

Unfettering the Voices of Palestinian Women: Counterstorytelling
against Dehumanization, Suppression, and Genocide

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

My thesis uses the opportunity and its platform to amplify the voices of Palestinian women while Palestine is enduring a holocaust by the settler-colonial regime known as ‘israel.’ I have chosen to read the life writing of four Palestinian women to provide a historical survey that contextualizes Palestine—whose people and voice has long been dehumanized and suppressed within western cultural and political spaces. These women, who include Fadwa Tuqan, Leila Khaled, Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari, participate in an overall objective towards counterstorytelling for the purpose of social justice for Palestine, Palestinians, and Palestinian women. I believe it is necessary to understand the circumstances and context of the Palestinian reality in order to recognize the depth of the propagandic nature of the dominant western narrative and locates the necessity of counterstorytelling which dismantles hegemonic narratives, highlights double standards, and strives for the liberation of Palestine.

In the Introduction I include: my positionality while introducing background information to help situate the reader in discourse of Palestinian feminist liberation, the culture of resistance which has developed historically in Palestine, an introduction of my voices and offer a brief history of Palestinian women’s activism and popular resistance.

In Chapter One I analyze and compare two Palestinian women’s autobiographies, Tuqan’s *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* and Khaled’s *My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a revolutionary by Leila Khaled as told to George Hajjar* which are read through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) and feminist lens. Tuqan’s autobiography provides an emotional and poetic description of conservative patriarchy as her foremost oppressor as she lived through the imperial British Mandate, the growing zionist threat/invasion, the *Nakba* and *Naksa*. Khaled’s autobiography is written much closer to counterstorytelling as she presents the suppressed history and brutality of imperialism and zionism against Palestinians. She completes her counterstory by using her personal narrative as a central structure from which to tell the collective story of Palestine.

In Chapter Two I first illustrate how Palestine/Palestinians are being silenced through habitual media and social media censorship. After illustrating the pro-‘israel’ bias of western media/institutions/politics I present the voices of Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari as examples of digital counterstorytelling and analyze how they challenge the dominant western narrative. While

Owda is literally surviving a genocide she manages to share her own personal stories as well as those in Gaza also trying to survive the holocaust. Matari, a storyteller from the diaspora, uses her platform to illustrate the vile depravity of 'israeli' society while simultaneously amplifying the voices of Palestinians in her homeland.

In the conclusion I include the results of a survey on the concept of "auditioning for humanity," addressing the October 9th "ceasefire," and the need to remain vigilant by following the lead of Palestinians as they alone must determine when justice has been applied in a Free Palestine.

Warning:

Within my thesis will be first-hand accounts and descriptions of gratuitous violence including sexual violence, gendered violence and violence against infants and children.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Heather Smyth for her support and guidance throughout my thesis process. Dr. Smyth's insight and feedback have shaped my thesis in both structure and content, but I also wish to specify how she has encouraged my voice and given me the confidence to write *my* thesis.

I also wish to express my appreciation and gratitude for my readers, Dr. Lamees Al Ethari and Dr. Brianna Wiens for their feedback and expertise. I would also like to thank them both for their leadership and kindness as instructors in my Undergraduate career wherein I began my decolonizing journey.

I wish to thank my wife, Erinne, for her constant support—without which my thesis would not have been possible. Erinne's consistent encouragement and emotional understanding provided a necessary reprieve from watching and documenting a live-streamed holocaust. Being able to reflect and discuss with Erinne has consistently provided me with growth and development of my understanding of feminism.

I extend my gratitude to all the women who were able to provide their opinions on the notion of "auditioning for humanity." I was truly honoured and humbled by your insightfulness and willingness to talk with me.

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Land Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge that my home, from where I have written my thesis, occupies the unceded territory of the Neutral, Anishnaabeg, and Haudenosaunee People, as does the university to which I attend. Both are situated on the Haldimand Tract—land promised to Six Nations in Treaty 4. This land includes six miles on each side of the Grand River and both have been developed to the disadvantage of Indigenous Peoples—severing their stewardship of Mother Earth. I would also like to acknowledge that my childhood was spent within the unceded territory of the Neutral, Anishinabewaki, and Mississauga, which nourished my growth and sustained my development.

Dedication

I dedicate my thesis to Palestine and its continuing anti-colonial struggle and reiterate that I found my freedom through Palestine.

I dedicate my thesis to all the Palestinian journalists documenting and showing the world what 'israel' continues to commit and to all the martyrs killed because their words posed threats greater than bombs.

I dedicate my thesis to all the Palestinian doctors, nurses, and first aid responders for their dedication and care for their patients knowing that they would be targeted by 'israeli' bombs.

I dedicate my thesis to all the Palestinian bakers, farmers, cooks, and aid distributors for feeding Palestine knowing that they would be targeted by 'israeli' bombs.

I dedicate my thesis to all Palestinian educators, entertainers, artists and writers for bringing joy, for helping to cope, think, distract and offer hope knowing that they would be targeted by 'israeli' bombs.

I dedicate my thesis to all the Palestinian mothers enduring the greatest difficulties and facing the greatest dangers, showing love and sharing history knowing they would be targeted by 'israeli' bombs.

I dedicate my thesis to all the Palestinian fathers whose fingers bleed as they rebuild, dig for those under the rubble, and showed the world what a loving father looks like knowing they would be targeted by 'israeli' bombs

I dedicate my thesis to all the Palestinian children as they fight for survival, maintain their innocence, and dream knowing they would be targeted by 'israeli' bombs.

Glory to the martyrs and long live the resistance.
Free Palestine, from the river to the sea.
Return, from diaspora home.
Turn tents to structures,
Songbirds fly, and
Olives grow.

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Introduction

My thesis was initiated by an academic “call-to-arms” as through my phone I witness daily the killings of Palestinians by the inhuman settler-colonial regime known as ‘israel.’¹ I intend to reveal the systemic dehumanization, suppression and silencing of Palestinian women as a result of imperialism, settler-colonialism (zionism), and Orientalism. Once I have identified the zionist/colonial filter through which the Palestinian narrative is heard I will demonstrate the essentiality of Palestinian women’s counterstorytelling as an instrument towards the liberation of Palestine and Palestinian women. I will be focusing my analysis through a feminist and Critical Race Theory (CRT) perspective.

With that in mind I have titled my thesis “Unfettering the Voices of Palestinian Women” to express that it is first and foremost a continual process, neither completed before or after writing my thesis. I aim to participate in the unfettering of the voices of Palestinian women, while trying to avoid the white male saviour trope so I will make clear, to borrow from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, I am not writing this to “save brown women from brown men;”² that Palestinian women neither asked me to complete this work, nor do they need my help in this particular way for their liberation. My work is intended to participate in the Palestinian-led anti-colonial struggle and in the Globalized Intifada. I believe the action of unfettering to be twofold: First, freeing the voices and stories of these women from their zionist suppression which in my capacity I am practicing by amplifying their voices in my work. Second, freeing the reception of these narratives from the majoritarian consciousness that automatically filters Palestinian voices through imperialist-zionist framework and Orientalist language. Concomitant with amplifying Palestinian voices my aim is to illustrate the hypocritical, racist, and dehumanizing framework of dominant narratives and western/zionist ideologies through which the imperial core attaches to Palestinian or Arab voices.

As the writing of my thesis will be slightly autoethnographic I will begin by addressing my positionality. I am a white male scholar born and raised in a small white majority Canadian

¹ I use ‘israel,’ to honour the designation used by many Palestinians in my local community and social media community. I understand this designation to be Palestinian’s reclaiming their narration and reaffirming that they, as do I, do not recognize ‘israel’ as a state nor legitimate.

² Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourses and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, (Columbia University Press, 1994), 92.

town with a military background and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classical Studies. I include these latter aspects of myself to specify that my perception of politics and history were developed through masculine Eurocentric ethos. I will also note that it was to my friend Aman, a Palestinian woman, that I broke down as I explained that I could have been deployed against Arabs under the hegemonic narrative of “peacekeeping.” This was a particularly illuminating moment in my life as Aman explained the power of propaganda and how it functions as social conditioning.

Beyond being an ally to Palestinian communities and advocacy groups I recognized, though of course this has been widely and in greater depth discussed long before my thesis, a significant gap between awareness and at best, ignorance, or at worst, racism, within my social and family community. I have been called “Hitler” and “terrorist” by those closest to me for merely presenting the history of Zionist settler-colonialism or stating that ‘Israeli’ bombs also kill Palestinian queers. I echo the refrain of many that “Palestine freed me” as October 2023 enrolled me in decolonization. It was within my decolonizing journey that I learned of counterstorytelling and challenging Eurocentric mentality and measurement or hegemonic narratives. I include two examples below that offered an entirely different perspective on the stories of history with which I was raised.

I begin with George Manuel who taught me a new way of looking at “civilization” as he discusses the difference in Indigenous and European technologies:

*The Indian list, in contrast to the European one, also gives some important clues about differences in values and goals. Europe’s most important contributions that are still of value today seem either to be means of transport or instruments of war: ships, wagons, steelware, certain breeds of horses, guns. Most of the other things that were brought to North America by Europeans came from other parts of the world: paper, print, gunpowder, glass, mathematics, and Christianity.*³

Manuel also writes that “Indian technology are almost all related to food, clothing, housing, and medicine,” and that “Measured by the needs of the common man, the commodities Indian nations had to offer in the greatest abundance were the ones Europeans most lacked.”⁴

Similarly, Carolyn Merchant’s *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* provided a counternarrative to the colonial education which conditions young

³ George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 15.

⁴ George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World*, 13.

students to identify with the heights of “civilization” of the Scientific Revolution. Merchant’s book persuades that “we must reexamine the formation of a worldview and a science that, by reconceptualizing reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women.”⁵ Katherine Park explains that Merchant’s book has historically been suppressed and is rarely cited by historians and philosophers of early modern science who form the hegemonic narrative of Eurocentric “advancement.”⁶ This is to shape Eurocentric ideology but also to safeguard it against criticism.

This is similar to how western media is weaponized to shape public opinion favourable to imperialist campaigns, including the bombing or invading of any foreign nation, but also specifically in this moment, the intensified genocide in Palestine. Western media launched into anti-Palestinian rhetoric after October 7, 2023 to manufacture consent for genocide. This included the all too familiar Orientalist campaigns focused on gender oppression and homophobia, along with conflating armed anti-colonial resistance with “terrorism.” I aim to balance the reporting of habitual media by amplifying the voices of the women which the west pretends to care so much about.

I will note that the practical and logistical reality of my thesis requires that I assume the role of gatekeeping; even more controversial as a white male. I acknowledge that the women whom I focus my thesis upon are emphasized which conversely suppresses the expression of other Palestinian women. In light of my constraints I have included at least 35 Palestinian women whose scholarship, knowledge, or narratives have provided evidence and/or testimony that bends my thesis into a collective counterstory. The choices that I have made are also limited according to my inability to read Arabic and therefore I must rely on either voices in English or translations. I have also given space through a survey completed by Palestinian women in response to a question of Palestinian use of social media in an effort to amplify voices more broadly without being necessarily scholars or published. The literary work I analyze include Fadwa Tuqan’s *A Mountainous Journey: A Poet’s Autobiography*, Leila Khaled’s *My People*

⁵ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1980), XVII.

⁶ Kathrine Park, “Women, Gender, and Utopia: *The Death of Nature* and the Historiography of Early Modern Science,” *Isis*, Vol. 97, No. 3, 2006, The University of Chicago Press on behalf of The History of Science Society, 488. www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/508078

Shall Live: An Autobiography of a revolutionary by Leila Khaled as told to George Hajjar, and the Social Media Storytelling of Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari.

I will provide a summary of what will be included in the three chapters to close my introduction. However, I first want to expand on a few themes to help situate the reader with context or background knowledge. I will address why Palestinian liberation needs to be viewed from a feminist lens, provide a brief introduction to the voices of my thesis, amplify the work of feminist scholars as they document women's activism and popular resistance which are often silenced out of masculine liberation narratives, and briefly introduce Palestinian culture as it associates with a long history of resistance,

Palestinian Liberation Through a Feminist Lens

I will tread lightly in offering my opinion so as to avoid paternalistically advising nations and peoples how they should liberate themselves. However, as many scholars have pointed out, often using the Algerian liberation as an example, national liberation does not equal liberation for women. Fatma Kassem explains the importance of a feminist approach to the topic of national liberation struggles as women often suffer from overlapping of both colonial and social oppression and adds that: "Therefore we need an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and contextualized feminist project to expose and make visible the various overlapping forms of subjugation."⁷ Nada Elia emphasizes that the struggles of Palestinian women are rarely centered in mainstream discussions of Palestinian resistance as the focus is generally understood in "masculinist militarized terms."⁸ For that reason, among others, this thesis will be focused on the voices of the most marginalized voices of an oppressed people—women. I am indebted to Kassem as her work guides my own and revealed a blind spot in my own reading of history. Kassem explains the vacuum which her work is trying to fill as she offers the testimonies of Palestinian women: "Canonical history typically does not consider women's actions and experiences as fit or desirable to be integrated into history."⁹ Kassem also highlights the findings of Rema Hammami who "finds that women are absent in studies of the Nakba, except when they

⁷ Fatma Kassem, *Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gendered Memory*, (Zed Books Ltd., 2011), 33.

⁸ Nada Elia, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts: Feminism Inter/Nationalism & Palestine*, (Pluto Press, 2023), 2.

⁹ Kassem, *Palestinian Women*, 4.

are mentioned in relation to issues of honour, fashion and clothing, which in turn demonstrates women's status as objects (and not subjects) of cultural norms.”¹⁰ As women will be the focus of my thesis, I do not want to remove the role men have played in Palestine's cultural and liberation history, especially during this intensified genocide. Therefore, I will include Palestinian men in my section below on the culture of resistance within Palestine, but I will first introduce the women of my thesis followed by Palestinian women's activism and popular resistance.

The Voices of my Thesis

In order to better understand the feminist counterstories being told by Palestinian women as they endure the struggles of being a woman living under occupation, oppression, and genocide by 'israel' this thesis will focus and amplify four distinct women whose voices and experiences create a better understanding of Palestine and Palestinian womanhood. Palestinians have a rich history of the novel and political or historical literature, however, life-writing has occupied less space in their culture of resistance. As life-writing allows for a deep and more intimate relationship between author and audience the stories and experiences of the women within this work offer glimpses of moments and movements within Palestinian womanhood. It is noteworthy to state that the voices amplified are limited by accessibility (translation) and affluence (afforded time and resources to publish) and that Palestinians are not monolithic. I will also take this opportunity to explain why I have chosen to describe these women as counterstorytellers, borrowing from Aja Y. Martinez's CRT methodological use of counterstorytelling.

In Aja Y. Martinez's book, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory* she argues that counterstorytelling functions as a methodology and method within Critical Race Theory. She states: “As a methodology, critical race counterstory is a theoretically grounded research approach with interdisciplinary roots in ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, legal studies, and the humanities.... [and that] critical race methodology [is] a challenge to 'majoritarian' stories or 'master narratives' of white privilege.”¹¹ For my own use, I

¹⁰ Kassem, 4.

¹¹ Aja Y. Martinez, *Counterstory: The Rhetoric and Writing of Critical Race Theory*, Sage Publications, 2001, 3.

employ this framework against the narratives of zionism and settler-colonialism specifically, while acknowledging that they are implicitly connected and indivisible.

While Martinez's work is largely applied to the experience and narration of marginalized people within their professional capacity as lawyers and academics, I apply this methodology to Palestinian autobiography and social media as particularly relevant within the framework of the tenets of CRT but also in the productive and necessary element of change. Martinez offers Derrick Bell's observation of the narrative voice which I apply to Tuqan, Khaled, Owda and Matari: "the teller, 'is important to critical race theory in a way not understandable by those whose voices are tacitly deemed legitimate and authoritarian. The voice exposes, tells and retells, signals resistance and caring, and reiterates what kind of power is feared most—the power of commitment to change' ('Who's Afraid' 907)."¹² Martinez also adds: "And as a necessary function of counterstory, these narratives serve the purpose of exposing stereotypes and injustice and offering additional truths through a narration of the [narrator's] own experiences."¹³

The first writer, and very much a pioneer for Palestinian women's life writing, is Fadwa Tuqan. Tuqan's experience is unique as she was born into a prominent family which both brought the resistance within her home while also further forcing her isolation from it. Tuqan, born in 1917 and passing in 2003, experienced sexism and patriarchy, British subjugation, zionism's growing anti-Palestinian violence and rhetoric, the *Nakba*, *Naksa*, and occupation by the 'israeli' regime.

The second writer, Leila Khaled, had once introduced herself as "a Palestinian Arab soldier" and needed encouragement from George Hajjar from the University of Waterloo to compile her memoir. Hajjar and Khaled would work together to write the autobiography of Khaled called *My People Shall Live*. Khaled was only four years old during the *Nakba* in 1948 and as a refugee was raised in a time and world altogether different from Tuqan. Khaled, famously pictured with her keffiyeh and Kalashnikov, became a feminist and revolutionary icon as a woman engaged in armed resistance against the 'israeli' regime and would be instrumental in creating the space for women to become more engaged in resistance movements which saw nearly equal partnership of Palestinians in the First Intifada.

¹² Martinez, *Counterstory*, 15.

¹³ Martinez, 17.

The third voice of my thesis is Bisan Owda, a journalist/filmmaker who has been (and continues to be) live-streaming the ‘israeli’ holocaust from within Gaza since October 2023. Bisan’s documentary, *It’s Bisan from Gaza and I’m Still Alive* won a Peabody award and an Emmy Award—despite zionists trying to have her nomination pulled in an effort to suppress her voice and the world from watching ‘israeli’ brutality. Owda’s documentary shows the journey of her and her family as they flee the genocidal bombs launched by ‘israel.’ Owda is a symbol of Palestinian resistance and a tower of undiminished strength and resilience as she manages to document joy and love as well as the most reprehensible acts of evil which beat in the hearts of zionism and ‘israel.’

The fourth voice of my thesis is Jenan Matari, a prominent diasporic storyteller who balances her family life with producing accessible materials to help educate a wide audience. Matari emphasizes and amplifies Palestinians “on the ground” in Gaza both historically but also especially since the genocide intensified in 2023. She also explains her role as pulling back the curtain and exposing the true nature of ‘israeli’ society and the evils of zionism. All four women above participated in Palestinian women’s activism; whether through poetry, protest, armed struggle, live-streaming surviving a genocide or dismantling the ‘israeli’ PR image. I was humbled researching Palestinian women’s activism and am honoured to share their incredible efforts which tell the silenced and suppressed story of how they simultaneously played the role of the shield and the glue of their community and culture.

A Brief Overview of Palestinian Women’s Activism and Popular Resistance

When I first began researching Palestinian history I didn’t realize I was reading masculine history. I saw women in pictures, read about how they were targets of sexual violence, and saw their gender be emphasized when they were killed. Palestinian women were always there, but I was simply too used to masculine military history to realize they were being silenced—seen but not heard. These women were relegated to a role to illicit emotional empathy or to characterize ‘israeli’ brutality, but not to testify to their incalculable contributions to the resistance and their communities. In Appendix V I include the poem, *She Freed Me*, which I wrote and performed at a Palestinian Solidarity Open Mic to commemorate historical Palestinian women activists as well as the Palestinian women I have met and who inspired my thesis.

In this section I will use the work of feminist scholars as they locate the role of women and feminism in Palestine and the question of their inextricability from nationalism. I am indebted to the work of these scholars as they detail the historical development of women within Palestinian politics as well as the ways in which women were (and remain) directly targeted by ‘israelis.’ I extend more space to Islah Jad’s work to conclude this section as Hamas and the Islamic Resistance Movement have recently become even greater targets of white liberalism/feminism to justify their genocide of Palestine (and in truth has revealed a blind spot in my own ignorance of Islam as an atheist).

Within the twenty-first century, as women globally sought their personal liberation from patriarchy, the Palestinian feminist movement was nearly always in tandem with the nationalist movement against the British Mandate and zionism. Palestinian women created women’s organizations which were premised on similar issues affecting women in the Arab world, but as contentions with British officials and zionist terrorism grew so did the politicization of Arab women’s organizations as they recognized their Palestinian society and way of life was being threatened.¹⁴ This resulted in the movement for gender issues to be sidelined in favour of Palestinian liberation.¹⁵ However, progression has been made as organizations like the diasporic Palestinian Youth Movement—taking their inspiration from Palestine-based groups like *Tal’at*—reproduce the slogan “No Homeland Without Free Women” and insist that “true liberation must include the full emancipation of each and every Palestinian: men, women, gender non-conforming individuals, and children.”¹⁶

The structure of feminism in Palestine was originally largely demarcated among social status, such as the educated and wealthy women who often took a patronising position towards the working class women. However, it was the grassroots movement which most benefitted the liberation of Palestine and Palestinian gender issues.¹⁷

While women’s organizations often participated in charitable functions it was Sheik’h ‘Izzedin Al-Qassam who began the program of mass organization of Palestinian peasants in the 1920s while also founding the *Rafīqat al-Qassām* the Companions of al-Qassam; a women’s

¹⁴ Liyana Kayali, *Palestinian Women and Popular Resistance: Perceptions, Attitudes, and Strategies*, (Routledge, 2021), 53.

¹⁵ Kayali, *Palestinian Women and Popular Resistance*, 56.

¹⁶ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts*, 87.

¹⁷ Kayali, 65.

group that was offered political and religious education, but also trained in the use of arms.¹⁸ During the Arab revolt of 1936-1939 women participated in armed rebellion to some degree, but largely in addition to their domestic roles women supported the rebellion by delivering food supplies, donating money, relaying messages and information, concealing weapons and fighters, and taking over the management of the domestic economy.¹⁹ I wish to highlight a particular action undertaken in the late 1930s after the British stormed the village of Baqa al-Gharbiya arresting men and burning down homes. That same night the village women “‘armed’ only with rocks, descended upon the barracks and successfully secured the release of the men.”²⁰ Elia also notes that women sold their jewellery in order to purchase guns for the fighters, formed social clubs for political organizing, and maintained a social network that proved essential for the men in hiding or who were exiled for their participation in the Revolt.²¹ During and following the *Nakba* women largely committed themselves to similar roles with an emphasis on collective community action in place of the lacking social services.

Kassem details how women would also support each other post-*Nakba*:

*In particular, inside the ghetto, Palestinian women managed to form an alternative family where women’s mutual support for one another is evident. The older women in the ghetto provided Salma and other young women with solace and emotional support. In return, Salma supported them with produce that she brought from the fields. The new web of relations described here, and which involved the entire community, emerged as a result of loneliness, shattered family lives and the absence of male figures.*²²

As the First Intifada (1987-1993) broke out, women played a larger role within the grassroots, mass mobilization. During the early stages of the uprising women would participate both as protestors and protectors; women of all ages would place themselves between the ‘Israeli’ soldiers and the youth throwing stones claiming them as their children and diverting attention so that the children could run away. Kayali notes of women:

Confronting soldiers in this way often became a collective act in which women would call on each other in the community during raids to protect those being arrested – one of many acts that have been pointed to for demonstrating how women’s traditional family responsibilities came to extend to the entire community. The IDF responded to these actions with harsh repression, with many women killed as a result of live fire, tear gas

¹⁸ Kayali, 57.

¹⁹ Kayali, 57-58.

²⁰ Nada Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, (Between the Lines, 2025), 14.

²¹ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 14.

²² Kassem, 224.

*inhalation, or beatings, and with scores arrested and imprisoned while attempting to protect others.*²³

Elia would note “These Palestinian women, the backbone of the First Intifada, had an incisive analysis of social norms and were intentional about resisting and challenging both Israel’s violations of their human rights and their own society’s restrictive gender roles.”²⁴ However, despite the role women played as leaders and organizers they would once more be forced from the public sphere.

‘israel’ recognized the strength of the resistance of a unified Palestine and doubled-down on their deplorable and evil strategy so common of settler-colonialism—sexual violence. The ‘israelis’ increased their “practice of sexual abuse, harassment, and blackmailing of women, called *isqāt* (‘loss of honour’ or ‘shaming’),”²⁵ to both deter younger women from activism but also to force a schism by “play[ing] on enduring patriarchal perceptions that tied women’s sexuality to notions of family honour within Palestinian society.”²⁶ Kayali continues, “these threats were used to spread fear and recruit collaborators. Men were also often threatened with the sexual abuse of wives or family members if they refused to comply with interrogators.”²⁷ I think Kayali is thorough and correct, and I am not attempting to downplay the seriousness or frequency of femicide, however, I find her approach too narrowly focused on reactionary conservatism. Kayali emphasizes the challenges towards the masculinity and virility of Palestinian men by the brutal ‘israeli’ oppression which I argue minimizes the reactionary fear of Palestinian men in providing safety and security to their mothers, wives, and daughters from the brutality of ‘israeli’ sexual violence.

I look to Sayigh to highlight the context which I believe needs to be understood before any conversation of reactionary Palestinian patriarchy can be justly had. I don’t believe this fear and terror should be taken lightly even through generations. Sayigh shares the statement of Richard Catling, the British investigator of the Deir Yassan massacre (1948): “Many schoolgirls were raped and later slaughtered. Old women were also molested. One story is current

²³ Kayali, 71.

²⁴ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 18.

²⁵ Kayali, 75.

²⁶ Kayali, 74.

²⁷ Kayali, 74-75.

concerning a case in which a young girl was literally torn in two. Many infants were also butchered and killed.”²⁸ Sayigh adds of the massacre and intentional terror:

*An atrocity particularly calculated to horrify Arab peasants was the cutting open of the womb of a nine months' pregnant woman. This was the clearest of messages warning them that the Arab code of war, according to which women, children and old people were protected, no longer held good in Palestine. Men now had to choose: their country or their family.*²⁹

My purpose of sharing these accounts are twofold: first, to participate in revealing the suppressed truth of ‘israel’ and their genocidal origin; and second, because I believe that the historical conservative and protective actions of Palestinian patriarchy always need to be scrutinized from an intersectional perspective that is not divorced from the material conditions of settler-colonialism. This does not imply that conservatism was not established prior to zionism nor am I positioning it as a righteous solution, I only suggest that patriarchy should always be contextualized so as to avoid monolithical application. There is also a conversation to be had, which I don’t have the space to expand upon, that many of the feminist scholars addressed: namely that Palestinian patriarchy also identified ‘israel’ as a Eurocentric identity and turned to traditionalism to avoid replicating the evils and hatred of the western mindset.

The First Intifada closed with the Oslo Accords which would end up being an abject failure in the liberation of Palestine. Edward Said called the accords “an instrument of Palestinian surrender.”³⁰ Vast shifts within Palestinian society through the weaponization of the Oslo Accords and western neoliberalism would further diminish the resistance and collective action of Palestinians. Kayali and Elia aptly demonstrate how NGOs bent the ground level resistance of Palestinians to the will of western donors which would also function to force an ideology of individualism within Palestinians to the detriment of collective action and created an atmosphere of depoliticization, social alienation, and declining voluntarism.

The Second Intifada (2000-2005) saw women’s participation markedly lessened as the resistance was much more armed and posed a specifically greater danger to women. While women took less of a collective front line approach they utilized individual resistance or dynamic everyday forms of resistance such as subverting the checkpoint regime, defying restrictions on

²⁸ Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, (Zed Books Ltd., 1979), 77.

²⁹ Sayigh, 77.

³⁰ Edward Said, “The Morning After,” *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 15, No. 20, 21 October, 1993, www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after

movement, or taking measures to preserve Palestinian culture as well as family and community life.³¹ Kayali also makes clear that the apparent decline in women's activism was not a result of apathy, but that "Palestinian women [placed] a high premium on the perceived legitimacy of particular resistance actions when they make their decisions about whether or not to participate;"³² specifically condemning the corrupt and distrustful nature of the Palestinian Authority and the neoliberalism (as part of the NGOisation) of Palestinian resistance.

I move now beyond the Intifadas to the "Instafada,"³³ which Kareen Haddad explains as Palestinians transitioning their activism towards social media. While I expand on this in Chapter Two I will share Haddad's experience as she calls it a turning point in her approach to activism for Palestine. She explains:

*I was met with much more sympathy then, I think because, rather than using statistics and numbers as I had been previously, I began arguing from a much more human basis. The reality of our situation began to be revealed through the spread of videos, images, and testimony coming straight from the ground.... Social media provides people across the West with a direct line of communication to the Palestinian street that is unfiltered, uncensored, and indisputable. This has allowed Palestinians to reclaim their humanity in the face of the dehumanization of traditional media.*³⁴

Social media has been a lifeline for Palestinians and, as will be explored, a battlefield that has posed the question of whether or not the international community, states and citizens, will permit genocide and settler-colonialism.

Finally, I conclude with Islah Jad who explains the goal of her research was "to examine the links and intersections of colonialism, nationalism, Islamism, and feminism in contemporary Palestine..."³⁵ She emphasizes how the national Palestinian women's movement is being interfered with by the international development and women's right framework from western states as they subject Palestinians to a framework that does not address the material conditions which Palestinian women struggle against and serves to isolate the women of their Islamist counterparts who are:

seen by the majority of Palestinians as the only organized force that stands in the face of a mighty colonial power that inflicts all forms of destruction on Palestinian men, women,

³¹ Kayali, 3.

