the very thing that needs to be overturned.

For Israeli Jews, however, the hyphen represents a different kind of lack. Not only do most Israeli-Jews trace their familial histories to elsewhere, but attachment to place is framed as a “return” to the land of mythical ancestors, but that a sense of “home” is produced through the acquisition of land by way of colonial conquest. The settler, disoriented by the unfamiliar landscapes, remakes place in his own image in order to stake his claim to it. The lack denoted by the hyphen represents these efforts to elide traces of another presence – in this case, of the colonized and absent Palestinian – through continuous attempts to reproduce the national place. In this context, Jaffa is a prime example of this process: the creation and maintenance of the “new normal” I described in chapter two have intensified in the previous two decades as more boutique hotels and gated communities for affluent Jews popped up in the city, increasingly displacing the local Palestinian population. The event’s venue, the old Jaffa port, is a case in point; as fishermen are displaced for more cafés, restaurants and artistic fairs, the port is rapidly expropriated and repurposed primarily for the benefit of Israeli-Jewish developers, entrepreneurs and their clientele.

The tensions of home/land was also powerfully invoked by another subterfuge: when prospective “clients” called the number on the banner behind Doron (and his business card), they heard an Arabic rendition of a famous Israeli song, “I have no other country:”

I have no other country
Even if my land is burning.

A mere word in Hebrew

Penetrates my veins, my soul,

With an aching body, a hungry heart,

This is my home.

I will not be silent, because my country

Has changed its face.

I will not give it up,

I will remind her,

I will sing in her ears,

Until she opens her eyes.368

The background to this song, penned by Ehud Manor (1941-2005), which has become an Israeli classic, is itself not bereft of internal contradictions. Originally penned as an anti-war hymn, the song became popular nationwide in the 1980s and was considered a protest against the invasion of Lebanon. Twenty years later it was appropriated by right-wing settlers opposed to the “pullout” from the Gaza strip (which also entailed the removal of several small outposts). Yet Palestinians are conspicuously absent from both interpretations. The liberal-Zionist understanding of the song laments a disagreeable transformation of the country; Manor belonged to a generation of Ashkenazi Jews who came of age in the years following the Nakba, under the rule of Ben Gurion’s MAPAI. For him, and other artists, politicians and writers of that generation, those years are commonly referred to as “the good old Eretz Israel,” code for the absolute hegemony of the Ashkenazim, the subjugation of the Mizrahi-Jews and the military rule

368 Lyrics: Ehud Manor, music by Coreen Alal.
that kept the Palestinian minority in check.\textsuperscript{369} This Ashkenazi elite laments 1967 as a year of profound transformation, with the occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza strip and the Golan Heights, that altered the Israeli self-image from perpetual victim (“surrounded by enemies”) to a fierce regional military power. The victory of the Likud party in the 1977 with the help of the Mizrahim brought the era of the MAPAI regime to an end, and challenged the hegemony of the old cultural and political elites associated with it. For Manor and his generation, that “change” is the cause for the “aching body” and the desire to restore the old order.\textsuperscript{370}

However, when callers listened to a recording of the Arabic rendition, the familiar and relatable lyrics suddenly became incomprehensible, eliciting a sense of disorientation and menacing unfamiliarity similar to that felt by “customers” who sought out the addresses of the phantom houses in Manshiyyeh. So if, according to the song “a mere word in Hebrew” makes an Israeli literally feel “at home,” listening to the same words in Arabic was designed to elicit the opposite feelings, of being “out of place,” inhabiting someone else’s home. Thus Doron undermines the settler-colonial project, by turning the table on Israelis: just like in Manshiyyeh, the state attempted to transform Palestinian landscapes into Jewish ones by obliterating identifiable traces of Arab presence and manufacturing the national home/land in its stead; Doron’s performance in “Arab homes for sale” seeks to symbolically overturn this process, not only by reminding Israelis of the “no longer conscious” but also by alienating and disorienting the settler in what is otherwise familiar space.


\textsuperscript{370} The right wing appropriation of the song, naturally, ignores the Palestinian plight, in particularly in the Gaza strip, where settlers exploited the labour of locals under the heavy guard of the IDF.
While the majority of fair-goers were Israeli-Jews, most of them from outside of Jaffa, one Palestinian family stood out in the crowd; a hijabi wife, her imposing husband and their small children approached Doron’s table, carefully eyeing the banner and the model houses. Doron, who noticed them, carried on with the charade, explaining the process of “purchasing” an Arab house, “the dream of every Israeli.” At first, the man listened silently, but upon the invocation of the “Israeli dream” he was unable to hold back his anger: “What is the meaning of this?” he asked. “My family has been living in this city for generations, and now you intend to displace us for profit?” he raised his voice. A small crowd of Israelis gathered around us, eager to witness the exchange. Doron never lost his composure, and explained to the man that he, too, can share the “Israeli dream” and consider buying a house large enough for his family. At this point, the man and his family hurriedly stepped away from the table, his rage visible to the small audience. Doron rushed after him, and quietly explained the subterfuge, to which the man and his wife reacted with a burst of laughter as they returned to the table. For a native Yaffawi family, watching the transformation of the old port, a symbol of the city’s economic flourishing prior to the Nakba, into an art fair for Israelis must be a disorienting experience. Other Palestinians, including my neighbours in Ajami refrained from taking part in this and other similar events. Everyday markers of Judaicization-cum-gentrification are evident throughout the city, including in Ajami (where, a few years ago, a national-religious Jewish settlement popped up) and in Jabbaliyeh (where the construction of Peres Centre for Peace displaced several families).

Just like many of Doron’s artistic performances, the political work that “Arab homes for sale” goes beyond the display of the models, or the act of public presentation. On a deeper level, the performance merely begins during and after the artist’s interaction with his audience. The phantom houses and recorded song, as well as Doron’s “sales pitch” itself are designed to solicit a reaction from spectators, yet at the same time, these responses are unexpected and contingent
upon the position of the spectator: the Palestinian man reacted with anger, whereas dozens of Israeli-Jews responded with curiosity and genuine interest. Even after it ends, the performance lingers in the kind of work it does – turning people into political agents. In this sense, Doron’s performance in itself as an articulation of futurity, because it opens the door for deliberation, political action and intervention in the here and now of settler-colonialism. Unsettling the settler’s sense of “home” also challenges the impasse of present realities of judaicization, gentrification and ongoing displacement. At the very least, it undermines the claims for certainty of the present colonial order and calls to question the premise of this certainty; the state’s project of creating the national space, a homeland, is unsettled, as traces of another presence – that which is no longer conscious – become visible through the invocation of tensions inherent to the hyphen home/land. The phantom houses were designed to have a lingering effect in the minds of spectators that continues to yield unexpected consequences – for both performer (who wishes to undermine the present) and for the current political order (that wishes to reproduce itself).

**Conclusion: Between Jaffa and Gaza**

In December of 2014, Doron participated in Intervals, an art festival and a fundraiser for legal expenses of anti-occupation activists, with a new series of collages titled “For Sand Thou are and unto Dust shalt thou Return.” This series, consisting of eight separate pieces, was created in the aftermath of operation Protective Edge, which was the official name given to the extensive Israeli military offensive in the Gaza strip in the summer of 2014, and resulted in over 2,000 dead Palestinians, the vast majority civilians.\(^{371}\) Each collage in this series refers to one of the

eight villages and suburbs that were ethnically cleansed during the Nakba and eventually incorporated into Tel Aviv.\textsuperscript{372} The series reinforces the haunting effect present in Doron’s work I discussed in this chapter: the pieces invoked the spectral presence of Palestinian villages that have been buried under Tel Aviv. In fact, he teases a reversal: urban landscapes of cement buildings and high-rises are symbolically buried, covered by shards of colourful arabesque-style floor tiles, where a lone witness to the horror casts a shadow. At the same time, the ghosts conjured in this series are also of Palestinians in Gaza, besieged and starved by Israel, and those killed by air raids, drones and artillery fire. Doron explained that he explicitly wanted to represent the “unbroken connection” between the Nakba of 1948 and the catastrophe in present-day Gaza, where many of Jaffa’s refugees reside. The sand invokes the commonplace myth of origin that claims Tel Aviv was “born of the sand dunes” while the dust is a reference to Israelis online calling for to “grind Gaza into dust.”\textsuperscript{373}

\textsuperscript{372} Those villages and suburbs are: Abu Kabir, the Fishermen’s village, al-Shaykh Muwanis, Manshiyyeh, Irshid, Jamasin, Salameh and Sumeil.

\textsuperscript{373} See \url{http://intervals.exiguo.us/artist/99}
In the context of this chapter, the artistic acts of urban intervention of Doron and his interlocutors were designed to elicit a sense of discomfort and disorientation among Israeli Jews. Through art, colonized urban spaces in Tel Aviv and Jaffa become haunted by spectres of Palestinians, those who are absent and those who live nearby but are marginalized, neglected and relegated to oblivion.

The ghosts of Jaffa’s past (and present), invisible to the Israeli eye, trained to see only that which has been normalized to become familiar, need to be summoned into visibility. The work that Doron’s art does is exactly that: making the spectral visible, the hidden and forgotten – known. Under these conditions, the artistic encounter is also a form of conversation: the audience
is summoned to acknowledge the uncomfortable presence of what has been normalized as invisible, recognize the existence of that which had been suppressed and made subconscious; this recognition also compels the audience to be possessed, respond, and forge new forms of political agency.

Finally, “haunting” is not a spontaneous thing. Ghosts need to be summoned, their presence must be made known. Artists like Doron, the Parrhesia group and Ayam collective, and activists who call upon these spectres to come forth and re-possess public spaces, challenging settler colonialism, reveal the cleavages of the “new normal.” Despite conscious efforts by the state, the municipality and the neoliberal market forces, the colonial present is negated, undermined, becoming undone. Tel Aviv haunted by Jaffa is the failure of the “new normal,” and this failure reveals the potential for its overthrow.
Chapter Six: Feeling Palestine in South Africa

Recognizing the historic injustice committed in 1948 and afterwards, Hoping for a better, cooperative future. We, Jews who live here, in Israel Call for the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homeland, which is also our homeland. The return of the Palestinian refugees does not mean that others will be uprooted and destroyed. It is a shared vision of a just, egalitarian future that will be better for us all. Nor is the return only a dream or a hope, but a right recognized in UN Resolution 194. The Cape Town documents, which were prepared jointly by Jews and Palestinians, define the preconditions for the practical implementation of the return, based on the following principles: 1. Our shared land has enough room and sufficient resources to resettle and compensate those of its inhabitants who were exiled, without evicting anyone from their home. 2. The actual return will be preceded by a process of winning over all the communities affected. The process of healing past wounds will continue after the return begins, through ongoing community work. 3. After the return, the country will really and truly act according to principles of freedom, justice and peace. All its inhabitants will have equal rights. The country will ensure freedom of religion, education, conscience, language and culture and will protect the holy sites of all religions. After the refugees were exiled from their land they kept faith with it in all their diasporas, never ceasing to pray and hope to return to their homeland. We entreat the Palestinian refugees in the refugee camps and everywhere else: Return! We will join you to build the land. Come home!

(Proclamation of Return, Zochrot, read in Tel Aviv, 23.12.2012

In August and September 2013, Israeli media, pundits of all political colours, and keyboard activists on social media were embroiled in a public debate surrounding the planned Zochrot conference titled “From Truth to Redress: Realizing the Return of the Palestinian refugees.” The event, first of its kind in Israel, was to be held, strategically, in the Eretz-Israel museum in Tel Aviv, on the lands of Shaykh Muwannis, a Palestinian villages depopulated in 1948. Indeed, the official invitation reclaimed the village’s lands and its elided history by identifying the museum’s location as Shaykh Muwannis. An extremist Zionist nationalist NGO, Im Tirtzu (“if you will”), launched a public campaign to pressure the museum to rescind its agreement with Zochrot, resulting in a legal battle of sorts between both parties. When it became evident that the event was to go on as planned, Im Tirtzu attempted to revoke the legal status of

374 http://zochrot.org/en/content/inaugurating-%E2%80%9Cvision-return%E2%80%9D
Zochrot as an NGO. In the end, the detractors the conference merely contributed to widen the circulation of the right of return as a concept that required serious consideration. The conference’s organizers, on their part, reported the event was attended to capacity.

This chapter studies a shared Zochrot-Badil project called “Envisioning the Return of the Refugees.” Zochrot is a Tel-Aviv-based NGO, which, as its name implies (Hebrew, “Remembering”), focuses on preserving the memory of pre-1948 Palestine, its lost life-worlds, cultures and demolished landscapes, and educating the Israeli-Jewish public about the Nakba, or the ethnic cleansing of the country’s Palestinian population, an act that enabled the establishment of the Jewish state. Established in 2002, Zochrot’s trademark is its Saturdays’ guided tours of depopulated villages, towns and urban neighbourhoods, often in the company of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from that particular locale who share their memories of violent uprooting. This format of “memory activism” is not a coincidence, as it corresponds with ideologically-imbued state-sponsored pedagogical tools. The Zochrot tours fuse the pre-state Zionist practice of “knowing the land” through hiking\(^3\) and post-1960 phenomenon of the rise of the witness testimonial, which can be traced to the Eichmann trial.\(^4\)


\(^4\) Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009). Significantly, though, as Gutman correctly observed, this format serves to highlight the asymmetrical authority of the Nakba tour ritual: the Palestinian story is mediated and its claim to veracity conferred under the aegis of Israeli-Jews. It is Zochrot, an Israeli NGO that determines the authenticity of testimonies (by carefully selecting the survivor-witness), leads memory tourists through the site, produce knowledge about it (in the form of a booklet), and finally – holding a ceremony of placing signage identifying key locations (mosques, churches, cemeteries) at the site. This asymmetry enhances the tension inherent in the politics of knowledge production in settler-colonial projects. Zochrot indeed works to undermine the state’s systematic silencing and erasure of the country’s Palestinian-Arab past, thus dislocating its effort at judaicizing landscapes. But at the same time, the format selected for this work reflects the political order and the fact that Palestinians are granted “permission to narrate” under Israeli-Jewish supervision.
More recently, however, Zochrot has been making an important shift: although still committed to the work of memory, Zochrot is increasingly involved in open discussions about the future of Palestine. More significantly, this shift is also a dramatic turning point from speaking about the right of return (of Palestinian refugees) as an abstract legal concept, to active envisioning the realities and practicabilities of such a return.

*Badil* (Arabic, “alternative”), a Bethlehem-based Palestinian refugee rights advocacy group, was founded in 1998. Its mandate is far broader than Zochrot’s; Badil consciously frames its publications in international law, but its activities far surpass the boundaries of the legal realm. The NGO maintains an impressive resource centre and engages in knowledge-production, primarily through its flagship publication *al-Majdal*, as well as periodic thematic reports. Citing Palestinian identity as the core of the organization’s mandate, Badil recruits its staff and activists from the different segments of Palestinians society in the West Bank, Israel and the diaspora, thus making an explicit transnational – rather than local – claim.

Zochrot and Badil launched a joint project aiming to plan and render the return practical, imaginable and even tangible. I was invited to join the working group and thus became a participant in this project and a co-author of the subsequent “Cape Town document,” which will be discussed in detail in chapter seven. “Envisioning the return of the Palestinian refugees” ambitiously aspired to shift the discourse about the return from a ‘right’ to ‘practice’ by asking its participants, Israeli-Jews and Palestinians, to plan and imagine everyday life in a post-return polity on multiple scales, from state administrative, symbolic and legal apparatuses to micro levels of urban landscapes in Tel Aviv and Jaffa. This year-long joint project yielded a few unexpected twists and turns, taking the group to Cape Town, South Africa, on a study tour of post-Apartheid society, and back to Palestine to dilapidated refugee camps.
This chapter will offer a discussion of the tensions inherent in, and particular to, projects of “imagining futures” such as this one. On the one hand, participants are required to make a temporal leap to a future that is “not yet here,” a “horizon imbued with potentiality.” On the other hand, the documents produced through this project, and the visions they entail are temporally- and spatially-situated. They are rooted at the multiple encounters and interactions between people and the engagements of people with landscapes, places as well as itineraries and the affective processes they engender. Fantasy and the imagination are steeped in affect; visceral processes are both implicated with and constitutive of the imaginary as well as elicited by it. By “fantasy” I mean to denote those imaginaries which are on the one hand rooted in tangible realities but also push towards the horizons of possibility. The fantasies of participants in the Cape Town visit were guided by the histories of settler-colonialism both in Palestine and South Africa, and the visceral ways they experienced post-apartheid realities. I wish to explore how these imaginaies were articulated through affect, or the ways in which individual participants, as well as the group as a whole processed affective reactions as they engaged with each other, multiple sites, itineraries and routes.