³² Kayali, 4.

³³ Kareen Haddad, "The Instafada: social media as resistance," *Shado Magazine*, 14 November, 2023, <https://shado-mag.com/articles/act/the-instafada-social-media-as-resistance/>

³⁴ Haddad, "The Instafada."

³⁵ Islah Jad, *Palestinian Women's Activism: Nationalism, Secularism, Islamism*, (Syracuse University Press, 2018), 156

*and children in its effort to empty the land of its people and end Palestinian aspirations to achieve national liberation.*³⁶

In her research, Jad notes how the Islamic movement and those within working towards progressive gender politics are both influencing the movements of the West Bank and secular feminists while also being positively influenced by the secular feminist movement. Jad states:

*In the Palestinian case, as I have shown, Islamist women's discourse stems not only from the Quran but also from positive engagement with other women's discourses, whether primarily feminist or nationalist. In my opinion, it is this engagement that motivates Islamist women to turn to religious texts to seek possible new readings to respond to the challenges posed by other women's groups.*³⁷

Jad clearly indicates and repeatedly asserts that Hamas' gender ideology has continually shifted in a way that is beneficial to women as they seek, and are influenced by secular movements, to gain a wider base of constituents. I also wish to introduce another organization, not to conflate with Hamas, but to amplify their work. The organization is called AlQaws for Gender Diversity and Sexual Diversity in Palestinian Society and has been advocating since 1985 against the multiple jeopardy of Palestinian women and queers. Their organization is "grounded in the understanding that there is no separating the personal from the political."³⁸ The very existence of this organization is a counterstory to the pinkwashing narrative as it refutes the "necessity" of western liberal groups "coming to the rescue."

Jad also notes that the democratic elections of Hamas in Gaza in 2006 would once more upset the traditional culture of resistance and further divide Palestine between Gaza and the West Bank. Jad summarizes how both Gaza (Hamas) and the West Bank (Palestine Authority) address the inequality of women in Palestine:

*The vision and methodology of the West Bank ministry are different from those of the Gaza ministry. The former focuses mainly on state building and on mainstreaming and institutionalizing issues of equality within the organs of the Palestinian Authority. In contrast, the latter, true to the modus operandi of the Islamist movement, offers support and services to the mass base of the movement, in addition to targeting women directly affected by the occupation.*³⁹

³⁶ Jad, *Palestinian Women's Activism*, 186.

³⁷ Jad, 165.

³⁸ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 21.

³⁹ Jad, 180.

While Jad does not specifically state her approval for one pathway over another she also does not hide her criticism of the PA's state-building which she calls "illusory" and that radical shifts in activism followed the emergence of the PA in order "...to sustain Palestinian communities and to mobilize and organize them to resist the Occupation."⁴⁰ Jad also makes it clear that:

*...the weaknesses of the Palestinian women's movement have become evident at the points where it was not able to be an inclusive mobilizing force. The greatest successes have been achieved at moments when the feminist and nationalist agendas were maximally synergistic; by contrast, the moment of imaginary state-building processes after Oslo played a crucial role in demobilizing all forms of secular political and social activism for the unintended benefit of the Islamist movement.*⁴¹

This context, of course, is entirely missing from western projections of Hamas as the west continues to propagandize against Islam and Arabs as will be addressed in the next two chapters. In the Culture of Resistance section below I include Sinwar and Kanafani to present a contextual and rhetorical background which women writers and liberators operated within, but also as a dedication and reminder of the value of Palestinian men who have often fallen into the background when the number of Palestinians killed are often reported with citations to emphasize the murdered women and children. Miya Mikdashi explains: "This trope accomplishes many discursive feats, two of which are most prominent: The massifying of women and children into an undistinguishable group brought together by the 'sameness' of gender and sex, and the reproduction of the male Palestinian body (and the male Arab body more generally) as always already dangerous."⁴² I will include the voices of Sinwar and Kanafani as an indictment against the hegemonic narrative that assumes Arab men to be inherently dangerous and thus needing to prove their innocence.

A Culture of Resistance

My will is to hold the weapon firmly, with a dignity that cannot be bargained, and with a dream that will never face death. The enemy wants us to abandon resistance and hand our cause over to endless negotiations. But I tell you: do not negotiate over what is rightfully yours. They fear your resilience more than your weapons. Resistance is not merely the

⁴⁰ Jad, 159.

⁴¹ Jad, 169.

⁴² Miya Mikdashi, "Can Palestinian Men be Victims? Gendering Israel's War on Gaza," *Jadaliyya*, 23 July, 2014, <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/30991>

*arms we bear; it is our love for Palestine, renewed with every breath. Resistance is our determination to survive despite the siege and oppression.*⁴³ ~ Yahya Sinwar

Sinwar's voice is Palestinian and his language of resistance is recognized in Yemen, in Cuba, in Venezuela, in South Africa, in Ireland, in Black and Latin America and in Turtle Island. This is the language of the oppressed but not submission, not defeated, and not tired. Within his last words are the history of the oppression of Palestine and the history of resistance against imperialism and white supremacy. Within this section I include excerpts from Sinwar's *Last Will*. I wish to highlight how Sinwar is narrating the Palestinian struggle by himself and to the world. The western stock story labels Sinwar as a "terrorist" and his motivations being focused on the imagined "hatred of Jews." Sinwar is plainly stating that the Resistance is an anti-colonial struggle and he intentionally does not name Jews. It's important to note that according to Martin Griffiths, the United Nations Under-secretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs, does not list Hamas as a terrorist organization, but rather a "political movement."⁴⁴

It is in this vein that I have chosen to include Sinwar's voice, as a counterstory to western portrayals of him and Hamas in general. I will remind the reader that the leaders of Hamas and the Resistance were and are willing to submit to the International Court of Justice for war crimes IF the 'israeli' leaders also stand trial. They, as well as I, admit that they committed war crimes on October 7th. However, they are facing an extremely asymmetrical application of violence, both before and after, which International Law has proven inept in, or actively opposed to, providing justice and security for Palestinians.

In his writing Sinwar positions himself as a collective Indigenous person with a love for his home, Palestine. Sinwar is known as one of the *Children of the Stones* who are "characterized as freedom fighters who resist the ravages of modernity or as young farmers who resiliently hold on to their heritage in spite of apparently overwhelming odds."⁴⁵ In imperialist circles Sinwar is portrayed as a "terrorist" but for those struggling for liberation he remains a hero standing against the colonizers. Brazilian Professor Marcelo Buzetto states: "Commander Sinwar

⁴³ Shaheed Yahya Sinwar, "The Last Will of Yahya Sinwar."

⁴⁴ Martin Griffiths, "UN chief: Gaza the 'worst humanitarian crisis' he's seen | Israel-Hamas," *Sky News*, 14 February, 2024, video, 3:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RLMtFqZFdc>

⁴⁵ Marouf Hasian Jr. and Lisa A. Flores, "Children of the stones: The Intifada and the mythic creation of the Palestinian state," *Southern Journal of Communication*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 1997, 95-96.

followed a path similar to that of heroes like Ernesto Che Guevara, who fought for freedom and resisted genocide.”⁴⁶

Marouf Hasian Jr. and Lisa Flores explain how the *Children of the Stones* became emblematic of a nearly mythical creation story of a Palestinian nation and state. This should not be confused as a suggestion that Palestine did not exist before the First Intifada, but that it was being given prominence in western media due to the media showcasing ‘israeli’ brutality against Palestinians, including the images of small children throwing stones against a massive ‘israeli’ tank. They write:

*For those Palestinians interested in preserving their own identity, the Intifada became the vehicle by which they could rhetorically reaffirm the existence of the Palestinian State. For many of these social actors on the Gaza and the West Bank, the uprising was more than a land dispute—it was a struggle to maintain a fragile identity in a world that has too easily erased many other colonies. Although there have been other uprisings in the area—most notably the one against the British in the 1930s—many Arabs felt that this time the form of resistance was something special. This time there would be total unity, where both the young and the old would do everything in their power to insure that the outside world would not forget Palestine. One Palestinian woman, Tahani Ali, remarked that: The Intifada changed my whole belief system...I have been wearing Western dress all my life, but for the first time I started thinking of making an embroidered Palestinian dress...The Intifada created a sense of solidarity among people.*⁴⁷

The First Intifada was largely a grassroots mobilization which functioned at the collective and community level which will be discussed further below. What Hasian Jr. and Flores are also illustrating in this excerpt is the development of a counterstory against a hegemonic narrative. That Palestinians are stating they have a culture, a history, a land, and that they are a people who deserve to narrate and self-determine their lives. This speaks out directly against the hegemonic line of “a land without a people.”

There is a saying, which many have attributed to former ‘israeli’ PM Ben-Gurion, though it seems more a murderous wish or death-inspired prayer among zionists: “the old will die and the young will forget.” It is the dream of a genocidal regime to want—to need—the Palestinians to lose their connection to their homeland, to sever their memory as a tangible strength that boldens their undiminished will. Sinwar responds to this: “I am Yahya, the son of a refugee, who

⁴⁶ Eman Abusidu, “Sinwar is a symbol of resistance and role model for freedom fighters,” *Middle East Eye*, 22 October, 2024, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20241022-sinwar-is-a-symbol-of-resistance-and-role-model-for-freedom-fighters/>

⁴⁷ Marouf Hasian Jr. and Lisa A. Flores, “Children of the stones,” 93.

turned exile into a temporary homeland and transformed a dream into an eternal battle.”⁴⁸ That Palestinian fire, a fire only known to Oppressed Peoples, is what ‘israelis’ seek to prevent from spreading, to extinguish through overwhelming violence to kill the voices in choir.

Prior to his martyrdom Sinwar wrote *The Last Will and Testament of Yahya Sinwar*, which seems unpublished in print in English and can’t be found in habitual media. However, it resonates in spaces uncontrolled by zionists such as Substack and similar platforms. His *Last Will* has been read aloud in spoken poetry events and shared and distributed in communist and anti-imperialist halls. To Palestinians he is a hero who embodied the Resistance and was a paragon of faith. His *Last Will* however, was not the first of his literature which disseminated throughout Palestine. Sinwar wrote a two volume novel, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, while locked in an ‘israeli’ prison. Sinwar was serving a sentence which was to total 426 years for his “alleged involvement in the capture and killing of two Israeli soldiers and four suspected Palestinian spies,”⁴⁹ but was released after 23 years of incarceration in a hostage exchange in 2011 which freed over 1000 Palestinians.⁵⁰ Sinwar writes the historic injustices and oppression which Palestinians have long suffered as he himself also suffered them. Regardless of how habitual media slanders him he will never be recognized by oppressed people through the colonial majoritarian narrative. He will be remembered as a leader fighting for liberation against the world order, including the UN, which continues to support a settler-colonial regime against Palestine.

In an interview with Vice News in 2021, Sinwar was asked about the “war” between Palestine and ‘israel’ and offered this response:

*For long periods, we have resorted to non-violent forms of popular resistance. We expected the international community, free peoples, and international organizations to support us and prevent the occupation from committing crimes and massacres against our people. But sadly, the world stood idly by as the occupying army’s war machine killed our children.*⁵¹

Sinwar would also say, in words that feel stronger now than in 2021, “Does the world expect us to be well-behaved victims while we are getting killed?”⁵² These statements are counterstories

⁴⁸ Yahya Sinwar, “The Last Will of Yahya Sinwar.”

⁴⁹ “Who was Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas chief Israel says it killed?” *Al Jazeera*, 06 August, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/6/who-is-yahya-sinwar-ismail-haniyehs-successor-as-hamas-chief>

⁵⁰ “Who was Yahya Sinwar,” *Al Jazeera*.

⁵¹ Yahya Sinwar, “How Hamas’ Leader in Gaza Reacts to Ceasefire,” *Vice News*, 02 June, 2021, video, 1:56, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Px6AyVjw2A>

⁵² Sinwar, “How Hamas’ Leader in Gaza Reacts,” video, 3:28, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Px6AyVjw2A>

and directly contradicting against the liberal framework on the monopoly of violence being controlled by western states. Sinwar is stating to the world that Palestinians have fought for peace through the International bodies and through non-violent measures but the western world has continued to support the impunity of 'israeli' oppression.

Dr. Jose-Manuel Barreto, who teaches International Law and Human Rights at Javeriana University through a decolonial framework and Third World Approach towards International Law (TWAIL), explains the injustice of international law, stating:

*The Palestinian genocide has unveiled the deep colonial structure of the international legal order...Rather, as the images of decapitated boys and girls and remains of bodies show up again and again for twelve months on the screens of mobile phones, computers, and televisions, the international legal system has revealed its true core: a colonial order before our very eyes—an order of unequal subjects; sovereigns and colonized; and of states, empires, settlers, and colonies.*⁵³

It is this continued injustice and continued abandonment at the hands of international law that frames how Palestine must be understood and motivates my thesis.

Sinwar writes: "I have left no personal legacy but a collective inheritance. For every Palestinian who has dreamed of freedom, for every mother who has carried her martyr son on her shoulders, for every father who saw his daughter writhing in pain after being struck by the enemy's deceitful bullet and wept in grief."⁵⁴ These words are not of a single moment in time, not only present, but past and future combined. These are the words which every generation of Palestine recognizes and internalizes until freedom is achieved. Moreover, Sinwar is making plain the emotional connection and love that Palestinian men hold for their children while simultaneously illustrating how 'israel' routinely kills children: two narratives which the west attempts to hide.

Palestinians are the wielders of truth which gives their voice such power against the 'israeli' narrative and makes storytellers so dangerous to the façade of settler-colonialism. Hasan Jr. and Flores note that the Intifada bridged the gap of intellectuals with peasants and that "many Palestinians voiced their beliefs that they were responsible citizens who had the obligations of

⁵³ Jose-Manuel Barreto, "Rethinking International Law After Gaza Symposium: The Palestinian Genocide and the Colonial Core of International Law," *OpinioJuris* 10 August, 2024, <https://opiniojuris.org/2024/10/08/rethinking-international-law-after-gaza-symposium-the-palestinian-genocide-and-the-colonial-core-of-international-law/>

⁵⁴ Sinwar, "The Last Will."

writing down their own thoughts or telling their tales”⁵⁵ to create a national narrative for themselves rather than to be spoken for by zionists and ‘israelis.’

Palestine has many voices of the struggle and resistance and many poets of the people, be they in Palestine or in the diaspora. Refaat Alareer’s poem, *If I Must Die*, seemed to give expression to the genocide following his assassination by ‘israel.’ Alareer recognized how important it was for Palestinian voices to be heard by the western world and played a key role in the creation of the We Are Not Numbers (WANN) organization which helps Palestinian writers reach a western audience. Social media has brought Palestinian voices even closer to a global audience with greater freedom of expression, except when ‘israel’ cuts off the internet or energy. I focus on some of the high profiled voices, like Fadwa Tuqan who became a voice that broke through conservatism and sexism and her poetry ignited that Palestinian fire. Leila Khaled also became a towering figure as a feminist and revolutionary icon. However, there are many others like Ghassan Kanafani and Susan Abulhawa who have captured the imagination of a world skewed against them, or Mahmoud Darwish’s *Identity Card* which wears Arab identity like gilded armour, or Khaled Nabhan’s “soul of my soul” which destroyed centuries of western dehumanization of Arab men, and of course Edward Said who voiced the crucial lens and theory of Orientalism. All these voices work as a collective towards unfettering Palestine.

Sinwar writes: “my final will is to always remember that resistance is not in vain. It is not just a bullet fired; it is a life lived with dignity and honor. Prison and siege taught me that this battle is long, the path is arduous, but I have also learned that nations that refuse to surrender create miracles with their own hands.” The rhetoric being used by Sinwar in this statement is to challenge Palestinians to not settle for being treated as nonhumans, to reject their dehumanization, and to reiterate that liberation will not be an eruption but an enduring and long struggle: all which refute western presentation of Palestinians. Reading this I am reminded of the unbreakable defiance in the Palestinian resistance as it echoes a sentiment found in the 1970 Richard Carleton interview of Ghassan Kanafani, the leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine in Beirut (PFLP). Within the interview Kanafani offers numerous poetic and empowering statements which demonstrate and act as an example of the Palestinian culture of resistance.

⁵⁵ Marouf Hasian Jr. and Lisa A. Flores, “Children of the stones,” 94.

While I discuss in-depth the practices of western legacy media (mainstream media) in applying hegemonic framing I will try to briefly illustrate the way which Kanafani defies the hegemonic framing and dominant narrative. Kanafani first refuses the narrative frame which Carleton, and western media, try to impose and restrict in order to narrow and determine what justice must be for Palestinians. As Carleton asks why the PFLP won't engage in peace talks, Kanafani rebukes him by clarifying that "peace talks" are "a kind of conversation between the sword and the neck."⁵⁶ Carleton offers that the Palestinians should engage in peace talks despite the constant dehumanization, killing, and oppression which 'israel' forces upon Palestinians as "it's better that way than dead, though." Kanafani responds in a language that only the oppressed and decolonized have learned. Kanafani dismisses Carleton, "Maybe to you. But to us, it's not. To us, to liberate our country, to have dignity, to have respect, to have our mere human rights, is something as essential as life itself."⁵⁷ Carleton's frustration is recognizable as Kanafani refuses to allow himself to be boxed into the hegemonic framework and produces soundbites that only expose the harsh reality of settler-colonialism. I will close my Introduction by summarizing what I will be covering in my thesis.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter One I offer my reflection of my comparative reading of Fadwa Tuqan and Leila Khaled as their autobiographies provide an opportunity to see the contrast of their class division while simultaneously writing often from a narrative voice that intends to embody all Palestinian women or the individuality of the author through anecdotes and personal experiences. Both women experience gender oppression, but challenge patriarchy in significantly different ways. Both women also offer counterstories to patriarchal Palestine, but also to the colonial gaze which dehumanizes Arab men and infantilizes Arab women.

Chapter Two is largely divided into two parts. First, I expand on the contemporary role of habitual media in the dehumanization and suppression of Palestinians and Arabs. I believe this to be beneficial to the reader in order to understand the propaganda which has presented

⁵⁶ Ghassan Kanafani, "PFLP Ghassan Kanafani, Richard Carleton interview COMPLETE," Anti Imperialist Front TV, 04 June, 2020, video, 4:28, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Veoy32G7trY

⁵⁷ Kanafani Interview, video, 5:42.

Palestinians and Arabs through a denigrating colonial gaze and, potentially, inform them of their own bias or experience of bias. Second, I explore counterstorytelling in social media through the Instagram accounts of Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari. Owda is a storyteller-turned-citizen journalist in Gaza surviving the intensified genocide and Matari is a Palestinian diasporic storyteller.

I close with a conclusion wherein I will introduce the concept of “auditioning for humanity” and provide a survey of responses I received from Palestinian women on said topic. I include this survey and discourse with the same intention as Chatterjee and Subramanian which is to invite my readers to engage with the topic and apply a critical mind towards decolonizing the notion of applicable humanity by imperialist powers. Finally, I address the supposed “ceasefire” and echo the Palestinian message that a ceasefire, even if ‘israel’ could control their impulse to kill Palestinians, does not equate to justice nor does it end the intensified genocide, on-going for 77+ years. Since the live-streaming of genocides in Palestine and Sudan, as well as the enforced conditions by capitalism in Congo, seem only to demonstrate that colonialism is as strong as it has ever been anti-colonial praxis must adapt accordingly. As will be explored below, counterstorytelling is proving to be detrimental to the ruling class master narrative which is being made transparent for younger generations.

Chapter One: A Comparative Reading of Fadwa Tuqan's *A Mountainous Journey* and Leila Khaled's *My People Shall Live*

I have included Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography in my research for two main reasons; the first being her experience of patriarchal and conservative Palestine, which is less singularly focused in my other voices in this thesis. The second reason is her testimony of a history that largely begins at the British Mandatory period and ends at the 1967 War. Throughout her life she recounts how Palestine was not free by being oppressed and occupied first by the British and then by the Zionists. Tuqan's experience is also that of the upper-class of Nablus and therefore of a very conservative family. Admittedly, my thesis is constrained towards the topic of counterstorytelling against hegemonic systems however, I wanted to ensure that I honoured Tuqan's voice and experience while also recognizing the oppression of Palestinian women by Palestinian patriarchy.

This patriarchal and imperial-colonial oppression is experienced differently from Leila Khaled who was a *Nakba* refugee turned revolutionary. While Khaled does experience sexism and gender politics they are not the focus of her autobiography. Perhaps a more important and correct statement would be that they are narrated specifically to highlight the vital and necessary role of women in the national liberation of Palestine and to criticize conservatism which attempts to segregate the liberation struggle according to gender politics.

Both women exist in a masculine world of oppression, but also of freedom. Tuqan's literary contributions situate her within the ranks of male writers; a place in which she finds exhilaration and joy, whereas Khaled steps into the masculine-dominated world of combat and politics to fight for her freedom and that of Palestine. Both women are sharing their stories of a homeland that is undergoing drastic changes to social, cultural, economic, and gender traditions. It is evident that both autobiographies have an agenda—a purpose to educate their readers and likewise to encourage their participation in the praxis of ending their respective oppressions. Both women are participating in counterstorytelling while using the genre of autobiography. They are intentionally defying the literary framework of the “western” tradition as if stepping into the media discourse which has systematically sought to silence and suppress them. Or, to say it differently, they are using the colonizer's language to dismantle the hegemonic narrative. In

Appendix III I explore Dwight. F Reynolds “The Fallacy of Western Origins” and expand on the tradition of Arabic Autobiography and ways in which Tuqan and Khaled defy “western” conventions.

Within this chapter I will first provide a description of counterstory/telling and offer some of its main thinkers. I will next elaborate on Arab Feminism which I believe is one of the main targets of Orientalism that has been weaponized by imperial feminism for hegemonic narratives and false “liberation” campaigns. I will explore Leila Khaled’s autobiography as Counterstory, and using Nawar Al-Hassan Golley’s concept of “Writing Back” I will also elaborate on the ways which Tuqan and Khaled are “writing back” which functions as a practice of counterstorytelling. I am grateful for Golley’s work as I was very much guided by her work through her two books *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiography: Shahrazad Tells Her Story*, and as editor, *Arab Women’s Lives Retold: Exploring Identity Through Writing*.

Counterstory/telling

In the process of writing my thesis I came late to the theory of counterstory/telling as I first encountered Gerald Vizenor’s term, “Survivance.” I will confess that I had purchased his book, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, but as it remains in transit I cannot quote directly from it. I will, however, provide this statement from a Wikipedia source that made me jump and purchase his book. Vizenor explains that “Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry.”⁵⁸ It was within this light that I approach Palestinian narratives, being Indigenous, as survivance stories. However, beyond renunciations of dominance Palestinians are also challenging the hegemonic narratives and the denial of their production of knowledge which is producing a counterstory.

In their article, “To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees: Counterstorytelling through Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics,” Sarah Cathryn Majed Dweik and Bernardita M. Yunis Varas explore Palestinian counterstorytelling during the time of this intensified genocide beginning in 2023. They explain that in order to combat the “socially acceptable” hegemonic

⁵⁸ Wikipedia, “Survivance,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survivance#cite_note-VizenorVII-3

narratives (which they detail as Palestinians deserving the violence against themselves) they “employ a ‘transnational feminist literacy practice’ (Dingo 535) to challenge powers that endorse genocide and ongoing Zionist settler colonization. Scholars (Dingo et al; Nish) call for research that can, as Dingo writes, ‘push readers to unveil the [...] macro-level power structures and better understand the multiple scales that cause women’s oppression’ (Dingo 535).”⁵⁹ They continue to say, “Through our writing, we show how Palestinian narratives are part and parcel of a Palestinian vision of a fully liberated Palestine because these are denied, targeted, and censored in the United States and the West since our counterstories contend with the Western-sponsored settler narrative.”⁶⁰

This has been my understanding and relation to counterstory/telling which I apply in my thesis; Palestinian voices speaking out against a system designed to silence and erase them. The very act of storytelling becomes resistance and acts to dismantle the hegemonic narrative. I offer this statement by Dweik and Yunis Varas which neatly summarizes the intention and breadth of my thesis:

*These embodied methods of counterstory through narrative and storytelling are rhetorical ways that we, as Palestinians, enact our survivance. Not only does Palestinian CRT embrace these embodied praxes of transformational resistance, but in the face of brutal, genocidal violence and the intentional targeting of journalists and other storytellers native to Palestine, as we have seen in the last 15 months, we also more intimately understand this as resistance to death, murder, erasure, and historical amnesia. It is more evident now, as social media broadcasts a genocide before our very eyes, that Palestinian storytelling and narratives are transformational counterstories that directly challenge the Zionist settler colonial state. We understand our existence is a threat. We have seen the Zionist settler colonial project before and after 1948 spew their narrative-myth of Palestine as being “a barren land” until they arrived (Pappé 6; Sharif 18, 22-23). We experience violence when we dare to speak of the truth of our existence that our ancestries go back hundreds if not thousands of years in Palestine to contest this Zionist myth. And we also know that if we do not speak on our terms, we allow their violence to succeed in erasing us.*⁶¹

While I am enthusiastic to learn more about the theory of counterstory/telling I reiterate that I am still quite new in its study and proper application. However, I value its use in CRT and

⁵⁹ Sarah Cathryn Majed Dweik and Bernadita M. Yunis Varas, “To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees: Counterstorytelling through Palestinian Feminist Survivance Rhetorics,” *Transnational Feminist Rhetorical Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, Spring 2025, 83.

⁶⁰ Dweik and Yunis Varas, “To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees,” 84.

⁶¹ Dweik and Yunis Varas, “To Gather Amongst the Olive Trees,” 88.

counterhegemonic studies. I will include some of the leading scholars in counterstory/telling: Frankie Condon, Derrick Bell, Aja Martinez, Richard Delgado, and Patricia J. Williams.

A Note on Feminism (Towards Arab Women)

I was raised to believe that Arab or Muslim women were oppressed as evidenced by the fact that they wear hijabs or niqabs. This conditioning refused to entertain the idea that Arab or Muslim women choose or have positive affiliations with their modest dress. This narrative was enforced by silencing these women so that they could be a stock story or a labeled image. It is in that light that I believe it necessary to bring to attention potential blind biases, also known as stock stories, or dominant narratives, which operate to obscure the Palestinian reality, especially from a perspective within the imperial core. It is these very prejudices and biases which result in the act of “writing back,” or counterstorytelling. To better appreciate or contextualize the “writing back” I will discuss how colonized women are removed from historical narratives, the impact of western liberalism to suppress Palestinian voices and obfuscate ‘israeli’ crimes, and finally, I will also elaborate on the intersectional gendered and sexual violence within Palestine, which is committed by ‘israelis’ that necessarily influences Palestinian patriarchy in their gendered and sexual violence.

It must be understood that colonized women are oppressed not only by the colonizer, but also by the society resisting the colonizer. The illuminating intersectional feminist, Gayatri Spivak, identifies that subaltern women are doubly effaced in colonized communities writing: “If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is ever more deeply in the shadow.”⁶² Kassem elaborates on this notion as she explains the struggle she discovered trying to find Palestinian women to interview: “...the voices of those women who refused to be interviewed were silenced by at least two ruthless forces: the Israeli colonial state apparatus and patriarchal apparatus of gendered power relations.”⁶³ Kassem expands that it is not only that males could silence their female relatives from telling their own story, but also that women could be removed from stories told by men. Kassem offers the testimony of Raiefeh as she illustrates women being denied their role in

⁶² Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 82-83.

⁶³ Kassem, 50-51.

history as her sister, Marit Karker, was silenced in the book by Ispir Munayyer: “My sister (Marit) was a nurse and worked with him (Ispir), non-stop day and night in 1948. And poor one, no one mentioned that [her work]. He talked only about himself as the hero.”⁶⁴ The implication which is consistently made is that women have been removed from history, doubly for colonized women, as history is focused primarily through masculine ethos and by dominant voices. In addition to being denied their history, Palestinian women are also excluded from the discourse of liberal values.

In her book, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts: Feminism, Inter/Nationalism and Palestine*, Nada Elia documents numerous examples of propaganda campaigns by Zionists directed towards westerners—whose liberal values maintain the status quo and offer mild representation of the global majority, women, and LGBTQ—in order to manifest permission to carry out their genocide. These propaganda campaigns include the protection of “helpless” women from Arab patriarchy, greenwashing, and pinkwashing. I will expand with examples below.

Elia breaks the silence of two known liberal Exceptions: “Palestinian rights activists have long been familiar with the sadly all too common phenomenon known as ‘PEP’: Progressive Except for Palestine. Less known, but no less common in feminist circles is ‘FEP,’ Feminist Except for Palestine.”⁶⁵ White feminism has proven to be implicitly linked with imperialism as women such as Hilary Clinton and Kamala Harris are propped up as representatives who firmly support ‘Israel’ despite its on-going femicide against Palestinian women. Layali Awwad had penned an open letter to Hilary Clinton as she continued to support ‘Israel’ pointing out the hypocrisy of her words:

*when you chose to speak about my homeland, not once did you mention Israel’s human rights violations against Palestinian women and children. Even worse, you described us as lurking terrorists motivated only by ‘incitement,’ as if the Israeli military occupation does not exist.*⁶⁶

It must be noted that several current and former ‘Israeli’ parliament members have advocated for the killing of Palestinian mothers and babies and that this messaging fails to make waves in western media; yet when criticized for her role Clinton condescended that the younger

⁶⁴ Kassem, 51.

⁶⁵ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts*, 70

⁶⁶ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts*, 71

generation simply isn't informed—a tactic to dismiss critical debate by saying it's "complex." Below I will include other remarks made by Clinton as she attempts to rescue 'israel' from being a global pariah while boasting about their impunity in carrying out a live-streamed genocide.

Elia describes this as but a single episode as she references the "saga of white feminism aligning itself with Orientalist imperialist militarism."⁶⁷ She offers the example of the US "war" on Afghanistan "which called itself a 'coalition of hope,' and suggested that invasion and occupation could, indeed would, liberate women."⁶⁸ Maryam Aldossari, writing about Imperial Feminism and selective outrage, notes that "Imperial feminism has a long history of engaging selectively with issues that align with Western political goals, often marginalizing the perspectives of women from the Global South."⁶⁹ I will reiterate the statement from Elia which poignantly illustrates this concept:

*It is in this context of the complete erasure of Palestinian women (and more generally, but not as consistently, Arab and Muslim women as well) that one must understand the statement made by former US secretary of state Madeleine Albright as she rallied for Hillary Clinton—a solid booster of the apartheid state—in the 2016 presidential campaign: "There is a special place in hell for women who do not help each other." Albright later apologized for that comment, just as she had earlier apologized for answering a question about the deaths of half a million Iraqi children as a result of US sanctions with, "We think the price is worth it."*⁷⁰

The hypocrisy is also laid quite bare as Aldossari notes that despite "collectively reveal[ing] a pattern of systemic sexual violence, torture, and other severe abuses inflicted on Palestinians in Israeli detention facilities"⁷¹ many western feminist scholars and organizations remain silent. She proves that sexual violence by 'israelis' is very well documented, including various UN bodies, human rights organizations like B'Tselem, Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, which draw on evidence "such as legal proceedings, formal complaints, lawyer documentation, and detainee testimonies." It is in this light that the BDS movement is growing and that feminist circles are turning (slowly) towards an

⁶⁷ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum*, 71.

⁶⁸ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum*, 71.

⁶⁹ Nicola Pratt, Afaf Jabiri, Ashjan Ajour, Hala Shoman, Maryam Aldossari, and Sara Abaneh, "Why Palestine is a feminist issue: a reckoning with Western feminism in a time of genocide," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2025, 239.

⁷⁰ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 11.

⁷¹ Nicola Pratt, Afaf Jabiri, Ashjan Ajour, Hala Shoman, Maryam Aldossari, and Sara Abaneh, "Why Palestine is a feminist issue, 239.

anti-zionist stance as by definition a zionist cannot be feminist as zionism proves to call for the killing, subjugation, and sexual violence against Palestinian women.

Golley sheds more light on the oppressive and dehumanizing ways which the west seems to automatically, through media conditioning, view Arab women as she agrees with Elly Bulkin's description of what the west imagines to the phrase "Arab woman:" [which] "conjures up heavily veiled, secluded women, whose lives consist of little more than their homes, their children, and the other females in the 'harem' or immediate kinship circle."⁷²

The veil and harem are perhaps the most immediate Orientalist exotics, which have Arab defendants on both sides, such as Leila Ahmed who argues that the harem was actually a space in which women forbid the inclusion or presence of men.⁷³ Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian diasporic novelist also provides a counterstory anecdote as an alternative perspective for her western audiences as she writes of Palestinian women in their private spaces as one of her protagonists, Nazmiyeh, is asked how her sister can only have one green eye:

*'Some Roman stud probably stuck his dick in our ancestral line a few hundred years ago and now it's poking out of my poor sister's eye.' In the private female freedom of those laundry mornings, they all laughed, their arms deep in wash buckets. Another woman said, 'Too bad it wasn't a double-headed snake so she could have two green eyes.' And another, 'Mostly too bad for your ancestor, Nazmiyeh. How she might have liked a double-headed one!' Their laughter reached higher notes, liberated by the vulgar immodesty they dared.'*⁷⁴

Abulhawa clearly, and humourously, destroys the trope of Arab women's conservative silence and non-agency as an act of challenging imperialist feminism.

Golley also provides her readers with Rosemary Sayigh's observation of the Orientalist and western feminist task of reducing Arab women into the spheres of "public" and "private" without an understanding of the impact which Arab women have within the "private" sphere to affect the "public" sphere. According to the studies Sayigh draws her information from they "show that Arab women's conventional roles, previously supposed to be merely domestic and

⁷² Nawar al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story*, (University of Texas Press, 2003), 17.

⁷³ Golley, 24. Golley includes Ahmed's argument that women wanted a segregated space, that one of the variants to the term "harem" is *haraam*, meaning "forbidden," which Ahmed argues that "it was women who were doing the forbidding, excluding men from their society, and that it was therefore women who developed the model of strict segregation in the first place." Ahmed adds that in their harem, women "share living time and living space, exchange experiences and information, and critically analyze—often through jokes, stories, or plays—the world of men."

⁷⁴ Susan Abulhawa, *The Blue Between the Sky and Water*, (Bloomsbury Circus, 2015), 94-95.

hence private, contain a much stronger element of the social, economic, and political.”⁷⁵ She explains that women are not voiceless within the home and engage in decision-making. This functions as a counterstory to the “helpless” Arab woman stereotype but also proves that Arab women are more educated and influential than the west wants to admit.

Regarding the adoption of the *hijab*, I wish to share my conversation with Ameera, who “absolutely love[s] [her] *hijaab*” and told me that she loves to ask women about their relationship with their *hijab* because they have such interesting and diverse stories. I provide this summary of our conversation about Ameera’s relationship with her hijab (which has been edited and approved by Ameera):

*Ameera chose to embrace her hijab at the age of twelve, even though her mother cautioned her to ensure that she was not making her decision too lightly. Ameera explained that she wanted to wear her hijab as a practice and demonstration of her faith but also being fascinated seeing how beautiful her mother would look as she watched her putting on her hijab. Once she had adopted her hijab Ameera felt ever more confident in herself and her bodily autonomy as she felt protected from the male gaze. Ameera also explained that compulsion is not a tenement of Islam, which is to say that it is not Islamic to force a woman to wear a hijab or to convert to Islam as religious actions are based on your intentions and an action completed without proper intention should not be undertaken. As she addressed the difference in wearing a hijab in the UAE and in Canada Ameera explained that she felt her identity shift in the colonial gaze to a Muslim woman, which actually makes her more mindful of her actions as she felt like she was a representation of Islam.*⁷⁶

I am so grateful to Ameera for her speaking with me on her relationship with her hijab. I am honoured to share her response as I do not have a strong background in the positive relationship with modesty dress while conversely being very aware of the negative stereotyping which I am attempting to dismantle.

While the *hijab* and *harem* are problematically synonymous with “Arab woman” (from an Orientalist perspective) there is another misunderstood trope regarding the concept of “honour killings” which is much more dangerous. To be clear, the position being taken here is not to suggest that “honour killings” are characteristic of Arabs or Islam; Elia notes that the killing of Israa Gharyyeb and the stabbing of a gay Palestinian were met with public outrage and protestors holding signs saying “Patriarchy Kills” and “there is no honour in honour crimes.”⁷⁷ However,

⁷⁵ Golley, 22.

⁷⁶ Ameera, Personal interview by phone, 30 November, 2025.

⁷⁷ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 22-23.

the concept of a woman's sexuality being tied to her family's honour has been used by Zionists to exploit, coerce, and kill women and, through the same tactics, Palestinian queers.

I argue that this needs to be properly understood for its intersectional connection to Palestinian gender oppression. I will first highlight some examples of the sexual violence which 'Israelis' are using against Palestinian women as a tactic of their settler-colonialism. Samira Haj points out (and it should be stressed that this was written in 1992) that 'Israelis' are:

*Cognizant of the powerful cultural implications of female sexuality for Palestinians, the Israelis have not shied away from using it as a tool of intimidation. Since the Intifada, women's committees as well as human rights activists (both Israeli and Palestinian) have been recording cases of sexual harassment and attempted rape by Israeli soldiers and interrogators intended to pressure and neutralize Palestinian activists...women who had been sexually assaulted were then threatened with exposure, forcing them to cooperate with and report to Israeli intelligence on political activists in their communities.*⁷⁸

Haj also directs her readers to a report from the early 1980s by Rosemary Sayigh which contains the personal story of Rasmiyeh Odeh and reads:

*Where girls and women are concerned they are vulnerable as females, not just as Palestinians because the Israeli reading of Arab psychology leads to sexual aggression or threat being used against them as a means of intimidating the population as a whole. Apart from what women have suffered on their account as activists, perhaps three times as many have been tortured or threatened to put pressure on husbands, brothers, or sons. Many threats were made against their sisters. Rasmiyeh Odeh's father was forcibly involved in his daughter's sexual violation in a complex attempt to shame both of them. All possible combinations of family-bound male/female feelings—love, fear, shame, protectiveness—are all employed to shock and break down resistance.*⁷⁹

As will be shown in the next chapter, along with barbarity for cruelty's sake, 'Israeli' sexual violence is an attempt to suppress and divide Palestinian society. Sayigh also notes, which demands respect as a tremendous act of resistance and courage, that Palestinian women have increased their politicization despite the gendered sexual violence to attack the traditional culture norms. Sayigh specifically highlighted that young women were changing the traditional popular slogan of "honour before land" to *al-ard qabla al-'ard* ("land before honour").⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Samira Haj, "Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relation," *Signs*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Summer 1992), 771.

⁷⁹ Haj, "Palestinian Women and Patriarchal Relation," 771.

⁸⁰ Haj, 771.

The intention of raising awareness to Palestinian femicide is to make visible the connections of gendered violence as a practice that is informed and influenced by settler-colonialism. As many historians make clear, settler-colonialism is an attempted conquest of Indigenous women. Thus, I echo that one cannot condemn the Palestinian oppressor without first condemning the oppressor of Palestine. Elia connects the settler-colonialism experienced by Palestinians with the experience of Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island as in the USA, a settler-colonial state, “Two in three Indigenous women experience rape at least once in their lifetime. And Indigenous women are murdered at rates as high as ten times those of all other ethnicities,” and like Palestinians, the Indigenous women are disproportionately killed by non-Indigenous males.⁸¹ Elia also includes this statement from the Red Nation Collective:

*Because Indigenous bodies stand in the way of access to the land and because women are seen as the producers of native nations through the European heteropatriarchal lens, violence against women, particularly sexual violence, is used as means of separating native people from the land.*⁸²

This statement connects to what Sharoni discusses below, however I want to also stress that not only is Canada guilty of this barbarity, but that it continues its “quiet genocide” of Indigenous Peoples with disproportionate violence being gender-based.

Simona Sharoni writes that “Palestinian women’s identities and bodies have in fact become the battlefield”⁸³ between the forces of liberation and settler-colonialism. The scholars Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Suhad Daher-Nashif, having completed many studies of the interconnectedness of Zionist colonialism, note that: “The study of crimes in colonized zones must never be divorced from the political contexts and workings of power that envelope them.”⁸⁴ Following the killing of Israa’ Ghayeb by three male relatives the Palestinian Youth Movement released a statement which quotes the Palestinian political prisoner Khalida Jarrar:

Palestinians exist within a domain of colonial occupation, in which all Palestinians are denied freedom, and whereby women within the Palestinian society are doubly affected by structural and intra-communal and interpersonal violence. It is in this context that we recognize the impossibility of addressing communal and intimate violence against Palestinian women without contextualizing the broader racial, economic, and colonial

⁸¹ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum*, 84.

⁸² Elia, *Greater Than the Sum*, 84.

⁸³ Simona Sharoni, *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: the Politics of Women’s Resistance*, (Syracuse University Press, 1995), 39.

⁸⁴ Elia, 86.

*structural oppressions that condition Palestinian society.*⁸⁵

The west attempts to create a vacuum to discuss gender ideology in Palestine as being only controlled by Palestinian men. I echo the instructions of Palestinian feminists that the voices which we should be listening to and receive education from on the topic of gender politics in Palestine are those of Palestinian women. This counterstory represents the strength of Palestinian women to protest against Patriarchy, but also highlights that conservatism is not mainstream and therefore acts as a less threatening narrative. Moreover, it is a problem which only Palestinians should fix and true feminist allies should endeavour to end 'israeli' oppression so that Palestinians can tend to progressive politics without daily threats, killings, or sexual-based violence.

White feminism or Global North feminism should be viewed as a weapon of imperialism and settler-colonialism. The majoritarian narrative of Arab women oppressed by only Arab men is accessible in the west only because of Orientalist propaganda which falsifies the material reality—which can only be successful by suppressing and silencing Arab women.

Leila Khaled's Autobiography as Counterstory

Khaled is very successful in narrating the material reality which oppresses Palestinians while ensuring her readers are instructed that the most significant oppressor of her people, regardless of age or gender, is western imperialism and 'israeli.' Below I will demonstrate a number of ways in which Khaled defies the "laws of the genre" which will ultimately culminate in her being able to present a personal narrative of Palestinian history. I wish to first start with, and praise, the scholarship of Janet Varner Gunn in her chapter, "A Politics of Experience: Leila Khaled's *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary*." After, I will also explore how Khaled functions as a counternarrative and offer the possibility that Khaled's autobiography could be considered a periautography.

I was particularly struck by Varner Gunn's explanation of Khaled's autobiography as "an autobiography of conscientization, a process that involves both a coming to an awareness of the

⁸⁵ Elia, 87.

past that has shaped her reality and a designing of a future that can transform that reality.”⁸⁶

Khaled routinely brings the history of both zionism and imperialism as a way to illustrate for her readers, especially those in Arab countries, that Arab socialism has been routinely defeated by imperialist alliances with Reactionary regimes that ultimately subjugates all Arabs. Khaled is making the point that Palestinian liberation is connected to their own liberation—a future worth fighting for.

Khaled’s autobiography could arguably be questioned as whether or not it should be considered as an autobiography. The distinction between her voice and George Hajjar is complicated, if not at times indistinguishable. The creation of this autobiography is detailed as a collaborative effort which included material written by Khaled that was either published or unpublished as Hajjar writes in his Prefatory Note: “We collected her notes and looked over the published and unpublished material about her. During the following September and October, I wrote this book as told to me by Leila Khaled.”⁸⁷ The distinction that Hajjar wrote the book potentially diminishes the formula applied by the British critic Stephen Spender’s dictionary definition of autobiography: “the story of one’s life written by himself.”⁸⁸ I believe the arguments of Reynolds and Smith and Watson in Appendix III sufficiently dismiss a claim such as this as being at the very least inconsequential. However, I offer my opinion that Khaled’s storytelling is as sufficient as the act of writing with the caveat that the rhetorical and literary presentation of the material is too infused with Hajjar’s storytelling to effectively assign value to a specific voice; thus I largely critique it as a single-voiced work. I would further stress that to imply that a person who is unable to write their own story is unable to contribute or produce an autobiography diminishes the act of storytelling while also forcing a Eurocentric coloniality and/or elitist perspective.

Furthermore, one could argue that Khaled is taking a page from her icon Ché Guevara’s literary production of *testimonio*, which John Beverley notes as being of particular interest in Third World liberation struggles as “a literature of personal witness and involvement designed to make the cause of these movements known to the outside world, to attract recruits, to reflect on

⁸⁶ Janet Varner Gunn, “A Politics of Experience: Lelia Khaled’s *My People Shall Live: The Autobiography of a Revolutionary*,” in Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject*, 69.

⁸⁷ Leila Khaled, *My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a Revolutionary Leila Khaled as Told to George Hajjar*, (NC Press Ltd., 1975), 6.

⁸⁸ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1.

successes or failures of the struggle, and so on.”⁸⁹ Beverley explains that *testimonios* can, though not necessarily, involve an oral account being transitioned into a literary work as the narrator can be illiterate or if literate, not a professional writer. In this way Khaled’s story and account of Palestinian history is still able to be expressed whereas traditional autobiography’s “laws of genre” would have otherwise silenced her experience as a witness to testify against zionism and imperialism. Implicit in Beverley’s chapter is how *testimonio* exists as counterstory, largely in the realm of class consciousness, and is easily adaptable to Third World revolutionaries.

In their introduction, Smith and Watson address the space in which autobiography can be manipulated and used by marginalized voices to gain agency of their narrative and circumvent prescribed stock stories: “Deploying autobiographical practices that go against the grain, she may constitute an ‘I’ that becomes a place of creative and, by implication, political intervention.”⁹⁰ The structure of Khaled’s autobiography is especially divergent from the “laws of the genre.” As will be described below, Khaled’s autobiography is written nearly balanced between her personal experience as a Palestinian woman/freedom fighter and a far removed narration and commentary of history and politics which combine to present the individual and collective humanity of Khaled/Palestinians which is typically removed from historical writings. The book’s use of this technique means the reader doesn’t just learn that Palestinians were killed or exiled into refugees; they also learn how cold the frozen mud felt to a child’s feet.

In a similar vein I will also note the observation of Varner Gunn regarding Khaled’s title: “Khaled’s title issues another kind of announcement. My People Shall Live will embed her (‘my’) personal story in the life of her people, already going beyond the conventional first-person singular of traditional Western autobiography. And the title’s tense stretches toward the future, not the more recognizably autobiographical past.”⁹¹ The aspect which Varner Gunn does not address specifically regarding the title is that it also invites the reader to initially question why her people are being threatened and by who. This implicitly situates her experience as having an opposition which she is speaking out against. I will expand on this below.

In “Counter-Narratives Mobilized by Deprived Communities Through Theatre Interventions: Deconstructing and Reframing Master Narratives,” the authors explain that master

⁸⁹ John Beverley, “The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative),” in Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject*, 94.

⁹⁰ Smith and Watson, *De/Colonizing the Subject*, xix.

⁹¹ Varner Gunn, “A Politics of Experience: Lelia Khaled...,” 70.

narratives represent hegemonic assumptions which counter-narratives necessarily challenge. Using the work of Nelson and Lindemann they explain that:

*counter-narratives seek to identify oppressive elements of master narratives, and then to counter-formulate the story by refusing, repudiated and contesting such elements, with a view towards reframing and restoring identities and subject positions that, historically, were damaged by abusive power systems.*⁹²

Khaled had gained international fame (or infamy) by her hijacking of planes to bring attention to the oppression of settler-colonialism against Palestine prior to the release of her autobiography. The master narrative wanted the world to see her only through their description of her, as a “terrorist,” and not allow her to vindicate her actions or express the very real motivations which caused her to use measures which she would not have otherwise taken. As Varner Gunn indicates, quoting Khaled, that after the three simultaneous plane hijackings “the Palestinians ‘for the first time in modern history...were on the centre stage’...we became a people for a whole week.”⁹³ I am also reminded that Khaled speaks directly to the passengers on the plane she successfully hijacks to offer her story and experience independent of the systemic filter through which her Palestinian voice would otherwise pass through.⁹⁴

Hajjar details (and provides evidence) Bantam books was lobbied by American Zionists to ensure that the book was not published after they had procured the publishing rights. This demonstrates how powerful counterstorytelling can be as colonizers fear Indigenous Peoples speaking for themselves and being given access to a critical thinking global minority. Finally, I wish to comment on Khaled’s autobiography as a periautography and the advantages which she gains from this style.

Khaled, and Tuqan to a lesser extent, write their autobiography in a style that could be categorized as a periautography which James Olney describes as “writing about or around the self.”⁹⁵ I use Giambattista Vico’s *Life of Giambattista Vico written by Himself* as an example as it is hailed as the first periautography, written in response to Count Gian Artico di Porcia’s

⁹² Fabio Prado Saldanha, Marlei Pozzebon, Chantale Mailhot, and David Le Puil, “Counter-Narratives Mobilized by Deprived Communities Through Theatre Interventions: Deconstructing and Reframing Master Narratives,” *Management Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2022, 483-484.

⁹³ Varner Gunn, 67.

⁹⁴ Khaled 145-147.

⁹⁵ Smith and Watson. *Reading Autobiography*, 276.

“Proposal to the Scholars of Italy” which asked for autobiographies “for the edification of young students.”⁹⁶ Paul Achambault notes of Vico’s autobiography that:

Vico was to weave into his account a brief account of his life, lineage, and education, pointing out the strong and the weak points of the curricula on which he had been raised. He was then to ‘pass on to the particular art or science to which he had devoted himself; the authors he has followed or shunned, and why; the works he has published or is preparing; how they have been criticized, what he has said or might say in defense of them, and what he would now retract. Let him candidly confess his errors, and defend only what seems defensible after due consideration, with generous neutrality.’⁹⁷

While Khaled was not a scholar much of the same applies to her autobiography as she instructs the reader in the education of a revolutionary. Tuqan, for her part, introduces the reader to numerous Arab authors and poets as they write about Palestine and/or Arab culture in a way that she cannot experience.

Khaled’s “scholarly pursuit” would be her devotion to the liberation of Palestine and educating herself to bring Arab Socialism to the Arab world. She educates herself in politics, most specifically of great Communist heroes and revolutionaries such as Vladimir Lenin, Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh and Mao Zedong. Her autobiography is written to primarily educate a western audience, to condemn of Arab audiences for not demanding more from their reactionary governments, and to present a history which dominant voices continue to suppress. It demonstrates her devotion to the revolution, but it also counters the dominant narrative which portrays Palestinians and/or Arabs as violent, backward, or being dependent on western “civilization.” By also writing as a periautography, Hajjar and Khaled are able to introduce a wealth of history and politics into the autobiography as markers of context and thus participate in counterstorytelling to combat the western presentation and occupation of history. By focusing on *Her People*, Khaled is writing for the collective Palestinian voice.

A Comparative Reading

Reading and comparing Tuqan and Khaled proves to be tremendously beneficial as each woman provides such different and almost alternative experiences to one another. Khaled is the

⁹⁶ Paul J. Archambault, “Introduction: Periautography and the Scholar,” *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, Vol. 51, No. 4, 212-213.

⁹⁷ Archambault, “Periautography and the Scholar,” 213.

“free” woman that Tuqan envies while Tuqan is from the society of women whom Khaled is so frequently at odds with. Both women have a view of womanhood that at times share similarities while suffering under similar oppression and both women strive in completely separate spheres of influence that eventually leads them to be iconic feminists to women who follow in their trailblazing courses. Having read both autobiographies I will expand on what I considered to be aspects of counternarratives which will be divided into the following subsections: Introductions, Palestinian Groundings, and “Writing Back.”

Counterstorytelling in the Introductions of Tuqan and Khaled

By virtue of being Palestinian women both Tuqan and Khaled face a suppression and colonial filter in the west which means that any publication of Palestinian voices has the heavy task of situating the western reader into an appropriate space to engage with these women. We are able to witness this through the use of language in the introduction and the ways in which the writers need to contextualize and provide background information. These introductions prove themselves to be written for an English speaking audience and likely for an audience who might not be well versed in Palestinian history or the history of imperialism in the Arab world. For Khaled’s autobiography this is less significant as it seems that a western audience was always her original intended audience and specifically within Third World Liberation studies. However, Tuqan’s autobiography was originally written in Arabic for an Arabic audience, which adds greater weight to her introductory material to situate her voice towards a western audience and provide context to bridge the gap from speaker to audience.

Jayyusi, the editor of Tuqan’s autobiography, makes clear to the reader that the political writings and poetry which earned her the title of Poet of Palestine would be in the second volume of her autobiography which details her life after 1967 and discusses the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (where she lives). This is a signal to the reader that the settler-colonial and imperial oppression is not the main focus of this volume while simultaneously inviting the reader to inquire further about it, or at the least, making them knowledgeable of the oppression and occupation. However, despite Tuqan’s focus on Palestinian patriarchy she includes her political resistance poetry following the 1967 War. Her poem, “Song of Becoming,” is included after the introduction of Malti-Douglass and before Tuqan directly speaks to her readers in order to

emphasize and connect her story to the culture of resistance. The lines “There is no shame in losing the battle. The main thing is not to give up and lay down our arms”⁹⁸ seem particularly telling, as if specifically addressing the 1967 War. Tuqan is reaching out to her readers and trying to embolden Palestinians not to give up the cause of liberation.

Conversely, Khaled’s autobiography was always intended to be a counterstory and thus the injection of resistance to domination is nearly the first concept read. Within the first couple of pages of Khaled’s autobiography, even before the publisher’s information, is a quote that pulls the politics of the revolution to the forefront: “‘It is not enough to hate and believe in the past to make a revolution. Hatred and belief in the past are sufficient prods for the rebellion phase. We must love and be future-oriented if we wish to carry out the revolution.’ ~ Ghassan Kanafani, Editor *Al Hadaf*, the organ of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.” Under this Hajjar notes that Kanafani was assassinated by ‘israeli’ agents. Jayyusi only names the ‘israeli’ occupation at the very end of her foreword however, Hajjar names the oppressor seemingly as early as possible. Although Khaled is the central narrator, her autobiography quickly emphasizes that it will focus also on the politics of the revolution and Arab socialism.

Hajjar opens the autobiography as a counterstory by encouraging the readers to question and think critically about the power of the media to suppress and silence voices. He does this in his “Introduction to Canadian Edition” which implicates the infiltration of zionism as a systemic force to suppress Palestinian and anti-zionist voices through the anecdote of the publication process of Khaled’s story. Furthermore, it includes an introduction to the different political actors within not just Palestine, but the Arab world, including U.S. imperialist, Soviet Union, and the Arab Revolutionaries and Reactionaries. Hajjar also adds a note to Jews in Canada and the U.S. that they have an obligation for their own self-preservation to combat zionism in all its forms as he states that “Zionism is the greatest disaster ever to befall Jewish People. By stressing the Jewish distinctiveness it turns Jews into aliens in their own countries.”⁹⁹ This challenges the hegemonic narrative of ‘israel’ that tries to persuade Jews that they can only be safe in ‘israel.’ While I do not have the space to properly delve into the topic of Jewish Exceptionalism, as it requires a chapter in and of itself, I will use some examples from Elia to illustrate why this is a

⁹⁸ Tuqan, 11.

⁹⁹ George Hajjar, “Introduction to Canadian Edition,” in Leila Khalid’s *My People Shall Live: Autobiography of a Revolutionary* by Leila Khalid as told to George Hajjar, 15.

topic worth investigating as there are numerous and lasting effects which need to be addressed critically.

Elia makes note that in the discourse of genocide: “despite the devastation wreaked by Europeans on the rest of the world throughout modern history, the only European who is unanimously acknowledged as evil is Adolf Hitler, whose victims were primarily Europeans.”¹⁰⁰ Elia also notes that while the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust is always cited, the deliberate omission of the almost equal number of other peoples and communities killed in the Holocaust “is proof that Jewish suffering is elevated above the suffering of others...”¹⁰¹ Elia explains that this has led to a situation wherein the “mainstream presentation of the resistance of the Palestinian people [is viewed] as another episode of violent antisemitism, continuing the age-old (if European) hounding of Jewish people.”¹⁰² While there is much more to add to this sidebar I hope the point is being made clear that not only are Palestinians being transposed into European antisemitism despite being a refuge for Jews prior to zionism, but also that the Palestinian resistance to settler-colonialism is swept up into the hegemonic narrative which relegates it as an irrational hatred of Jews.

Palestinian Groundings in Literature

In my activism I have been introduced to the concept of groundings which I’ve been told are utilized to situate the audience at the gathering in the work they are participating in, why it is important, and how it ties to historical events and how it can impact the future. I use the phrase Palestinian Groundings in Literature to group familiar aspects which I have found in my (limited) research pertaining to Palestinian autobiographies and narratives. The aspects I found are temporal associations with tragedy, most often related to zionism/‘israelis,’ poetic connections to Palestinian land, and denied childhoods. I begin first with temporal associations with tragedy.

In Kassem’s research she notes a peculiarity as she interviews women, not only that most did not know the exact day of their birth, but also that their ages were often calculated through

¹⁰⁰ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 40.

¹⁰¹ Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 41.

¹⁰² Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 42.

events and often through negative associations with colonizing Jews: “I was in fourth grade when the Jews came in.”¹⁰³ Kassem asserts that the women relay their ages and birth in such a way due to their oral and traditional culture. I note, however, that it is also maintained in Palestinian literary culture. Khaled’s “birth” is narrated as: “I left Haifa four days after my fourth birthday, on April 13, 1948,”¹⁰⁴ due to the *Nakba*. Tuqan discovers the year of her birth through the death of her cousin who was killed in action.¹⁰⁵ This action is not identified, but could involve the British occupation or zionists. Tawil offers her “birth” in a similar way: “...following the Israeli conquest of Acre in 1948....I was just a little girl at the time,...”¹⁰⁶ Amiry recounts her birth while telling a frustrating story of an ordeal with an ‘israeli’ security officer.¹⁰⁷ Even in Susan Abulhawa’s novel, *Mornings in Jenin*, is the protagonist, Amal, “birthed” in suffering: “Until this birth, Dalia (Amal’s mother) still wore a cloak of bereavement for Ismael (who was kidnapped by Jews in the *Nakba*), sheathing herself in black grief that reached to her wrists and ankles.”¹⁰⁸

The marring of joy through the memory of oppression and injustice is a catastrophe which I can hardly fathom due to the chance of my birth (white and Canadian), yet with the Palestinian diaspora each time they introduce where their family was ethnically cleansed from they are tying their own stories to the tragedy of the *Nakba* or dispossession. I find a similar connection when Indigenous Peoples include their Tribe or Nation as they introduce themselves as a form of historical resistance. To use this representation in literary works intentionally ties the experience of being so oppressed/occupied as to make inseparable moments of joy or remembrance. I read these as examples that directly challenge zionist framework of the “‘israel’/Palestine conflict beginning in 2023 and previous attempts at revisionist history.