The Commensurability of Apartheid

The choice of South Africa as a springboard to imagine Palestine’s future was not a foregone conclusion. Other options were considered, in particular Rwanda and Guatemala, where in both cases, an ethnic minority fled genocide, endured refugeehood but eventually returned to a

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process of reconciliation. Organizers finally opted for South Africa for three main reasons: First, the other cases of refugee return and reconciliation represented internal ethnic conflicts that emanated from particular sociopolitical contexts that were less relevant for the Palestinian case, where mass expulsion and displacement were results of settler-colonial policies. Unlike Guatemala and Rwanda, South Africa is a prominent example of settler colonialism, even though, arguably, the colonial question was largely muted (or downplayed) in post-apartheid public deliberation and legal arrangements. Second, in recent years, the apartheid analogy, by which I mean pointing the similarities between Israeli state policies and those of the apartheid regime, has become salient in global activist (and some academic) circles. Exploring this analogy, and its application to the case of Palestine, appealed to both Zochrot and Badil (the latter had already conducted their own fact-finding mission to South Africa). Finally, funding and guidance for this project dictated the logistics of the tour. The joint delegation’s hosts and local interlocutors in Cape Town were members of KAIROS, a local chapter of a global Christian movement enmeshed in several social justice struggles around the world, in particular Palestine. The leadership of KAIROS in this tour also meant that our itineraries were carefully planned by our local interlocutors to reflect their faith-based form of activism. Significantly, these itineraries and pre-arranged meetings with selected individuals were to perform as meaning-making moments that would produce certain understandings and responses, but potentially foreclose others.

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Recently, anthropologist Julie Peteet has taken a closer look at the apartheid analogy and its political effectiveness, arguing that such a comparison situates particular histories within broader contexts and frameworks of analysis, and thus works to “de-exceptionalize” and “de-nationalize” histories. In the case of Israel, as I demonstrated in chapters two and three, the state has made a claim to be an exception in the region, the “only democracy in the Middle East.” Its practices of mass expulsions and especially blocking the return of the refugee fly in the face of such claims. This chapter, then, adds to that earlier discussion by broadening the analysis of Israel’s practices vis-à-vis the Palestinians and locating it within a specific set of settler-colonial “family resemblance” while still accommodating specificities and differences. The apartheid analogy is linked to the rise of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in 2005. This recent juxtaposition of Israel and South Africa has yielded important political lessons in terms of strategies and potential trajectories for the Palestinian struggle. But the analogy has a much longer history than its current phase, in the kind of arguments produced by proponents of the apartheid analogy, from Maxime Rodinson in the early 1970s to Peteet’s recent intervention. Generally speaking, these comparisons focused on structural similarities between


380 On this, see Jon Soske and Sean Jacobs, eds, Apartheid Israel: The Politics of an Analogy (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015), especially Mahmood Mandani’s intervention, relevant to the discussion here, about the role anti-apartheid Israeli-Jewish activists should take.

apartheid South Africa and Israel (either within its internationally-recognized borders or the 1967 occupied territories alone) in terms of legal discrimination, restrictions on mobility and access to resources, or highlighted the moral and racial aspects of these two settler-colonial formations. Although analyses often diverge, these arguments offer a comparison “from above,” emphasizing ideological and state-formation that underscore two comparable sets of legal and political systems.

In this chapter, I offer an addendum to this volume of scholarship, by suggesting an analysis of commensurability (rather than comparison) that is rooted in affect. In what follows, I will retrace the groups’ journey through post-apartheid urban landscapes in the greater Cape Town area, explicitly focusing on the encounters between group members and local interlocutors, the sites they visited and were led through, as well as the intra-group interactions and tensions. The commensurability that is at the heart of this chapter does not emanate from a structural comparison, but rather from the subjective ways Palestinians and Israeli-Jews experience a sense of what Freud called “the uncanny” and Navaro-Yashin called “eeriness,” or a sudden realization of unexpected similarities: as commensurability unfolds, lived spaces intersect and partially merge with other sites – Jaffa is reimagined as a refugee camp in the West Bank or, as I will demonstrate below, as a Cape Town neighbourhood razed by the apartheid regime.382 The work of commensurability exceeds shared grief and expressions of solidarity. Turning our attention to the ways commensurability is experienced and embodied and to the

realm of affect makes the work of hope visible. Put differently: the politics of comparison opens up opportunities for trans-regional approach to collective resistance, embracing strategies that have been effective elsewhere. Commensurability, by contrast, is rooted in experience and affect and elicits a sense of hopefulness that emanates from successful struggles and human solidarities. This emerging hope generates new imaginaries, political activism and subjectivities that revolve around the tangibility and practicability of return.

**Planning as Resistance**

Participants in this project are not merely engaging in symbolic and/or discursive acts of reclamation or provocation, such as Doron’s artwork from the previous chapter. Rather, planning goes beyond critique of the status quo towards imagining into being a radical alternative. Planning for a reversal of history and for redress of injustice concretizes an alternative to state and municipality authority, as well as to nationalist and colonial histories. In chapter 2, I described the process that had begotten the “new normal,” or normalizing the occupation of Jaffa. Planning the return of the refugees means dislocating that false sense of normalcy by pointing in another, and opposite, direction.

The object of desire, the return of the ’48 refugees of Jaffa, has been all but rendered impossible by the “new normal” of life under occupation and the absorption into the municipality of Tel Aviv (see chapter 2). As many of my interlocutors revealed, both in Jaffa and in forced exile, the mere notion of return became a hollow idea that, with the passage of time, lost a sense of concreteness or immediacy. Life under occupation, either as second-degree citizens or subjects of military rule has become the only thing many know or remember. Refugees in Balata refugee camp, for instance, kept telling me “it’s normal (‘adi, Arabic) for us” when I asked about living in a dilapidated refugee camp, with running water only four days of the week, or about
night raids and arrests of young men. Over time and under the “new normal,” return has become a wish, a desire to a place familiar through fading personal histories; it is, as I said, hollow, because of the acute and painful acknowledgement that the past is irrevocable, that one cannot magically turn back the clock as if the last seven decades never happened. Indeed, this is also the argument I hear from many Zionist Israeli-Jews: “do you honestly think history can be undone?” The act of imagining and planning the return, then, is a radical shift from invoking a wish, and a step towards making the object of desire more tangible, grounded in both the traumas of the past and the realities of the present. This chapter is therefore about “in-betweeness”: the interaction between human beings, on many roads between places, and between moments of despair and visions of futurity.

The journey to South Africa that this chapter focuses on ran concurrently with other, less ambitious return-related projects. One such project that also involved Zochrot through a coalition group by the name of ‘Udna (Arabic, “we have returned”). However, these projects were localized and focused on smaller, agrarian communities, such as Ma’loul near Nazareth, and were actively run by displaced persons from that village. In addition to planning, upper Galilee communities such as Iqrith and Bir’im actively reclaimed their lands, resettling and maintaining a continuous presence on the ruins of their villages despite adverse responses from the state, in particular the Land Administration Authority that has made several attempts to forcibly remove them.\(^{383}\)

A more symbolic form of reclamation and “return” is the “March of Return,” organized by the Committee of the Internally Displaced Persons since the late 1990s. This march, usually with many thousands in attendance, occurs annually on the Israeli “Independence Day” as a direct challenge to the state-sanctioned celebrations, and is often staged on sites of destroyed Palestinian villages. Although the right of return has been the core of Palestinian claims since 1948, it is no coincidence that its transformation into forms of practice emerged only in the last two decades. While the 1950s and 1960s were marked by silencing any form of Palestinian dissent through Israel’s military rule, the pressing issue in the two decades following 1967 was the struggle over the ever-growing rapid land annexation and the governmental “judaicizing” projects, particularly in the Galilee. Since the Oslo Accords there emerged what is commonly known as the “stand-tall generation,” younger cadres of activists who defied attempts to silence them – by both the Israeli state and the Palestinian old guard. Moreover, the rapid marginalization of Palestinian citizens of Israel from peace negotiations and the mainstreaming (and subsequent decline) of the two-states model motivated these young activists to stake their claim to alternative nationalist narratives of displacement and return as opposed to state-building.

‘Joint Action’ across the Colonial Divide

The “envisioning” project under scrutiny here was born out of previous experiences of what Zochrot and Badil members called ‘joint action,’ a study tour in the former Yugoslavia (2009) followed by a workshop in Istanbul (2010) out of which emerged preliminary documents of

The concept of joint action was put to the test soon after the two organizations agreed on moving forward from abstract concepts and into the realm of planning and fleshing out a reality of return. Thus, in the fall of 2011, both NGOs formed their core groups that became a part of this current, much more ambitious, undertaking. But what did it mean for colonizer and colonized to jointly imagine a mutual post-liberation terrain? Is it even possible to jointly feel and articulate hope in a reality that is the radical other from that which we envision and that, furthermore, constantly reconstitute geographical, racial and ethnic boundaries?

Naji ‘Owdeh (Arabic, “return”), then-director of al-Fineiq (Arabic, “Phoenix”) centre at the Deheishe refugee camp, explained to me that joining this action was not easy for him. “We need to work a lot to break the ice,” he explained, as we were sitting his office in the Lilac centre, which he founded after leaving al-Fineiq. “[This type of idea] is difficult for the majority of both sides… and needs a lot of planning.” Indeed, mutual suspicion between the groups was voiced during and after the first encounter. While the Zochrot members were told that our Badil counterparts have formed a rather sizeable working group akin to ours (at the time we numbered about twenty participants), only five of them attended the first meeting in Bethlehem, and were more interested in a presentation rather than an open discussion. Back in Tel Aviv, members of Zochrot voiced their disappointment: Yoav, for instance, claimed that “he had never felt so unwelcome” and that he felt “the people did not want us there.” Perhaps, mused Janet, a

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Palestinian from Jaffa, “Jews represent the occupation for Palestinians in the ‘67 territories. I also represent the occupation for them. This is, after all, a Jewish group.” Lital, another Zochrot member immediately and emphatically corrected her: “it’s an Israeli group.” This sense of unbridgeable gap between the two groups was then addressed by Manal, who explained Badil’s delicate position and its membership’s collaboration with Zochrot. The NGOization of the West Bank in the post-Oslo era, funded by American and European organizations, and the brutality of the second intifada, contributed to the absolute rejection of the “coexistence” model (Du-Kiyum in Hebrew, derogatively referred to as “Duki” by anti-normalization activists) and general suspicion of Israeli activists and NGOs attempting to operate there. A glimmer of hope was offered by Salah, a refugee from the village of ‘Ajur and a member of Badil, who also participated in previous encounters. Salah was impressed by Zochrot’s commitment for the right of return and refugee rights, and argued for ameliorating communications between the two groups. “We should meet more often,” he proposed. However, arranging meetings between occupier and occupied proved a challenging task, on more than one level.

The realities of occupation and spatial segregation enforced through complex networks of military checkpoints, walls, fences and travel permits dictated Zochrot’s working schedule and modes of operation. Thus, the NGO’s members’ privileges as Israeli citizens also prescribed mobility whereas our counterparts were forced to stay in place; the result was that each meeting necessitated detailed planning of the drive from Tel Aviv to Bethlehem, located in area A and therefore officially banned for Israeli citizens, by-passing the heavily policed checkpoints. The road from Tel Aviv to Bethlehem and back, and, as I discuss later, from Palestine to South

Africa, traversed more than checkpoints, national borders and geographies of occupation; it also forced a temporal porosity, the ability to envision a future that is radically different from the status quo.

But if we override the linearity of time, and create a point of encounter between the present and an uncertain distant future, can ‘landscapes of hope of despair’ or real places that are geographically distant from each other actually meet as well? Badil, in collaboration with DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency, located in Beit Sahour, on the outskirts of Bethlehem) introduced us to the concept of “stereoscopic vision” which means exploring the interconnectedness between what they called the ‘extraterritorial space of refuge and the destroyed site of origin.’ Stereoscopic vision, then, was a concept developed to recreate the urban landscapes of Jaffa in ways that would incorporate the right and practice of return to what was lost with what communities built over time elsewhere, especially in refugee camps. This approach, explains Alessandro, an architect working closely with Badil, forced Zochrot to take into account refugees’ complex relationships with their surroundings: both the ‘places of origin’ and all their places of exile. In fact, he insisted, we must also think about itineraries of multiple displacements and returns, which situate Jaffa and the refugee camps in regional and global contexts. What would happen to Beirut or Balata when refugees go back to Jaffa, and in what ways would the latter be affected and transformed by the cultural encounters produced by returnees from different places in the globe? Alessandro attempted to ground this radical and rather abstract approach in a particular example.

Based on his experiences in the Deheishe refugee camp and the creation of al-Feneiq cultural centre, Alessandro and Naji (then the centre’s director) argued that al-Feneiq could be used as a model for what they call ‘present returns,’ by which they meant a culturally-centered return rooted in camp experiences. In this model, they suggested, a similar centre can be established in Jaffa by returnees, for instance, from Balata and ‘Askar camps; their branch of al-Feneiq would reflect and be attuned with their specific experiences of camp life. They locate this centre at a site of a surviving old city complex, which, among other things, used to house the famed Damiani soap factory during the late Ottoman era.

Their presentation encountered unexpected opposition from the visiting Zochrot members. Sivan, a Jewish resident of Jaffa, wondered whether the planners even considered the present population of the city or the current use of the old building, which houses al-Saraya, the Arabic-Hebrew theatre. The building you imagine as vacant or abandoned, she argued, is in fact home to a lively existing cultural centre that embodies the city’s current spirit and human geographies; it is a place of encounter for young Palestinian and radical Jewish artists, writers, actors and activists. In fact, the very existence of a place like al-Saraya or nearby Ana Loulou (a bar popular among a similar crowd) challenges the notion of Jaffa and its place in Palestinian national memory as the quintessential Arab city. Sites like al-Saraya and Ana Loulou represent present-day attempts to create a shared urban culture that transcends racial and ethnic boundaries. Both of these spaces already serve as Jaffa’s “spaces of hope,” loci of revolt against the state’s prescribed racial segregation and microcosms of what the city might become. Sivan’s intervention, in effect, exposed cleavages in Alessandro and Naji’s stereoscopic vision. She reminded them that although planning the return of the refugees required taking into account places of origin (a notion that should be complicated and unpacked) and sites of exile, the “Envisioning” project could not afford to overlook the cultures, people and places that have
developed in the city since Palestinians were expelled. In other words, ‘present returns’ needed to also include those in situ, Palestinians who are internally displaced, those who never left, and the Jews that are now rooted in place as well. Back in Tel Aviv, Sivan was reflecting on the intense first meeting with our Badil counterparts and potential challenges ahead. While Zochrot explored and debated the political implications of the “Envisioning” project, questions like ‘do we, who possess colonial privileges, have the right to plan for those who are absent from these discussions,’ it seemed that Badil and their allies at DAAR never reflected on such questions. Moreover, added Ari,

Their model completely overlooked my living environment, what I consider my hometown – and my place in it. Perhaps we have been speaking of return almost like a figment of our imagination, an unlikely occurrence, because, let’s face it, for us, if the return doesn’t actually happen would not be a great disaster. But that is not the case for them, of course.

This uneasy acknowledgement of fundamental differences between the two groups lingered as the delegations headed to Cape Town, South Africa for a study tour of post-apartheid society and its challenges.

Israel’s system of colonial segregation dictated separate itineraries to South Africa. While the Zochrot delegation, coming from Tel Aviv, boarded a plane at Ben Gurion international airport at Lyd, our Palestinian counterparts were forced to travel to ‘Amman, Jordan, traverse several military checkpoints and the Allenby bridge which prolonged the journey by another day. The separate routes taken to our next site of encounter clearly affected the ways in which we came to think about the kind of future we desire for Palestine.

Optimism and Melancholia in Cape Town

On the joint delegation’s first day in Cape Town, we awoke early in the morning, and wearing our best Sunday clothes, were hurried to nearby St. George Cathedral for a mass led by
Archbishop Desmond Tutu, followed by breakfast with him at the church’s cafeteria. Excited to meet this world-renowned figure, several members of the delegation tried to crowd behind him and at his side. Mr. Tutu shared his experience of humiliation by a young female Israeli soldier when he was detained at the airport in 1989, but at the same time, made light of the situation in an attempt to elicit our amused laughs. When asked about the possibility of reconciliation between the formerly colonized and the perpetrators he answered:

In South Africa we couldn’t know with certainty that people would want to forgive, but I think people possess a wonderful capacity for forgiveness, perhaps even a disposition. You have to risk it and change the regime… most people don’t enjoy harming others… the day will come when people look back and won’t understand why they did the terrible things they’re doing today.

And like many other anti-apartheid activists, the archbishop also added that we must tell ourselves the same thing they did in the heyday of struggle: “in our lifetime.” Tutu’s profound sense of optimism, not just about the situation in Palestine but also about human nature (which, no doubt, emanates from his deep religious convictions) infected us all. When we left the cathedral we were elated, chatting enthusiastically among ourselves about the work we came to do. It felt like endless possibilities were out there, waiting for us to dream of and share with the world. The encounter with the South African archbishop sent a “flash” through our bodies and each other, a sense of familiarity, commensurability, and optimism that the seemingly bleak situation in Palestine can be transformed into hope, liberation and reconciliation.