I turn now to the poetic connections to Palestinian land. In Tuqan’s introduction she is figuratively grounded in Palestinian soil; the site of sacred reverence, genealogical history, and resistance: “A seed does not see the light without first cleaving a difficult path through the earth. This story of mine is the story of the seed’s battle against the hard rocky soil; a story of struggle,

¹⁰³ Kassem, 53.

¹⁰⁴ Khaled, 23-24.

¹⁰⁵ Tuqan, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Raymonda Hawa Tawil, *My Home, My Prison*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 17.

¹⁰⁷ Suad Amiry, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*, (Random House, Inc., 2006), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Susan Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin*, (Bloomsbury, 2010), 51.

deprivation and enormous difficulties.”¹⁰⁹ Khaled similarly connects herself, and Palestinians, to the land when recounting a story of her mother scolding her for picking oranges in Lebanon saying: “‘Darling, the fruit is not yours; you are no longer in Haifa; you are in another country.’”¹¹⁰ This anecdote elegantly and simply reminisces Palestinians as belonging to the land which sustains them, as they in turn sustain it, only now forced into exile—into a world wherein they do not “belong” and severs the tie of mutual nurturing. Khaled also proves to have a poetic side as she describes her emotional experience seeing Haifa for the first time since being ethnically cleansed:

*Now I saw Haifa from the air and formed my own cherished image of my home. Haifa is caressed by the sea, hugged by the mountain, inspired by the open plain. Haifa is a safe anchor for the wayfarer, a beach in the sun. Yet, I, as a citizen of Haifa, am not allowed to bask in its sun, breathe its clear air, live there with my people.*¹¹¹

I also include Raymonda Hawa Tawil, as she writes in her autobiography, *My Home, My Prison*, a beautiful account of the Palestinian olive tree:

*Our people are deeply attached to the olive tree; its fruits are vital to the existence and survival of our villagers. With wheat, bread, and olive oil, a house is always secure from famine, from war, and from catastrophe. Arabic literature mentions the olive tree as the cure of all diseases; in the holy Koran the Prophet Muhammad exhorts us, ‘Take care of the holy olive tree; from it you will gain your benediction.’ The olive trees had a special appeal for me, with the mystery of their defiant strength that withstands the ordeals of time by virtue of the long, tough roots they sink into the soil. Like thoughts and memories that sit deep in the mind, deeper than words, the olive tree has its roots in this land since the time of my ancestors, long ago.*¹¹²

I include these groundings as aspects of counterstory because they reinforce their Indigenous connection to their homeland as a site of sacredness which Zionist and ‘Israeli’ settlers cannot replicate. These are used to remind readers not only of Palestinian Indigeneity, but also as a counterclaim against ‘Israel’ as a promised land. I turn now to the use of a denied Palestinian childhood to both reimagine how childhood tropes are used in autobiography, but also to once more prove how oppressive is ‘Israeli’ settler-colonialism.

¹⁰⁹ Tuqan, 11.

¹¹⁰ Khaled, 28. Sarah Irving expands on this anecdote in her biography of Khaled by noting that Khaled explained in an interview with Eileen MacDonald for her book, *Shoot the Women First*, that “Since then, I haven’t been able to eat oranges. It brings such a feeling of sadness to me to see them and to think that our orange trees are still in Haifa, but now they belong to somebody else.” Irving, *Leila Khaled*, 15.

¹¹¹ Khaled, 21-22.

¹¹² Tawil, *My Home, My Prison*, 37.

Both Tuqan and Khaled clearly suffer from the denial of their childhood. While Tuqan's childhood is denied almost exclusively by Palestinian conservatism, Khaled's childhood is denied entirely due to Zionism and ethnic cleansing. This is a crucial and tragic aspect of Palestinian identity as it could be argued that any Palestinian child born post-1967 would be denied a childhood living in occupied Palestine and as well as the ethnically cleansed Palestinians from the *Nakba*. With the intensified genocide of Palestinians this proves to be more true today than any time in Palestinian history as not only are Palestinian children being denied the freedom of a normal and safe childhood, they are being targeted and killed in unprecedented numbers.

As Khaled's narrator recounts the story of the orange groves and the lesson which her mother instructed she notes: "As a child of four I found myself burdened by the adult problems of life and death, right and wrong. I, as a dreamer, living on the bare subsistence provided by a UN blue ration card, in a crowded room, on a side street in Sour, stand as a witness to Zionist inhumanity."¹¹³ Khaled includes another example of her material misfortune which further emphasizes the class and material contrast between Tuqan and Khaled. Khaled recounts a memory which followed a heavy snowfall in early 1953:

I caught a bad cold but had no medicine and I had to keep on going to school in my worn-out sandals. One windy February day I struggled home through nearly two feet of snow. I was freezing to death. I entered the house crying pitifully. I shouted: 'I can't take it anymore! I need a pair of socks and a pair of shoes. Sandals without socks are for summer, not for the winters of Lebanon.' Mother looked at me sadly, 'Darling, don't you think I know that?' 'If you did,' I screamed, 'you'd buy me a pair of shoes and socks.' Angrily she answered: 'You should be thankful you have a pair of sandals to wear and a house to come to. Other children have neither sandals nor homes. They don't even have enough to eat. Do you understand Leila? Do you?' "As Leila asked why they had not these things her mother explained the situation and how they themselves were considered the lucky comparatively with other refugees. "Imagine where we might have landed had we not had relatives in Sour and I had not had a few bracelets from the old days which I could sell to buy food for the first few months. Where would we have gone, where would we be now? I wonder if you would have survived to this day. What might have happened to you and your sisters and your brothers had I been killed or taken away by the Zionists when we were on our way from Haifa to Sour? Don't you know that Zionists slaughtered our people, and those who escaped them died of thirst or starvation?... We fought and fought valiantly to save the land; we lost and were driven out. You Leila, and your brothers and sisters, must never forget Palestine and you must do your utmost to recover her."¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Khaled, 28.

¹¹⁴ Khaled, 33-34.

I cannot help but imagine in the background of this debilitating tale of collective punishment the image of Naji al-Ali's 1969 Handala: the barefoot cartoon boy that represents the plight of Palestinian refugees. So powerful was Handala's representation of 'israeli' oppression that it is widely believed that 'israel' was responsible for al-Ali's assassination;¹¹⁵ yet another example of the threat of counternarratives. At this moment, November 18, 2025, I am reading this testimony of Khaled from 1953 while also watching videos of Palestinians enduring a brutal winter to compound their suffering trying to survive this holocaust; videos of children shivering with bare feet, tents of the dispossessed flooding, and sewage mixing with the flood spreading disease while 'israel' is banning the materials to build shelters and vaccination medicines. The international community is still failing.

Similar to Tuqan, Khaled's childhood experience is the impetus of her chosen career; the revolutionary. Like Tuqan, it is moments and people immortalized in her memory that would develop her consciousness and ideology. One such example includes when Khaled experiences a Palestinian refugee camp for the first time at the age of nine. Khaled explains that she learned the true and fuller effects of Palestinian misery in the Spring of 1953. Her narrator explains that she was competitive and thought herself to be the brightest child of her grade, but found out that she was second place behind Samirah: "My self-assurance was undermined by Samirah, a little girl from the camps – scum of the earth, so I thought."¹¹⁶ Khaled explains that she used violence and insults to get back at Samirah, when:

*The teacher took me inside for a little talk; it was a talk I shall never forget. She explained to me that poor peasant children were just as bright as my family and friends. 'Besides,' she added, 'they are the true children of Palestine because they live on the land, and cultivate and harvest it. Virtue is a part of the people of the land, and the simple folk are the backbone of all societies...'*¹¹⁷

Khaled uses this memory to reflect on her blind social prejudice which she overcomes throughout her revolutionary training.

Khaled's narrator explains that part of the lesson the teacher imparted was that she would be taken to Samirah's "tent-home to see how she lived and her parents and hundreds of

¹¹⁵ "Naji al-Ali remembered: A Palestinian cartoonist gunned down in London," *Middle East Eye*, 30 August, 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/discover/palestine-naji-ali-handala-creator-remembered>

¹¹⁶ Khaled, 34.

¹¹⁷ Khaled, 35.

thousands of Palestinians lived.” This was the moment which instilled Khaled with an awareness of class consciousness. Khaled explains:

*As I grew older, I acquired the necessary intellectual and moral ideology to understand what I had felt in that camp, why class society must be abolished and socialism established in its place. But, Samirah, my classmate and class sister and Amirah, my teacher and working-class advocate, taught me that first lesson of true freedom and true humanity... In that camp, I saw misery, hunger, and humiliation. I saw the maimed, the diseased, the broken-hearted. I saw bare-footed children with swollen stomachs, fathers with heads bowed, pale mothers with sickly babies, grandparents in despair. I saw the meaning of poverty and hunger, and felt the despair of deprivation to my bones...I returned home intoxicated by the wine of reality. I was crucified and redeemed at the same time. Ever since, I have loved the poor and marched with them to overthrow our mutual oppressors.*¹¹⁸

In this moment Khaled seems like the exemplar of the Palestinian community. As all accounts of Palestinian women during the Intifadas and Occupation reify all children become their children in their steadfast defence of their community. Khaled is keenly applying her Marxist-Leninist theory which connects her liberation to the liberation of the most oppressed. I am also reminded of the James Baldwin poem as he writes “Every bombed village is my hometown / And every dead child is my child, / every grieving mother is my mother, / every crying father is my father,...”¹¹⁹

Khaled demonstrates that she took the camp lessons of her own privilege to heart when she took up the call to help Hassnah, “a sad little girl in ragged clothes” to fundraise some money to help buy Hassnah an Easter dress as their teacher, Nabil, spoke to the class saying “It would be unMoslem not to share our riches with the poor, and certainly unArab not to be generous.”¹²⁰ Khaled continues to say, after Nabil asked “if each one of you contributes two to five piastres, we could buy Hassnah a dress,” that her peers seemed confused by the request. Her narrator, however, proclaims that:

*I was not. I knew what it meant to be poor, having just visited the primitive camps. I stood up and announced, ‘Here is my entire weekly allowance of five piastres.’ Most of the children followed suit and we bought Hassnah a dress in the midst of joyous tears. I decided not to wear my own new dress that year because thousands of Palestinian children had none.*¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Khaled, 35-36.

¹¹⁹ Jacquelin Mulhallen, “James Baldwin: ‘The Indians are you,’” *Counterfire*, 12 December, 2024, <https://www.counterfire.org/article/james-baldwin-the-indians-are-you/>

¹²⁰ Khaled, 36.

¹²¹ Khaled, 36-37.

While reading Khaled's memories, it's clear that she is being shaped by the misery and injustice which were forced upon Palestine and Palestinians. She is denied joy, whether self-imposed or not, because she is committed to solidarity with her people. As she aged, though still a child, she only grew more politically and socially conscious. She continues to say:

*By 1955 I was becoming conscious of present problems and future plans. In that spring, I obtained my elementary school certificate and made plans to go to secondary school. I was eleven years old and Israel was seven. We went through the same perennial ritual of denouncing Zionism, imperialism and Arab reactionaries on the seventh anniversary of our exile and doing nothing about it.*¹²²

Khaled then continues as if the political world in which she lived was her childhood playground, noting things like the 1954 Lavon Affair wherein 'israel' planned to bomb the embassies of the U.S. and England, as well as other western strategic interests as a false flag operation, or the expansion of 'israel' including the attack on the village of Kibya which concluded on February 28, 1955 as 'israel' invaded the Gaza strip to demolish the Egyptian fortifications and killed and wounded over one hundred and fifty people."¹²³ Khaled brings attention specifically to the ways in which zionists and 'israelis' represent a very real and fatal threat to Americans, a fact which is of course minimized as much as possible in the media. Khaled explains that her own family's fortunes were materially eased while she simultaneously "absorbed details and mastered most of the anti-Western arguments."¹²⁴ She also notes that "The years from 1956 to 1959 were my period of political apprenticeship as an activist. Although I had sensed intense political interest and activity in our house since 1954, I somehow did not grasp its full significance and was not really involved in the discussions."¹²⁵

It's clear that not only is Khaled presenting a history of oppression, but she is also proving her educational training which is to say she is proving that her motivations are not a "hatred of Jews" but of the dire oppression which they zionists and 'israelis' are enforcing on Palestinians. In fact, Khaled specifically recounts a dialectical exchange with Miss McNight who helped her to see that "not all Jews were Zionists; some were, in fact, anti-Zionist."¹²⁶

¹²² Khaled, 42.

¹²³ Khaled, 43.

¹²⁴ Khaled, 43.

¹²⁵ Khaled, 45.

¹²⁶ Khaled, 54.

I will summarize this section on Palestinian Groundings in Literature to once more reiterate that they each function as an aspect of counterstory, whether by making the brutality of ‘israeli’ occupation fundamental to understanding the Palestinian experience, or demonstrating and proclaiming their ancestral connection to Palestine since time immemorial, or by documenting how it is impossible to enjoy a normal, or safe, childhood (or life for that matter) while suffering ‘israeli’ occupation and oppression. Each aspect in the Groundings are also reinventions, or at least circumventions, to the “western” tradition of autobiography. A fourth aspect to these Groundings, especially for Palestinian women would be Palestinian Patriarchy. As Palestinian Patriarchy figures so prominently in my next section, “Writing Back,” I have chosen to keep it separate in my thesis.

“Writing Back”

It was my intention above to detail how Palestinian women have used the genre of autobiography as a function of their counterstorytelling. I am deliberate in keeping this section separate because of the more direct condemnation or criticism which the speakers share with their readers as they specifically address policy or beliefs that oppress Palestinian women. Below I will first introduce Golley’s theory of “Writing Back” which I apply to both Tuqan and Khaled as Tuqan writes her vexations against Arab patriarchy, hypocrisy, and as she addresses western women and imperialists for their ignorance and misplaced condemnations. Khaled, likewise, “writes back” to Arab patriarchy as she admonishes their sexual politics that inhibit liberation while also imploring women to avoid the “travesty of womanhood.” Khaled also “writes back” against U.S. imperialism and zionism that gives such emphasis to her counterstorytelling against hegemonic narratives.

In her book, *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story*, Golley includes Tuqan’s *A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography* as an example of Arab women “writing back” to western and Arab male perspectives and as alternatives to Orientalist perspectives. Golley explains: “The stories in these texts about Arab women’s identities are different from the ones already written by westerners about Arab women. I would also argue that the women are writing back in a double way: they are writing back to the west and, probably

more importantly, are writing back to Arab ‘patriarchy.’”¹²⁷ I will reiterate that my inclusion of Tuqan’s counterstory is not to strengthen my central argument of counterstorytelling against hegemonic imperial narratives, but to amplify her experience of gender oppression which remains central to the liberation of Palestinian women.

Tuqan’s autobiography is vividly honest as she shares her emotionally infused analyses regarding her male relatives and Palestinian society. She writes Yusuf as a mean tyrant and is fearful for her physical safety from his fists and the barbarous notion of “honour killing,” yet she also offers him a sort of redemption when she notes that he becomes “less oppressive.” Her father is written as a stoic oppressor who offered only disdain, if not indifference, to Tuqan and routinely sided against her for the sake of his reputation regardless of his hypocrisy. The positive male figures in Tuqan’s life were celebrated for their relations with women: Ibrahim being her greatest champion and Nimr after Ibrahim’s death. However, she early writes of her envy and wish to have been the daughter of her maternal aunt whose husband “was neither a fanatic nor a slave to tradition”¹²⁸ which would have allowed Tuqan to enjoy a social life with the love and affection not found in her richer, high society family.

Tuqan is unapologetic as she writes that “Filial love is often clothed in hate.”¹²⁹ Her relationship with her mother is always trying; she is partly empathetic as she writes to condemn the patriarchal oppression of society which forced her through ten pregnancies: “She was overcome with the burden of pregnancy, birth and nursing, for every two or two and a half years she presented the family with a newborn infant. Married at eleven, she was not yet fifteen when she bore her first son.”¹³⁰ In this family and society which vastly valued boys over girls Tuqan is born after her mother repeatedly tried to abort her and she could never give Tuqan the love or affection a child needs and deserves. In this atmosphere Tuqan defines her relationship with her mother, and could be applied to the father, as a “nonentity...I am nothing. I have no place in her memory.”¹³¹ While this is a scathing statement that moves me to empathize with Tuqan, I don’t know how effective it would be in motivating change within a patriarchal society that normalized this behaviour (not that I believe her writing should only be judged on if it affects change).

¹²⁷ Golley, *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiographies*, 13.

¹²⁸ Tuqan, 21.

¹²⁹ Tuqan, 21.

¹³⁰ Tuqan, 13.

¹³¹ Tuqan, 19.

However, I believe that Tuqan addressing the double standards of men to have a greater impact on her male audience.

When her father is persuaded by his brother's family to end Tuqan's English lessons she writes a scathing rebuke which her passivity would not allow her to vocalize:

The men dressed in European style; they spoke Turkish, French and English; they ate with knives and forks; they fell in love. Then they lay jealously in wait whenever one of us girls aspired to better things or tried to assert herself in quite natural ways. They represented, in the most flagrant manner possible, the rigidity of the Arab male and his absolute inability to maintain a personality that was healthy and whole. They represented, now as ever, the dual personality of the Arab: one half going along with development, conforming to the spirit of the times and adjusting to the rhythm of contemporary life; the other half paralysed, informed by an age-old egoism rooted in the Arab man's soul, with all the eastern haughtiness that has dictated how the male should treat his female relatives.¹³²

Tuqan is challenging Arab society by indicating its many flaws and oppressions. A statement such as this would not be easily ignored or dismissed and thus invites discourse; whether to agree or refute her claim. However, Tuqan is also keenly aware not to write the west as an altogether better alternative.

Tuqan is aware of the Orientalist view which a western reader might inherently hold as she writes of instructing the children of Mrs. Veetham's niece as well as the French children on Arab culture. Tuqan notes "The word 'Arab' portrays nothing to the western mind but images of tents, desert and camels"¹³³ as she also finds it strange that the English people should conjure such limited understanding of Arab people as they had colonized Arab countries for several decades. Tuqan then instructs the reader that Arab and non-Arab women alike are still oppressed and still fighting for equality around the world:

I used to believe that Englishwomen, who had fought for the right to vote and won, had achieved complete equality with men. But I found that the press was full of news of the war of the sexes: women were still seeking equality with men with regard to wages. A woman performs the same work as proficiently as a man, but she receives a smaller pay cheque, simply because she is a woman. The suggestions that a woman's place is in the home, and that a woman must not do anything that would embarrass her husband or hurt his manly pride, are still expressed. Likewise, there are those who believe that the woman is a second-class being revolving in her husband's orbit, or who think that time and money spent on educating a girl are wasted...A great deal of money is spent on the boy, while the girl is ignored and expected to look for a husband. It is assumed that this will solve her

¹³² Tuqan, 78-79.

¹³³ Tuqan, 157.

*problems in a world that still hands the other sex privileges as if bestowed by divine right.*¹³⁴

Tuqan is ensuring that the western woman, as well as the Arab woman who reads her autobiography, understand that their oppressor remains the patriarchy and that the patriarchy begins and proliferates within the family home first and society second. By situating Arab women's gender oppression alongside the gender oppression of western women Tuqan is illustrating the hypocrisy and diminishing the strength of imperial feminist stock stories.

While Tuqan does remotely address colonialism and zionism, namely in her opening poem and her condemnation of the English who colonized Arabs while remaining ignorant of them, they are largely muted as she focuses on her own life whose oppressor was Arab. Like Tuqan, Khaled's oppressor is at times Arab, but unlike Tuqan, Khaled is willing to challenge the sexism without flinching and within the moment. Khaled's autobiography challenges Arab patriarchy not with the eloquent language Tuqan uses to recount her memories but with brute force. What is more important to Khaled, however, regarding "writing back" is the politics of the Arab world, demonizing Arab leaders who profit from the colonization of Arabs, and to the western reader whose skewered media propaganda denies a true understanding of "terrorism."

Khaled details repeatedly throughout her autobiography that she would not be intimidated by anyone regarding her gender, age, or social ranking. Khaled proves that she is free from social pressure by constantly fighting against social guardrails and sexist ideology. While Khaled is at the Saida School for Girls in 1960 she explicitly expresses her disdain towards the other girls she was boarding with at the time: "I was placed in a house with twelve other girls. A few were Palestinians with whom I thought I could communicate. But to them Palestine was in the distant and remote past. They wanted to obtain an 'education' and find husbands. What a travesty of womanhood."¹³⁵ Khaled uses the opportunity of her autobiography to express her opinion of sexism in Arab consciousness both in connection to the liberation of Palestine and Arab Socialism but also as a force which is trying to deny her freedom.

Khaled uses the sexist treatment of her own family to explain the difference between western sexism and Arab sexism:

In the summer of 1962, I once again had to face the problem of being a Palestinian Arab woman. My sisters in the West speak of two kinds of oppression: class and sexual. I had to

¹³⁴ Tuqan, 158-159.

¹³⁵ Khaled, 53.

*face four kinds of oppression: national, social (the weight of traditions and habits), class and sexual. At this point I was particularly prone to oppression because I was a woman. My family professed equality like most modern families, but didn't practise it. Although I passed the baccalaureate examination with flying colours and my brother Khaled failed, my family insisted on sending him to university instead. I was a very low priority item compared to my brothers.*¹³⁶

Though Khaled would be able to go to the American University of Beirut through the generosity of her brother, Mohammad, her narrator was quick to reiterate her condemnation of traditional Arab misogyny: "But I was delighted to have passed and wanted to enroll as quickly as possible before I got railroaded into some uncreative role like office work or marriage and baby-production."¹³⁷ This once more reaffirms Khaled's view of the travesty of womanhood: stuck in a marriage as a symbol whose only validation comes from the success of her husband or from her womb.

In this way we understand Khaled's view of marriage as an institution which traps women and although we are not afforded Tuqan's perspective beyond the criticism of her own parents we are able to learn that Tuqan spends time with men whose identity she keeps hidden and that she never marries. Khaled's narrator states that she "had casual boyfriends but never became really attached to any man. The older I grew the more attached I became to the revolution."¹³⁸ It is while fighting for the revolution that Khaled falls in love with Comrade Bassim and towards the end of her autobiography she notes without emotion or detail: "We got married on November 26, 1970, spent a week together and then returned to our separate tasks."¹³⁹ Despite being married Khaled remains consistent with her ideals of womanhood; being her own individual self. When Khaled was part of the student committee that attacked the Jordanian embassy and ambassador in 1963, her narrator identifies herself as the future Arab woman: "Since we were talking in English and I was being so forceful, he presumed that I was not an Arab. Before we left I spoke to him in Arabic and assured him that I was an Arab, a Palestinian and that every Arab woman was going to be my kind of woman in the near future."¹⁴⁰

Khaled is making a very strong point here and speaking not just to Arab males. While she certainly is challenging traditional Arab patriarchy and the domestication of Arab women, she is

¹³⁶ Khaled, 59.

¹³⁷ Khaled, 59.

¹³⁸ Khaled, 67.

¹³⁹ Khaled, 212.

¹⁴⁰ Khaled, 64.

also instructing Arab women that they must break this tradition if they want to free the Arab world from imperialism and zionism or themselves from Arab patriarchy.

For Khaled, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the conservative view of Palestinian and Arab women needs to be in the past and not carried forward (a shared ethos of many present Palestinian diasporic organizations). Khaled explains as she and twenty other women engaged in a last “struggle session” to determine if they could stomach becoming full-time revolutionaries. They argue “about individuality, the role of women in the Movement and the kind of relationship [they] were going to have with parents, boy friends or husbands. If a woman decided to commit herself to this phase of the revolution it meant the final break with her past and relegating her private life and desires to a secondary position.”¹⁴¹ Khaled understands that the PF needs women liberated from their social conditioning that conscripted them to become the caretakers of their husbands and parents. Without the freedom to fight for liberation, they would be too easily divided and fractured, unable to combat the imperialism which promotes monarchy and patriarchy in the Arab world.

Khaled’s autobiography also “writes back” by connecting U.S. imperialism to the conservative and ruling elites of the Arab world—believing them to be two sides of the same coin which oppresses the Arab masses and both of which need to be eradicated in order for Palestine to be liberated. As noted above nearly half of Khaled’s autobiography is focused on instructing the reader with the political history of Palestine and the Arab world: following the rise and fall of Egypt’s President al-Nasser and the terror campaign of King Hussein of Jordan, as well as the zionist settler-colonial expansion with context from the US/USSR influence in the region. Khaled explains that the 1967 War was a limping gesture by Arab states not directly interested in the liberation of Palestine which resulted in the embarrassment and subjugation of the Arab world to U.S./zionist imperialism. Khaled presents this history to be accessible to a western audience to see clearly the ways in which zionism has infiltrated American domestic and foreign politics, but also to highlight for Arabs that western imperialism is using Reactionary Arab regimes to collectively oppress all Arabs. Beyond the metanarrative of Arab politics, Khaled also uses her personal narrative to challenge the representation of herself and Palestinians.

¹⁴¹ Khaled, 121-122.

Khaled reached global fame (or infamy) for her role in the hijacking of airplanes as a revolutionary. This autobiography is her opportunity to challenge the western view and understanding of her and her motivations, to confront the stock story and label of terrorism. Before the reader can learn of that most famous exploit she instructs the reader in the role the west has played in destabilising and siding with zionists against Palestine:

*I do not wish to further burden my reader by our indictment of the West for the crimes it has committed against me and my people, because that alone requires a volume in itself. I merely wish to make some references to the policies of the chief imperialist, America, in order to explain the timing of my revolutionary deed and to illustrate further the bitterness and animosity we harbour towards US imperialism.*¹⁴²

Khaled also explains to the reader that she had a crisis of conscience looking at the children who would be boarding the plane with her, saying:

*...This child had committed no crime against me or my people. It would be cruel to imperil her life by hijacking a plane, the symbolic meaning of which she had no conception—a plane that could explode during our attempted seizure or be blown up by Israeli anti-aircraft fire when we entered the 'Israeli airspace.'*¹⁴³

She continues:

*While these qualms pricked my conscience, the whole history of Palestine and her children came before my eyes. I saw everything from the first day of my exile. I saw my people homeless, hungry, barefoot. The twice 'refugee' children of Bagan camp near Amman seemed to stand, a humiliated multitude, in front of me saying, 'We too are children and we are part of the human race.'*¹⁴⁴

This directly challenges the media production of Khaled as a “terrorist” to present her as someone who cares about innocence and children and the well-being of those on the plane and that she is only trying to lift the boot off Palestine’s throat.

For Khaled it’s important that Palestinians are able to narrate for themselves the injustice they have faced and the oppression they suffer by U.S. imperialism and zionist settler-colonial policy. The hijacking of planes was partly to gain access to the global media rather than continuing to be suppressed and denied access to justice. It must be remembered that Palestinians have received no justice from international law despite consistently following the “rule-based order.” Palestinian history has routinely been denied and suppressed when western media

¹⁴² Khaled, 131.

¹⁴³ Khaled, 136.

¹⁴⁴ Khaled, 136.

discusses what they refer to as the “israeli-Palestine conflict.” This is how western journalism is still centered throughout the last two years of the Zionist genocide. When political analysts are invited onto western news programs the narrative is centered around first receiving a condemnation of the October 7th attack, and second a condemnation of the resistance group, Hamas. The purpose of this narrative framework is to force the audience to negate the 77+ years of Zionist occupation, incremental genocide and ethnic cleansing, and to deceive the audience into thinking that Palestinians are the aggressors and ‘Israelis’ the victims.

Tuqan’s experience of imprisonment and patriarchal oppression are representational of the personal and individual narratives which Khaled directly addresses in her indictment against patriarchy and conservatism which keep half of Palestinians in bondage unable to unify for the liberation of Palestine. Tuqan’s autobiography doesn’t represent much of a threat to Zionism nor imperialism, but could actually be utilized in feminist imperialism (especially when first published). I will once more highlight that Tuqan does have a second volume to her autobiography, *The More Difficult Journey*, that was a challenge to Zionism and imperialism as it records her life after ‘Israeli’ occupation.¹⁴⁵ Though admittedly conjecture, it bears asking, knowing the history of Zionist suppression, whether this volume has been historically suppressed as Sameena Kausar notes:

*The second volume of Tuqa’s autobiography, titled The More Difficult Journey, is talked about significantly less in academic circles. This volume is a record of Palestinian history after the Israeli occupation. It deals with the minute details of the war between the two sides, the elements that may hide from the eyes of a historian but can be seen by the eyes of a poet and a woman fighting for the rights of human beings through her voice.*¹⁴⁶

I suggest that the narrative of Tuqan during the occupation being suppressed is more logical than any argument premised on the idea that her story does not garner enough public interest.