The mood changed entirely when the group arrived at the next site, the black township Gugulethu, which was a “dumping site” for “surplus people,” as non-whites were sometimes
called, from the Cape Town area. After we assembled in what seemed like a central open-air shopping centre and were introduced to Mbongeni and Mcedisi Twaloand from the local anti-eviction campaign we were led through streets of vast residential areas. These streets were lined with modest-looking small houses, occasionally surrounded by dry and yellowing shrubbery. Local residents came out and gazed at us curiously; Children waved hello. It was only later, once we learned more of the local race relations and politics, that a few members of the delegation realized that the attention we undoubtedly attracted during our visit in Gugulethu and elsewhere was largely due to the fact that onlookers “read” us as a racially mixed group of whites and coloureds, a rare sight in South Africa, especially in the townships. Later, Janet, a Palestinian from Jaffa, shared her daunting experience with the rest of the group. She recalled a local woman approached her and asked whether she is looking for a maid, since she happens to be quite good at cleaning houses. That moment, she concluded, was when she realized the relativity of whiteness. She, who has been identified as the nonwhite “other” of the Jews her entire life, was suddenly read as white in a different context. The whole experience at the township (and later on at the refugee camp) made her feel uneasy, even angry.

I feel we experience everything from the perspective of poverty and wretchedness; we are made to see how poor these people are instead of focusing on anti-poverty action. I am experiencing all this from the perspective of a white person which means self-righteousness and self-flagellation.

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389 Gugulethu, located about 15 kilometers outside of Cape Town, was founded when Langa, another area strictly designated for blacks only, was deemed overcrowded. Gugulethu, like many other townships outside the bantustans, was established for those non-whites employed in European-only areas and were economically dependent on Cape Town. For a more comprehensive analysis of forced removals and the formations of townships and bantustans, see Desmond, Cosmas, *The Discarded People: An Account of African Resettlement in South Africa* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1971); Laurine Platzky and Cherryl Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985). Two decades after the abolition of the apartheid regime, though, Gugulethu is still economically depressed and largely dependent on Cape Town, see Annika Teppo and Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch, “Gugulethu™: Revolution for Neoliberalism in a South African Township,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 2013, Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 51-74.
Sivan remembered how passers-by in Cape Town’s city centre used to curiously gaze at her whenever she went out with the Palestinian members of the group. At first she had not realized the reason for that unwarranted attention, until

I was shocked to find out that people look on and made comments because I happen to be white in the company of dark-skinned people… it happened to me repeatedly. There were comments and gazes all the time. Once, a woman asked me how am I connected with them [the Palestinians] and I realized I am the only white woman in the street accompanied by brown people.

The question of race, and the differences between South Africa and Palestine in that respect first emerged during that first day in Gugulethu. The local activists led us to a dilapidated windowless house where we were graciously welcomed by “Noma” China, a middle-aged heavy-set woman. The house felt stifling in the oppressive afternoon heat, and countless flies were buzzing about, occasionally perching themselves on two infants sleeping soundly on the floor. Noma explained that 29 people lived in this two-room dwelling, and that they all faced forced eviction. She was speaking in one of South Africa’s many native languages, her speech translated for us by one of the local activists who accompanied us. Like millions other blacks and South Africans of colour, Noma was uprooted from her original community and ended up transferred to this racially-segregated township during the apartheid era. She explained she had no desire to return, because her original community was long gone and in the meantime a new one had sprung up there, in Gugulethu, one with a powerful sense of mutual responsibility, local pride and social cohesion. Noma’s rejection of the idea of a “return” to a “place of origin” points to the ways in which such notions should be complicated: is the place in which one (or one’s ancestors) a marker of “origin” that should be retrieved by all means? What does it mean to “return” to a place that is lost in the present and that has become “alien”? Noma’s insistence on the primacy of community and forms of solidarity crafted out of experiences of displacement indicate, then, the importance
of considering present attachments and social ties, in a manner that is similar to members of
Zochrot’s critique of Alessandro’s plan for Jaffa I quoted above.

When I stepped outside for a breath of fresh air, Eitan whispered to me that he overheard
the Palestinian members comparing the scene at the township to their own refugee camp
existence. “It’s like looking at the mirror,” they said, “except here is far worse.” The Palestinians
in the group identified with both the histories of uprootedness they share with township dwellers,
as well as the consequent emerging of new forms of solidarity and community, but they were
also taken aback by the lack of rage and collective struggle. Instead, they noticed an acceptance
of the current situation and a general sense of resignation. By the end of the visit, the Palestinian
group, inhabiting a history of mutual assistance, collected donations on behalf of the family in
order to get their windows fixed. This sense of recognition by Palestinians seemed to dwell on
past experiences of displacement, framed as similar to their own. Yet, as we shall witness below,
later discussions of return reverted to an uncomplicated notions of a “place of origin,” largely
glossing over Noma’s emphasis on present communal ties.

The next day the delegation visited a refugee camp located at Mandela Park.390 Driving
through green hills and majestic trees, the landscapes suddenly shifted as the camp appeared over
a ridge. As we approached, we could make out a few miniscule brick houses amidst a mishmash
of rusty steel freight containers. We were first led to a building that housed what seemed to be
modest offices and a meeting room. There, we were given a presentation by Braam Hanekom of

390 According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), there are over 900,000 refugees and asylum seekers currently
in South Africa from countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and
Somalia. This already vulnerable population has been under periodic threat of xenophobic violence from South
Africans, see Michael Neocosmos, “The Politics of Fear and the Fear of Politics: Reflections on Xenophobic
well as the UNHCR website for figures http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e485aa6.html
PASSOP (People against Suffering Oppression and Poverty) and a local activist, a migrant from Nigeria who explained the camp was now home to persons displaced internally as well as from neighbouring countries, and that cohabitation has produced waves of intra-camp violence. Naji, the prominent activist at the Deheishe refugee camp in Bethlehem, keenly interrogated our hosts about communal activism. He later admitted to me it was an “emotional moment” for him exactly because he suddenly identified certain similarities between the refugees and IDPs of Mandela Park and Deheishe, where he had also served on the local popular committee.

Although Palestinian refugees in particular (and in a different way, the rest of us) acknowledged familiarity in the status of refugeeness, they also articulated an acute sense of difference. Naji, for instance, described their situation as “much harder” than the refugees in Deheishe and the rest of the camps in the West Bank. During a later meeting, he also explained that whereas all camp dwellers in Palestine and elsewhere in the region are Palestinians, in South Africa it seems refugee camps are much more ethnically diverse and therefore lacked social cohesion. As an organizer in his own camp, he also noted the absence of a system that works with refugees, like UNRWA which, among other things, established schools in Palestinian refugee camps.

As we were walking through the camp, occasionally stopping to photograph the dilapidated shipping containers-cum-dwellings, we all agreed the living conditions at the camp are beyond wretched. Clothes hung on makeshift laundry lines outside, in the streets and between houses, sometimes on the barbed wire fence surrounding the camp. A child locked behind steel bars that separate his container-home from the dusty alley; a young woman, who introduced herself as Fortunate, invited me into her home, which was a windowless boiling-hot container, where she lived with her young son. I asked her how long has she been staying at the camp, and
she answered: five years. I hurry back outside to the unpaved street to escape the stifling interior, ashamed at my bodily reaction. We keep walking around; some of us are having their photographs taken with local children, who smile at the strangers’ cameras. I suddenly felt like a colonial tourist, voyeur and consumer of third world misery, my whiteness as a marker of self-congratulatory benevolence. I returned my camera to my backpack and kept looking around.

This tour and the performance of poverty echoed Janet’s critique of the particular framework which was imposed by the local organizers. Leading the group through “landscapes of despair” was designed to elicit certain kinds of reaction, and, as I learned later, to enhance the liberatory narrative of the ANC, which many of our interlocutors, active in the camp, were affiliated with (unbeknownst to members of the delegation).

Months later, after the Zochrot’s members’ first visit to Deheishe refugee camp and my own sojourn in Balata, I was able to reflect more on the differences between these sites. During an interview in her university office, on a hot summer day, Sivan articulated my thoughts:

The differences are striking. At the Palestinian refugee camps one constantly senses the spirit of resistance with the [anti-occupation] graffiti, the look in people’s eyes when they notice a Jewish visitor at the camp, powerful pride and dignity. Here [in South Africa] people have given up.

The absence of resistance was apparently filled with the hope of receiving charitable donations from Western NGOs. Some of the small brick structures at the Mandela camp were donated by Dutch and other European philanthropic societies. Local activists doubled as agents of the state, as they were also members of the ANC and towed the party line rather than voice an opposition. One cannot help but ponder the difference between the ANC, revered as the ‘liberation party,’ voted into power through general election, and the feeble Palestinian Authority, still doing the bidding of its colonial occupier and whose nominal president is forced to obtain special permits from Israeli authorities whenever he wishes to cross the separation barrier.
District Six seen through Palestinian Eyes

On one particularly hot summer day, our joint delegation was driven to District Six, which used to be a residential area at the heart of Cape Town, until its 60,000 ethnically- and socially-diverse inhabitants were forcibly removed following the 1966 Group Areas Act.\(^{391}\) This brutal expulsion was followed by the razing of the majority of the structures, with the exception of houses of worship.\(^{392}\) One of them, a former church, is now home to the District Six museum.\(^{393}\) As soon as we walked in, we were overwhelmed by a plethora of images, exhibits and printed data that fill the place. We found ourselves walking aimlessly trying, in vain, to absorb as much as possible. Despite the valiant efforts of the museum’s curator, who did her best to impose some semblance of order and coherence onto the museum and the ways we experienced it, most of us felt disoriented.

Climbing to the gallery, I noticed the museum’s floor was covered by a map depicting a network of roads, streets and alleyways. The map was adorned by quotes on its edges, written with colourful markers by community members and visitors. Significantly, countless markers of places were also handwritten on the map: locations of stores, schools, playgrounds and lost homes. This elaborate memory map prominently located at the heart of the museum, where all

\(^{391}\) District Six was one of 42 areas where populations were forcibly removed around the Cape Peninsula along the Table Mountain range. See John Western, *Outcast Cape Town* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1981); on the group areas act, see Alan Mabin, “Comprehensive Segregation: the Origins of the Group Areas Act and its Planning Apparatuses,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, Issue 2, 1992, pp. 405-429.


visitors had to pass. Most other exhibits, such as street signs, maps and blowup images, were hanging on the walls, arranged by certain organizational logic (thematic or chronological); other smaller items, such as house keys, children’s toys and silverware, carefully selected by professional curators, were exhibited in glass cases. The memory map, however, was handwritten by multiple laypeople, eschewing stylistic conventions, hierarchies of taste and of importance and curatorial commonsense. Furthermore, whereas exhibits were commanding respect and distance, the memory map was asking, demanding even, to be defiled and stepped on by visitors. The small space was inhabiting shreds of past lives, frozen in time, rearranged according to professional conventions; the floor memory map was, perhaps, District Six’s way of defying that process of museumization, a way of making itself once again visible, rematerializing through its own rubble. For Palestinians, the creation of the District Six Museum as a project by a displaced community that insists on preserving the memory of everyday living in a working class urban neighbourhood, was understood as the display of summud (Arabic, steadfastness).

One form of summud is the production, often using meager resources and amateur work, memorial books dedicated to specific ethnically cleansed communities, displaced during the Nakba. The commemoration of the everyday, both by Palestinians and former residents of District Six, not only preserves fond memories of communal solidarities, but also symbolically reconstitutes these communities despite their dispersion.394

394 On Palestinian memorial books see Rochelle A. Davis, *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011). The District Six museum, much like the Palestinian memorial books, was very much a community project that was denied significant state funding, unlike Robben Island, where ‘community’ eventually stood for ‘the nation.’ See Annie E. Coombes, *Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 118-121.
Blown-up portraits of former residents adorned the gallery, facing the inner central space of the museum haunted us with their powerful phantasmic presence. A shiver went down my spine; I felt their eyes on my back whenever I turned away, pleading to be acknowledged, demanding their tragedy remembered. A quote on a wall above an array of black and white photographs caught my eye. I scribbled it hurriedly in my notebook: “It struck me that our history is contained in the homes we live in, that we are shaped by the ability of these simple structures to resist being defiled.” Raed, a Palestinian citizen of Israel and a member of the Zochrot group, who was eyeing the same exhibit offered an explanation: “I think it means no matter where they exile us to, we carry memories of home with us, even if we are forced to leave
over and over again.” The question of attachment to one’s home was one that kept resurfacing throughout our entire stay in South Africa. As I discuss in chapter 7, during the heated debate over the drafting of the “Cape Town documents,” it was the question of ‘the second occupant’ that flared up repeatedly in the debate and elicited the most passionate reactions. This question of multiple attachment and the translocality of diasporics and refugees will come up again in the final chapter, as I discuss the engagement of Palestinians with the question of return Jaffa after decades of urban transformations.

At the same time, this inscription also echoed a sentiment similar to the one articulated by Noma, who defined “home” relationally rather than through the rigid linearity of “a place of origin”; home, after all, is where “our” community resides. This communal sense of belonging, though, inhabits contradictions: one can sense and articulate a deep affective attachment to one’s lived spaces and those who inhabit them as a shared communal forms of identification. At the same time, one can also articulate belonging to an abstract cross-border and generation community, by invoking shared histories of displacement and violence. Raed himself embodies this complexity: as a Palestinian who remained and became an Israeli citizen, who is deeply attached to his village of birth, located in the “triangle”, where his extended family still resides. But at the same time, he articulated a profound acknowledgment of shared history and identity with Palestinian refugees. The Nakba was not an event that occurred to others a generation ago. In a real sense, it happened to him as well.

Gugulethu and District Six, then, highlighted the complexities of multiple attachment to place produced by displacement: on the one hand, refugees like Noma, who relates to place in situ, are ‘working through’ the trauma of dispersion by forging affective attachments with those who surround them; one the other hand, people, like Palestinians, who have experienced repeated
displacements, have shown creativity by maintaining their attachment to lost places: through the organization of space in refugee camps\textsuperscript{395} organizing heritage trips for their descendants (see chapter 4) or connecting with other exiles through the internet.

For the Palestinian members of the group, then, the museum served as what Navaro-Yashin called “affective spaces” that exude of melancholia over a lost home and a yearning desire to reclaim it.\textsuperscript{396} However, when we were taken to the vacant grounds that used to be District Six, the way we affectively experienced the open urban space radically changed. Under the blazing midday sun and punishing humidity, we were led through a plateau dotted with rubble, fragments of household items and personal belongings and exposed foundations. Some of the items were identifiable from our everyday life: a broken toilet here, a rusting old pot there; most remains though seemed like undistinguishable piles of garbage. Eitan Bronstein, founder of Zochrot, pointed to what seemed to him like the remains of streets. I followed these remains, which transformed the open field into a blueprint of a once lively neighbourhood, with a network of smaller alleyways off a wide thoroughfare, probably a busy local business district, teeming with shoppers, housewives and toddlers on their daily afternoon stroll and noisy traffic. Our guide was Aslam, a former District Six resident who fought back tears as he was pointing to where his grandmother’s house used to stand and where he spent countless afternoons playing with the neighbourhood’s children. “It felt like a tour of Zochrot,” mumbled Eitan, and those members of the Tel Aviv group within earshot silently nodded. Indeed, the resemblance to Zochrot’s trademark Saturday Nakba tours was uncanny: carefully treading among rubble,
listening to the stories of the witness-refugee and reflecting about the bleak reality of the state that ethnically cleansed vast populations and then refused to allow them to return. For us Israelis, District Six was an environment of destruction and loss that discharged melancholia and even despondency. Yet surprisingly, for our Palestinian counterparts, these landscapes scarred by forced removals and state violence invoked a sense of hope, even elation. In the outskirts of the area, revealed Aslam, new homes are being built for District Six returnees, some of whom have already reclaimed their keys from government officials in a formal ceremonial return, an annual ritual commemorating the anniversary of the neighbourhood’s destruction. Silently, Salah kneeled down and inscribed on a large slab of concrete “’a’idun” (Arabic, “returning”) and “we will” in English (figure 6.2). He then took out the Palestinian flag from his backpack, proudly standing upon a nearby rock, joined by Naji and Nidal who chanted together “from ‘Ajur to District Six, we will return.” The rest of us watched them, tears in our eyes, cameras at hand (figure 6.3).
Figure 6.2: The inscription “a’idun” on the ruins of District Six (Photo by Amaya Galili).
Following this symbolic act of solidarity, and still attempting to grapple with his emotions, Eitan posted the following text in his blog:

“I lived here, in District Six, until I was ten years old / My parents were born here, in ‘Ajur village.

Our house was near the northern edge of the neighborhood. The whites lived on the other side of the street / My father explained that our house was in the southern part of the village.

Today, as you can see, there’s a small parking lot there, and a wall / You can see that only a heap of stones is left.

The area remained empty, so we can return, and we will. My father filled out the application forms and I hope he’ll soon build us a new home in District 6 / I want to return to Ajur even though I was never there. I’ll return with my wife and daughters.

My father was in jail because he was active politically against apartheid / I was jailed by Israel for activities opposing the occupation.
The neighborhood will develop and again be inhabited by people of different backgrounds, like it was when I was a child / I want to live here along with my neighbors from the ‘Aida refugee camp. Jews will live near the village, as in the past.

Aslam Levy talks to us as he stands next to a map of the District Six drawn on the floor of the museum at Cape Town that preserves its history. He cries when he remembers how his family tried to keep him from knowing his father was jailed / Salah Ajarma is filled with optimism when he sees a new neighborhood arising from the rubble of the one destroyed by the apartheid regime. Cape Town, 6/2/2012.397

Though this passage was based on what Salah and Aslam shared with the delegation, Eitan created an imagined dialogue using the first person “I” between two refugees at the point of intersection between the places they were forced to leave behind and became inaccessible to them. District Six and ‘Ajur partially merged and became a space of hope for both, a vantage point from which they could both imagine better futures for themselves and others, refugees and colonizers alike. Thus, the pile of rubble in the open field elicited fantasies of future for these three men, Aslam, Salah and Eitan, who imagined this conversation taking place at the site (“here”). Yet, this imagery also produces a reversal: The two refugees are reconstructed as mobile, en route back to their lost place of belonging, when, in our present reality, refugees and internally displaced persons are often confined to spaces of uprootedness, like refugee camps (which is indeed where Salah resides), their mobility severely confined by transnational aid regimes as well as states’ security apparatuses. Eitan, the Israeli-Jew whose mobility is unrestricted, reimagined himself here as staying in place, the “white Jew” who will remain in the city and may live “nearby” the returnees.

The differences between the Palestinians’ and the Israelis’ affective reactions to District Six kept haunting me for the duration of my fieldwork. A year and a half later I finally explored the meanings of that site for some of the tour’s participants. Naji was enthusiastic when I wrote to let him know I was coming for another visit to Deheishe. Accompanied by a colleague from my own department who was doing his fieldwork in Jerusalem at the time and had never visited the camp, we headed to Deheishe by public transportation on a sweltering late summer day. I was keenly aware that as an Israeli citizen, I am not allowed to travel to Bethlehem, so we had to avoid the direct bus and opt for a different route: from Jerusalem to Beit Jala, and from there to Deheishe by taxi. Naji greeted us in his small office at the Lilac centre, located at the bottom edge of the hillside camp. He offered us coffee, and spoke at length about the centre, its activities and the international volunteers staying there. Occasionally, people kept coming in and interrupting us, and Naji, apologizing each time, resumed his impassioned speech. When I asked him about District Six, he explained: “A few years ago we visited Deir Aban (his ancestral village) and we carried the Palestinian flag with us. It [District Six] was the same,” immediately correcting himself, “it felt the same.” Then he made an observation that escaped me during our visit to District Six:

When you look, you can see white people living in the mountain and it’s the same with the Jewish colony in Deir Abban… I know it’s different in South Africa, but those people [refugees from District Six] are thinking about this place, and … thinking about coming back.

In this case, I asked him, how come you seemed to us so elated? Naji grinned, as if he had heard the question before. “People always ask us [Palestinians] how come we smile when we talk about Palestine… We know our story, we are connected to the land, and we are living here.” For Palestinian refugees like Naji and Salah, then, the remains of District Six represented sites of memories of loss and spaces of hope – it is where their own ancestral villages, now demolished
and inaccessible to them – and the neighbourhood that was depopulated intersected and converged. Landscapes of ruins turned into itineraries of expulsion but also of return. It was in Cape Town that Palestinians (and in different ways, Israeli-Jews) were prompted to remap local, national, regional and global spaces. Where officially-sanctioned maps drew borders, erased histories and life worlds, our own “being in space” brought to our lines of vision places of old and those that have yet to be created, super-imposed on one another. Our affective experiences in Western Cape gave new meanings to Alessandro’s “stereoscopic vision.” For a moment in District Six, traumatic memories and hopes for a future projected different places into one space: Naji’s Deir Aban, Salah’s ‘Ajur, Manshiyyeh (for many of the Israeli-Jews, including myself) and District Six itself.

The ways in which we experienced affect differently in District Six (and throughout our visit) were further elucidated by ‘Umar. ‘Umar, a Zochrot employee and a key figure in other return planning projects, was also the leader of the NGO’s Jaffa group, and, together with Bassem from Badil, was also in charge of the South Africa itineraries and schedules imposed by our KAIROS hosts. I interviewed him in the offices of Zochrot, shortly before an event, as people occasionally shuffled into the adjoining meeting room and waved us hello. When I asked him about District Six, he explained that the elation I noted and was baffled by was because of the Palestinian flag:

We experienced a flash as we heard a name of a place there that sounded like ‘Ajur, which is when a refugee from ‘Ajur [Salah] waved the Palestinian flag. [Unlike his village of origin], that [i.e District Six] was a space where that act was allowed, and [the sight made them] feel pride. The place reminded them of ‘Ajur, and they can see it’s in ruins, but there were also other possibilities nearby. There was hope not too far from the destruction… and it made them feel hopeful.

The “flash” ‘Umar was referring to is the moment in which landscapes transform and merge with each other, as a new and unfamiliar place imbued with a new-old meaning. It becomes a place
that is intimately familiar, even if one, like a Palestinian refugee, has never actually inhabited it.

That “flash” is the affective engagement of humans and sites, like a switch that goes off in one’s imagination and sends electrical currents through one’s body. ‘Umar was not just referring to a cognitive act of meaning-making through comparison (“this site is similar to another”), but to an embodied response to a realization, to being in place, that sends jolts of affect through the body, processed and generated emotion. For the Palestinians in the group, those emotions were hope and pride. For the Israeli-Jewish members, despair and melancholia.

Sivan, for instance, reflects on her experiences in South Africa as saturated with melancholia. The museum, she said, attempted to promote a progressive narrative – from racial oppression, through apartheid to liberation and redress. However,

you did not solve any of the problems! That area [where District Six used to be] remains vacant! It was a testament to everything that is not resolved… then when we walked around there I found it hilarious – that Nakba village in the midst of Cape Town.

The hilarity Sivan cited also denotes a sense of familiarity and commensurability. As a member of Zochrot, she had also visited countless destroyed Palestinian villages and towns during the Saturday tours. But for Sivan, that recognition, the same “flash” that went through ‘Umar and the other Palestinians produced a sense of despair, cynicism even. She could not, or would not, see “other possibilities nearby” as genuine forms of redressing injustice. The melancholia shared by other Israelis in our group was a way to make sense of the commensurability (or “cultural intimacy”) of the landscapes of destruction and loss, their intersection with sites we frequent and silenced histories we are vocal about. Yet this familiarity was also coupled with realization of the failures of the new regime in South Africa, our sense of dystopia and urban terror. Every night members of the group ventured out to remove themselves from conversations about the day’s events and the urge to process and work through their emotions. The double iron gates,
surveillance cameras and security protocols at the guesthouse were our first introduction to what I come to consider “dystopic urbanity.” Members of the delegation, both female and male, could not shake the feeling of imminent danger – of sexual violence, assault or robbery, and we were constantly warned by our hosts to avoid venturing out by ourselves. At different moments during the visit we were wondering aloud whether this is how postcolonial Palestine might end up looking: crime-ridden, violent, with ever-increasing social disparities. This shared sense of melancholia can perhaps, then, be attributed to these darker sides of liberation as well as implicit and explicit fears, often voiced by Israeli-Jews about being engulfed by the natives, taken over by demography or the return of the refugees. In one of Zochrot’s events, someone sarcastically called this “fear of the invasion of the barbarians.” This remark, although made in jest, perhaps to lighten a tense moment of heated discussion, conveys the colonizer’s anxiety of the revenge of the colonizer, articulated by Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Decades of forced evictions, underdevelopment and incarceration would be avenged tenfold upon liberation, when the colonizer, outnumbering his oppressor, finally rises up to rid himself of the occupier. In this dystopic scenario, the colonized is the one to determine the price for the horrors of occupation – claiming the colonizer’s city, home, even the body of his wife as his own.\(^{398}\) In this particular context, the Israeli-Jews of Zochrot and their supporters, who embrace the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and undertake the task of imagining it are articulating concerns about the future of the former-colonizers. While they reject the racist undertones of the demographic discourse perpetrated by the Israeli state, Zochrot members are keenly aware that dismantling the current regimes of power and colonial privileges would mean having to consider the possibility

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that some of the returnees might simply not want them around, and that reconciliation may be a challenging task.

**Conclusion**

Earlier in this chapter, I referred to the unexpected way by which a moment of recognition and the acknowledgment of the uncanny congeal to reveal ‘horizons of possibility.’ I was referring to a “flashlike” recognition of what we did not realize was there prior, something that is new and yet painfully familiar. This sudden ‘flash,’ as my analysis showed, is embodied and deeply affective, the moment participants in this tour identified the uncanny resemblance between places and along itineraries. Focusing on the ways in which place is affectively experienced made visible those moments of flashlike recognition of the uncanny and significantly – the political valence of this embodied response. I argue that the lens of affect enables us to explore the ways in which Palestinians and Israeli-Jews visiting Cape Town differentially identified and reacted to similarities and differences between Palestine and South Africa; recognizing the uncanny resemblance made those two places commensurable, or, to quote one Palestinian member of the group “it felt the same.”

This impulse of making the two sites commensurate is more than just identifying the familiar and uncanny in a history of racial segregation, forced removals and brutal political control; this recognition also provides Palestinians with a toolkit to challenge the settler colonial
“new normal” and forge a sense of hopefulness, a horizon of liberation that was made possible elsewhere, and can materialize in Palestine as well. 399

And finally, the south-south encounter of the kind I described here is productive beyond the bequeathal of resources of collective anticolonial resistance. Perhaps its most powerful, far-reaching political implications, lie in the potential to create trans-regional conversations between formerly- and currently colonized peoples over the heads of their colonizers. Earlier in this chapter I described how Eitan, an Israeli-Jew, fantasized about a conversation between Aslam and Salah; the South African “coloured” and the West Bank Palestinian refugee find common ground in the experience of displacement and draw on each other’s histories in ways that are inaccessible to Israeli-Jews, who are left outside the conversation. The force of this encounter and its potential can explain the outburst of optimism and elation expressed by the Palestinians in Cape Town, which evaded the Israelis who remained dwelling on the hurdles and impossibilities. While the remainder of this dissertation focuses on the colonizer-colonized dynamics and the potential for their undoing, and the next chapter foregrounds the question of post-liberation “living together,” it is worthwhile to consider what the Cape Town journey implies not just for the anticolonial struggle in Palestine, but for potentially rethinking the circulation of ideas and the remaking of globalization in the image of human solidarities, or what the Zapatistas, in the 1996 Fourth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle called the “international of hope” 400: unity that


transcends and overcomes both national boundaries as well as the “globalization of misery,” the working of transnational bodies that regulate and control human activity, maintaining global resources and economic power in the global north.
Chapter Seven: The Palestine of Tomorrow

“Why therefore should I not dream and Hope? For is not revolution the making real of dreams and hopes? So let us work together that my dream may be fulfilled, that I may return with my people out of exile, there in Palestine to live with this Jewish freedom-fighter and his partners, with this Arab priest and his brothers, in one democratic state where Christian, Jew and Moslem live in justice, equality, fraternity and progress.” (Yassir Arafat, UN address, 1974)401

Shortly after our return from Cape Town, we heard that the Tel Aviv municipality decided to name a small turnabout in Jaffa after Dr. Fouad Dajani (1890-1940), scion of an elite family, a physician and Palestinian medical pioneer who had lived nearby. The roundabout is located right behind the Dajani family home and hospital founded by Dr. Dajani. Both have been repurposed by the state and are used today as a geriatric centre. The ceremony was planned to be a public affair in the presence of the extended Dajani clan, including the physician’s surviving son and his grandchildren, several of whom allowed back into the country for the first time.402 A group of Zochrot activists, both Palestinian and Israeli-Jews, planned to attend the ceremony and call for the implementation of the right of return rather than tokenizing the Dajani family and the Palestinian-Arab history of the city in order to curry favour with Palestinian voters.403


402 The Jerusalem-based branch of the Dajani family rejected the invitation and published a public notice in the Palestinian media stating the refusal of the symbolic gesture by the Tel Aviv municipality “under the Israeli flag.” see “Dajani family of the city of Jerusalem announces its refusal to participate in the naming ceremony of Dr. Fouad Dajani roundabout,” 16 February, 2012, Yaffa48 (http://www.yaffa48.com/?mod=articles&ID=4934) Last access 26 May, 2016.

403 Uncoincidentally, municipal elections were planned to take place the following year. Those instrumental in security naming the roundabout, in particular Ahmed Masharawi from Liberal Zionist party Meretz, where hoping to capitalize on this event. His local political rivals, in particular Tajamu’ supporters, were conspicuously absent.
Our group took position at the periphery of the large crowd, yet clearly visible, holding banners in English, Arabic and Hebrew calling for the right of return. One of the signs provocatively greeted the Dajani family members with “welcome returnees.” Our presence was quickly acknowledged by members of the audience and the media. We were approached by architect and self-styled “Tel Aviv expert” Samuel Giller, who, according to his account, facilitated the whole affair. Giller sternly demanded that we leave the scene, claiming that “such provocations might discourage the municipal authorities from making similar gestures” and that moreover, the Dajani family was “uncomfortable” by our presence. His claims were belied by the sheer enthusiasm of all members of the Dajani family, who came to shake our hands, expressing their gratitude, and insisting on having their photographs taken with the group and the banners (see figure 7.1).

On the surface, this incident is reminiscent of the “virtual returns” I discussed in chapter 4; the Dajanis’ visit consisted of the predictable elements: strolling the streets of ‘Ajami, visiting the old family home and paying respects to their ancestors’ graves. Yet at the same time, this “return” was fraught enough to raise the ire of the Jerusalem-based branch of the clan. The Dajanis were *invited* by the Tel Aviv municipality as honoured guests into a well-orchestrated performance designed to cement its image as a “cosmopolitan” city. Naming the roundabout after Dr. Dajani was clearly meant to support the municipal’s claim for inclusion of Palestinians in its official narratives, and contribute to marketing the “new normal” as a success story. Standing for the local Palestinian community, the presence of the Dajanis was meant to symbolize the respect and tolerance of “minorities” within the urban landscapes and Israeli society as a whole.
Any discomfort felt by the Dajanis themselves, by their own account, was not a result of the presence of a small group of activists who reminded the crowd about the ethnic cleansing in Jaffa and the plight of the refugees. Rather, the cause of their consternation was the fact that they were admitted into their ancestral homeland by virtue of an official invitation from what they see as an occupying authority. The Dajanis’ itinerary also included a visit to their old family home in Jaffa, not far from the roundabout and the hospital, where a Palestinian family now resides. The current occupant, a man by the name of Ramzi Jun, attempted to overcome the awkwardness by greeting the Dajanis: “this is your home… we will be honoured to welcome you here.”

The Dajani incident, and in particular the hostile responses and discomfort of several Jewish members in the audience (as well as mayor Ron Huldai, who was quick to leave the scene) point to the profound anxiety prevalent in Israeli society surrounding the Nakba and the right of return. The Tel Aviv municipality celebrates diversity and cosmopolitanism, as long as its “others” remain absent, or, at the very least, are briefly feted and then leave. The longer those absentees linger, the more tangible their presence, as neither the settler-colonial nor the Zionist nationalist logic can tolerate their claims to place. Furthermore, those Palestinians who are rooted in place and continue to live in Jaffa are considered either impediments to gentrification and urban renewal, or a source of political and social anxiety. Outside election

405 The visit and ceremony were documented by a family member and Dr. Dajani’s namesake: https://youtu.be/DSVPWF_ye-M

406 “Immortalizing the Memory of the late Dr. Fouad Dajani by naming a roundabout in what remains of Jaffa after him,” 29 February, 2012, al-Quds, p. 6. [Arabic]

407 This dynamics is somewhat similar to the deliberate erasures of Turkey’s “others” from nationalist urban histories, but at the same time using “traces of minority pasts” to celebrate an urban cosmopolitan culture. See Amy Mills, Streets of Memory: Landscape, Tolerance and National Identity in Istanbul (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010).
season, Jaffa’s Palestinian population and its needs are systematically neglected by municipal authorities. The group that picketed the ceremony consisted of those of us who had just returned from Cape Town. We were in the midst of deliberating and writing our reports, and the obvious Israeli-Jewish anxious response to our intervention gave us pause. Additionally, the Dajanis’ visit to their home currently occupied by another Palestinian contributed to heighten our sensitivities to the complexities of the process of decolonization and return, including, for instance, questions of generational differences and what we came to frame as the “secondary occupant” (see discussion below).