Within this chapter I have tried to demonstrate the ways in which Tuqan and Khaled participate in counterstorytelling. Both women use the genre of autobiography in a way that reinvents or circumvents the “western” tradition; a demonstration of their mastery and inventiveness to manipulate the hegemonic framework that attempts to contain Palestinians.

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Compton writes in her paper “Palestinian Resistance Poetry: The Difficult Journeys of Fadwa Tuqan”: “In the second book, and in her poetry after 1967, [Tuqan] does an about-face and is completely devoted to the Palestinian people and their plight...”

https://www.academia.edu/113796489/Palestinian_Resistance_Poetry_The_Difficult_Journeys_of_Fadwa_Tuqan

¹⁴⁶ Sameen Kausar, “Tuqan and Autobiography as History,” *Critical Muslim*, 2023, https://www.academia.edu/128377497/Tuqan_And_Autobiography_As_History

Tuqan's autobiography is less focused on the ills of colonialism and therefore operates less as a counterstory against hegemonic narratives when compared with Khaled. However, she is cognizant to not only ensure that she does not present an Orientalist portrayal of her people but also to challenge imperialist feminism and the ignorance of colonialism in the western mind. Her criticism of Palestinian patriarchy is still a counterstory against the dominant culture, namely masculine control of social etiquette and gender politics.

When combined with the study of Khaled's autobiography, we see that Khaled is advocating for the freedom of Tuqan (figuratively) as she reiterates that Palestine will never be free from zionism without the liberation of women. Both women offer glimpses of ideology which challenges the notion of sexual segregation and gender oppression which act as counterstory to Palestinian patriarchy. Khaled's autobiography is designed specifically as a counterstory against zionism and U.S. imperialism by detailing and speaking specifically to the western world about the history of modern Palestine. This is the reason why zionists were so quick to suppress its publication in the west as it upsets the narrative and "humanizes" Palestinians.

In the following chapter I will examine how the zionist genocidal regime would recognize during the Intifada movements that they were most vulnerable and most exposed when the reality of their settler-colonial brutality escaped the Arab world and became mainstream news. The reaction was for zionism to infiltrate western mainstream media which proved successful at dominating and controlling the narrative in a way favourable to U.S. imperialism and zionist settler-colonialism. However, it is through social media, originally largely uncontrolled, which offered a live-streaming of the genocide of Palestine and opened Palestinians to a global, "unsuppressed" audience.

Chapter Two: Suppression, Dehumanization and Digital Counterstorytelling

Within this chapter I will first explore the relationship between dominant narratives and counternarratives and how they have shaped the public perception of Palestine and Arabs in order to properly contextualize for the reader the historic suppression and creation of stock stories which inform our western/dominant bias. Using the research of Palestinian scholar Dina Matar and the documentation of Francesca Albanese I will explore the nature of epistemic violence and the charge against “Third States” participating in the holocaust. The second part of this chapter will focus on the counterstorytelling of Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari.

Palestinians have endured suppression and censorship by settler-colonial ‘israel’ in order for the regime to control Palestine’s production of knowledge—their ability to narrate for themselves. The autobiographies of Tuqan and Khaled largely focus in the historical range of the *Nakba* and *Naksa* as they bring Palestinian voices to speak for themselves and to a western audience. Owda and Matari, representing the digital age with its ease of global communications, will illustrate the how zionists are losing their stranglehold over the voices of Palestine, be they in Palestine or part of the diaspora. However, I will first explain how Palestinian voices are being marginalized and how they participate in counterstorytelling.

Richard Delgado uses the term “outgroups” to describe “groups whose marginality defines the boundaries of the mainstream, whose voice and perspective – whose consciousness – has been suppressed, devalued, and abnormalized.”¹⁴⁷ The 1967 Security Council Resolution 242 is an important illustration of how Palestine, as a state, has had its sovereignty and voice suppressed and denied. As a Collective People they were not invited to the council that directly affected them, which included the United Arab Republic, ‘israel,’ and Jordan as Palestinians were also denigrated simply as “the refugee problem.”¹⁴⁸ This imperialistic domination is a repeat of the same arrogance and denigration of language in the Balfour Declaration which referred to the Arabs of an vastly Arab majority country as “non-Jews.” In another example Khalidi notes that two years after the 1967 SCR 242, the ‘israeli’ prime minister, Golda Meir

¹⁴⁷ Richard Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative,” *Michigan Law Review*, Vol. 87, No. 8, 1989, 2412.

¹⁴⁸ United Nations, “UN Security Council Resolution 242 (1967),” 22 November, 1967, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/90717?v=pdf>

would claim “there were no such things as Palestinians...they did not exist.”¹⁴⁹ While this might be seen as such an preposterous, false, and ignorant claim, it is also an essential tactic of settler-colonialism as such rhetoric is abundant within the doctrine of discovery, manifest destiny, and “land without a people for a people without a land.” I include the following assessment by Rosalind Hampton and Ashely DeMartini:

*While storytelling is a widespread practice across cultures, there is a long-standing Western tradition of creating and telling stories about other peoples' histories, societies, and cultural practices. This tradition is an essential part of imperialism, which has enabled Western Europeans to impose their stories as universal truths, while misrepresenting non-Western narratives as fantasies, superstitions, and lies of naïve, unsophisticated, and uncivilized less-than-humans...However, rather than 'truth,' Western European stories—like all stories—represent historically and culturally specific ideas, desires, and socio-political and economic interests.*¹⁵⁰

The transparency of western hypocrisy is increasingly bewildering as Palestinians are currently being vilified in such dehumanizing language while President Trump shakes hands in the White House with Abu Mohammad al-Jolani, who once had a U.S. bounty of \$10 million¹⁵¹ as an Islamist extremist with ties to Al Qaeda and ISIS.

While the west sought desperately to deny Palestinian nationalist sentiment and narrative control following the 1967 War, Ahmad Samih Khalidi writes of an emerging culture: “A central paradox of 1967 is that by defeating the Arabs, Israel resurrected the Palestinians.”¹⁵² Rashid Khalidi expands by noting from his experience of living in Beirut in the 1970s:

*I was witness to an important resurgence of Palestinian political agency. Writers and poets both throughout the Palestinian diaspora and living inside Palestine—Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, Fadwa Tuqan, and Tawfiq Zayyad, together with other gifted and engaged artists and intellectuals—played a vital role in this renaissance, culturally and politically. Their work helped to reshape a sense of Palestinian identity and purpose that had been tested by the Nakba and the barren years that followed. In novels, short stories, plays, poetry, they gave voice to a shared national experience of loss, exile, alienation. At the same time, they evinced a stubborn insistence on the continuity of Palestinian identity and steadfastness in the face of daunting odds.*¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, (Picador, 2020), 106.

¹⁵⁰ Rosalind Hampton and Ashley DeMartini, “We Cannot Call Back Colonial Stories: Storytelling and Critical Land Literacy,” *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l'éducation*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2017, 250.

¹⁵¹ Freddie Clayton and Ammar Cheikh Omar, “Syrian rebel leader's extremist past raises questions about his future,” *NBC News*, 09 December, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/abu-mohammad-al-jolani-leader-syrian-rebel-hts-rcna183402>

¹⁵² Khalidi, 109.

¹⁵³ Khalidi, 109-110.

The narratives of Tuqan and Khaled would be created and published in this atmosphere. However, while Palestinians would narrate for themselves within their communities in Palestine, their voices would be silenced and they would be spoken for by Zionists and 'Israelis' in the West and to a global audience. I believe this silence and suppression to be possible first and foremost due to the dehumanization of the "Other," but also the "inherent" authority of Global North speakers.

To provide an accessible demonstration of this I offer this quote from Martinez's *Counterstory* as Edward Taylor asserts that "assumptions of White superiority are so ingrained in political, legal, and educational structures that they are almost unrecognizable" and that "because [they are] all-encompassing and omnipresent, [they] cannot be easily recognized by their beneficiaries."¹⁵⁴ In the Global North we are conditioned not to be suspicious when white people speak for peoples of the Global South as we are taught to believe they are inherently authorities on the subject. However, when the roles are reversed, such as when Indigenous Peoples offer their history or claim their sovereign territory as contradictions to western governments they are often legally dismissed and not disseminated among popular discourse. As this has been happening for Palestinians since the British Mandate, I will explore in the next section the dehumanization of Palestinians and Arabs.

Dehumanization of Palestinians and Arabs

Growing up I remember watching movies and playing video games wherein the villain is Arab and the protagonist is white and never questioning it. A conditioning wherein the lyrics to Disney's *Aladdin* rolled right over me: "Where they cut off your ear / If they don't like your face / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home." A space wherein after 9/11 (ironically my 11th birthday) the only response and discussion I remember in our home was how awful the attack was and that it happened as a result of "they hate America." That was enough as our social conditioning filled in the necessary information which made that acceptable and believable, without questioning it. They were Arab men and we were taught that Arab men resort to violence because they were

¹⁵⁴ Martinez, 10.

“savage,” or “barbarous,” or any other rhetoric which settler-colonials use when they want to genocide and ethnically cleanse an Indigenous people.

When I started learning about Palestine I was compelled to also learn how and why I was raised with a caricature representation of Arabs. The western stock story of the “Middle East”¹⁵⁵ and Arabs has been profoundly shaped by Zionists in media production, institutions, and governments as well as the military industrial complex needing a “forever enemy.” The comprehensive research of Dr. Jack Shaheen who produced a book and documentary with the same name, *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies Arabs*, is a prominent and accessible survey. Shaheen documents how generations of western viewers were raised with the Hollywood depiction of Arabs. Shaheen analyzes “more than 900 films, the vast majority of which portray Arabs by distorting at every turn what most Arab men, women, and children are really like... [Shaheen] was driven by the need to expose an injustice: cinema’s systemic, pervasive, and unapologetic degradation and dehumanization of a people.”¹⁵⁶

Perhaps the most damning and significant proof of the effect of dehumanizing and vilifying of Arab people in the American consciousness is the film *Rules of Engagement* (2000) whose use of “ethnic exploitation are especially obvious in scenes revealing egregious, false images of Yemeni children as assassins and enemies of the United States.”¹⁵⁷ Shaheen continues to say:

*To my knowledge, no Hollywood WWI, WWII, or Korean War movie has ever shown America’s fighting forces slaughtering children. Yet, near the conclusion of Rules of Engagement, US marines open fire on the Yemenis, shooting 83 men, women, and children. During the scene, viewers rose to their feet, clapped and cheered. Boasts director Friedken, ‘I’ve seen audiences stand up and applaud the film throughout the United States.’ Some viewers applaud Marines gunning down Arabs in war dramas not necessarily because of cultural insensitivity, but because for more than 100 years Hollywood has singled out the Arabs as our enemy. Over a period of time, a steady stream of bigoted images does, in fact, tarnish our judgement of a people and their culture.*¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Even this framework of “Middle East” is centering Europe implicitly. My use of the term here is both a demonstration of a dominant narrative and for clarity as it is, unfortunately, widely recognized rather than the acceptable and preferable term, Southwest Asia.

¹⁵⁶ Jack G. Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, July 2003, 172.

¹⁵⁷ Shaheen, “Reel Bad Arabs,” 177.

¹⁵⁸ Shaheen, 177.

This social conditioning has trained western audiences that it is right to celebrate the killing of Arabs because they have been historically and systematically dehumanized to be seen only as villains (which also includes Disney movies such as Aladdin).

As Shaheen explains that of the 45 depictions of Palestinians in the films he watched, Palestinians are never seen as innocent, or 'israelis' as brutal oppressors. Of the 45 films, 28 were filmed in 'israel' and nearly all films "display violent, sex-crazed Palestinian 'bastards [and] animals' contesting Westerners, Israelis, and fellow Arabs."¹⁵⁹ Shaheen instructs that even as early as the 1900s, studio executives realized that films acted as propaganda and shaped ideology:

*Following WWI, Adolph Zukor, the head of Paramount Pictures affirmed this film-as-propaganda fact, saying fiction films should no longer be viewed as simply 'entertainment and amusement.' The war years, he said, 'register[ed] indisputably the fact that as an avenue of propaganda, as a channel for conveying thought and opinion, the movies are unequaled by any form of communication.'*¹⁶⁰

Zukor's statement now reads like a confession that Hollywood intentionally sought to dehumanize and characterize Arabs as villains, which is all the more damning when many films produced in collaboration with the CIA or Department of Defense. As Shaheen proves the dehumanization of Arabs through propaganda I turn now towards the how this social conditioning is utilized and examples of how it is embraced by U.S. politicians.

The dehumanization of Palestinians functions largely for the advancement of Zionist settler-colonialism. I include a history of Zionism as settler-colonialism in Appendix II. However, I wish to quote from Ifat Maoz and Clack McCauley's "Threat, Dehumanization, and Support for Retaliatory Aggressive Policies in Asymmetric Conflict" as they offer a number of important discoveries in case study of 'Israeli' public opinion towards Palestinians. They note public support for a government's adoption of aggressive and belligerent retaliatory policies against an out-group is consistently found if the out-group is perceived as a collective threat.¹⁶¹ I will use another example from Elia as she explains how Palestinians are rhetorically being portrayed as irrationally hating and desiring violence against Jews as she quotes former 'Israeli' PM Golda

¹⁵⁹ Shaheen, 187.

¹⁶⁰ Shaheen, 187.

¹⁶¹ Ifat Maoz and Clack McCauley, "Threat, Dehumanization, and Support for Retaliatory Aggressive Policies in Asymmetric Conflict," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 52, No. 1, February 2008, Sage Publications, Inc., 94.

Meir who is reputed to have declared: “Peace will come when the Arabs [Palestinians] love their children more than they hate us.”¹⁶² Essentially, Meir is implying not only that Palestinians are willfully sacrificing their children (which itself is dehumanizing) but also that they simply hate Jews, want violence to continue against Jews, and even the idea of killed Palestinian children is not enough to dissuade them from continued violence (a lasting threat).

Another existential and forever threat to ‘israel’ is the demographic threat of Palestinians. Elia writes: “Zionism views Palestinian women as a demographic threat, the progenitors of future terrorists, “enemy combatants” raising “little snakes,” as Knesset Member and far-right Yamina Party member Ayelet Shaked put it.”¹⁶³ Elia also notes that Shaked made that statement while she was serving as ‘israel’s’ Justice Minister. The point being made is that it is not even Palestinian armed resistance which serves as a threat for ‘israelis;’ the mere existence of Palestinians is distorted into an illusionary threat. I also highlight a video that went viral as ‘israeli’ activist Sofia Emuna told ITV News, while blocking humanitarian aid from entering Gaza which was (and remains) being starved by ‘israel,’ that “it doesn’t matter who your enemy is, you need to destroy their offspring to prevent them from creating more offspring.”¹⁶⁴ As Moaz and McCauley note that “Perceived threat, including competition for scarce resources, clearly plays a major role in the development of negative dispositions towards an out-group,”¹⁶⁵ it’s plain to see how the “demographic threat” can be manipulated into the discourse of scarce resources. This study by Moaz and McCauley represents a counterstory to the Zionist narrative that ‘israelis’ want peace while blaming the on-going violence on Palestinians.

Below I offer will Moaz and McCauley’s description of the process of dehumanization which I will pair with Ali Harb’s collection of dehumanizing statements made by U.S. officials, politicians, and celebrities:

Dehumanization often occurs in social contexts of ethnic or national conflict and is described as related to an increased tendency to aggress against the dehumanized others. Opatow’s theory of moral exclusion describes the process by which people are placed “outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply.” Causing or allowing harm to those outside of one’s moral community is justified and rationalized on the premise that they are expendable, undeserving, exploitable, and

¹⁶² Elia, *Palestine and Feminist Liberation*, 44.

¹⁶³ Elia, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts*, 75.

¹⁶⁴ Sofia Emuna, “you need to destroy their offspring” says Pro-Israeli Activist,” Middle East Eye, 24 May, 2025, video, 14-22, <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/q2QgxICyVb0>

¹⁶⁵ Moaz and McCauley, “Threat, Dehumanization, and Support...,” 95.

*irrelevant. Severe instances of moral exclusion may include systemic violations of human rights, political oppression, slavery, and genocide.*¹⁶⁶

With that definition in mind, I wish to show the translation of theory into practice. This is a collection of dehumanizing statements by U.S. officials and celebrities since October 2023 to illustrate how badly Palestinians are dehumanized in the west:

Congressman Brian Mast: “I don’t think we would so lightly throw around the term ‘innocent Nazi civilians’ during World War II. It is not a far stretch to say there are very few innocent Palestinian civilians.”

Congressman Max Miller: “We’re going to turn that [Palestine] into a parking lot.”

Congressman Andy Ogles: “I think we should kill them all.”

Congressman Randy Fine: “Release the hostages. Until then, starve away.”

Congressman Tim Walberg: “We shouldn’t be spending a dime on humanitarian aid. It [Gaza] should be like Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Get it over quick.”

Senator Tom Cotton: “Israel doesn’t need patronising lectures about civilian casualties. As far as I’m concerned, Israel can bounce the rubble in Gaza.”

Senator Lindsey Graham: “We are in a religious war here, I am with Israel. Whatever the hell you have to do to defend yourself; level the place.”

Former President Joe Biden: “I have no notion that the Palestinians are telling the truth about how many people are killed. I’m sure innocents have been killed, and it’s the price of waging a war.”

Former President Bill Clinton: “ Hamas makes sure that they’re shielded. They’ll force you to kill civilians if you want to defend yourself.”

Former White House spokesperson John Kirby: “Being honest about the fact that there have been civilian casualties and that there likely will be more is being honest – because that’s what war is.”

Former presidential candidate Nikki Haley: “Finish them.” (Written on an Israeli bomb)

Atlantic Magazine writer Graeme Wood: “It is possible to kill children legally, if for example one is being attacked by an enemy who hides behind them.”

¹⁶⁶ Moaz and McCauley, “Threat, Dehumanization, and Support...,” 95.

Singer Kid Rock: “I don’t disagree with what Israel is doing. It’s like they should just go in there and be like, ‘You know what, we want our hostages back. If we don’t have them back, the clock starts now. In 24 hours, we are gonna start bombing m*****, and killing civilians, 30,000 to 40,000 a f***** time’.”

Actor and producer James Woods: “No ceasefire. No compromise. No forgiveness. #KillThemAll”.

Fox News commentator Jesse Watters: “This population in Palestine is hostile, it’s uneducated. It’s even more radicalised than they were at the beginning of this. I mean, now, they have no homes at all. They’re even more hateful of the Israelis. And their birthrate is explosive.”¹⁶⁷

I included the above list of vile statements to illustrate not only how widely is the dehumanization of Palestinians in the politics of the west, but to make the connection that if one can publicly praise the death of another group they will find no moral objection to their silencing and suppression. It must be remembered that these are public statements leaving an impression on their audience and many are from a position of authority. While I dislike the use of comparison to illicit what should be a natural response I ask if these statements were made about Jewish victims whether or not these people would be ostracized or fired. I argue that it is from here that we need to imagine the Palestinian narrative trying to develop, infiltrate, and be heard. As will be explored, the systemic suppression of these voices has been a fortress keeping the imperial core from the testimony of Palestinians.

Suppression: Devoicing Palestinians

In a conversation with one of my Thesis readers, Dr. Al Ethari, an Iraqi poet and memoirist who wrote about her experience surviving U.S. imperialism and invasion of Iraq, we discussed the lack of Arab authors or courses on Arab literature (in either English or Arabic) within the Arts program at the University of Waterloo. I awkwardly, uncomfortably, and apologetically tried to say something to the effect that if we were able to study and read Arab authors we would be able to...more humanize and empathize. I quickly apologized again while reiterating the obvious inherency of the humanity of Arabs and a group can neither take it away

¹⁶⁷ Ali Harb, “‘Not a punchline’: 15 dehumanising quotes on Gaza atrocities by US figures,” *Al Jazeera*, 07 October, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/7/not-a-punchline-15-dehumanising-quotes-on-gaza-atrocities-by-us-figures>

or bestow it upon them. However, the point we were both making was that Palestinians, and Arabs more generally, continue to be dehumanized, suppressed, and spoken for by others. As Dr. Al Ethari noted, there is an interest as students make inquiries and demands to study a nearly entirely dismissed and suppressed voice in literature (in western institutions).

Within this section on suppression of Palestinian voices I will explore the historical suppression which has, largely successfully, contained or controlled the narrative of Palestinians and Palestine more generally. This includes the weaponization of antisemitism, media institutional racism and pro-‘israel’ bias, zionist lobbying powers, “Third States” support and participation of the intensified genocide, and the epistemic war against Palestine.

Edward Said’s essay, “Permission to Narrate,” clearly implicates how zionism in the west, specifically in America (the most significant actor in propping up ‘israel’) acts to both obfuscate the reality of ‘israeli’ brutality while also denying Palestinian existence. Said uses the example of the MacBride Commission, which was subsequently published in the book *Israel in Lebanon* by a British publisher. The Commission concludes that ‘israel’ was guilty of attempted ‘ethnocide’ and ‘genocide’ of the Palestinian people in the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, yet no publisher would be willing to publish the Commission within the US.¹⁶⁸ Said notes that despite the MacBride Commission’s “view that ‘the facts speak for themselves’ in the case of Zionism’s war against the Palestinians, the facts have never done so, especially in America, where Israeli propaganda seems to lead a life of its own.”¹⁶⁹

Said continues: “Paradoxically, never has so much been written and shown of the Palestinians, who were scarcely mentioned fifteen years ago. They are there all right, but the narrative of their present actuality—which stems directly from the story of their existence in and displacement from Palestine, later Israel—that narrative is not.”¹⁷⁰ Said implies that narrative is a controlled object by those who produce an artifact that is circulated via mass-media. He notes that “No television watcher could have had any doubts that the Israelis were savage and ruthless during the siege of Beirut,”¹⁷¹ but that a campaign to target the media as “anti-Semitic” or that “the millions of feet of newsreel are less trustworthy than the impressions of a supporter of Israel

¹⁶⁸ Edward Said, “Permission to Narrate,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol, 13. No. 3, 1984, 27.

¹⁶⁹ Said, “Permission to Narrate,” 29.

¹⁷⁰ Said, 29-30.

¹⁷¹ Said, 34.

who spent a day in Lebanon touring the place as a guest of the Israeli Army”¹⁷² would obfuscate viewers from what they had witnessed. Said proclaims that “The repetition and accumulation of these claims amount to a virtual orthodoxy, setting limits, defining areas [and] asserting pressures...”¹⁷³ This tactic used by ‘israel’ to weaponize “anti-Semitism” is still prominent deflection against criticism of ‘israel.’

Nasim Ahmed writes: “Across the West, we are witnessing a coordinated campaign to redefine anti-Semitism in ways that protect Israel from accountability...At the centre of this effort is the IHRA definition, which labels various criticisms of Israel and Zionism as anti-Semitic.”¹⁷⁴ The ingenuine argument of antisemitism concern (although real antisemitism is certainly an issue with the rising neo-Nazism) is made plain by the hypocritical responses to the October 2025 leaked chat of the Young Republicans who praised Hitler, made gas chamber jokes and other racist and homophobic and transphobic references. While the pro-Palestine movement (which includes numerous Jews/Jewish groups) has never embraced antisemitism and only criticized imperialism, zionism, and ‘israel,’ yet it has been labelled specifically as antisemitic by Anti-Defamation League (ADL) CEO Jonathan Greenblatt. Greenblatt also intentionally responded to the leaked Young Republicans chat as “offensive and very concerning,”¹⁷⁵ but did not equate loving Hitler as being antisemitic and he earlier also defended Elon Musk’s Nazi salute as “an awkward gesture in a moment of enthusiasm”¹⁷⁶ (for more on the weaponization of antisemitism see Appendix I).

There are numerous examples of zionists targeting advocates for a free Palestine or for views critical of ‘israel’ with the intention of silencing and suppressing the movement. Brishti Basu writing for CBC (CBC has also been criticized for their pro-israel bias and Palestinian suppression) calls it the “chilling effect” wherein professionals are threatened with suspension, censured and even fired for views and advocacy in favour of Palestine.¹⁷⁷ In Canada Dr. Yipeng

¹⁷² Said, 35.

¹⁷³ Said, 35.

¹⁷⁴ Nasim Ahmed, “The Weaponisation of anti-Semitism: how a fight against hate became a tool of oppression,” *Middle East Monitor*, 24 March, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250324-the-weaponisation-of-anti-semitism-how-a-fight-against-hate-became-a-tool-of-oppression/>

¹⁷⁵ Asaf Elia-Shalev, “GOP chat praising Hitler downplayed by Vance, denounced by Johnson,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 October, 2025, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-870756>

¹⁷⁶ Ali Harb, “ADL faces backlash for defending Elon Musk’s raised-arm gesture,” *Al Jazeera*, 22 January, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/1/22/adl-faces-backlash-for-defending-elon-musks-raised-arm-gesture>

¹⁷⁷ Brishti Basu, “‘Chilling effect’: People expressing pro-Palestinian views censored, suspended from work and school,” *CBC News*, 22 December, 2023, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/chilling-effect-pro-palestinian-1.7064510>

Ge was suspended by the University of Ottawa and Juno Award winning Palestinian-Canadian singer, Nemahsis, said in a TikTok video, “My label just dropped me, a Palestinian artist, for being pro-Palestine.”¹⁷⁸ However, the most public example (I have seen) of this “chilling effect” is Palestinian-British Dr. Rahmeh Aladwan, whose story demonstrates the levels of power of the Zionist lobby groups in England.

Dr. Aladwan has supported Palestine and criticized ‘Israel’ while also demonstrating against and illustrating the proliferation of Jewish supremacy in politics through lobbying groups. According to the writer Skwawkbox at *The Canary* Dr. Aladwan has endured a “two-year long coordinated campaign” which has included increased death threats. The Health Secretary of the UK, Wes Streeting, openly backed the campaign against Dr. Aladwan “claiming that their criticism of Israel’s genocide and the UK’s collusion is ‘antisemitism’ and planning changes to legislation to effectively allow their suspension without trial or process.”¹⁷⁹ Dr. Aladwan has continuously had her social media accounts deleted in order to suppress her voice and story. In a now deleted/suppressed post Dr. Aladwan writes:

*My medical regulator @gmcuk admits it seeks my suspension for being ‘unrepentant.’ The first tribunal found no need for any order. Now, the GMC demands suspension because I refused to ‘moderate’ speech that was already deemed acceptable. This is not about safety. It’s about punishment. They are explicitly seeking what the ‘Israeli’ lobby demanded: my removal from practice for my political views. This is the weaponisation of medical regulation. This is political persecution.*¹⁸⁰

What Dr. Aladwan’s case makes implicitly clear is that after the regulatory body, the Tribunal, found her conduct to be acceptable, therefore the Zionist lobby group proceeded to use a different lever of power to punish and suppress pro-Palestine support and views.

Dr. Aladwan calls this Jewish supremacy arguing that Jewish British doctors have enlisted in the ‘Israeli’ Occupational Forces (IOF),¹⁸¹ participated in the genocide of Palestinians, and returned to their practice in England without any scrutiny or consequences. It is not surprising in this atmosphere of genocide support, despite being disgusting, that Canadian university campuses are also hosting IOF soldiers in the “Triggered: From Combat to Campus” series by

¹⁷⁸ Vivian Rashotte, “Nemahsis says her label dropped her for her pro-Palestinian stance,” *CBC News*, 10 July, 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/q/nemahsis-says-her-label-dropped-her-for-her-pro-palestinian-stance-1.7259367>

¹⁷⁹ Skwawkbox, “Dr Rahmeh Aladwan arrested at her home after her public support of Palestine,” *The Canary*, 21 October, 2025, <https://www.thecanary.co/skwawkbox/2025/10/21/dr-aladwan-arrested/>

¹⁸⁰ Skwawkbox, “Dr Rahmeh Aladwan arrested,”

¹⁸¹ I echo the Palestinian use of IOF instead of ‘Israeli’ Defense Force (IDF) as the military is being used for ethnic cleansing and genocide which are not aspects of defense.