The purpose of this chapter is not to chart out a systematic vision or plan for the “morning after” the return of the refugees, nor do I intend to grapple with the countless logistical issues that are part and parcel with a process of mass repatriation. Furthermore, none of the following directly addresses the question of how things will come about: what might be the political process that eventually leads to the final breakdown of settler-colonialism in Palestine and precipitate the return of the refugees. Instead, in this chapter, I am attempting to probe the potential for “living well together.” The aim is to tease out potential futures, and point to the way both Palestinians and Israeli-Jews might engage in “forward dawning” by imagining and bringing into consciousness that which is not yet here. In fact, by articulating these imaginaries,

408 One such ongoing needs is a better local education system. Palestinians and Jews in Jaffa have been locked in a bitter struggle against the municipality over the city’s bilingual education system, see for instance, Yarden Skoop, “Tel Aviv backtrack, will not open bilingual school in Jaffa,” January 30, 2015, Haaretz (http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.639812) and Yarden Skoop, “Parents and Tel Aviv Municipality in a row over the Bilingual education in the city,” 28 January, 2016 (http://www.haaretz.co.il/news/education/1.2833104) [Hebrew]. Last accessed 26 May, 2016. In addition to Jaffa’s education crisis, there has always been a shortage of accessible public transportation, and the majority of Palestinians who reside in Ajami and Jabaliyyeh are forced to walk considerable distance to Jerusalem Boulevard in order to catch a bus to Tel Aviv. Current municipal plans for the construction of the light rail system will force Palestinians to traverse even longer distances and considerably limit their access to public transportation during years of construction along the boulevard.
those who engage with the future already, in a way, bring it into being, giving it shape and form through language and making these possible futures, potentialities, legible. The vantage points from which individuals are able to imagine these futures, however, are situated in the present and saturated in personal grief and a profound sense of injury. For many Palestinians, the idea of reciprocal exchange with their oppressors, let alone the potential for reconciliation remain unimaginable, and so is the notion of “living together” that transcends the present formations of coexistence under colonialism. As I will demonstrate below, some eschew the mere idea of “living together” and can only imagine a future existence without the presence of Israeli-Jews.

First, I will return to the Cape Town “detour,” this time through the tangible products of our visit. Written as part of an ambitious project by Zochrot and Badil, two documents in particular reflect their engagement with the future, one that is concerned with the language of rationality and civility, emphasizing civil society and processual thinking.409

The next section of this chapter will shift to the world of fiction that, unlike the NGOized report-production genre, has always been the bedrock of human imagination and offers a creative outlet from the stagnant confines of the present into the realm of possibilities. Here, I will offer close readings of two short stories, by a Palestinian and an Israeli-Jew, both imagine a post-

409 The genre “trickled down” from the neoliberal business world, NGOized, and has become a prominent marker of a rationalized form of humanitarianism and other forms of activism. Donor foundations now expect annual reports presented in formats familiar to them and the governmental agencies that regulate them. These formats render information simple and easy to read since it requires short sentences, using a language that has been naturalized in the sphere of NGOs: “facilitating,” “community-based grassroots initiatives,” “advocacy,” “coalition-building,” “knowledge-building,” “democratically organized,” etc. Rationalizing the language of humanitarianism, and therefore also activism, bestowing an air of universalism and transparency, obstructs from our line of vision the specific histories associated not only with these phrases, but also their linkages to the spheres of business and government bureaucracies. In fact, although its repeated redeployment creates an effect of coherence and transparency, the rationalized language remains opaque and hinders context-specific meanings. The Cape Town and Jaffa documents then, grapple with the limitations of the genre of “the report.”
return reality in Jaffa, but with sharp difference in tone: while the Israeli-Jewish author’s engagement with the emergent future reality reflects hopefulness and sheer optimism, his Palestinian counterpart suggests that even when politically the path is open, “real” return remains impossible. In a sense, literature is where fantasies come alive, because not only the author’s wildest and most profound desires become legible through the use of language and the narrative form, but they also demand the attention of the readers, entice them to entertain, even for a fleeting moment, the possibility of another life, and undermine binaries such as truth/lie, fantasy/reality and self/other. Readers are expected to partake in fantasy and imagine themselves assuming a role in another reality.

A group interview I held with a few of Balata’s young men is the centre-piece of the third and final section of this chapter. It elucidates that the conditions of entrenched military occupation and collective trauma may inhibit, even foreclose, refugees’ ability to imagine a reality that is the radical other of the life they were born into and are forced to endure. Furthermore, the youth’s affective reactions to my questions also illustrate that the practice of “imagining futures” and planning a post-return reality is the purview of the privileged few, who are able to take time away from everyday struggles to survive.

Living Well Together

A few years before his death, Jacques Derrida, who by the late 1990s has become a vocal critic of Israel, engaged with the idea of “living together” in the context of Palestine. Specifically, Derrida was concerned with the question: how to live well together? If we take the present conditions of military occupation, forced displacements and ethnic segregation as our point of departure, then following Derrida, we must ask: how do we change these forms of living together, under settler-colonialism and its constant application of violence, to something else,
better? Moreover, what does this other, better way of living together entail, and what might it look like? Derrida explored an understanding of “return” that meant revisiting a traumatic past in order to achieve a sense of closure through repentance and reconciliation. Derrida’s idea of return is derived from the Jewish tradition of *teshuvah*, which literally shares the same Hebrew root means “a change for the better,” or “a return to oneself.” If we follow his logic, then, the route for a new way of living together in Palestine necessitates reconciliation and forgiveness, which imply forms of reciprocity between colonizers and colonized that would open up possibilities for a better future for both. Indeed, Desmond Tutu, who I mentioned in the previous chapter, has argued that there is no future without forgiveness, a principle that directed his leadership of the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa.

Derrida, however, remained on the abstract level when he spoke of the potentiality for “living well together” in Palestine. He did not attend to the specific forms of oppression that the state of Israel has imposed on Palestinians, not to the settler colonial occupation of Palestine, and remained particularly silent about the history of mass expulsions and spatial appropriations, which I discussed in the context of Jaffa in chapter two. Understanding histories of oppression is crucial for any discussion about the possibility of reconciliation and “living well together.” For instance, refugees in West Bank camps have experienced military occupation, while their

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411 Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (London: Rider, 1999). In this deeply Christian account, Tutu explicates the principles that guided the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation committee in South Africa with the fall of the apartheid regime. In a similar manner to Derrida, he argues that perpetrators’ confession and appeal for forgiveness from their victims is the only way to forge new relationships as individuals and collectives that are radically different than those who caused the injustices of the past. In this formulation, reconciliation is a national project aimed at producing a new society that embraces multiculturalism.
counterparts in Syria and Lebanon have been multiply-displaced as a result of civil wars, revolutions and regime reprisals. Palestinians who remained and became citizens have endured political and economic marginality, and in recent years in Jaffa, as I mentioned in chapter five, are under an increasing threat of displacement as a result of rapid gentrification. This is not to argue that “living well together” is not a useful concept and should be abandoned. Instead, I would like to argue that this approach is symptomatic to the prevailing discourse of “negotiations” that produces false symmetries between occupied and occupier. This same approach ungirds commonplace notions of “coexistence,” reinforced by NGOs and the “peace industry.” The symmetrical approach, then, should be overcome by thinking through “living well together” through the lens of experience, accounting for particular forms of oppression as well as the contingencies of de-colonization.

My discussion of “living well together” is therefore informed by these multiple histories and the way people relate to them. The possibilities of “what might be” that I am concerned with here are deeply vexed, and are rooted in present political contexts and multiple configurations of power relations, primarily colonial in nature. The long decades of exile have complicated refugees’ sense of belonging. As Diana Allan argues,

while the importance and legitimacy of the right of return is not in doubt, what it means for different generations of refugees, in particular those born and raised in exile, is less certain. 412

As Quayson and others have argued, exile does not only mean absence from one’s “place of origin.”\textsuperscript{413} Dispersed refugees have traveled multiple routes, formed attachments to other places where children were born, immense loss and trauma occurred, and communities created (and dissolved). At the same time, newcomers resettled in places from where Palestinians were expelled, and made them their homes. In other words: since time has not stopped in 1948, we must account for the upheavals and transformations in the life of refugees and settlers alike, including all the places they now call “home,” and those spaces in between.

**A Return to the Homeland**

All these considerations were discussed during the final two days in Cape Town that were devoted to the visit's concluding workshop. The joint delegation was divided into three sub-groups, each responsible for what we identified as a significant theme, broadly defined - working toward return, reparations and visions of a new state - then reconvened to share their main conclusions and proposals. While certain issues sparked lively, even heated, debates, others encountered consensus, in ways that were often surprising. The final product which came to be known as “The Cape Town Document” is representative of the emotional journey undertaken by the delegation, but also reflective of the conundrum of collective imaginary this “joint action” implies.

The introduction (which was written some time after the Cape Town trip and after the drafts of the other sections were finalized) positions this document on spatial and temporal scales: it charts specific itineraries, from various places in Palestine (and the diaspora) to Cape Town and back; itineraries within the Western Cape which generated particular narratives and insights while, at the same time, potentially hindering others. The introduction also acknowledges the challenge of making a spatio-temporal leap, between present geographical and human terrains, punctured by borders, checkpoints and walls: the territories under Israeli control (both inside 1948 and 1967), and the global Palestinian and Jewish diasporas. The difficulties of ‘jointly imagining’ and sustainable collaboration between Israeli-Jews anti-occupation activists and Palestinians who live under occupation have perhaps been partially mitigated by the shared experiences in Cape Town, and through the process of group discussions that are based on agreed-upon principles. Indeed, upon our return to Palestine, it was Naji who revealed to me that he considers Jewish members of our group closer to him than some of his Palestinian neighbours, a sentiment he probably would not have been able to share had it not for this collaborative work in South Africa and beyond.

The document acknowledges the different ways in which participants engaged the challenge of imagining a post-liberation future: while for Israeli-Jews, imagining a return may represent an outlet for a quest for justice, a possible avenue of political activism or merely an intellectual exercise, for Palestinians, particular those who live in refugee camps and/or under Israeli military occupation, the act of imagining means leaping over the daily struggle for liberation, overcoming injuries and working through trauma in order to envision a yet unformed future where not only the injuries cease, but one in which perpetrators and victims work towards reconciliation. These disparities are also clearly illustrative of the ways in which imagining futures is a privilege most colonized are deprived of. As I quoted Ari in the previous chapter, if
the return does not occur, it’s “not a big deal” for “us.” Israeli-Jews can afford to preserve the status quo (and therefore their settler-colonial privileges) and treat projects such as this one as an exercise of utopian thinking. For Palestinians, particularly refugees who live in the West Bank, and contend with everyday forms of oppression, the threat of imminent violence, restrictions on movement and the struggle to maintain a semblance of normality leave very little space, time and resources for fantasy. Those very few Palestinians who participated in this project were able to do so because they were extracted from their everyday contexts into a different place where the act of imagining was made possible, and where they were able to engage in fantasy with members of the settler society.

At the same time, this project is not about decontextualized fancy or mere intellectual exercises; our extraction from the immediate context of life in Palestine along the colonizer/colonized divide was also a process of recontextualization – in the sites in which we visited, but also affectively, with other places we imagine as eerily similar, just like Salah likened District Six to his ancestral village of ‘Ajur, and the same site prompted the Saturday Nakba tours for the Israelis in the group. Thus, this document is very much a product of a particular moment, at the intersection of people and places, along specific itineraries. Nevertheless, the cultural intimacy that elicited our visions of the future also revealed the cleavages within the delegation, between colonized and members of the colonizing society.

The basic premise of the Cape Town document is that there will be no forced removals, and that evictions of residents from their homes do not constitute a just solution. Moreover, the document advocates both actual and symbolic unsettling and “overthrowing” geographical, ethnic and spatial boundaries, and props up the idea of “mixing” as a strategy to overcoming colonial anxieties. Postcolonial de-Zionized society will thus eschew ethnic and racial enclaves,
transforming Jewish-only locales (the way Tel Aviv is imagined today by the state, municipality and its residents) into shared communities.

Arguably, the most contentious point and a subject for a heated debate was the issue of “the second occupant,” shorthand for cases where the original pre-Nakba house is still standing and is currently occupied by someone who purchased it in good will. The guiding principle and the ideal resolution in these few cases is to prioritize a mediated and consensual solution, as long as the right to housing is guaranteed for both the Palestinian returnee and the current occupant. The declaration held the view that whereas legal title of the property reverts back to the original owner, it is the state’s duty to find housing for the “second occupant” and their heirs even when no agreement is reached.

The issue of “the second occupant” proved to be the flashpoint for the question of collective imagining. As soon as the group introduced the topic of the “second occupant,” Salah’s facial expression and demeanor suddenly changed; he interrupted the presentation and, visibly upset, exclaimed “if my house still stands, I don’t care who’s in it. I just want my house back.” Salah’s emotional reaction and his adamant refusal to debate the issue are indicative of the intimate attachment of refugees to memories of home, as a marker of justice, and a place of intimacy and security. Salah has never actually lived in the (hypothetical) house in question, yet he passionately claims his right of ownership and attachment to it. Nevertheless, as other discussants indicated, the so-called “second occupant” also maintains their own attachment to the same house. These moments of unbridled affective outbursts disrupt the notion of “joint action,” and prove to be an unexpected result of a process aimed at producing a coherent vision for the future.
The question of a shared vision also inhabits another concern: what about those who are imagined as part of this future society, but who are overlooked, their desires and fantasies ignored or not taken into account? One of those groups is the population often referred to as “second and third Israel,” namely the Mizrahim, who are imagined in this document as a frontier, contact zone in the post-Zionist polity. If the state of Israel settled them along its borders as a reluctant civilian policing force against Palestinian returnees, the Zochrot-Badil document implicitly relegates them to a similar role though for the opposite purpose. What I mean by that is that the document imposes on the Mizrahim the role of avant-guard postcolonial “mixing.”

Presently, most urban, semi-urban and rural communities within both the 1948 and the 1967 territories were designed and are maintained as either exclusively Arab or Jewish. Even within the so-called “mixed cities” residents are spatially distributed by ethnicity and class.

Monterescu and Hazan argue that the nationalization of space has also meant that even within a mixed city, physical proximity notwithstanding, neighbours are viewed as distant political and cultural “others” to the point that any discussion of cohabitation in “symbolic space,” i.e. bridging this imagined distance, is impossible. This symbolic distance was particularly poignant when, during the summer of 2011, a coalition of Jaffa residents and social justice activists formed the tent encampment protesting government and municipal policy of house demolitions and mass evictions from public housing. Notably absent from this

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415 Haim Hazan and Daniel Monterescu, A Town at Sundown: Aging Nationalism in Jaffa (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute and Hakibutz Hameukhad, 2011). [Hebrew]

celebration of protest were the impoverished Jewish Mizrahi working class neighbourhoods (Yafo Gimel, Yafo Dalet) were notably absent. Thus, symbolic distance overpowered class solidarities and inhibited a joint struggle that would have benefited Jewish and Palestinian residents both.\footnote{It is important to note that briefly, some of the Mizrahim in Hatikva neighbourhood, a working class area in southern Tel Aviv, joined the coalition with the Jaffa tent encampment on the condition of exclusion of all nationalist claims or symbols.}

The Cape Town Document postulated that “for the purposes of medium and long-term integration and reconciliation,” the new state (or interim authority) is to encourage the creation of mixed communities by offering monetary incentives and housing subsidies.\footnote{Zochrot-Badil, \textit{Study Visit to Cape Town}, 2012, p. 19.} Though not explicitly stated, the population targeted by these incentive packages is working class Mizrahi Jews (as well as former camp dwellers). The document effectively allows the Ashkenazi middle class to maintain its segregated suburban communities while the Mizrahim would be once again subjected to limited housing choices, in newly constructed mixed public housing and other sites earmarked for this social engineering experiment of mixing. The Mizrahim, in particular those who originated in Arabic-speaking countries, have been forced by the Zionist state to abandon their rich non-Jewish cultural heritage. Adults were socialized through their school-age children to refrain from speaking Arabic (or Judeo-Arabic) or listen to Arabic music.\footnote{Shohat, “Sepharadim in Israel”; Sami Shalom Chetrit, \textit{Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews} (London and New York, Routledge, 2010).} In fact, although certain elements of Arab culture have re-emerged in the past two decades, few Mizrahim would publicly identify as “Arab-Jews” because of the social sanctions and political ramifications of such an act. Decades of forced alienation from everything Arab, compulsory military service,
usually in low-ranking combat roles that entail close contact with Palestinian population in the 1967 occupied territories, and continuous repression by hegemonic Ashkenazi elites (often identified as politically liberal or leftist) resulted in reluctance and often outright hostility toward Palestinians. A common (mis)representation of working class Mizrahim (mostly among Ashkenazim) is of extreme right-wingers hurling racial slurs against Arabs. Though exaggerated and de-contextualized, the image of the Mizrahi as an “Arab hater” is indicative of ethnic class tensions, emanating from state indoctrination and from the brutality of everyday survival struggle in the lowest social echelons. This form of “living together” in the sense of physical proximity within overlapping urban spaces is typical in “mixed cities” such as Jaffa, and has been designed to produce intercommunal tensions. The purpose of this document is therefore to chart possible ways to overcome these forms of vexed coexistence and instead offer imaginaries of better ways to live together. Planning for the future of Palestine, then, must account for these enmities and devise policies overcome these obstacles.