Students Supporting Israel. David Gray-Donald provides a great expose on the incident which occurred on November 5th, 2025 at Toronto Metropolitan University. An the IOF soldier, Jonathan Karten, locked two protesters in a room and subsequently violently attacked others forcing them out of a clinic where the event took place. Karten, despite assaulting the protesters remains free with no charges while the Toronto Police mobilized to brutalize and arrest protestors.¹⁸² I wish to also highlight that the University of Guelph has just cancelled the sold out People’s Conference for Palestinian Solidarity four days before it was to take place on November 29, 2025. The organizers stated that the cancellation was “issued without *warning, without explanation, and without any transparent process* which represents a profound abuse of institutional power and a direct attack on academic freedom.”¹⁸³

It must be stated that it is more than corporations and institutions that are being implicated as countries around the world continue to suppress pro-Palestine activists. Francesca Albanese has released an advanced report which makes damning accusations against the role “Third States” have played in propagating and supporting this genocide:

*Prolonged political and diplomatic support by influential Third States has enabled Israel to initiate and sustain its assault on the Palestinian people. In the past two years, entrenched complicity, marked by narrative manipulations and reproduction of Israeli fabrications, have muted the urgent calls for action and obscured the web of political, financial and military interests at play. The longstanding failure to address egregious violations of international law by Israel – threatening international peace and security – has normalized and deepened relations with it, entrenching oppression, domination and erasure.*¹⁸⁴

Albanese continues:

*Following 7 October 2023, most Western leaders parroted Israeli narratives, disseminated by State and corporate media, repeating debunked claims and erasing core distinctions between combatants and civilians. Israelis were depicted as ‘civilians’ and ‘hostages’, and Palestinians as ‘ Hamas terrorists’, ‘legitimate’ or ‘collateral’ targets, ‘human shields’ or lawfully detained ‘prisoners’. Drawing on a long history of the ‘savage’ denied protections of international law, revived by the War on Terror discourse, Western States helped to justify the genocide against Palestinians.*¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² David Gray-Donald, “IDF Soldier Mandhandles Toronto Students Who Disrupted Event,” *The Grind Mag*, 11 November, 2025, <https://www.thegrindmag.ca/idf-soldier-manhandles-toronto-students-who-disrupted-event/>

¹⁸³ guelph_palestineconference, [@guelph_palestineconference], *Instagram*, 26 November, 2025, https://www.instagram.com/p/DRiK4GiCf5k/?img_index=2

¹⁸⁴ “Gaza Genocide: a collective crime” *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, 20 October, 2025, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/a80492-gaza-genocide-collective-crime-report-special-rapporteur-situation>, 9.

¹⁸⁵ “Gaza Genocide: a collective crime,” 9.

The political and narrative cover which Albanese accuses “Third States” of is what Dina Matar refers to as “epistemic war” against Palestinians.

Matar defines the epistemic violence as “violence against knowledge production as well as the false and deliberate communication or prevention of knowledge production about certain groups and communities through the language of othering and related practices.”¹⁸⁶ Matar includes Gayatri C. Spivak’s definition of epistemic violence:

*“the process through which colonised and subaltern social groups are prevented from formulating their own epistemologies (systems and spaces of knowledge), are deemed to be inferior or unreliable and, as such, are denied the right and ability to express themselves on their own terms, or speak in their own voices.”*¹⁸⁷

Matar notes of the “war against Gaza” that the reporting during 2023-2024 by western legacy media “systematically prioritised and legitimised Israeli and pro-Israeli voices as the voices of rationality and reason, and, as such, served to silence or discredit the Palestinians, often talked of as irrational and unreasonable.”¹⁸⁸ Matar determines that “These practices result in forced devoicing of the colonised through the production of a narrative that erases their stories and their perspectives from history.”¹⁸⁹ In order to better understand the “devoicing” I will offer Matar’s explanation of “habitual media” and why she applies it to her work.

Matar explains that she borrows from Mann’s use of the term, “referring to ubiquitous media and communication technologies defined by the repetitive engagement of various users with media, on the one hand, and the permanent need, by the state and main power holders, to continuously update and recalibrate practices of media, on the other.”¹⁹⁰ She continues to explain how Mann applies its use in reporting on the genocide:

*habitual media is, as such, sustained by the engagement of various Israeli officials, citizens and soldiers with media, and by the Israeli state’s continuous intervention in media practices to ensure the dominance of its narrative about itself, maintain its control of the Palestinians and ensure that habitual media use becomes inseparable from the security regime in Israel-Palestine.*¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Dina Matar, “Habitual media: interrogating Western legacy media’s complicity in the epistemic ‘war’ against Palestinians,” *Third World Quarterly*, February 2025, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Matar, “Habitual media,” 2.

¹⁸⁸ Matar, 10.

¹⁸⁹ Matar 10.

¹⁹⁰ Matar, 3.

¹⁹¹ Matar, 3.

Matar explains ‘israel’s’ control of western media as a battle to control the epistemological space:

*Israel’s intervention in the practices of habitual media, including the commonplace news practice of framing and agenda setting, is a well-known tactic of its propaganda (hasbara in Hebrew) that aims to produce a particular narrative about Israel as a nation under attack while also manufacturing public discontent, and even animosity, towards the Palestinians. Israel’s propaganda has gone hand in hand with its long-term practice of shutting down communication networks in the areas it is controlling or attacking; the prohibition of entry to Gaza to international journalists, the mass killing of Palestinian journalists, and the shadow banning and censoring of social media posts and accounts all serving to reveal and obscure important realities of the devastating war and its consequences for ordinary people.*¹⁹²

Part of this campaign Matar affirms has been for Zionists and their supporters to attack Palestinians in order to “silence them, strip them of their right to know themselves, to narrate their own politics and their own history, or even acknowledge their existence.”¹⁹³

I offer the example Matar includes of the testimony of Atef Alshaer, a panel speaker on one of BBC Radio 4 *The Moral Maze*. Alshaer writes “the frames of habitual media in the Global North were not only ‘loaded with de-humanising language directed against the Palestinians, [but] every issue [was] reduced to the word ‘Hamas.’”¹⁹⁴ While these are stark observations they are by no means novel as the ‘israeli’ playbook has only been updated to include social media trends to maintain its propagandic core.

Palestinian journalist Ramzy Baroud uses Machiavellian philosophy to illustrate the strategy of ‘israeli’ propagandists during the Second Intifada:

*Today’s imperialists must use the mass media, for it is unquestionably the most effective tool in winning today’s wars. It is important that the message conveyed through the media highlights the losses of the colonialist, not the colonized. The media must portray us as civilized and our enemies as savage; it must show us as righteous and our enemies as wicked; it must show us as peaceful and our enemies as terrorists. If the media is tightly controlled, we can fashion our own reality. We can cause the world to blame our enemy when we kill their children, and we can make our soldiers heroes while their fighters are branded as criminals. Israel has indeed mastered the art of media control, to the point that we can even blame Palestinian parents for sending their children to be killed to grab media attention.*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Matar, 5.

¹⁹³ Matar, 5.

¹⁹⁴ Matar, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Baroud, 34

Malcolm X, who would also advocate for a Free Palestine, echoes a similar understanding of the rhetorical power of the media as he said in his December 13th 1964 speech at the Audubon Ballroom: “The press is so powerful in its image-making role,... It will make the criminal look like he's the victim and make the victim look like he's the criminal. If you aren't careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed and loving the people who are doing the oppressing.”¹⁹⁶ It is against this dominated media sphere that the Palestinian counterstory is so necessary and so essential to breaking the occupation of narrative. The pathway to breaking through that occupation would be the “Instafada.”

Social Media: Suppression and Counterstorytelling

The “digital battlefield” between zionism and Palestine is perhaps the most significant and pressing front for narrative control as social media has destroyed a century of narrative production and billions of dollars’ worth of propaganda. Within this section I will discuss the “digital battlefield,” the “threat” of TikTok to zionism, and younger audiences and Sarah Hurwitz “giving the plot away.”

While referring to social media as a “digital battlefield” sounds cliché, it becomes more appropriate and apt after a MintPress investigation determined that hundreds of former military and state officials, including CIA, FBI, State Department, and NATO were being hired to high level positions at social media companies such as Meta, Google, TikTok, and Twitter. Alan MacLeod writes: “What this story highlights is that social media is not a neutral global town square, but rather a battlefield being silently fought over. Over the past decade, the U.S. national security state has infiltrated major social media platforms, in a successful attempt to manipulate the public debate and influence what the world sees and does not see.”¹⁹⁷ It is within this framework that we must view the recent US Army appointment of four senior executives from big tech companies including Palantir, Meta, and OpenAI as Lt. Colonels.¹⁹⁸ I will also note that

¹⁹⁶ Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements, written by Malcolm X, 1925-1965; edited by George Breitman (Merit Publications, 1965), 233.

¹⁹⁷ Alan MacLeod, “Social Media Spies Exposed: Profiles Vanish After MintPress Report,” *MintPress News*, 10 October, 2025, <https://www.mintpressnews.com/social-media-spies-exposed/290506/>

¹⁹⁸ Wyatt Reed, “US Army appoints Palantir, Meta, OpenAI execs as Lt. Colonels,” *The Grayzone*, 18 June, 2025, <https://thegrayzone.com/2025/06/18/palantir-execs-appointed-colonels/>

MintPress News, run by Palestinian American Mnar Adley has been suspended by Meta (Facebook and Instagram).¹⁹⁹

MacLeod also investigated the links of people transitioning from the ‘israeli’ spy agency Unit 8200 into habitual media as well as social media. Unit 8200 “is Israel’s largest and perhaps most controversial spying organization. It has been responsible for many high-profile espionage and terror operations—including the 2024 pager attack that injured thousands of Lebanese civilians.”²⁰⁰ MacLeod specifically named Barak Ravid who “has quickly become one of the most influential individuals in the Capitol Hill press corps.”²⁰¹ MacLeod also names others from Unit 8200 including Shachar Peled (producer and writer for three years at CNN, now Senior Media Specialist at Google) and Tal Heinrich (CNN). Other ‘israeli’ officials or soldiers named include, Tamar Michaelis (CNN), Anat Schwartz (Air Force intelligence officer who co-wrote the infamous and now discredited mass rape hoax “Screams Without Words”), David Brooks (NYT) and Jeffrey Goldberg (former NYT Magazine writer and current editor-in-chief of The Atlantic). Goldberg revealed in his memoirs that while he was an IOF prison guard during the First Intifada he helped cover up the abuse of Palestinian hostages. It is hard to fathom how Goldberg is able to admit to falsifying reports and covering up war crimes yet manages to continue to hold high level positions in the media. The media is supposed to be a neutral landscape but these are examples of people with a vested interest in protecting ‘israel.’

As zionists already occupy habitual media they are now desperately trying to occupy social media. The most significant threat for zionists in social media seems to be TikTok which gives western audiences the ability to see Palestinians without the filter of western media bias and see ‘israeli’ brutality and violence without apologists and propagandists trying to deflect and absolve ‘israel’. This is evidenced by the U.S. passing an act to ban TikTok, falsely claiming that it was due to fears of Chinese access to U.S. user data. However, in a leaked audio recording which has gone viral, the zionist ADL CEO, Jonathan Greenblatt said “We really have a TikTok problem.” James Wright reports “Greenblatt suggested that the warmongers had been wrongly focusing on left-wingers who sympathise with Palestine,” Greenblatt continued to say in the

¹⁹⁹ Skwawkbox, “Palestinian-run MintPress News appeals for help after Meta attack,” *The Canary*, 19 November, 2025, <https://www.thecanary.co/skwawkbox/2025/11/19/mint-press-news/>

²⁰⁰ Alan MacLeod, “Revealed: The Israeli Spies Writing America’s News,” *MintPress News*, 16 October, 2024, <https://www.mintpressnews.com/revealed-israel-unit-8200-spies-american-media/288457/>

²⁰¹ MacLeod, “Revealed: The Israeli Spies Writing America’s News.”

leak: “Cause again like we’ve been chasing this left/right divide. It’s the wrong game. The real game is the next generation,”²⁰² namely Bisan’s generation. ‘israel’ is polling historically low among younger voters and when coupled with far-right Charlie Kirk pivoting his massive platform, Turning Point USA, against ‘israel’ this represented an especially dangerous existential crisis for ‘israel.’ While I will not delve into conjecture I will note three facts regarding the speculation that ‘israel’ assassinated Kirk: First, ‘israel’ has a history of political assassinations, second, Netanyahu felt obligated to claim that ‘israel’ had no part in the killing of Charlie Kirk and third, the fallout of conservative youth turning against ‘israel’ would have been catastrophic.

I will also note a disturbing and condescending framework, very similar to Sarah Hurwitz’s statement explored below, by Clinton as she attempts to reiterate that younger audiences are too unintelligent to understand the ‘israel’ and should stop believing video testimonies. At a conference hosted by an ‘israeli’ newspaper Clinton complained that young people “were getting their information from social media, particularly TitkTok...That’s a serious problem. It’s a serious problem for democracy, whether it’s Israel or the United States, and it’s a serious problem for our young people.”²⁰³ Within her performance she would also refer to social media as “pure propaganda” and claim that many of the Palestinian video testimonies are “totally made up.” It must be made clear that Clinton is engaging in holocaust denialism and advocating that “democracy” is threaten by a critically engaged and educated citizens.

Umer Bin Ajmal writes how zionists sought to tackle the issue of “the next generation” by noting TikTok’s importance as “The app helped beam shaky footage of Israeli brutality against Palestinians to tens of millions of young people – most of them Gen Z – who otherwise were largely oblivious or confused about the Middle East’s longest-running dispute.”²⁰⁴ Although Bisan Owda doesn’t have a TikTok account her videos posted on Instagram would be shared by other users to bring her voice to users beyond Instagram. Within his article Bin Ajmal details that the American ownership of TikTok is divided between Oracle Corporation and Silver Lake

²⁰² James Wright, “Leak shows pro-Israel lobby chief blaming TikTok for pro-Palestine youth. Now the US is banning the app. This is an attack on free speech,” *The Canary*, 14 March, 2024, <https://www.thecanary.co/global/world-analysis/2024/03/14/tiktok-us-israel/>

²⁰³ Michael Arria, “The Shift: Hillary Clinton says young people are turning on Israel because of ‘made up videos,’” *Mondoweiss*, 04 December, 2025, <https://mondoweiss.net/2025/12/the-shift-hillary-clinton-says-young-people-are-turning-on-israel-because-of-made-up-videos/>

²⁰⁴ Umer Bin Ajmal, “TikTok exposed young Americans to Gaza war. Is it falling under the control of Israeli sympathisers?” *TRT World*, 19 September, 2025, <https://www.trtworld.com/article/3eaf50baa999>

private equity firm. Oracle's founder, Larry Ellison is the largest private donor to the IOF.²⁰⁵ It is plain to see that Ellison, a Zionist, will pivot TikTok towards further suppressing Palestinians and content related to Palestine or the intensified genocide.

While I cannot do justice to this topic presently, it is crucial to note that the visibility of Palestinians on social media, or conversely stated, the amplification of 'Israeli' settler violence against Palestinians in the West Bank has traditionally been used as a deterrent against 'Israeli' settler violence and oppression. However, with the increased suppression, historical impunity, and the lukewarm response by the international law, the violence and oppression are vastly increasing. Ajith Sunghay said in their report on October 21, 2025 that **"settler violence has skyrocketed in scale and frequency, with the acquiescence, support, and in many cases participation, of Israeli security forces – and always with impunity"** (I maintain original bolding).²⁰⁶ I include this report to highlight how necessary it is that Palestinians be heard, but also to demonstrate the very real implications of what media suppression is doing—leading directly to the killing of Palestinians.

I also note the very open Holocaust denial which is happening as in June of 2025 'Israel' signed a \$45 million dollar deal with Google to run misinformation propaganda to cover up their intentional starvation of Palestine.²⁰⁷ Google is heavily implicated in the 'Israeli' genocide through their cloud sharing partnership with the IOF, but to run ads denying that Palestinians are being starved to death is to create misinformation against a proven fact as the UN and numerous NGOs concluded that 'Israel' was carrying out a starvation plan. I combine this misinformation with the social media influencers that were brought to a GHF site at the Kerem Abu Salem crossing to "document" all the aid 'Israel' was providing. 'Israel' has tried to blame the UN for failing to deliver the food, and that Hamas is stealing the food, both of which have been proven to be false accusations. I also include the exposed "Esther Project" which was an "influencer Campaign" that reportedly paid up to \$7,000 per post from influencers to "distort public discourse, especially among younger audiences, and deflect mounting accusations of

²⁰⁵ It is worth noting, for some context of Zionist control of media narrative, Larry's son, David, is founder of Skydance, which has bought Paramount Pictures, and is seeking to buy out Warner Bros. Discovery as well which would be a significant stranglehold on American media which includes CBS, and HBO, and CNN if a deal is struck.

²⁰⁶ "UN rights office sounds alarm over 'skyrocketing' Israeli settler violence during olive harvest," *United Nations News*, 21 October, 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166145>

²⁰⁷ "Google under fire for \$45m deal with Netanyahu's office to spread Gaza genocide propaganda," *Middle East Monitor*, 04 September, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250904-google-under-fire-for-45m-deal-with-netanyahus-office-to-spread-gaza-genocide-propaganda/>

genocide.”²⁰⁸ This is all evidence that ‘israel’ is panicking to gain control, or at worst, to obfuscate social media as the world shifts sympathy towards Palestinians and ‘israel’ is recognized as a pariah and settler-colonial state.

Before transitioning to Counterstorytelling, I want to conclude by discussing a connection to something said by Sarah Hurwitz, a former speechwriter for Michelle Obama, at an assembly of the Jewish Federations of North American on November 16, 2025.²⁰⁹ Her statement ties into Finkelstein’s commentary in his book, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, and I will highlight that Finkelstein is the son of Holocaust survivors. Originally published in 2000, Finkelstein presents a history wherein the Holocaust is being rewritten and weaponized to the advantage of Jews, zionists, and ‘israel.’²¹⁰ Part of Finkelstein’s argument is that the “Holocaust industry” focuses on exceptionalizing the Jews as perpetual victims (even at times when they are clearly not), but more importantly that the Holocaust be maintained in memory as the single greatest evil in human history (of which it is objectively not) to deflect from the actions of zionists/‘israelis’ today—even to the point of lessening and demeaning other genocides and holocausts.

Hurwitz admonishes young audiences for criticizing ‘israel’ while they witness the holocaust of Palestine through videos shared on social media. She claims this outrage as a failure of media control and “misunderstanding” the lessons from the Holocaust. Hurwitz believes it is problematic that audiences are able to both witness and think critically about the news and master narratives. Hurwitz disagrees with audiences getting information through sources that do not offer a pro-‘israel’ bias and criticizes the lessons which young Jews are drawing from the Holocaust.

According to Hurwitz the lesson being learned by young Jews was “seeing big strong Nazis hurting emaciated Jews and they think antisemitism is like anti-Black racism... powerful white people against powerless Black people,” and then extrapolating and criticizing against “powerful Israelis hurting weak, skinny Palestinians.” For Hurwitz the problem is that young

²⁰⁸ “Israel pays influencers up to \$7,000 per post to occupy information space,” *Middle East Monitor*, 02 October, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20251002-israel-pays-influencers-up-to-7000-per-post-to-occupy-information-space/>

²⁰⁹ Maysa Mustafa, “Backlash after former Obama speechwriter claims youth misinterpret Holocaust lessons amid Gaza war,” *Middle East Eye*, 19 November, 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/trending/backlash-ensues-after-former-obama-speechwriter-claims-youth-misinterpret-holocaust>

²¹⁰ Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, (Verso, 2024).

Jews interpret the Holocaust lesson as “you fight the big powerful people hurting the weak people.” According to Hurwitz, Jews being emotionally moved by the live-streamed holocaust of Palestinians, which she diminishes and dehumanizes by referring to their human suffering only as “walls of carnage,” are irrational for considering pro-genocide advocates to be “obscene.” She wants Jews, and everyone else for that matter, to ignore what they are witnessing and only listen to the arguments she is making; to listen only to the dominant narrative which Zionists control and to disengage in critical thinking. I will once more reiterate Said’s statement about the media campaign after the ‘Israeli’ savagery and massacres in Beirut in 1982, which was to convince audiences that: “the millions of feet of newsreel are less trustworthy than the impressions of a supporter of Israel.”²¹¹

The Counterstorytelling of Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari

When I first engaged in Palestinian activism I was frequently met with significant Palestinian cultural moments or images. These images would collaborate in a collective story of documenting both Palestinian resistance and ‘Israeli’ oppression. To name a few I will include the iron Palestinian keys and the Right of Return, the killing of 12-year-old Muhammad al-Durrah, Palestinian children throwing stones against massive ‘Israeli’ tanks, Mona el-Kurd’s viral video where she accuses Yaakov Fauci (Justin Fauci) of stealing her home and his response of “And if I don’t steal it, someone else is going to steal it,” and Mahfodah Shatayyeh hugging her olive tree as armed ‘Israeli’ soldiers come to demolish and destroy her home, livelihood, and “child.” Among the moments captured since October 2023, the phrase “It’s Bisan from Gaza and I’m still alive” has also embedded itself into the public consciousness and Palestinian experience. It is first and foremost survivance—standing defiantly against the attempt to kill her and all Palestinians. These are moments of cultural significance that collectively reinforce the Palestinian Counterstory.

In this section I will discuss the growing call to Globalize the Intifada while analyzing the media of Bisan Owda as she develops and assumes the role of testifying to a global audience. I will also use the work of Jenan Matari who, while also amplifying Palestinian voices in

²¹¹ Said, 35.

Palestine, dismantles the imaginary hegemonic narrative of 'israel' which ensures that Palestinians are vocalizing not only their suffering, but explaining in their own voice who their oppressors are.

I would first like to provide some information as Bisan Owda and Jenan Matari are joining the ranks of Palestinians calling for the globalization of the Intifada, which once more offers the translation of “shaking off” not just the Zionist/'israeli' oppression, but in this context, the narrative stranglehold on global citizens. Rouand X, an Afro-Palestinian political science graduate and writer explains that the call to Globalize the Intifada is to engage and guide pro-Palestinian activists towards a universal fight against oppression. Rouand X explains that the Intifada has proven to be “immune to the tactics normally used by occupiers to crush revolts.”²¹² She illustrates that “To globalize the Intifada means to recognize that this form of resistance – decentralized, popular, and rooted in everyday life – carries lessons for oppressed peoples everywhere.”²¹³ Without having a central leader and no command structure to dismantle, the ranks of the Intifada are filled and carried by anyone, regardless of wealth, position, gender, or age. Without being limited to eruptions but rather daily resistance, the Intifada becomes accessible to a wide base of support.

As we have witnessed favourable polling for the Palestine movement, we have also witnessed the abandonment of democratic representation as politicians ignore the demands of their constituents, whether it be continuing to send 'israel' bombs or war machinery, or refusing to divest and end economic support or partnership with 'israel' or complicit companies. The Intifada, from what I witness in my activist groups, forces politicians to commit to ceasefires, or ending the Canadian embargo loophole. If politicians prove unwilling, the community knows that they are choosing to support the killing of Palestinians which will result in the community campaigning against them. The intention is make politician's end their partnership with 'israel' as a prerequisite for election, but more broadly to end the western foreign policy of imperialism and to end the proliferation of anti-Palestinian/Arab racism which suppresses Palestinian voices. Being so accessible the Intifada also encourages community support which functions as collective counterstorytelling.

²¹² Rouand X, “What does Globalize the Intifada mean?” *Mondoweiss*, 03 October, 2025, <https://mondoweiss.net/2025/10/what-does-globalize-the-intifada-mean/>

²¹³ Rouand X, “What does Globalize the Intifada mean?”

A significant feature of Globalize the Intifada are the actions of individuals, especially when collectively practiced. The call for boycotting ‘israeli’ companies or goods, or companies complicit with ‘israel’ has connected many pro-Palestinian activists to investigate and publish which companies and brands to avoid. Beyond goods this even includes celebrities and which media to consume or boycott based on production companies, directors, or actors and actresses. The list which celebrities signed in support of ‘israel’ has been co-opted by Palestinian activists as a boycott list while they simultaneously boost support for artists and celebrities that are signing pledges not to work with Zionist companies. These relatively small individual actions (choosing products intentionally) collectively invert the dominant narrative that tries to portray ‘israel’ as the victim to being correctly identified as the oppressor. It is within this context that activist counterstorytelling should be embraced; as intended not just to provide evidence and testimony, but to motivate their audiences into action against the status quo.

I will also note that in the conclusion of my thesis I introduce the discourse of “auditioning for humanity.” While I am uncomfortable offering my opinion to its application by Palestinians, I believe it often to be inseparable from the conversation of social media use, whether in its application or simultaneously in its absence; thus I have incorporated it within my analyses in this chapter.

I begin first with Bisan Owda who has become a citizen journalist documenting the intensified genocide of her people with little more than her phone and voice. Owda likely has the largest Instagram following of any Palestinian in Palestine at over 5 million²¹⁴ which is more than both martyred journalists Anas al-Sharif and Saleh al-Jafarawi who so bravely documented the brutality and barbarous genocide of their people. It’s significant to note as an act of suppression that Meta has deleted al-Jafarawi’s Instagram account with all of his posted material in what can only be described as an attempt to delete evidence of genocide and war crimes.²¹⁵

In researching Owda I learned how important Palestinian culture was to her and how this shaped the stories she would tell specifically with the framing of who to vocalize and who to omit. Prior to October 2023, Owda produced Arabic videos calling herself a *Hakawati*, which

²¹⁴ Bisan Owda, @wizard_bisan1, *Instagram*, https://www.instagram.com/wizard_bisan1?igsh=bDc5ZXd4anh1OHow

²¹⁵ Instagram has a policy that allows accounts to be “memorialized” so that it can stay active, or even for family members to gain access to the account, or if the family asks, the account can be removed. For example, Charlie Kirk’s Instagram account is still active and filled with misogynistic and racist content. <https://help.instagram.com/264154560391256>

translates to a storyteller, as she explores and explains Gaza and brings Palestinian culture to the world. In one of her videos, posted August 22, 2023,²¹⁶ Owda explains numerous aspects of Gaza City including beautiful markets, beaches, and streets and how they gained their names. Within this context, Owda offers no such inclination that her audience might question the humanity of Palestinians; it is inherent. Perhaps most significant in this video is how Owda doesn't mention 'israel' or zionism choosing instead to focus her video on Palestinians and their "civilization."²¹⁷ In this episode Owda brings her fold-up chair to set up and tell stories of Palestine and her testimony directly challenges the zionist and imperialist propaganda that attempts to claim that Palestine was empty and barren prior to the zionist settler colonial project. Crucial for this series, which is produced with Caravanroya, is the focus is on Palestine and Palestinians and Arabs as active and with their own agency.

While Owda covers Palestine it would be inevitable that she must address topics that in some way involve 'israelis,' yet she manages to do this without giving them power or voice. In an episode from May 29, 2023²¹⁸ she speaks of the international airport in Gaza which was destroyed via 'israeli' bombing. Even as Owda discusses how the radar was attacked during the Intifada she never names 'israelis' as she simply calls them "they." This struck me as significant as the two years+ of my advocacy and learning of Palestine, zionism and 'israelis' seemed to always provide the framework or the context necessary to understand Palestinian experience. I argue that this is intentional as Owda is a journalist and understands the importance of specifying the actions of agents. While "they" must certainly be common sense to Palestinians, it's still a powerful narrative tool to keep the focus of the video on the resilience of Palestinians and their once beautiful international airport.

As indicated above, prior to October, Owda was focused on an Arabic audience and thus her videos were in Arabic and only a few offered any sort of translations. Even if the reader doesn't understand Arabic the tone is largely always clear as so many videos begin with a smile on her face. There is a distinct lack of acknowledgement of 'israelis' and apartheid infrastructure or political content. This does not imply that it does not exist, of course, but that the story being

²¹⁶ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CwQVMDkldCp/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng%3D%3D>

²¹⁷ I put civilization in quotations because dislike the term and its imperialist connotations but to a western propagandist the video represents the historical vitality and prosperity of Indigenous Palestinians and Arabs to invalidate the imperialist rhetoric that the land was barren or no people were living within Palestine.

²¹⁸ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/Cs1pznIII6/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

told is of Palestine and Palestinians, removing the ‘israelis’ from the narrative as a control measure and a counterstorytelling technique of becoming the master of her own story.

Unfortunately, the story she would begin telling, and continues to tell to this day, is documenting her survival of the intensified Zionist genocide and on-going ethnic cleansing of Palestine.²¹⁹ It is in this way that Owda’s counterstorytelling would develop—providing the evidence of her lived experience with her voice as testimonial. This technique locates the reader of her videos as a witness, thereby not needing to be convinced or persuaded of the story she wants to tell—they vicariously experience it with her. On October 7th Owda posted a picture of white Arabic script against a black background which my friend Aman has translated for me:

*The sound of the bombing, it gnaws at us, it rocks our insides, it makes us feel the shattering of our cells as though they are mirrors. We hear the sound reverberating inside us before it reaches our brain, and our limbs start to shake.
The night in Gaza is the longest night in history, the sound of bombing besieges us, and there is nowhere for us to run, in the time that hundreds of thousands of residents received notice to evacuate, where do we go? Do we fly vertically and take the first right turn at an altitude of two kilometers? Seriously, where do we go? You terrorize us with bombardment as though we have other solutions up our sleeve?
Gaza is under siege from the land, sea and air, its area is 360 km and two million and a quarter residents live in it, most of which are children and elderly, they live through all kinds of terrorizing and fear and horror without electricity under bombardment in the middle of the night, then what? You say to leave, where do we go?
Oh God, show us the way, you’re all we have.
Deliver us.. we are tired.*²²⁰

From this moment on Owda seems to understand that she must tell her story to a global audience. She shares two posts on October 8th, each accompanied with audio, one being a Gaza Youth Choir singing Salute to Gaza, and the other being the sound of the ‘Israeli’ bombardment. Both posts feature a black background and white text, which transitions to more text but importantly the text is in both Arabic and English to reflect that she recognizes her assumed role and her growing audience.²²¹

²¹⁹ It is important to keep in mind that the intensified genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestine is being carried out not only by ‘Israel’ but also actively by the U.S., and the U.K., and with complicity including Canada, Germany, France, Egypt, UAE, Jordan, and many others.

²²⁰ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyHaH3ioDKx/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²²¹ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyJD5v4Me9c/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==> ; <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyJXvYTrdQh/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

As Owda continues her documentation, she writes in the captions that these posts are a part of a series as October 9th continues with Part 3 and Part 4. In Part 3 of the series, which Owda refers to as “Things about Gaza you will never know from news” she documents the families which were in supposedly “safe zones” who had been massacred by ‘israel’ which totalled more than 120 Palestinians.²²² As a counternarrative, Owda is providing the evidence against the western media claim of ‘israel’ providing safety to civilians. Owda continues to say that “the situation is catastrophic and media coverage is very scarce! All massacres happen at night, because there are no eyes to document and no awake eyes to flee.” Owda ends with a chilling statement, “Make our voices heard before they are all gone.” This framework, asks for their voices to be heard, as if seeking permission to enter western discourse, which is different from demanding, but it is also a call for empathy and the humanity of others.

While I have said that Owda has 5 million followers I think it’s important to contextualize as I analyze her work how many people she is able to directly speak to. A Reel from January 16, 2024, which shows how many people have seen the video records that 856k users “liked” her Reel, 34.8k users commented on her Reel, 303k users shared her Reel and 31.4 million users watched her Reel and listened to her story.²²³ This does not include other platforms where the video might be viewed. While this is an example of a relatively higher amount of viewers, many of her Reels show millions of people watching and listening to each story she tells, directly and without interference.

In Part 4 Owda uses her platform to amplify the news being broadcasted from an Arabic media outlet (which appears to be *Al-Jazeera*) while adding her commentary of words on black background in both Arabic and English. Owda specifically states that the media isn’t reporting on the population density, the emphasis on the fact that this is an attack on civilians, and that the media is regurgitating ‘israeli’ propaganda about evacuation orders or giving Palestinians time to flee.²²⁴ It’s clear that Part 3 and 4 are directly attacking mainstream media whose bias is against Palestinians—favouring a pro-‘israeli’ narrative. I suggest that if there is any hope for the United Nations as an instrument of International Law a reckoning will need to come for western media’s

²²² @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyKmgHxoBfa/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==> ; the families include, Abu Hilal (17), Al-Zaanin (20), Abu Daqqa (9), Shabat (13), Abu Rakab (7), Al-Najjar (19), Abu Qouta (23), Shamlakh (12).

²²³ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C2LkK7FoEjk/?igsh=MWppZHlkam91c2k1bw==>

²²⁴ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyLGK6mgFRv/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

complicity in supporting and denying the Gaza holocaust (though I am not optimistic).²²⁵ Matar's research provides a compilation of explicit examples which offers an in-depth analysis of this topic. Owda repeatedly posts against habitual media to enlighten her readers with the truth which encourages critical viewing of western media and narrative framework.

In Owda's post on April 10, 2024 she reports on 'israel' bombing a Palestinian orphanage in Khan Younis; as well as using tanks and bulldozers to destroy a nearby Palestinian cemetery. As Owda explains the *kafil* system of Palestinians supporting materially and emotionally Palestinian orphans she speaks directly to her viewers. She instructs them to be aware that when 'israeli' spokespersons and the western media echo chamber speak they "lie to you about destroying military buildings," as she explains the bombed buildings are not military buildings but orphanages where people document their lives, where people secure their dignity, they are markets and streets, and residential homes.²²⁶ In this post Owda is not only bringing the brilliance and generosity of Palestinian people into focus for her viewers to engage with, but also illustrating how 'israelis' are historically responsible for creating generations of orphans and parents of murdered children.

I return to the first week of Owda documenting the intensified genocide, to illustrate how Owda adapts to her expanding role and her target audience as she would develop a new methodology for documenting the survival of her people and the genocide by 'israelis.' She begins speaking directly to her phone in English as seen in her post on October 10th, 2023. Of course Owda would also have Arabic videos, verbal or text, but the focus would be for an English audience or at the least would include an English translation. Eventually Owda would create a second profile which becomes her Arabic reporting. Owda is not only providing her testimony to the west, but also to Arabs which acts, in a similar way with Khaled, to condemn Arab Reactionary regimes and advance a call for Arab unity.

Owda's videos bring her emotions visually to the forefront in a way that text cannot replicate. This would also differentiate herself from those aiming to stoically report on the genocide. On October 12, 2023 she posted a heartbreaking video as she breaks down crying

²²⁵ Use of the identification "holocaust" rather than genocide (as I have used thus far) is to amplify the many Palestinians voices who are calling the extermination of their people a holocaust. The Cambridge Dictionary defines holocaust as: "a very large amount of destruction, especially by fire or heat, or the killing of large numbers of people." <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/holocaust>

²²⁶ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C511X14rcmZ/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

about the news that her office has been destroyed and the post caption reads: “I lost my dreams, work, equipment and second home! This building was a residential building, and despite this it was bombed by the Israeli warplanes! Gaza, Palestine 10-10-2023.”²²⁷ Owda herself notes that compared to the Palestinians being killed this news is not as egregious, but the video helps a western eye grasp the reality that life requires more than being alive. Beyond the destruction of buildings the viewers are able to recognize the anguish of loss in the reckoning of thousands of hours of determination, education, the “blood, sweat, and tears” of human effort destroyed. Within this video are spliced images of a montage of smiling and laughing coworkers contributing to various projects which brings even more relatability and empathy from a western audience. While white supremacy and western imperialism conditions the global minority to be less empathetic to suffering of Brown and Black people this video is able to effectively push the viewer to see the very real, very familiar human lives. My thesis is dedicated to ending this conditioning and to encourage anti-racist action.

Palestinians in Gaza surviving the intensified genocide have also pursued various narrative forms to reach western readers for the purpose of action which will be seen in the following paragraph. They provide examples of apartheid infrastructure and policy and testify to their oppression. As they routinely relay the humiliations and intentional dehumanizing effects of ‘israeli’ checkpoints they are simultaneously trying to have their audience realize and identify with the denial of Palestinian’s access to time. Suad Amiry, a Palestinian woman, published her autobiography, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*, with frankness and honesty that documents the reality of living under ‘israeli’ Occupation. Her rhetoric is entirely accessible to a western audience as the most mundane every day tasks become outlandishly difficult. She addresses the imposed and random curfews which force Palestinians to either run to the store to buy groceries or make social calls as they don’t have the time or freedom to do both. Palestinians in Gaza use the exorbitant price of food to make connections in the west as they can’t afford food. In a similar way to bridge the gap between Gaza and western viewers Palestinians have used social media trends.

Owda tries to help western audiences embrace that Palestinians are relatable by their similar daily routines, but also their social media consciousness. She does this particularly well by specifically mimicking the “Get Ready for Bed With Me” trend which social media users are

²²⁷ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyTMBAXsDbn/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

familiar with. This GRWM post on October 13, 2023 has the effect of situating the viewer in the shared humanity of social media use, but through the engagement of contrast the viewer can try to imagine for themselves what it would be like to have to collect all of their things together in a go-bag to evacuate in case they are targeted by ‘israelis.’ Or that they must go to bed early because the ‘israelis’ bomb at night and that they leave their shoes at the door as a counting measure to ensure that everyone is accounted for.²²⁸

While the above mentioned posts of Owda are demonstrations of the hardships and trauma of trying to survive the ‘israeli’ genocide, she often posts entries of Palestinian joy. One such entry is from July 13, 2025 as Owda shows Palestinians swimming in the Mediterranean Sea with smiles on their faces and joy in their childish cheers.²²⁹ Another such example was a second video Owda posted on October 9, 2025 after the “ceasefire” as she explains that the children were celebrating a time of relative “safety” while rollerblading and asking Owda to film them.²³⁰ Although I could not find the video I was reminded of a video of Owda detailing how the children all wanted her to film them so that they would not be forgotten; so that they would have left some sort of impact on the world. This testimony is an important part of combating the desensitization of Palestinian suffering. When the only visual of Palestinians is as they suffer it becomes harder to imagine their joy or that their joy becomes more a rupture than normality which is unintentionally dehumanizing. I will foreshadow Sara Awad’s statement: “Do they only want to see us begging for food?” In Owda’s effort to document the joy of children rollerblading, however, there is a haunting contrast of the children smiling and playing while in the background can be heard helicopters and gunfire. A similar contrast can be seen in Farah Obada’s “GRWM for a wedding while being bombed” video which entwines “normalcy” and joy with oppression and violence.²³¹

In her video, which is produced with a group that amplifies Palestinian journalism known as @seen.palestine, Farah explains, while getting ready for the wedding, that Palestinians are hosting a wedding despite the evacuation order by ‘israel.’ Both bride and groom “were glowing” and dancing and even though ‘israeli’ bombs were falling in the background Farah explains that “just seconds later people went back to singing and celebrating, as if to say we won’t let fear stop

²²⁸ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/CyV3GCiM2sc/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²²⁹ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DMDcuKSK38t/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²³⁰ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPl86mJCkrM/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²³¹ @farah_obada, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DOqqIh4DDhL/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

us. It was such a strange mix, the sounds of war and the sounds of joy.” Farah notes that the wedding party would later evacuate for safety but reiterates for her audience that she “learned that love is stronger than war.” It stands as a testament not only that Palestinians will not be denied joy and love, but that they will not allow ‘israel’ to dictate time. This serves as an affirmation that Palestinians are not waiting to resume life only after the end of the genocide and that they operate outside the desire of ‘israelis.’

I think it is worth critically thinking about how zionists would narrate this same story if they reported it as I believe it helps to identify framing tactics in dominant narratives. While Farah is emphasizing the resilience of her people in this video—that they will not allow ‘israel’ to determine when they are able to access joy—zionists would spin the narrative to suggest that there is no genocide or war crimes being carried out as evidenced by the fact that Palestinians are attending weddings. As Awad’s testimony below makes clear, the very appearance of a Palestinian enjoying a moment of relative peace or being nicely dressed amounts to suspicion against the reality of the genocide. We have also seen how holocaust deniers have denied the real policy of starvation by ‘israel’ based on Palestinian parents not yet bearing the disfigurement of starvation in relation to their children.

Returning to Owda’s counterstorytelling, I believe that part of what makes her so unique and important to the narration of Palestinians is that she brings a “humanness” to the news that she is reporting. This is not, of course, to imply that other Palestinian Journalists are not human, but that their reporting of the genocide, which is crucial to document and amplify, can be a presentation of numbers and numbers are always obscure and abstract to western audiences. Numbers, I would argue, implicitly dehumanize, though I can offer no media alternative nor am I condemning the necessary practice. Courageous Palestinian journalists have been largely abandoned by international humanitarian law which stipulates that the ‘israeli’ policy of assassinating journalists is a violation of international humanitarian law and also constitutes a war crime. These journalists are also largely being abandoned by the global media institutions which continue to suppress their voices, deny the deliberate policy of killing journalists, and repeating ‘israeli’ propaganda and denigration of Palestinian journalists as “terrorists.” The normalization of assassinating journalists in Palestine has implications in documenting the Sudan genocide and the imperial boomerang sees increased police violence and suppression against domestic journalists that challenge hegemonic narratives.

The necessary documentation and testimony by Palestinian journalists frees Owda to be the *hakawati*, talking about Gaza, talking to Palestinians, sharing their stories of hardship and survival, sharing their beautiful resilience and amplifying ways which her audience can materially help Palestinians. Each video acts as evidence of Palestinian survival and testimony of the genocide by ‘israel.’ Beyond her work on the ground Owda is also able to use her massive platform to expand Palestinian voices through collaborative projects with others including in the diaspora.

Within the diaspora there remains an impetus to amplify Palestinians living in Palestine—to share and witness the genocide. However, there are also many voices that report especially on the sadism of ‘israeli’ society or to document how zionism is influencing domestic politics. Jenan Matari, a “4x award-winning Palestinian ‘*hakawati*,’”²³² is a particularly well-spoken and (rightfully) unapologetic critic of zionism and ‘israel/israelis.’ In my curated selection of her work she seeks to prove that ‘israel’ does not have the right to exist, as zionist western politicians and media analysts love to proclaim. Matari counters the argument by offering that states do not have rights but people do. Matari is producing work for her audience to challenge any notion that ‘israel’ can be reformed either now or in the future. With an eye towards the eventual reckoning of the genocide and future trials and tribunals she wants people to approach justice for Palestinians from a place of understanding the psychology and reality of ‘israeli’ society. For Matari the idea of reformation or scapegoating ‘israel’ is akin to suggesting Nazi Germany could be reformed with a different Nazi leader. The work I viewed of Matari, being less testimonial in nature, exposes the nature of ‘israel’ which doesn’t see Palestinians (or Arabs) as human. She does this without positioning herself as someone asking to be seen as human. However, the positionality of Matari and Owda are especially different in numerous ways, the most influential being the desperation of survival, but also that Matari has long lived in the U.S. whose voice and humanity have been less suppressed.

In an Instagram Reel, one of many that Matari produces to illustrate that the foundational obstacle to peace in Palestine is the existence of ‘israel,’ Matari explains that she wants to break down from a psychological perspective what we (people watching the live-streamed genocide) are witnessing daily. She explains that we are not only witnessing the physical genocide, but also the psychological warfare—specifically sadism of ‘israel’ as an entity and sexual sadism of the

²³² @jenanmatari, *Instagram*, <https://www.instagram.com/jenanmatari?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==>

‘israeli’ military.²³³ Matari uses the Oxford Languages definition of sadism: “the tendency to derive pleasure, especially sexual gratification, from inflicting pain, suffering, or humiliation on others” though she explains that sexual gratification is not a necessity. Throughout the Reel Matari remains composed, articulate, and she uses industry-specific language as she knows that her video will face heavy scrutiny along with violent accusations of antisemitism and/or death threats. However, this does not deter Matari as she knows not only that she is presenting the truth, but also that she is challenging the cognitive dissonance which protects the “‘israeli’ democracy” narrative. Additionally, it is often the reactions of zionists/‘israelis’ which Matari includes in her narratives.

The examples Matari uses to document the habitual enjoyment of humiliating and dehumanizing of Palestinians includes the checkpoint system spread throughout Palestine that “are set up to specifically humiliate and dehumanize Palestinians,” as well as the joy with which ‘israelis’ celebrate Palestinian suffering: including tourism based on watching the bombing of Gaza and publicly celebrating the intentional policy of starvation against Palestinians by organizing large-scale picnics and festivals while blocking humanitarian aid from entering Gaza. Once more, Matari offers documentation through associated news articles and videos. In the parlance of social media, she “brings the receipts.” Additionally, Matari includes a montage of the large amount of racist and dehumanizing social media content in which ‘israelis’ mock the Palestinians which their settler colony are killing. This includes mocking the fact that Palestinians are being denied access to water, food, or fuel and shelter. It’s important to highlight that many of these clips also include ‘israeli’ parents with their children which offers documentation of how this behaviour is encouraged and conditions generations of ‘israelis’ to chant for the death of Arabs. This is crucial as one of the main ‘israeli’ talking points claims that it is Palestinians who raise their children to hate Jews (to project Palestinians as the problem and as a lasting threat).

The phenomena of ‘israeli’/zionist “every accusation is a confession” demands a thorough investigation, which I cannot presently offer. However, I will include an example, as I think it is essential in the epistemological narrative battleground to at least address it. I will use a testimony by Maya Ayooni, a Palestinian artist. She produces a video wherein she compiles the following contradictions “all within the last week” during the twelve day Iran-‘israel’ war in June

²³³ @jenanmatari, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DOJYSxegFj6/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

13-24, 2025: ‘israel’ building an IOF headquarters in Ichilov Hospital, IOF soldiers seen hiding with civilians, including women, children, and the elderly in bomb shelters, ‘israel’ denying access to Palestinians and foreign workers into “for Jews only” bomb shelters, and closing airports so that ‘israelis cannot leave.’²³⁴ She uses news articles and ‘israeli’ photos as documentation. These are, of course, all accusations which zionists and ‘israelis’ make against Palestinians and Hamas. It is also worth noting that ‘israel’ made false claims that Sinwar was hiding and living in luxury while Palestinians were being massacred—the reality being that he was fighting on the frontlines and his autopsy proved he was martyred without having any food in his digestive system for at least three days—meanwhile ‘israeli’ PM Netanyahu fled ‘israel’ to hide in Cyprus before Iran retaliated. Matari also dedicates time to present similar videos or posts.

As Matari transitions to discussing the sexual sadism of the IOF she explains that sexual sadism disorder involves the following, quoting Merck Manual—a diagnostic reference for physicians: “People are distressed by their behavior or unable to function because of their behavior; They take these acts to an extreme, sometimes causing severe bodily or psychological harm or even death; The acts involve partners who do not give their consent; The condition has been present for at least 6 months.” Matari explains that we are able to witness this in the IOF members “because of how excitedly their soldiers post videos and photos of them[selves] wearing lingerie of Palestinian women the murdered.” Matari includes several examples of photos which act to document this behaviour in public consciousness. She is not only testifying as a Palestinian witness, but she is also providing evidence against the claim that ‘israel’ is the only “civilized” state in Southwest Asia. She is using the boastful self-documentating and self-incriminating evidence in a similar way which other organizations are in their persecution of ‘israeli’ war criminals.

Matari continues to say that the IOF members:

find so much joy and sexual pleasure in the sexual humiliation of Palestinian women that they have gone so far as to use images of them amongst the lingerie of women they have just murdered as pictures for their dating profiles. And we know that this brings them joy and sexual gratification because to use an image like that, as a dating profile photo, means that you find so much joy and normalcy in that that you believe it will cause someone else to develop sexual attraction to you.

²³⁴ @mayaaooni,
https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLENBUGRQr9/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==

I argue a good reflection of ‘israeli’ society comes in the example of Yifat Tomer-Yerushalmi, ‘israeli’ military’s top lawyer, being arrested and declared a traitor for leaking the video evidence of ‘israeli’ soldiers raping a Palestinian in the Sde Teiman torture camp.²³⁵ As a whole, ‘israelis’ are proving to be more upset about the leaking of sexual violence and torture rather than the practice of sexual violence and torture.

Matari also includes how the mindset we are witnessing, which included a video of an ‘israeli’ proudly claiming to rape and kill Palestinians, replicates the ‘israeli’ mindset during the *Nakba*. Matari demonstrates this by comparing the current sadism with the testimonies of Zionist terrorists as she splices in clips from the documentary *Tantura* which features discussions of elderly ‘israeli’ terrorists bragging about the rape that they or their gang-members committed during the *Nakba*. Matari ends the video by noting, once more using the Merck Manual, that “sexual sadism is considered a crime and is likely to continue until the sadist is apprehended” and stating that “Israel cannot exist.”

Matari uses her platform to educate against and challenge the ‘israeli’ narrative by creating videos which document or amplify such atrocities as ‘Israel’ training dogs to rape Palestinian hostages,²³⁶ the Samson Option (see footnote),²³⁷ the intentional killing and genocide of Palestinian children,²³⁸ ‘israelis’ protesting for the “right to rape”²³⁹ or ‘israeli’ polls which demonstrate that 82% of ‘israelis’ want to ethnically cleanse Gaza with nearly half supporting the killing of all Palestinians in Gaza, and 56% support ethnically cleansing the West Bank.²⁴⁰ Matari is the counter-punch of ‘israeli’ or pro-‘israeli’ influencers who offer subjective views of ‘Israel’ in order to promote it as the victim and last safe haven of Jews (a statement and notion which is itself antisemitic). She uses her platform to let the world witness the ‘Israel’ that habitual media is now failing to hide and contain. The purpose of Matari’s documentation,

²³⁵ Chris Doyle, “In Israel, whistleblowers are criminals and rapists are heroes,” *Arab News*, 10 November, 2025, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2622123>

²³⁶ @jenanmatari, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DP9H7VkgMYc/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²³⁷ @jenanmatari, https://www.instagram.com/reel/DO_S6guEeSr/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng== ; The Samson Option is the ‘israeli’ doctrine which states that if the existence of ‘Israel’ is threatened they will launch their nuclear arsenal to major capitals around the world, including allied western countries like USA. The intention is that threat of nuclear annihilation as a deterrent, but it also forces allied states into defending ‘Israel’ or suffer being targeted by the rogue nuclear state.

²³⁸ @jenanmatari, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DIjG--cRI1t/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²³⁹ @jenanmatari, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C-BcEJkvrSx/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²⁴⁰ @jenanmatari, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DMohZVxRzWf/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

despite its factuality, is not to necessarily be used in a legal trial, but to engage with public discourse and challenge the hegemonic illusion of 'israel.' As Palestinians and Arabs have been dehumanized to the point of western internalized ideological and Orientalist assumptions videos and testimonies like the ones which Matari produces work to question not only the 'israeli' image, but also those western apologists and champions of such an evil settler-colonial society.

This counterstorytelling between Owda and Matari works to simultaneously write the Palestinian story by Palestinian hand, but also to document and educate the world of the fabrication and falsehood of the 'israeli' narrative. This same technique is prevalent in the literature of the oppressed. Indigenous writers share their epistemologies while others will document the inhuman actions of genocidal settler-colonial states. The enslaved write stories of love and kinship while simultaneously documenting the monstrous injustice and religious hypocrisy of slaveholders and the system which perpetuated slavery. Women, queer, trans and people with disabilities write their humanity, their "radical" love²⁴¹ and philosophy while others establish how patriarchy and white supremacy first seek to deny it. The practice preserves the human and community while also striving against oppression by first identifying it and then illuminating the necessary reform or revolution. I am reminded by Dr. Smyth of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson who teaches about affirmative politics and focusing inward on the community and its survival more than outward on colonialism.²⁴² Whichever focus the storyteller utilizes the most important aspect is that they are narrating their own individual or collective stories and not being spoken for by their oppressors.

Owda, despite facing extreme hardships, is determined not to allow 'israelis' or zionists speak for her people. I wish to acknowledge the prohibitive measures in place that suppress the freedom of her productions as well as all Palestinians in Palestine. Owda is not only focused on surviving a genocide, but she is also limited and constrained by the inaccessibility of internet and electricity which makes it far more time consuming to routinely make videos which require more in-depth editing or pulling resources such as reporting on the genocide from the internet. She notes how some videos take minutes to upload and sometimes only in certain areas. However, despite these restrictions she is still determined to be the counterstory to the 'israeli' biased media. For example, on October 14, 2025 Owda produced a video which was able to include

²⁴¹ This is a nod to bell hooks' *All About Love*, (HarperCollins, 2000).

²⁴² Dr. Heather Smyth, annotation on this thesis, November 16, 2025.

embedded videos of Palestinian hostages being released from ‘israeli’ “concentration camps.”²⁴³ Owda uses this post to highlight the fact that the Palestinians being released are not prisoners as they have done nothing wrong and in her video she include articles illustrating the western dichotomy of humanity; namely the media’s use of “‘israeli’ hostages/Palestinian prisoners.” Additionally, Owda notes the barbaric torture and punishment which ‘israelis’ use against the Palestinian hostages, including rape, food and water deprivation, and highlighting the 3600 kidnapped Palestinians who are held without even being charged of anything, which is largely omitted from the western media narrative. Within the post Owda also states that the oppression used by ‘israel’ does not surprise her because “if israel would change, it wouldn’t be israel anymore.”

As my thesis developed into writing I realized how important Owda was for me in my own learning and being educated on Palestine and the genocide. However, I wanted to better understand how her work was received by Palestinians in the diaspora. Therefore, I emailed Jenan Matari to ask for her perspective on being a storyteller and how Bisan influences her work. I was so grateful and honoured to share her response:

As a diasporic storyteller, all of my inspiration comes from our people in the homeland. I feel indebted to journalists and storytellers like Bisan to continue amplifying our cause outside of Palestine, and it pushes me to step out of my comfort zone and begin difficult but important discussions about subjects that folks like Bisan specifically cannot speak about or would be in increased danger for covering. Palestinians in Palestine should only have to focus on surviving on our land. Palestinians in diaspora should feel obligated to center Palestine and amplify the stories from the homeland, regardless of any potential 'loss' it could result in in diaspora; this is our 'diaspora debt.' -- Jenan Matari²⁴⁴

I thank Matari for her email as it helped shape my analysis of the various roles storytellers play through the stories they tell, but also the concept of “diaspora debt” which I connect to the demonstrations and protests of Palestinian community groups in Kitchener-Waterloo who come out to protests and demonstrations regardless of the weather—always acknowledging that whatever struggles they are facing pales in comparison to those in Palestine.

Matari and Owda both present their audiences with views of Palestinian life. Both feature Palestinian joy, resilience, and heartbreak. Both show ‘israel’ for what it is, a violent settler-

²⁴³ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPy1LDtCmxJ/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==> ; I put concentration camps in quotations as a direct quote from Bisan Owda’s post but also would also like to emphasize that I share its use and support her terminology.

²⁴⁴ Jenan Matari, “RE: Form Submission,” Received by Jordan Gallant-Turner, 29 October, 2025.

colonial state determined to kill and/or ethnically cleanse all Palestinians in Palestine. Matari amplifies voices on the ground in Palestine while Owda is on the ground and working with both the Palestinian diaspora and certain media companies to provide evidence and testimony, but also to use her platform to bring charity donations as an ambassador for such organizations as Ele Elna Elak²⁴⁵ to help Palestinians to be able to access fresh water.

Many Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank seek international donations via social media posts to secure food, transportation, medication, or shelter. While the methods and tone differ, the concept of “auditioning for humanity” often becomes embroiled with the creator asking the audience, in English, “where is your humanity” or “if you have any humanity...” Similarly, early in the genocide children in Gaza gathered at Al-Shifa hospital and even held a press conference, in English, to illicit the support of the English-speaking world to end the “extermination, killing, and bombing falling over [their] heads. All of this in front of the world.”²⁴⁶ These are the calls to mobilize not politicians, who often profit from or are bought by ‘israel,’ but the constituents and citizens to globalize the Intifada. These Palestinian voices are trying to remind their audiences of their own humanity and to recognize their role—that if they do not speak out against oppression that they are siding with oppressor.

²⁴⁵ @ele_elnalalak, *Instagram*, https://www.instagram.com/ele_elnalalak?igsh=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

²⁴⁶ Al Jazeera English, “Palestinian children plead for protection in Gaza press conference | Al Jazeera Newsfeed,” *YouTube*, 08 November, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLxHBRPLzow>

Conclusion

“Auditioning for humanity”

As stated in my introduction part of my intention was to amplify the voices of Palestinian women. I will reiterate that in my capacity I chose a select few women to focus upon which necessarily means I acted in as a gatekeeper determining a value/non-value to which Palestinian women to include. Importantly, I also did so as a white male. Logistically, I had to make a judgement and in the spirit I have attempted to be more inclusive in my conclusion. I will also highlight Salma Khadra Jayyusi's *Anthology of Modern Palestinian Literature* as a comprehensive resource and introduction to the world of Palestinian writers.

In my research I read an article by Shraddha Chatterjee and Perna Subramanian called “Auditioning for humanity: the geopolitics of social media and the question of Palestine.”²⁴⁷ The article is framed as a dialog between two scholars as they “interrogate[] the structural logics of settler colonialism and racial capitalism that produce Palestinians as non-human, demanding they perform humanity for recognition within a global framework shaped by colonial-capitalist values.”²⁴⁸ They list Bisan Owda, Motaz Azaiza and Plestia Alaqad as specific examples and provide the example of Alaqad's interview response regarding the expectation she wishes to reach with her audience: “We are just humans, you know...I want the world to see us as humans.”²⁴⁹ Chatterjee and Subramanian discuss how this mentality implies that Palestinians do not inherently have humanity (by needing to ask for it to be recognized by the colonial gaze).

In order to better explain the concept of “auditioning for humanity” I share two sides of the dialogue between Chatterjee and Subramanian. First Chatterjee reflects on what she is witnessing on social media:

*I contend that this debate on the humanity of Palestinians is evidence of the epistemological foundations of how the struggle for Palestinian autonomy and self-determination is understood in the Global North. I question why Palestinians and those in solidarity with them are attempting to reinforce that Palestinians are human, as if the humanity of Palestinian people is suspect, and as if global solidarity could be extended to Palestinians only by proving that they are human.*²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Shraddha Chatterjee and Perna Subramanian, “Auditioning for humanity: the geopolitics of social media and the question of Palestine,” *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 32, No. 10, 2025, 1523-1536.

²⁴⁸ Chatterjee and Subramanian, “Auditioning for humanity,” 1524.

²⁴⁹ Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1525.

²⁵⁰ Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1525.