Although the social integration and reconciliation postulated in the document are desirable ideals, forced mixing might not encourage “trust among individuals and communities” or “bolster faith in the process of reconciliation,” especially if this mixing is artificially and reluctantly created. This reluctance to mix is often voiced by Palestinian refugees themselves. As we will see later in this chapter, a teen I interviewed in Balata was adamant that there is no possibility of reconciliation with Israeli Jews: “Has your best friend died in your arms because


421 *Study visit to Cape Town*, p. 23.
the soldiers shot him? How could I ever live with these people?” And indeed, in an evening of discussion at Zochrot, a few months before our Cape Town excursion, when we discussed the prospect of return, one of the speakers had asked: “all fine and well, but what if the Palestinians don’t wish to see our ugly faces anymore?” This anxiety is prevalent among Israeli-Jews as well as Palestinians. Countless times I have been told by random taxi drivers or store vendors who opted to move out of Jaffa because of the presence of “Arabs.” When I moved into an apartment in the heart of ‘Ajami, a group of Jewish repairmen who spent most of the day in our living room curiously inquired about our experience living in “this kind of neighbourhood” with “these people,” and whether we were not afraid of a break-in or random acts of violence in the street. These types of utterances are indicative, on the one hand, of the profound sense of enmity that undergirds any kind of social exchange between Palestinians and Israeli-Jews. For Palestinians suffering the brunt of military occupation, the experience of “living together” has been so traumatic that sharing lived spaces with Israeli-Jews seem unimaginable. On the other hand, Israeli-Jews have internalized the Zionist state’s core principle of ethnic and religious separation, and its spatial articulations of walls and fences. This internalization also manifests in a desire to police those boundaries and maintain the status quo. These acts of policing are performed not just by the state’s security apparatus, but by ordinary civilians.

Consider, for instance, one of the gated communities in Jaffa where my friend Ari resides. The complex is surrounded by a wall, and entry is possible only through designated gates with sophisticated electric panels that require a code. When he invited a few Palestinian children from the neighbourhood into the complex to play football, his neighbours were up in arms, denouncing his “frivolous” act and voicing concerns about the possibility of “break-ins.” Alternatively, Palestinian interviewees in a short Zochrot documentary filmed in Balata imagined their return into a network of such gated communities, where a wall would be built between them
and the Jews. What seems to be absent from this document is a more thorough discussion about the deeply ingrained acceptance of the notion of segregation from racial “others” and the ways in which a process of “de-Zionization” of space would also have to overcome such rooted convictions. At the same time, this perceived embrace of segregationist practices is underwritten by anxieties about self-preservation and cultural survival, especially for the colonized Palestinians.

Conversely, there are also many Palestinians like Naji, who repeatedly claimed: “I feel closer to my friends from Tel Aviv than to my neighbours from the camp,” and that as educated urbanites, he and his grown children would rather settle in Jaffa or Tel Aviv than in his ancestral village of Deir Aban. Consider, as well, ‘Adel, who I mentioned in chapter 4, originally from Abu Kbir neighbourhood in Jaffa and currently residing in ‘Askar refugee camp near Nablus who would rather return to present-day Tel Aviv and live in a middle-class Jewish-majority neighbourhood than reclaim his house which is located in a “slum.”

Geographer and right of return scholar Salman Abu Sitta has demonstrated that most of the destroyed Palestinian villages remain vacant; many have been simply annexed to kibbutzim or other Jewish settlements and are allocated as land reserves for future expansion, while others were used by the JNF in their nationwide, vast forestation projects. The process of repatriation to these villages, argues Abu Sitta, should be the least complex, especially in the Galilee (north) and the Naqab/Negev (south), and that moreover, many of their former inhabitants would not even have to traverse vast distances: most of the refugees currently languishing in Lebanon hail from the Galilee while those in the Gaza strip and the southern parts of the West Bank originated
in the Naqab region. Abu Sitta is therefore mainly concerned with the reconstruction of
destroyed Palestinian villages and towns for the benefit of “their” returnees. 422

Zochrot and Badil’s line of thinking offered an alternative: rather than recreate lost
communities, it proposed taking into account realities on the ground, as well as the trajectories of
refugees’ lives. Thus, for instance, former peasants and their descendants have long abandoned
the falahi lifestyle, settled into their urban (proletarian) lives instead. In the 1950s, successive
Israeli governments determined that Mizrahi Jews must all be “natural peasants” and sought to
resettle them in remote agricultural settlements, expecting them to tend to livestock and toil the
land. These assumptions utterly ignored the large percentage of urban, middle and lower class
Jews from the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria and Libya) and the Fertile Crescent,
especially Iraq. Bitter lessons learned from the Israeli experience require us to attend to
contemporary experiences of refugees in whatever scenario of return.

Over the past several decades, refugees have built lives, created communities and called
many other places “home.” Imposing a “return” to a place most have never known, and that
looks nothing like the memories of elders might not make sense to refugees. The pre-Nakba
village cannot be resurrected, nor can Palestinians be forced to give up powerful attachments
created in years of exile and to dissolve communities that crystalized in the camps and the
diaspora. Attending to all this and to the will of the refugees themselves, Zochrot and Badil

proposed a return to the *homeland*, i.e. the territory that used to be Mandatory Palestine, stressing routes over roots, living experience over memories.

This approach offers several creative possibilities for refugees. For instance, provisions should be made for those who wish to exercise their right of return and those who do not; the latter could opt for a Palestinian citizenship, some in addition to the one they already hold from another state.\(^{423}\) Those refugees who belong in the first category and wish to take residence in Palestine should be free to choose whether they wish to resettle in a new returnee community on the lands of their ancestral village, joining a Jewish settlement built on the lands of a former village thus making it a “mixed community,” or an existing Palestinian town. The shifting political realities in the entire region will also alter received spatial configuration; thus, for instance, a person can reside in Jerusalem but travel to Amman for work, since crossing borders will become routine practice. The flexibility of this approach will not only cater to returnees’ needs, but is also in line with the principle set by Zochrot and Badil (and inherent in the concept of transitional justice), firmly rejecting any further displacements, including those of Israeli-Jews.

**Returning to Jaffa**

The follow-up document to the Cape Town Document, which was publicly launched on Nakba Day 2013, focused on Jaffa and Tel Aviv. Zochrot’s work in South Africa opened up

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possibilities of imagining the future of Jaffa-Tel Aviv while physically situated in the city and embedded within urban culture elicited concrete and place-specific imaginaries. The intimate familiarity of the group’s members with these urban spaces elicited fantasies that completely transformed them in their minds to fit the new political realities: The “green house” at Haj Kahil roundabout, a majestic villa at the heart of ‘Ajami (see figure 7.2), overlooking several falafel and shawarma places (all owned by the formidable Haj Kahil clan), where traffic often comes to a halt and pedestrians scramble to safely navigating among the cacophony of honking impatient drivers - functions as a local courthouse to judge Israeli war criminals; the IDF museum near the historic railway station in Manshiyyeh that is slated to be preserved in order to remind visitors of the atrocities of occupation; The army radio station (Galatz) at Yehuda Hayamit street, which leads from Jerusalem boulevard (the epitome of modern Jaffa) towards the old port, as a local news station that would broadcast Arabic music.424

424 For many years Galatz has been famous for its refusal to broadcast Mizrahi music, and was critiqued, among other things, as the bastion of the ruling Ashkenazi elite. Although in recent years it seems it has conceded and added selected Mizrahi music to its playlist, it never plays any Arabic music, despite the fact it is located at the Heart of Jaffa, surrounded by Palestinian residents.
Although these locations were repeatedly discussed during the group’s meeting, the Jaffa document focuses on one particular location: Beit Gidi, or the Etzel museum located at Charles Clore Park in the area which was built on Irshid, a northern suburb of Jaffa. The structure is comprised of two main architectural elements: modernist steel and glass cube superimposed on a stone Arab house, a scene of further symbolic violence wreaked on the battered city of Jaffa. Because it is the only surviving pre-Nakba structure on the beach (with the exception of the Hassan Bek mosque located nearby), participants reimagined Beit Gidi as the prototype of the new site of memory and a community centre. Its location and current use fueled our planning: from a museum that commemorates occupation and its perpetrators, we willed it to become a site

\[425\] Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City* (Tel Aviv: Bavel), pp. 235-240. [Hebrew]
of remembrance of loss but also of return, an architectural embodiment of urban history and hopes for the future. Optimistically we envisioned the building in relation to its historical surroundings – the railway station across the street, which we planned as part of the complex. The two could be connected by underground passageways. These “Manshiyyeh tunnels” were to be made of glass, so that visitors and passers-by will be able to view the remains of the neighbourhood homes, buried underneath the park. The group’s members envisioned the historical museum section of the complex to be underground, the main floor would be dedicated to the present, and the top – to the future. The complex was going to be fitted with a glass roof, where visitors would be able to view the open sky but at the same time shielded from the sun and the rain. And finally, the refurbished building should also include a spatial element linking it to the Mediterranean, symbolically reconnecting exiled Yaffawi Palestinians back into the sea, from which many used to derive their livelihood prior to 1948, and by which many escaped and expelled during the Nakba.
The most important factor in the building’s redesign would be its embeddedness within the community. This multi-purpose complex would house community services attracting returnees, professionals, a tourist information centre and a point of departure for Nakba tours, and above all – a safe space for public performance addressing trauma and healing. In this context, healing means a process by which suffering as victimization would be worked through and “renounced” in order to forge a truly shared new urbanity. “Healing of memories,” then, are processes both separate, serving the needs of each community, and shared, where victim and victimizer mourn multiple losses: Palestinians would be encouraged to mourn the obliteration of their pre-1948 lifeworlds, but also of the new communities they had forged in the decades since – in exile, in refugee camps, along itineraries, even within “landscapes of despair.” Jews, on the other hand, should be allowed to reflect on the loss of the Zionist sociopolitical order, the only one they had known, which at the same time hinged on suffering as identity-endowing, and on the other hand, provided them with the power to dispossess and do violence unto others.

Even with the absence of Badil (who were not part of this part of the project), the problematics of “joint action” or collective imagining resurfaced. ‘Umar, for instance, argued that we created a very “Israeli” document which deploys psycho-social thinking, which I am not sure should be presented to the refugees. I am not sure they would accept the notion of ‘healing’ but instead maybe a new beginning,” ‘adjustment,’ and so on. The approach here creates a symmetry between the two sides, for instance, acknowledging each other’s mourning. At present time, this symmetry is rather problematic. Even the creation of joint communities does not necessitate joint healing processes. These can be separate and respond to each sides’ needs… Besides, I am missing a more detailed description of the new society. How do you envision the transformations of Israeli society and culture?

‘Umar voiced a concern about the idea of “traveling theories,” or the tacit assumption that ideas and notions, such as the “healing of memories,” can somehow travel and that they migrate
between contexts. Walter Mignolo, for instance, argued that theoretical concepts are rooted in “emotional foregrounding” or local sensibilities that link the body to specific places. In this case, the complex concept of healing, with its particular dynamics that are rooted in specific histories of psychology, may resonate with a particular, middle-class segment of Israeli-Jewish society, but may seem alien and moreover – an imposition – not just to Palestinians, but also to many Mizrahi Jews who have been excluded from academic circles and from “new age” trends. As I noted earlier, it will be Mizrahi Jews who might be positioned in the borderlands and contact zones of urban neighbourhoods that will inhabit returnees. Perhaps there should be further consideration about the ethics of “mixing,” spatial (re)designing and the politics of hope.

Finally, the issue of “the second occupant” created a moment of disruption within the Zochrot group as well. ‘Umar once again exhibited unease: “but what about the refugees’ lands? Why would the [Jewish] residents of Ramat Aviv remain in houses built atop these lands… the right of the refugee over his land should be recognized.” Sivan attempted to explain that we should strive to avoid creating new forms of social injustice by avoiding emphasizing private property and that in fact we should focus on questions of reparations. Suddenly, the discussion takes a turn to the intimate and personal. Sivan explains that her parents “worked very hard all their lives to afford their home in Ramat Aviv, and therefore it would be a gross injustice to force them to relinquish their right to their apartment, including the right to bequeath it.” ‘Umar disagrees, and insists ownership should revert to the refugee in all cases. Sivan is visibly frustrated; “this in fact revokes the understandings and solutions agreed upon in Cape Town,” she passionately argues, trying to reason with ‘Umar. We take a vote. Most Jewish members of

the group vote with Sivan, while the Palestinians side with ‘Umar. The meeting is adjourned with obvious unresolved tensions in the air. The group never revisited the issue again.

Once more, the specific nature of “return” and the question of a “place of origin” proved to be the fault-lines between Israeli-Jews and Palestinians. In Cape Town, it was Salah’s emotional outburst refusing any compromise with the “second occupant” that revealed a cleavage within the idea of “joint action”: for members of the colonizing society, the notion of “return” represents an opportunity for creativity, reconfiguring spaces of belonging, a position that enables ideas of symbolic returns. But for the displaced, like Salah, whose mobility is restricted by a security apparatus designed to keep him in place, it is a lost ancestral place that is an object of desire, an actual locus of hope and not merely a symbolic gesture.

The Jaffa document was eventually launched as part of Zochrot’s activities for Nakba Day on 15 May 2013. The event was held at the Saraya theatre in the old city of Jaffa. Janet, who was the presenter, could not hide her excitement. After saying a few words in Hebrew, she switched to her native tongue of Arabic:

Perhaps one day I will be able to speak in either language and everyone in the audience will be able to understand… We are gathered here this evening to mark 65 years of the Nakba, not to mourn, but to speak about the vision for the return of the refugees. I wish to open with a story [about my grandfather]… everything I know about this city comes from him. During the war, they [his family] sent him to Egypt on a ship, thinking he would return later. But he understood he would not be able to survive with only one Lira, and therefore jumped ship, headed back to the port, and this is how we remained in Jaffa. It is difficult for me to speak of him, and I am anxious. This coincidence always perplexed me; I could not understand how come we remained here. This is not a story of heroism or courage, but of coincidence. Like many other residents I was preoccupied planning to leave because the reality here is unbearable. I escaped to the US to study, and there I understood what refugeeess feels like. I missed Jaffa, its scents and people… Those of us who remained, are here, but the glory of Palestine had dimmed after the Nakba – the culture, books and scents – those kept vanishing. I hope tonight we will give back to Jaffa its pride and honour my grandfather used to speak of. Discussing the return will revive the possibility and the dream to return to Jaffa.

Janet’s tearful speech invokes the rationale for our project: imagining the return of the refugees is a project designed to elicit discussions, as unresolved as they may be, and through them – also
open “cracks” in the walls of separation and silence, which in turn, become part of the “cluster of promise.” Sites of enunciation, whether they are in Tel Aviv, Jaffa, Deheishe or Cape Town, or even the texts themselves as they circulate and generate a new kind of discourse – making the return thinkable within growing publics – bring into being that which is “not yet here” and transform into spaces of hope. At the same time, these documents and the discussions around them reveal the tensions and potential pitfalls of the process of planning and the eventual return: decades of occupation, dispossession and refugee life have left their marks on both the settler and returnee society, and these fissures will have to be taken into account as well.

The New Manshiyyeh

The bilingual edited volume *Awda, Imagined Testimonies of Possible Futures*, which was launched at Zochrot’s return conference I mentioned at the top of chapter five, advanced the NGO’s work further by offering a broader readership through tangible and deeply personal narratives of post return “experiences.” These “experiences” reflect the wide array of responses by Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish authors to the idea of radical post-liberation transformation, forcing them not only to make the temporal leap I mentioned earlier, but to position their imagined selves within a reality that has yet to emerge, and that moreover most people dismiss as an impossibility. In what follows, I will discuss two short stories from this volume, by an Israeli-Jew and a Palestinian, that directly address the imagined futures of Jaffa. My discussion will pay special attention to the particularities of both visions, the emplacement of the respective protagonists and the ways these authors approach the possibility of return.

Tomer Gardi’s “A Story from Manshiyeh al-Jdeideh” deliberately confounds the reader with the dizzying interchange of temporalities, gender and truth claims: which parts in all this can be true? To confuse us even further, Gardi pauses to stress that every part of the story is pure
fiction, yet at the same time, he mentions at least two very real people: Samir al-Youssef and his novel *The Illusion of Return*, and Zochrot’s ‘Umar al-Ghubari who co-edited the book *Awda* with Gardi. He even mentions ‘Umar’s embodied response to Gardi’s joke, and his scowl, familiar to all who know him.\(^{427}\) The reference to Samir al-Youssef’s novella is especially instructive. Al-Youssef, originally a camp refugee, published *The Illusion of Return* in English, obviously intended for broad audiences. As the provocative title suggests, the right of return, held sacred by Palestinians, is dismissed by the story’s protagonist as an “unrealistic” idea that should be replaced with an unspecified form of a “symbolic return.” Later in the story, the protagonist’s collaborator friend Ali is articulating a similar idea that was instilled in him by his Jewish friend Bruno:

> It’s a one-way journey! ... [A]s for those who claim to return to a place where they never were... they are simply confusing the symbolic and metaphorical with the possible and actual... The idea of a right of return in such a case is, he believed, no more than a claim on the past – the near or faraway past – and perhaps the only possibly legitimate claim for those who are faced by the inhospitality of the world. The idea of return is actually an attempt to escape the inhospitality of the present state of the world – the discrimination and persecution.\(^{428}\)

Articulating a “failed nationalist” voice, like the majority of the characters, al-Youssef grapples with the right of return as an impossibility for Palestinians; significantly, he considers the locus of enunciation of Palestinian return advocates, namely, those refugees who have been confined to the camps, unable to migrate or assimilate. Al-Youssef, the author, was even more explicit:

> The idea that every single person whose parents came from Palestine should have an automatic right of return is ridiculous. People who make that claim don’t give a toss about the refugees, whether Palestinians live or die, they


just to continue the war with Israel… I don’t believe in the right of return, he says, and don’t want to return, but I do want an acknowledgment from Israelis that I don’t come from nowhere.\textsuperscript{429}

Later in the story, as I discuss below, it is the fictionalized al-Youssef that becomes the plot’s catalyst, as Gardi reveals that in his imagined future, al-Youssef was proven wrong by the (relative) success of the return project, and eventually settled in Haifa himself. That Gardi consciously chose to challenge an outspoken Palestinian critic of the right of return is by itself significant. As an Israeli-Jew, Gardi claims that an acknowledgement of injustice is not sufficient redress, and that moreover, as a member of the settler society, he is taking upon himself the burden of finding a way out of the present impasse and imagine a future that is not only simply “not yet” here, but that many, including Palestinians like al-Youssef, are not even capable of conceiving.

Gardi opens his story with an anecdote that could be real and that he actively tries to convince us has occurred: finding al-Youssef’s book in a second-hand Tel Aviv bookstore in what seems like the present day.\textsuperscript{430} The store’s owner priced the book higher than it should because of a handwritten dedication by the author to an unknown Lisa. In jest, Gardi proposes to change his own name to Lisa to make the steep price, 100 NIS (New Israeli Shekels, the official currency), worth his while.


\textsuperscript{430} Gardi mentions the book he was editing, \textit{Awda}, which ostensibly locates the bookstore anecdote firmly in present time, i.e. before the return.
And so, the next time the story returns to al-Youssef, Gardi has morphed into Lisa. When the story picks up again after the interlude of meeting ‘Umar, the male protagonist is now female, and the story takes place in the future, in the “new Manshiyeh” of post-return Jaffa. Manshiyeh al-Jdeideh is, apparently, the creation of “ridiculous architects,” an artificial island overlooking the old Manshiyeh, which, we are made to assume, is now repopulated with returnees. The island “mixed diasporic” neighbourhood is a new, yet crowded, residential area that houses returnees and old-timer Palestinians and Jews, “full of complaints and happy.”431 Gardi implies that everyone on the island remains a refugee: they can see Jaffa from the sea, from the point Palestinians gazed upon the city the day of their expulsion, and Jews – as they migrated into Palestine; at the same time, their unique vantage point also endows them with a particular identity: being there, and/of Jaffa, and not in it. Only a bridge connects the new Manshiyeh to the mainland, a tangible marker of the “ridiculousness” of the existence of the island, but at the same time reflects a necessity: the Jaffa-Tel Aviv metropolis continued to attract migration after the return and planners were forced to resort to creative housing solutions.

At the same time, Gardi implies that living on the artificial island would not be anyone’s preference, and that in addition to the crowdededness, the neighbourhood also housed several “cheap bars” but “no money.” Manshiyeh al-Jdeideh then is a working class neighbourhood where those down on their luck found cheaper accommodation in a neoliberal housing market. The joy of return was marred by the decisive victory of neoliberalism over its political opponents, anarcho-communism, which resulted in the production of a highly stratified society:

431 Gardi, “Manshiyeh al-Jdeideh,” pp. 184-185. Gardi uses the biblical word Sha’atnez, referring to the divine prohibition to wear garments containing wool and linen together. Its usage here denotes mixing of two things that should not be united, perhaps hinting at the inherent difficulties of imagining a post-return reality and the challenge of overcoming the colonial logic of segregation.
affluent elite returnees managed to restore their previous economic status, while the huddled masses of former peasants and tenants were squeezed once again into the economic and political margins.\textsuperscript{432}

Despite these structural inequalities, when Gardi scales down to the personal, it is clear that in the realm of the social, the return utterly transformed the life of both Palestinians and Jews, returnees and old-timers. First, the ethnic and sectarian organization of space that currently undergirds the colonial Zionist order was replaced with what seems like a normative approach to mixing. But, as I cautioned earlier in this chapter, the poor and the economically disadvantaged face few choices and usually end up living within working class enclaves. Still, when Lisa is faced with the challenge of treasure hunting, the first person she turns to for help is Manar, her Palestinian neighbour. Manar’s immediate agreement to drop everything on a moment’s notice and accompany her neighbour further attests to a sense of closeness between the two women. This is also the final tone of the story: Gardi stresses that once they ran back across the bridge onto the island, they both stopped and gazed into each other’s eyes, a gesture demonstrating their affinity and sense of intimacy.\textsuperscript{433}

Samir al-Youssef, the author whose novel launched this story, became a protagonist in Gardi’s fantasy, just like Lisa from the book’s dedication. Al-Youssef’s dismissive approach towards the possibility of return in “our” present reality is belied by his return to Haifa in Gardi’s story. Moreover, in this alternate future, al-Youssef is an editor of a volume not unlike Awda,
except that in his case, the prose is to document and testify to the actual return rather than “possible futures,” whereas Lisa (a female version of Gardi) is a freelance writer, literally starved for employment. The paths of the two intersect again when al-Youssef calls Lisa and offers her to contribute a story for his edited volume. When Lisa demands compensation, al-Youssef, after an initial enraged refusal (“you Jews have only money on your mind!”), proposes to guide her to a treasure his grandfather hid in a wall in their Jaffa home before they left in 1948. Lisa, suspending her disbelief, accepts the barter, enlists her friend Manar and together they head to the house in question, now owned by a rich French Jew by the name of Jean-Louis, who they convince to join the treasure hunt.

Lisa, Manar and Jean-Louis’ efforts come to naught, however, when their persistent attempts to tear the house’s walls in search of the treasure bring about the collapse of the entire house. The collapse of the house marks the end of the story and gestures towards a contradiction already present in the story: on the one hand, it was the former home of al-Youssef family, representing Palestinian-Arab rootedness in Jaffa that survived the Nakba, the Israeli occupation and the eventual return. Its destruction then is a powerful symbol for the final abandonment of the myth of “paradise lost” prevalent among diaspora Palestinians today; it is a departure from a traumatic past in the form of a house that has haunted the Israeli-Jewish psyche with the notable absence of its original owners. On the other hand, the fact that in the story, the house is owned by a French Jew, an agent of neoliberal gentrification and dispossession, represents a flicker of hope for Gardi. The destruction of the house through a collective effort of two women, a Palestinian and a Jew, with the aid of a greedy French occupant, hints at a possibility for another, more

egalitarian future, where social relations can flourish in the absence of state-imposed segregation and class-solidarity can score occasional victories even against hegemonic and powerful neoliberal power structures.

**The Closing of the Path**

Contrary to Tomer Gardi, who has spent most of his life in Israel and lives in Tel Aviv, Husam ‘Uthman, author of “Our Father’s House,” was born in al-Yarmuk refugee camp in Syria, and resided in several different countries before allowed back into Palestine and settled in Ramallah as a result of the Oslo Accords.435 This poignant “return,” at the sufferance of the occupier which left him few choices, also severely limited ‘Uthman’s mobility: the return foreclosed travel across the Middle East and North Africa and confined him to the West Bank, where he is encircled by the separation barrier, a network of checkpoints and a strict permit regime.

‘Uthman also dwells on real and symbolic itineraries traversed by his protagonists, brothers Saleh and Shweikat, as they travel between the Jalazun refugee camp near Ramallah to Jaffa and back in order to stake their claim to their family’s home in the old city. The first thing they notice is how empty the road seems without Israel’s military presence. The observation and the initial arrival into Jaffa’s iconic clock tower square fill the brothers with joy and longing for their deceased father, who experienced the horrors of expulsion. But soon thereafter, as their vision is adjusted to see what is there rather than how it used to be “before,” doubt creeps in. And the seed of doubt grows over the course of the story until it completely takes over Saleh’s horizon and expectations and effectively results in a “blocked path.”

Already on their way to Jaffa’s post office, presumably the historical building in today’s Jerusalem Boulevard, Saleh notices the presence of “light-haired” Jews and wonders where do they fit in the new order: “could they be our neighbours?” Unlike Gardi’s Lisa and Manar, sharing urban spaces or a homeland with the former colonizers is not an option Saleh welcomes. He is further taken aback by the presence of “light-haireds” at the office of returnees claims, and opts to speak only with a “woman of eastern, Arab, facial features, whose dark hair marks her as a true daughter of Jaffa,” and whose presence alleviates their consternation. When he gets back to Jalazun, his wife Amina exacerbates his anxiety, warning him that the Jews at the claims office might steal the kushans (land deed documents) he left with them, steal their property and turn them into eternal refugees. The possibility of losing their claim would then confine them to the refugee camp indefinitely without a glimmer of hope of getting out. This anxiety is rooted in the desire to strip their refugee status and stake a claim to the place they believe they belong:

From now on, we will not be called refugees and the only blue colour remaining for us is the colour of the sea. No more UNRWA clinics and hospitals, not more refugee camp committees. This, here, will be our homeland. This is where the dream ends and reality begins.

Returning to Jaffa and locating his family’s property does not allay his anxieties. On the contrary; perhaps echoing Kanafani’s “Returning to Haifa” that I discussed in chapter four, the longer he spends on the road to his ancestral home, the longer his destination seems. Thus, for instance, he wonders what would become of the Jewish settlements that puncture the Palestinian landscapes and whether their occupiers would just leave the country, now that its “true” sons and

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daughters are back to reclaim it. Moreover, he discovers that his family’s house, like that of his acquaintance’s Abu Rashid, is currently occupied by a Jewish family, and that it may take elaborate litigation to take possession of it. A large portion of land belonging to his family is lost to a paved asphalt road. Even meeting Haim, an Israeli-Jew who had supported the return and believes in a democratic state for all, does not cheer him up: if there are so many bureaucratic hurdles to claiming my home, “what do I get out of it?” he wonders.\(^{438}\)

It is at the moment of realizing the refugee’s dream, that Saleh realizes that the “paths are closing in his face,”\(^{439}\) and the future he had hoped for disappears. The dream of return was never to become a reality. Even when political circumstances made the return a possibility, for the refugees themselves, the dream turned into a nightmare:

> I don’t know whether to return there or remain here [in the camp]. This is where I was born, grew up and came of age. Here everyone is family and friends. Over there, everyone will be family and friends, but I will be the stranger, son of a foreign land.\(^{440}\)

This sense of strangeness of Palestinian returnees echoed Gardi’s story as well: Samir al-Youssef was a “migrant returnee,” relocating to where he had never left, just like ‘Uthman himself. These two short stories could not be more different in tone; Gardi, the Israeli-Jew, wholeheartedly embraces the fall of settler-colonialism and the return of the refugees, even if the outcome is far from ideal. Jaffa of tomorrow is a place of contradictions, tensions of class, and a lingering sense

\(^{438}\) Ibid, p. 88 [Arabic].  
\(^{439}\) Ibid, ibid.  
\(^{440}\) Ibid.
of exile, but at the same time, it is, as Lisa “testifies,” a “happy” place that enables forms of social interactions unavailable under Israeli colonial rule. ‘Uthman, on the other hand, articulates a desire prevalent among Palestinians in the diaspora, who have not had sustained and meaningful social interactions with Israeli-Jews (that were not uniformed soldiers): that the liberation of Palestine would entail the departure of the Israelis who have settled in the country from 1948. The departure is perceived as a zero-sum game, where Palestinian absence depends on Jewish presence and vice versa. It is the inability to move beyond this fantasy and acknowledge that while Palestinian society was refashioned by exile, Palestine itself has irrevocably changed by decades of settler colonial rule and mass Jewish migration. This realization drives both Saleh and ‘Uthman to conclude bitterly that exile has become homeland, and that the dream of return is merely a pie in the sky, so unrealistic, in fact, that by the end of the story, Saleh is grateful his father, of jil Filastin, is deceased and was not forced to accept the bitter reality.

**From Balata to Jaffa?**

The fate of the settlers also loomed large in conversations I had with people in Balata Refugee Camp. On one particular occasion, I conducted a group interview with Muhammad, Ihab and ‘Anan, three young men between the ages of 19 to 23. I had met them at the Yafa Cultural Centre, and during a rare lull in my usually hectic schedule of visits and interviews with elderly refugees, Ahmad, the camp’s “fixer” suggested I speak with some of the young men and hear their perspectives about the return.

441 This Zochrot-produced short film documented diasporic Palestinian points of view about the possibility of return, including the possibility of living together with the (former) colonizers. The film was first screened during the Israeli Independence Day activities at Zochrot, 2012: [https://youtu.be/zxeRcle01ps?list=PLF32C600FA6433540](https://youtu.be/zxeRcle01ps?list=PLF32C600FA6433540)
Muhammad’s grandfather hailed from Jamasin al-Gharbi, a small village that bordered with Tel Aviv on one side, and Ramat Gan on the other. By March 1948, the villagers were forced out because of their defenselessness in the face of increasing violence from the Zionist militias.\footnote{Benny Morris, \textit{The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1947} (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1991), pp. 62, 81-82. [Hebrew]} Muhammad, 23 at the time of the interview, dominated the conversation; he related some of the stories he had heard from his grandfather, about the idyllic life in Jamasin before it was lost, and dwelled on its proximity to the Mediterranean (“only a few minutes bike ride to the sea”). Palestinians, they all explained to me, are barred from reaching the sea: “We just want to see it, not even swim, just to see.”

Muhammad is painfully aware of the current condition of his grandfather’s village. Months after the depopulation of Jamasin, the vacant houses became home to impoverished Jewish migrants from various Middle Eastern countries as well as those known as the “refugees”: Jews who previously lived in proximity to Jaffa or surrounding villages and had been displaced during the hostilities. Over the decades, Jamasin became known as Givat Amal, a working class neighbourhood of Tel Aviv that incrementally fell prey to real estate moguls. Today, what is left of Givat Amal is sandwiched between the affluent Bavli quarter and the newer Akirov high rises, residential skyscrapers that are home to some of the Israel’s millionaires.\footnote{In the meantime, Givat Amal Bet, the remnants of the working class neighbourhood, is constantly under threat of forced eviction by developers, see Haggai Matar, “Desperation and Hope in the Eviction of Givat Amal,” 3 January, 2015, +972 http://972mag.com/desperation-and-hope-in-the-eviction-of-givat-amal/100875/ and Daniel Ben Simon, “The Gentrification of Tel Aviv,” 18 September, 2014, \textit{Al-Monitor}, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/israel-tel-aviv-givat-amal-neighborhood-yitzhak-tshuva.html#}

When I tell Muhammad about the current landscapes of Jamasin, he sighs and notes: “I cannot connect the memories of my grandfather with the reality of those big towers. [This is
why] I cannot imagine how it is going to be [after the return]. We do not know our land anymore.” The others concurred. Irrevocably changed, their places of origin have become opaque for them, and so has the ability to imagine a future where they live anywhere but the camp, the only place they now call home. Just like ‘Uthman/Saleh, these young men acknowledge that even though they have a right to repatriate, “people are not going to go back, they are settled here.” A third generation of the Nakba, Muhammad and his friends embody the tension between homeland and home: as national subjects and as refugees who grew up commemorating Palestine’s “lost paradise,” they articulate profound links to a homeland they do not know, and places they had not visited and yet trace part of their identities to them. But having come of age at the refugee camp and its particular histories of violence and trauma (of which they related to me over the course of our discussion), these young men and their peers have formed affective communities that are based on their experiences of military incursions, incarceration and devastating loss.

These traumatic histories are also constitutive of Muhammad’s approach towards the possibility living with his current occupiers:

How can you live with the person who killed your brother or imprisoned your brother and father? Even if it’s a peaceful person who has nothing to do with the army, you can’t even look at them, because when you do, you remember everything that happened to you. Imagine you are 16 years old waking every morning to the sound of the mosque announcing a new martyr. You can’t face them and live like neighbours. Are we going to have to see them every day?

For Muhammad, who lived through the second Intifada (2000-2005) and a three-week Israeli siege of the camp, Israelis are constant reminders of his loss, like the death of his best friend in his arms, from bullets fired by the invading Israeli army. He believes that Palestinians should “stick together as one group” and “kick the Israelis out, like they did to us in 1948.” Muhammad refuses to imagine the particularities of return, but he insists on one thing: the absence of the
Israeli settlers as a precondition for liberation and collective healing. Ideas about the eventual departure of Israeli-Jews have been commonplace among refugees, modelled after the Algerian experience. The single democratic state, the vision for Palestine formally accepted by the Fatah-controlled PLO in the late 1960s that I mentioned in my introduction was created as a response to these ideas of mass departure. Nevertheless, a segment of Palestinian refugees still hold on to this idea. Ihab and ‘Anan may not share Muhammad’s idea of liberation, but they are equally skeptic about Zochrot’s vision of shared urban spaces:

I don’t think they will leave. We should respect them as humans, but I don’t know exactly how that’s going to be. If they allow us to return, are they going to accept us? Because now they are calling us ‘terrorists.’ I don’t see an ultimate solution that will solve all the problems; maybe one that would bring some peace but it’s not like everyone will be happy.

Contrary to the optimist ic tone of the Zochrot and Badil return documents, Ihab voices doubt: can former colonizer and colonized actually form social relations that are not based on asymmetrical military power? Moreover, politically, what does it mean to ask Palestinians currently living under Israel’s military occupation to extract themselves from ongoing struggles for liberation and engage in imagining a reality where their oppressors are former colonizers?

Ihab’s response inhabits this tension: on the one hand, he cannot quite extract himself from the current colonial relations of power (“they are calling us terrorists”). He later added that he did not wish to feel compassion towards Israelis, because Palestinians are locked in an intense struggle with them, and he needed to remain resolved to be part of this struggle. But on the other hand, Ihab is clearly willing to entertain the possibility of postcolonial coexistence that, just like in Gardi’s story, will not make everyone happy, and will no doubt, maintain certain social tensions, but at the same time will provide at least a partial solution that is preferable to a violent present.
Conclusion

In a short documentary prepared by Zochrot for the launch of the “Planning the Return” project, residents of Balata of all ages were asked to imagine the possibility of their return to Jaffa. An elderly woman joyfully responds: “Back there I left my cows, my sheep and my crops. We want to live as we did before.”\(^{444}\) This romantic vision of restoration of the past inadvertently elides decades of occupation and Judaicization of Jaffa, and its mere enunciation can be read as a form of resistance to and rejection of the “new normal.”

However, Palestinian refugees are well aware of the profound transformations their places of origin have gone through over decades of Israeli occupation and resettlement of Jewish migrants. The Zochrot-Badil documents, as well as the works of fiction I discussed above and my conversations with Balata youth clearly reflect this. The radical differences in outlook and tone that I noted here are rooted in the ways people imagine “mixing”: while the Cape Town and Jaffa documents clearly advocate ethnic and confessional mixing as the path towards reconciliation, Gardi also cautions us about its inherent tensions. Conversely, the author Husam ‘Uthman and Balata’s young men are highly skeptical of the possibility of living together with the same people who are currently perpetrating violence and that have settled on their ancestral lands, effectively “closing the path” of return. The high rises of Jamasin and French-owned mansions in Jaffa literally obstruct the horizons of possibility from the refugees’ line of sight.

This closure also challenges the Derrida’s notion of “living well together” that the Cape Town document articulated, and points to the potential failure of their prescribed forced

\(^{444}\) [https://youtu.be/HzdRFA6edUM](https://youtu.be/HzdRFA6edUM)
“mixing,” and the work of reconciliation that should be done before former colonizers and colonized develop other forms of social relations, that are based trust and reciprocity. The literary and ethnographic examples I discussed in this chapter elucidate the tension between return-as-repatriation and “return” the way Derrida advocated – revisiting a tainted past in order to fashion a new way of living. Viewed in this light, Lisa and Manar’s friendship in Gardi’s short story is a reflection of this process, as the working-class “mixing” on the island of “New Manshiyyeh” represents a possibility for “living well together” that transcends the understandable suspicion and distrust of former colonizers by Palestinians, on the one hand, and the normalized acceptance of ethnic segregation prevalent among Israeli-Jews.

The reluctance, even outright hostility, that some Palestinian express towards “living together” reveal a profound suspicion of the concept of reconciliation, especially if, in the liberal logic, it means reconstructing version of the past that accommodates both victims and perpetrators.445 For Palestinians, most of whom are displaced, the past represents not merely a place of belonging, but of grave injury and a demand for justice. The question of justice in this context opens up the absence of settler colonialism as a theoretical framework and point of departure in Derrida’s intervention, and raises the issue of the unforgivable act that both Hannah Arendt and Derrida (in another piece) attempted to address.446 Can willed colonial violence be “overcome” and forgiven? This question is notably absent from Derrida’s engagement with “living together” as well as the Zochrot and Badil documents and Gardi’s short story, where

somehow, former colonized and colonizer transcend the present history of continued dispossession. The outright suspicion expressed by ‘Uthman and my Balata interviewees reveal that thorny issues of injustice and forgiveness cannot be glossed over. This suspicion cannot be overcome by forced “mixing” or suppressing histories of violence for the sake of reconciliation, but through replacing guilt with responsibility, not just for past injustice, but for a future that is the radical other of the present. “Living together,” then, should be recast not as a romantic fantasy of reconciliation and the erasure of suspicion, but as a process of becoming and of overcoming.

Perhaps the artificial island of “New Manshiyyeh” can serve us as an apt metaphor here: its inhabitants’ vantage point maintains Jaffa as an unobtainable object of desire, within a short distance, but yet out of reach, while new, if imperfect, forms of communities and social relations are fostered. Maybe this is all one can hope for in the neoliberal present.
Conclusion: The Way Home

At moments like this, when destinations, glimpsed, just there, at the bottom of the road, slip away, all you have is the journey, the not-much-deliberated, unfulfilled attempt to go there.\textsuperscript{447}

Home is more lovely than the way home [al-bayt ajmal min al-tariq ila al-bayt].\textsuperscript{448}

In May 2014, Zochrot led a day-long Nakba tour promoted under the title “from Yafa to Beirut.” Signaling a departure from their trademark Saturday tours to a specific site of a former Palestinian village, this event highlighted the refugees’ path to their forced exile. The meet-up spot ‘Umar, the tour organizer, chose, was symbolically ironic: 48 Hakovshim (“conquerors,” Hebrew) street. Located in the heart of what used to be Manshiyyeh, it is named after the Irgun Zionist militants who the Israeli state credits with the occupation of Jaffa that began with the shelling and depopulation of Manshiyyeh in the spring of 1948 (see chapter 1). From there, the group of middle-class Israeli tour participants walked to two local key sites: the Hasan Bek mosque, the only complete surviving pre-Nakba structure that still functions as a house of worship for Jaffa’s Muslim community, and Beit Gidi, currently occupied by the historical museum of the Irgun (see chapter 7). After a relatively brief historical introduction by ‘Umar, the group was led to a bus parked by the mosque, and began the journey north, making brief stops at Qaysariyah (Caesarea), Bir’im and al-Bassa (inside the Jewish settlement of Shlomi in the Acre district), all Palestinian communities that were ethnically cleansed in 1948. Our destination was


Rosh Hanikra, or as it is known in Arabic, Ras al-Naqrarah, the northwestern (closed) border crossing to Lebanon.

Figure 8.1: ‘Umar introducing the history of demise of Manshiyyeh in front of Beit Gidi (photo by the author).
The narrow passageway leading to the locked gate was the end point of our tour; we did not reach Beirut after all. Ras al-Naqrarah became our “unfulfilled destination,” where a large sign directs visitors to Beirut and Jerusalem in three languages, but the path north leads nowhere. By virtue of settler-colonial conquest and war, Ras al-Naqrarah became a site of closure: even the locked gate is covered so visitors cannot get a glimpse of what lies beyond. Moreover, tunnels blasted in the rocks during the late British Mandate, designed to connect Istanbul and Cairo via rail, were sealed by Israel in 1949, ending its railway in the Jewish town of Nahariyah, just south of Ras al-Naqrarah. It is, perhaps, metonymic to the state of the country and its citizens, cut off
from the rest of the region, self-condemned to isolation behind locked gates, walls and barbed wires, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu argued, to “keep the predators out.”

An outsider would have been greatly disappointed by the failure of the tour organizers to deliver on the promise implicit in its title “from Yafa to Beirut.” However, the intention of ʿUmar and Zochrot was never to somehow illicitly traverse the 1949 armistice line, Israel’s de-facto Border with Lebanon, and reach Beirut. Rather than focus on the commemoration of one depopulation village or town, ʿUmar chose to highlight the journey of Palestinian refugees such as Ghassan Kanafani, forced to flee from Jaffa northward and find solace in Lebanon, hoping for a reprieve and fast resolution. Instead, the gate was locked behind them and their path back home was closed indefinitely (as I discussed in chapter 3). Those locked gates only allow movement in a single direction and for Israel’s military only. In fact, two Israeli middle-aged men in the group quietly joked that they have, in fact, been to Beirut, and that the distance from Ras al-Naqrarah seemed shorter aboard military jeeps and tanks.

This dissertation has examined Palestinians’ profound attachment to home while simultaneously also challenging nationalist discourses about belonging. The ways in which Palestinians continue to identify as yafawiin, whether or not they actually reside in Jaffa, are spatially fluid, as identity and locality are contingently formed through the intersection of places of origin, sites of refuge, and the paths traversed in between. Put differently: against the nationalist doxa that is centered on the idea of origin, Palestinians articulate belonging in much more creative and unpredictable ways that highlight multiple origins, intimate commitments and

affective attachments. Thus, for instance, the refugee camp figures both as a site of collective and personal trauma and as a vibrant if disenfranchised community and locally embedded support networks.

These multiple and interconnected enunciations of belonging are also vital for the way Palestinians engage with ideas about return. If refugees eschew received nationalist wisdom about restoration to the place of origin, or turning the clock back to 1947, then imaginaries of the return are anything but predictable: a “stereoscopic” approach, like the one employed by DAAD (see chapter 6), has attempted to project places of refuge into sites of origin while for members of Zochrot and Badil, the road to envisioning the return went through the post-apartheid landscapes of Cape Town. To return to Diana Allan’s caveat about the “airy purity of solidarity rhetoric,” overemphasizing return to a place of origin overrides the lived experiences of Palestinians since the Nakba, their embeddedness in multiple places, the complexities of social commitments and the multidirectionality and contingent sense of belonging that I have attempted to chart here. Being attentive to how Palestinians themselves think of the possibility of return also allows for skepticism, fear and even the outright rejection of the idea. Thinking of return as an impossibility or as a potential dystopia challenges both nationalist doxa and prevailing discourses among committed scholars and solidarity activists that position Palestinians as bearers of memory, places of origin such as Jaffa as “Nakba museums” and the future as a unidirectional reversal of exile, from the camp back “home.” And finally, shifting our scholarly spotlight to


451 Allan also interviewed camp Palestinians who would rather pack up and move to Europe or elsewhere in the west, essentially giving up the hope of return. While my interlocutors repeatedly professed their commitment to return, I have met countless other Palestinians who have despaired of the entrenched occupation of Palestine and instead expressed their wish to migrate elsewhere.
itineraries of displacement and the multiple experiences of exile expands our horizon of possibility to think of return to a homeland and refashioning lives in ways that are meaningful to Palestinians. In other words: visions of the return are crafted out of Palestinians’ experiences since 1948 in all the places they have been exiled to, and the lives they have made for themselves.

Although I have referred to Palestinians who reside outside of historic Palestine as “diasporic” (often interchangeably with “exile”), the category is problematic in its own right; upholding what is perceived as the Jewish diasporic history as paradigmatic, scholars have been debating the level of “diasporicity” of various ethnic groups, or how others, including Palestinians, measure up in comparison with the Jews as the “ideal type.” Universalizing Jewish experience in such a way has led Safran, for instance, to imply that Palestinians do not quite constitute a diasporic group since they share “language, culture and religion” with their “Arab hosts,” replicating the Israeli claims that justify its policy against the return of the refugees that I discussed in chapter 3. Conversely, insisting on the diasporicity of Palestinians can potentially “dislodge the politics of return,” according to Julie Peteet, especially if it replaces refugeehood and stresses the level of integration of Palestinians in host societies.


The way in which Jewish diasporic experiences has been universalized, and in particular the unproblematic naturalization of its attendant concepts of “return” and “homeland” have obstructed our understanding of the violence they have unleashed: the mass displacement of Palestinians and the settlement of Jewish migrants in their stead, on the one hand and the elision of rich Jewish diasporic cultural traditions, sidelined by the monolithic Zionist ideal of the “new Jew.” Situated within the history of settler-colonialism in Palestine, displacing the universality of “return” would reveal the violent practices it entails and the complicity of scholars in maintaining a colonial state formation that passes itself off as a “restoration” of national independence. In the future, scholars need to better attend to what ways the deployment of hegemonic diaspora paradigm boosts nation-states and their exclusionary and oppressive practices in other contexts, especially towards “minorities,” or groups that self-identify in ways that dissent from the hegemonic categories in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, or sexuality.

Rather than just being there, waiting to be reclaimed, homelands are made. These place-making practices are often absent from narratives about diasporic returns; in the Zionist case, these practices involved ethnic cleansing, expulsions and spatial appropriations, of which Jaffa is merely one notable example (see chapter 2). However, for many Palestinians, who live in the colonial present, “homeland” is future-oriented, not a simple restoration of a place lost to others, but an invocation of their right to belong and to remake the world in their own image.455

455 See also Peteet, Landscape of Hope and Despair, p. 216.
Heeding a recent call to reframe scholarship of Palestine in the context of settler-colonialism in addition to space and time,\(^{456}\) I argue that in addition to revealing the “continuity between 1948, 1967 and the present,” and “the consistency of the Zionist project” from its inception to contemporary practices of containment and separation,\(^{457}\) this analytical framework is instructive for futuristic projects such as “imagining the return of the refugees” that aim to undo the “new normal.” Settler-colonialism as a political force has profoundly shaped the lives of Palestinians (and Israeli-Jews) at least since the Nakba, radically reorganizing spatiotemporal resources in Palestine for the benefit of the Jewish colonizers. Undoing a “nationalist-inflected” conceptual framework reveals that the Palestinian demands for justice and Zionist colonization are not competing claims over territory. Using settler-colonialism as analytical framework not only de-exceptionalize the history of Zionist occupation of Palestine, locating it within a broader context of settler-colonial formations elsewhere, as I explained in chapter 6, but moreover, it encourages us to imagine the decolonial: overcoming the suspicion of the colonized in liberal processes of “reconciliation” and undoing violent histories of expulsion and expropriations and claim responsibility for shaping a different future. Put differently: “living well together” in the future is made possible only through a sustained understanding of the settler-colonial present.

Being attentive to lived realities and historical transformations forces us to consider the fate of the colonizers. Imagining the return is also a project of repositioning Israeli-Jews not as colonizers, and this is, arguably, the more challenging task. As I demonstrated in this dissertation, for Palestinians, thinking beyond the call for one democratic state for all meant to


imaginatively transcend their sense of injury by making place for Israeli-Jews, for instance, through “mixing” or by negotiating the status of the “second occupant” (see chapter 7). The fact that authors like Husam ‘Uthman or my Balata youth interlocutors were not able to overcome the colonizer/colonized divide and insisted that they cannot even imagine living with the Jews proves my point: that entrenched settler-colonialism in Palestine with its practices of violent displacement and forced segregation, has, at least partially, cemented the “new normal” and almost completely foreclosed potential different trajectories.

This last point is crucial; the ability to imagine that which is not yet present, and to expand our horizon of possibilities is vital in order to overcome settler-colonialism, undo its legacy of violence and rebuild lives destroyed by decades of refugeehood, military occupation and siege. The particular settler-colonial formation in Palestine means that Israeli-Jews, though conscripted by the state, willingly, in most cases, as a means to cement the removal of the native and take his place, are not about to leave with the onset of decolonization. No matter how the return of the refugees shapes up, former colonized and colonizer – irrespective of the latter’s level of complicity in colonial oppression - will have to adjust to living together in a way that will necessarily be different than what it is today.

Since it is clear that neither Palestinians nor Israeli-Jews are likely to leave Palestine and will be faced with need to recreate a “shared homeland,” the role of the imagination as a means to forge new potential futures is crucial. Moreover, Edward Said has once charged that “if we are all to live… we must capture the imagination not just of our people, but of our oppressors.”

Said, then, also recognized the importance of the imagination in the struggle against settler-colonialism in Palestine, and that the liberation struggle cannot afford, in the long run, to exclude Israeli-Jews. Perhaps against nationalist logic, Said entices Palestinians to reach out to the colonizers, despite and maybe because of a profound sense of injustice, and “capture their imagination.” What he meant by this, I think, is to understand the imaginaries that fuel Zionism and makes it appealing for Israeli-Jews, literally understand what makes them tick, in order to address their fears, desires and hopes as humans. In other words, if Netanyahu, for example, as did Jabotinsky before him, deploys images of walls and fences to mobilize the Jewish masses to rally for the state, what Said is effectively saying is that Palestinians should fully understand this logic and the power it sways over the colonizers in order to undo it. Put differently: the way to undoing physical cement barriers, walls and barbed wires goes through dismantling affective barriers. Admittedly, so far, the Palestinian liberation struggle, and in particular the idea of return has failed to capture the imagination of Israeli-Jews, with the exception of a tiny minority, such as the Zochrot activists and artists like Gil Mualem-Doron and Tomer Gardi, whose activities I discussed in previous chapters.

My point is that the path to decolonization goes through the imagination, ideally of both colonized and colonizer. Imagination and hopefulness are mutually constitutive: our capacity to imagine a future that is radically different than the present propels revolutionary action in order to realize that future. But at the same time, action is what opens up horizons of possibility and, as a renowned veteran black scholar and activist recently argued at a well-attended lecture at the University of Toronto, any counterhegemonic action, as small and insignificant as it may seem, works not only to undermine the entrenched present political order, but produces unpredictable avenues for revolutionary action, literally refashioning futures.
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