Chatterjee then asks her readers to reflect on the following questions:

*What epistemological and geopolitical conditions produce this perverse calculus of humanity through which Palestinians are remaindered as non-human? And, if Palestinians must prove their humanity during their own ongoing dispossession and ethnocide, who must they prove their humanity to, why must they do so, and how does this demand shape their visibility and legitimacy?*²⁵¹

In her response Subramanian uses the insights of Frantz Fanon to answer Chatterjee:

*Fanon (1952) famously articulates this cycle of recognition and subjugation in Black Skin, White Masks, where he argues that the colonial subject's demand for recognition within the framework of the oppressor does not dismantle colonial hierarchies but instead reaffirms them. This coercive structure forces Palestinians to perform humanity on terms dictated by a global media economy that remains invested in their dehumanization. Just as Fanon describes how the Black subject's demand for recognition is always conditioned by the gaze of the white world, Palestinian digital visibility is similarly structured by a settler-colonial epistemology that renders their humanity legible only under conditions of western-imperialist exceptionalism and attendant conditions of survivability.*²⁵²

While explaining the framework which Palestinians are being subjected and limited to, both Chatterjee and Subramanian are aware and acknowledge that advocating for their humanity through social media is an immediate response to the extermination of their people and threat to their own lives. They share that “On the global stage offered by social media, Palestinians must audition for their humanity, so that those already deemed ‘human’ can adjudicate on their humanity.”²⁵³

They also share a quote from Hana Alyan as she writes: “The task of the Palestinian ... is to audition for empathy and compassion ... It is, of course, a remarkably effective strategy. A slaughter isn’t a slaughter if those being slaughtered are at fault, if they’ve been quietly and effectively dehumanized—in the media, through policy—for years. If nobody is a civilian, nobody can be a victim.”²⁵⁴ It is in this light, the struggle for survival, that I refuse to advise or critique Palestinians on their use of social media in the attention economy in which we live. I share my opinion below that it is Eurocentric/white supremacist ideology that needs to be targeted regarding the applicability of humanity.

²⁵¹ Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1525.

²⁵² Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1527.

²⁵³ Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1527.

²⁵⁴ Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1527.

Chatterjee and Subramanian wrote their article not to provide a conclusion or judgement, but to open a global dialog that calls for us to “rethink the geopolitics of our resistance, and to engender a shift in our emphasis on deploying humanity as a barometer for solidarity. What we hope to contribute to is not only discursive, but lived—a collective present in which we are not simply compliant, but complicit in the demand for change.”²⁵⁵

In truth, I remain wary of how to address this topic, though I do see the benefit and utility of its inclusion to critically assess how best to practice decolonization now and in the future. I also wish to stress that as I enter this space from a privileged place I believe my opinion would be, albeit unintentionally, paternalistic. That being said, I will state that while the framing of “auditioning for humanity” focuses on Palestinians, the heart of the injustice lies within white supremacists/zionists/colonizers. Therefore, I believe that it is incumbent upon those within the imperial core to remove this rot from within the psychology of Eurocentric ideology. So long as this ideology exists and influences our social, political, and economic systems the actions of Black, Brown, and Indigenous Peoples, including Palestinians, will not be able to up-end the narrative within mechanisms of imperialism and settler-colonialism (I have in mind the work of Rinaldo Walcott, *The Long Emancipation: Moving Toward Black Freedom* which argues that to this day Black people remain globally unfree and unhuman).

In wanting to bring more Palestinian women’s voices forward, I sought out Palestinian women through social media, emails, and text conversations. Below I offer their responses and in the case of Hana Alyan I offer excerpts from an article she wrote on a similar topic. For clarity I provided these women with an introduction similar to my introduction in this section and asked for their opinions or thoughts towards the following: “Is it possible in this current climate for Palestinians to assume the world sees them as humans, or when do you believe it would be safe for such an assumption to be made? What does it mean to have to ask for recognition of one’s humanity from another person/group?” I also offered the space to diverge from the questions to provide their opinions in whichever way they wished to express themselves. I am extremely grateful and honoured to amplify their voices below.

Sara Awad, Storyteller in Gaza

²⁵⁵ Chatterjee and Subramanian, 1533.

“I believe the world knows that we are human beings just like them, but they have become used to watching us suffer and die. Maybe that’s why they struggle to imagine that we also have families, friends, dreams, and lives — just like any other people on this planet.

Yesterday, I published a video with The Independent magazine, and for the first time in my life I received a very negative and aggressive comment about my work. The person reacted to how I was dressed nicely and looked healthy. It made me angry. **Do they only want to see us begging for food?** Asking for a piece of bread for our brothers? I don’t understand those people.

We are human. I am a student with dreams — to continue my studies abroad, to travel, to see the world. I don’t want to change the entire world; that’s impossible. But I want to change how people look at my people — not as numbers in a headline, but as humans. Wake up. We are human. It’s heartbreaking that we have to show pain to be recognized as human.”

Aman M, Student, Diaspora from al-Sindiyana

“Dehumanization of Palestinians is one of the most prevalent barriers to foster genuine solidarity with the cause...And even from my personal experience, which pales in comparison to Palestinians on the ground of course, it’s always been a question of ‘how can I sell people on the general concept that Palestinians deserve to live in dignity.’

Starting at this oftentimes ridiculous ground zero is sometimes necessary with the massive amount of conditioning that people have been subjected to in the imperial core with regard to Palestinians.

However, I think we’re reaching a point where this kind of narrative can cause more harm than good. Rejecting our dehumanization is something we must also actively do to claim what we’re after, which is complete and total liberation.

We need to assert our humanity by force, which is essentially the whole point of the resistance. Taking what you are owed and what you want, without appealing to an audience that hates you, to give you some crumbs or fake sympathy.”

Leali Shalabi, Journalist, Diaspora from Mazraa Al Sharqiya

“Personally, I think the fact that Palestinians still have to prove or remind the world of our humanity reflects how successful the machinery of dehumanization has been. We’ve been narrating our pain and existence for decades, yet the world often treats our grief as content to be consumed rather than testimony to be heard. I don’t know if it will ever feel “safe” to assume we’re seen as human—but I do believe in the quiet rebellion of continuing to speak, create, and exist without asking for permission to be understood.”

Lina Zed, Content Creator in Gaza

“As for the concept of “auditioning for humanity,” it is painful because it reflects a reality in which Palestinians are forced to prove their humanity to the world, whereas their humanity should be recognized without any condition. **I believe that telling our stories in our own voices is our true way of asserting our existence and dignity.**”

Rawan, Student in Gaza

“Honestly, in today’s reality, I don’t think Palestinians can assume the world sees them as human. If the world truly did, they would not remain silent in the face of such clear atrocities. **We are forced to show our pain, our blood, our tears—just to prove that we deserve basic compassion. That is exhausting.**

I don’t know when it will ever be safe to assume our humanity is recognized. Maybe only when justice is done, when the occupation ends, and when we are not asked to “perform” our suffering to be worthy of attention.

Having to ask others to see your humanity strips you of dignity. It makes you feel like you're pleading for something that should never be questioned. We shouldn't have to explain that we are mothers, daughters, students, dreamers—just like everyone else. But we are constantly reduced to numbers, or worse, target.”

Daliah, Diaspora, Radical Writer | Anti-Racism Educator

“I honestly never truly felt human enough for this world, far before the genocide. My Persian half would still give me the chance to be recognized as acceptable, but my Palestinian half always ended up in me experiencing full-on dehumanization.”

Rola Dalloul, Artist and Journalist in Gaza City

“People are intelligent and it’s become difficult to deceive them. I believe that the people stand with Palestine and look upon us with compassion and support us greatly. I saw this through videos throughout the war; it was very moving. **People around the world now want us to live in peace and want Palestine to be free from Israeli occupation; this demonstrates their good character. But of course, all governments and regimes are subject to the world’s superpower, America. They cannot take any real action without America’s approval, especially the Arab regimes.**

I have never seen a racist system or anything like America. It is a country complicit in this genocide. They treated us like animals, as if our lives had no value. It was okay for them to kill innocent people and children every day. What matters to America are the Israeli prisoners and their bodies, while thousands of Palestinian dead remain under the rubble, and we do not know the fate of many of them.

Israel has killed hundreds of Palestinians in Israeli prisons, including doctors, without trial, and stolen their organs. Why is this not being investigated and Israel held accountable? Why is the world silent in the face of this scandal? Everyone knows that Palestinian prisoners were raped to death, so yes, this world is incredibly hypocritical. We saw death every minute during the war and we were subjected to starvation. Meanwhile, all that mattered was the Israeli prisoners held in Gaza. Hamas treated them with mercy and love, but the regimes wanted to ignore that and wanted to consider them criminals and terrorists.

Meaning that people and nations treat us as human beings, but governments don’t.”

Hala Alyan, Poet, Writer, Psychologist

Excerpts from her essay, “Why Must Palestinians Audition for Empathy?”

“If that weren’t enough, Palestinian slaughter is too often presented ahistorically, untethered to reality: It is not attributed to real steel and missiles, to occupation, to policy. To earn compassion for their dead, Palestinians must first prove their innocence. The real problem with condemnation is the quiet, sly tenor of the questions that accompany it: Palestinians are presumed violent—and deserving of violence—until proven otherwise. Their deaths are presumed defensible until proven otherwise. What is the word of a Palestinian against a machinery that investigates itself, that absolves itself of accused crimes? What is it against a government whose representatives have referred to Palestinians as ‘human animals’ and ‘wild beasts’? When a well-suited man can say brazenly and unflinchingly that there is no such thing as a Palestinian people?...

...Of course, literature and the arts play a crucial role in providing context—expanding our empathy, granting us glimpses into other worlds. **But every time I was told I’d humanized the Palestinians, I would have to suppress the question it invoked: What had they been before?...**

...This is demoralizing work, to have to speak constantly in the vernacular of tragedies and atrocities, to say: Look, look. Remember? That other suffering that was eventually deemed unacceptable? Let me hold it up to this one. Let me show you proportion. **Let me earn your outrage. Absent that, let me earn your memory. Please.**”²⁵⁶

Mariam Barghouti, Journalist and Researcher, Ramallah, West Bank, Occupied Palestine

I deeply respect the work of Chatterjee and Subramanian, and I do agree it is *to an extent* an auditioning for humanity, however in that very endeavor of people like Azaiza and Alaqad it becomes telling not of their lack of being human but that of the audience to which they are appealing. **In this way it becomes less of trying to prove their own humanity and more as an act of reminding the world of their own humanness and humanity.** If we look at it this way, we come to recognize that it is the world that has become so dehumanized that it must be reminded of its affinity to other people.

That being said, I also want to draw attention to context, people like Awda, Azaiza, Alaqad are very young (at least in my eyes, being at least 12 years their senior), and not only are they young but they have lived the majority of their lives in a prison, never having seen someone from the outside world, save for the few international workers and reporters that went into the strip on few occasions. They have been in complete isolation, never having even seen the face of an Israeli (as Israel did not have soldiers on the ground before the war, only drones in the sky that unleash waves of bombs every couple of months). In this regard, this profound sense of isolation necessarily moves one to remind the world “*we are like you, flesh and bone.*”

With that, to answer your question I don't think there is ever a climate to assume that the world does *not* see us as humans. I think in trying to prove our humanness we deny it and put it on trial rather than emphasize it as a matter of fact. I recall in many assignments I was commissioned editors would emphasize to me to choose “the human story” and to show “the human side of Palestinians.” I always refuted that attempt claiming that any story is inevitably a human story speaking about the labyrinthine relationships between people and power.

²⁵⁶ Hala Alyan, “Why Must Palestinians Audition for Empathy,” *New York Times Opinion*, 25 October, 2023, <https://editionnytimes.pressreader.com/article/282969634759168>

It is true that one significant part of genocide is to establish dehumanization in order to sustain continued aggression and depopulation campaigns. However, to counter these efforts by *only* affirming one's own humanness can risk turning the issue of colonialism to a mere denial of humanity rather than a an attempt at conquest and control of natural resources and human power.

I think the case of people like Azaiza and Al-Aqad helped them gain sympathy from the world, but did little to establish empathy and affinity for Palestinians as a whole, it became a more individual admiration and sympathy for these individuals while not recognizing the unequal power dynamics and cruelty of Israel. In this regard, Palestinians that were being burned to smithereens, starved to death, and bombed into minced meat were seen as horror stories rather than people being systemically killed by another people.

The issue with assuming that the world does not see us as human is suggesting that it is okay to harm non-humans. It suggests that people can harm other parts of the world if they're not human, and this is dangerous as well.

So when I hear or read a line such as this: “We are just humans, you know...I want the world to see us as humans.” I personally differ from the positionality, and **rather than want the world to see us as humans, I want the world to see the ways in which it engages in power relationships to seek domination, control, and eventually severe abuse. Rather than see us, I want the world to see itself, interrogate itself, and examine what it has done, continues to do.”**

Above I have bolded parts of these women’s testimonies that most shook me or resonated with my thesis. They offer insight into aspects that I did not originally imagine, such as the idea that Palestinians should only be seen begging for food or in tattered rags so as to fit the one-dimensional presentation of Palestinians. Similarly, the exhaustion from having to prove their suffering or humanness, which, in truth, I question if my survey exacerbates this problem—for which I apologize. It is clear to see by these testimonies that Palestinians need to be able to engage in counterstorytelling and that their dehumanization is linked to the suppression of their voices which cannot offer a defense if silenced. Moreover, there is some consensus that Palestinians must continue their resistance against settler-colonialism and an unjust international order. The conversation needs to stop focusing on the classification of “humanity” but the material reality of domination and application of power as being the problem which the collective humanity needs to dismantle.

I wish to extend further to certain aspects above which match the tone, confidence, and language of Leila Khaled. I read Awad’s statement: “Do they only want to see us begging for food?” in the voice of righteous rage and incredulousness. Nearly the entirety of Aman and Rola’s statements could find a home within Khaled’s autobiography, especially as Rola attacks and connects the oppression of Palestinians with U.S. imperialism and their control over Arab

regimes. Aman replicates Khaled's philosophy that peace and humanity cannot be delivered or provided to Palestine/Palestinians—as only through their resistance and determination will lead to their liberation.

As I read Hala and Mariam I saw their identification of the institutional practices which serve to dehumanize Palestinians and echoes throughout my thesis. However, they also provide their opinions and reactions to the concept of “humanizing” Palestinians that was particularly distinct. The writing of Hala, specifically as she questions what the perception of Palestinians was that “required” humanizing, was jarring. Equally evocative was the rhetorical framework used to illustrate the “necessity” of transposing a different identity over Palestinian suffering in order to illicit empathy or to be able to understand the violence as being committed against humans. I found Mariam's address towards the concept of the “human side of Palestinians” as honest and unique, similar to how she explained how she viewed the testimonies of Owda, Alaqad, and Azaiza. That they are young was not something I missed, but the idea that they have largely lived their entire lives under siege and oppression wherein they are daily reminded of the inhumanity of their oppressors and the injustice of International Law that upholds ‘israeli’ impunity was not a framework that I consistently used through which I heard their narratives.

I will once more reiterate my agreement with inverting the mirror of humanity against the oppressor and settler-colonization. Her words: “In this way it becomes less of trying to prove their own humanity and more as an act of reminding the world of their own humanness and humanity. If we look at it this way, we come to recognize that it is the world that has become so dehumanized that it must be reminded of its affinity to other people” are powerful and in my opinion the pathway to decolonization. To provide an intersectional connection I offer Fredrick Douglass' rhetorical description of the slaveholder Sophia Auld which details the corruption of humanity with absolute power (be it slavery or settler-colonialism), or self-imposed dehumanization.

Upon first meeting Sophia Douglass says of her: “...it was a white face beaming with the most kindly emotions;... It was a new and strange sight to me, brightening up my pathway with the light of happiness.”²⁵⁷ Douglass explains that Sophia had never enslaved anyone before and that she was:

²⁵⁷ Fredrick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, in *Only by Experience: An Anthology of Slave Narratives*, edited by Derrick R. Spires et al., (Broadview Press, 2023), 565.

*“a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings...But, alas! This kind heart had but a short time to remain such. The fatal poison of irresponsible power was already in her hands, and soon commenced its infernal work. That cheerful eye, under the influence of slavery, soon became red with rage; that voice, made all of sweet accord, changed to one of harsh and horrid discord; and that angelic face gave place to that of a demon.”*²⁵⁸

For Douglass then, and Barghouti now, humanity cannot be stolen from an oppressed person—it can only be self-extinguished by an oppressor by trying to deny it to others. As Paulo Freire makes explicit: “No one can be authentically human while he prevents others from being so.”²⁵⁹

It is within this framework that I have tried to design my thesis, to allow Palestinians to speak for themselves as the assertion of their humanity (what is more human, from a cultural perspective, than telling stories) while simultaneously participating in doing the necessary work of illustrating the inhumanity within the hegemonic narratives themselves, as well as within those who accept, create, reinforce, and uphold those narratives. I acknowledge that my work remains continuous, as does the process of decolonizing myself. In light of the continual process I offer a closing statement on the “ceasefire” which not only is a false assertion as ‘israel’ continues to kill Palestinians, but also that the process is ceasefire AND a liberated Palestine.

However, before I close with my reflection regarding the “ceasefire” I wish to offer concluding remarks on Fadwa Tuqan and Leila Khaled. As I read through my thesis I cannot help but imagine a torch being passed down from these two women to Owda and Matari and if not a torch then the duty of narrating the Palestinian story against the oppression which seeks to silence and suppress it. Tuqan set out to illustrate how her imprisonment was not only cruel punishment, but also that the behaviour of Palestinian men was hypocritical and stymying the cultural and liberatory growth of Palestine. Tuqan would also “write back” against the Orientalist lens through which Europeans saw her as an Arab woman but also the Arab world in general. Khaled’s autobiography, or manual of liberational education, was experimental in nature by combining her personal narrative with the historical metanarrative of Palestine’s liberation struggle against zionism and imperialism. The effect would enable readers to become a refugee through Khaled rather than read the numbers of Palestinian children displaced from their homes and living in tents and mud. Both writers expose their oppressors, the limitations of certain then-prevailing ideologies, and offer instructions on how to create a better, more egalitarian society. I

²⁵⁸ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, 566.

²⁵⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2005), 85.

think it is also worth noting that Khaled’s autobiography, which had been out of print for many years was recently republished by Midnight Books in 2024; allowing her voice to reach a new generation of readers in a climate that I believe to be more receptive to hearing Palestinian voices. It is my hope that in this same climate the second volume of Tuqan’s autobiography becomes available in English. Khaled and Tuqan remain icons of Palestinian women for their endurance and vocalization of the Palestinian and Palestinian woman’s experience. However, Tuqan and Khaled importantly do not end their autobiographies with a satisfactory conclusion as the Palestinian story of the struggle continues.

“Ceasefire”

Palestine and ‘israel’ agreed to a “ceasefire” on October 9, 2025—two years and two days after the intensified genocide began. I use ceasefire in quotations as ‘israel’ seems only ever to violate “ceasefires” with impunity. Jonah Valdez notes that Palestinian-American writer and foreign policy expert Tariq Kenney-Shawa “expected Israel to violate the new ceasefire deal – as Israel repeatedly did during the first few months of a previous ceasefire before shattering it completely by killing more than 400 Palestinians in a single day – he didn’t expect it to happen so shortly after Trump’s tour of the region.”²⁶⁰ The day after Trump declared the “war” to end ‘israel’ killed at least seven Palestinians who were returning to their homes. In the previous ceasefire which came into effect January 19, 2025 the government media office in Gaza made an announcement on March 2, 2025 that ‘israel’ had violated the “ceasefire” 900 times in 42 days.²⁶¹

‘israel’ has “resumed its ceasefire” after killing more than 100 Palestinians, including 46 children, late Tuesday and into Wednesday (October 28/29) in the “deadliest 24 hours” since the start of the US brokered ceasefire.²⁶² This is the way that western media is recording the actions

²⁶⁰ Jonah Valdez, “Israel’s Mounting Ceasefire Violations in Gaza,” *The Intercept*, 15 October, 2025, <https://theintercept.com/2025/10/15/israel-ceasefire-violations-gaza-aid/>

²⁶¹ “Israel violated ceasefire more than 900 times since 19 January, says Gaza govt. media office,” *Middle East Monitor*, 03 March, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250303-israel-violated-ceasefire-more-than-900-times-since-19-january-says-gaza-govt-media-office/>

²⁶² Maziar Motamedi, “Why did Israel launch air strikes on Gaza, then ‘resume’ truce?” *Al Jazeera*, 29 October, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/liveblog/2025/10/29/live-israel-kills-63-in-gaza-trump-insists-nothing-will-jeopardise-truce>

of ‘israel’ still suggesting that it is participating in a “ceasefire” while they are actively killing Palestinians. This is the very dehumanization of which the Palestinian women above were speaking. Amnesty International has reported on November 27, 2025, 49 days into the “ceasefire,” that 347 Palestinians—including 136 children—have been killed by ‘israel.’²⁶³ This is the present position and likely final position which will be covered in my thesis. I echo the apprehension of Palestinians who know that ‘israel’ remains hell-bent on the total eradication of Palestinians and as the genocide in Gaza claims more media attention ‘israel’ is ramping up their on-going ethnic cleansing in the West Bank which includes the ‘israeli parliament’ advancing a bill to annex the Occupied West Bank.²⁶⁴ Referring once more to the UN report on “skyrocketing” violence in the West Bank introduced above: “since October 2023, more than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or settlers in the West Bank, while thousands have been displaced by attacks, movement restrictions and home demolitions.”²⁶⁵

October featured a plethora of Palestinians returning home to the north of Gaza, hundreds of thousands spending days in heavy traffic. It was heart-warming to see so many Palestinians returning defiantly to their homes. I offer a glimpse into the important and distinct Palestinian Connection to their homes with using Amiry’s autobiography in Appendix VI. Included in the trend of videos of Palestinians returning home were montage videos showing the before and after of homes, including before the intensified genocide and after, as well as before cleaning and after. One such video by sisters Aya and Lina Zed features a montage of the family cleaning their burned and destroyed kitchen.²⁶⁶ The video is a demonstration of resilience, of joy, of family and of love. In the caption Aya writes “Even after everything we’ve lost, I still believe in Gaza. We’re here to rebuild, to stand strong, and to hope[.] Your support means the world to us – link in bio.”

When Owda posted on the “ceasefire” she made sure to note and direct her audience that this “ceasefire” was not the end to Palestinian suffering and oppression; that those in Gaza did not resist and were not killed for a “ceasefire” but for a free Palestine and for Palestinians to be

²⁶³ “Israel’s genocide against Palestinians in Gaza continues unabated despite ceasefire,” *Amnesty International*, 27 November, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/israels-genocide-against-palestinians-in-gaza-continues-unabated-despite-ceasefire/>

²⁶⁴ Tim Hume and News Agencies, “Israel’s parliament advances bill to annex occupied West Bank,” *Al Jazeera*, 22 October, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/10/22/israels-parliament-advances-bill-to-annex-occupied-west-bank>

²⁶⁵ “UN rights office sounds alarm over ‘skyrocketing’ Israeli settler violence during the olive harvest,” *United Nations News*, 21 October, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/10/1166145>

²⁶⁶ @aya_e_zed and lina_e_zed, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQWfu3kiKAq/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

able to live in dignity and with self-determination.²⁶⁷ In her captions Owda writes, “Don’t stop until Palestine is free, from the river to the sea, until justice!” As the United Nations Security Council just voted on November 17, 2025 in support of the colonization of Palestine and removing self-determination from Palestinians I will re-affirm my support of Hamas’ armed resistance, as well as the numerous other resistance organizations, against the imperialist driven and UN normalization of genocide and settler-colonialism. Craig Mokhiber, former director of the New York office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, describes the resolution as “disempower[ing] and further punish[ing] the victims and reward[ing] and empower[ing] the perpetrators [of the genocide].”²⁶⁸ Mokhiber states:

*“Most disturbingly, it hands control of Gaza and the survivors of the genocide over to the United States, a co-perpetrator of the genocide, and provides for the participation of the Israeli regime in decision making. Under the plan, Palestinians themselves are to be granted no such participation in decisions on their own rights, governance, and lives ... In adopting this resolution, the [Security] Council, in effect, has become a mechanism of U.S. oppression, an instrument for the continued unlawful occupation of Palestine, and a complicit actor in Israel’s genocide.”*²⁶⁹

Similar to how the UN and the British before tried to leave Palestinians out of any discussion on the future and sovereignty of Palestine, they are attempting to do so again. We must continue to listen to Palestinians as they alone can be the determinants of what justice must entail, what a Free Palestine looks like, and we must not be cowed by western liberals denunciation of armed resistance.

While the leaders of Hamas have agreed to surrender and be tried for war crimes IF ‘israeli’ leaders are also tried this does not invalidate their efforts to free Palestine from erasure and eradication. I echo many when I say that the disarmament of Hamas and other Palestinian resistance groups should only be determined by Palestinians and only after the disarmament of the terrorist state of ‘israel.’ I will add that our duty within the imperial core is to not only maintain our solidarity for Palestine and other oppressed people, including in Sudan, Congo, and all Indigenous Peoples, but we must be vigilant to hold our own institutions, corporations, and governments responsible for their complicity. On November 4th 2025 it was reported that

²⁶⁷ @wizard_bisan1, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DPl6scgiltz/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

²⁶⁸ Craig Mokhiber, “The UN Embraces Colonialism: Unpacking the Security Council’s mandate for the U.S. colonial administration of Gaza,” *Mondoweiss*, 19 November, 2025, <https://mondoweiss.net/2025/11/the-un-embraces-colonialism-unpacking-the-security-councils-mandate-for-the-u-s-colonial-administration-of-gaza/>

²⁶⁹ Mokhiber, “The UN Embraces Colonialism.”

YouTube deleted over 700 videos from their site which documented ‘israeli’ human rights violations—we cannot let them rewrite history.²⁷⁰ It is also incumbent upon everyone to ensure that the narrative, as it has largely tried to do, does not become one that blames only ‘israeli’ politicians as the scapegoats. ‘israel’ is a violent and sadistic entity whose origin and intent remains to be the eradication of Palestinians from Palestine and the erasure of the history of Palestine.

Palestine is the litmus test of humanity and while we are watching “the rise of fascism” I will stress that it is not *rising* for it has always been here with the inception of Canada and America; the expression of fascism is just now including white heterosexuals. Palestinian counterstorytelling has exposed the global audience to recognize dominant narratives as propaganda but also as a system that oppresses foreign peoples and countries while simultaneously oppressing the working class of the global minority. This class consciousness and solidarity has the potential to be revolutionary. I will let Bisan Owda carry the last word of my thesis as she explains the revolutionary #gazaeffect:

*Do you feel it? This invisible power and lets please agree in calling this power the gaza effect and start using this term. The power that push people to unite against fascism, against colonization, capitalism, against dictatorship, and start acting based on new standards of the world. We need a better world and we can lead this world to where it's a better place. And whatever is controlling the world now, cannot be stronger than us. Gaza freed the entire world. Every single place that is going into a revolution. Unprecedented, some new decisions and events every single place of these is just affected by Gaza Effect so lets use it. And my congrats to the New Yorkers and to everyone taking new decisions and being so brave to have this step.*²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Nikita Mazurov and Jonah Valdez, “YouTube Quietly Erased more than 700 Videos Documenting Israeli Human Rights Violations,” *The Intercept*, 04 November, 2025, https://theintercept.com/2025/11/04/youtube-google-israel-palestine-human-rights-censorship/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=The%20Intercept%20Newsletter

²⁷¹ @wizard_bisan1, 06 November, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DQuEmDLit3F/?igsh=MWhwc3VuMDhocjFlaw==>

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Appendix I

A Grounding of the Current Climate

I will attempt to briefly situate the reader in my positionality while explaining how the conflation of anti-zionism or anti-‘israel’ rhetoric with antisemitism is not only wrong, but is being used to weaponize the claims of antisemitism. I will also address the three spheres of liberalism that are enabling this holocaust, including politics, institutions, and the media. In an effort to avoid any ambiguity the language of this thesis is intentional and direct as my positionality is made clear. Palestine neither has now nor ever had a ‘two-sides’ political query; Palestinians are indigenous to Palestine and zionism and ‘israel’ are settler-colonialism. Palestinian Jews have lived safely in Palestine for a centuries until zionists orchestrated, with the help of the British, the ethnic cleansing, occupation, and genocide of Palestine. Zionism does not equate to Judaism, nor is anti-zionism antisemitic. Palestinians have a legal right under international law to respond and resist, including armed resistance, against the illegal occupation by ‘israel.’²⁷² Conversely, ‘israel,’ as the illegally occupying power, does not have the right to “self-defence” against Palestinians. UN Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Territories of Palestine, Francesca Albanese, states that “Israel cannot claim the right of self-defence against a threat that emanate[s] from the territory it occupies, from a territory that is kept from a belligerent occupation.”²⁷³

In the background of writing my thesis lobbyists and genocidaires are attempting to incorporate the new working definition of antisemitism into legislation for the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) to include criticism of ‘israel.’ However, numerous Jewish advocacy groups emphatically denounce the amendments. Stefanie Fox, the Executive Director of Jewish Voice for Peace published this response (whose use of bold font I have maintained): “Instead, our elected representatives are considering the controversial IHRA definition. Make no mistake: **Legislating the IHRA definition is not about Jewish safety.** The

²⁷² “Palestinians and the Right to Resist.” *Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East*, August 2023. www.cjpme.org/fs_236/

²⁷³ “UN Special Rapporteur: Israel can’t claim ‘right of self-defence.’” *Al Jazeera*, 15 November, 2023. www.aljazeera.com/program/newsfeed/2023/11/15/un-special-rapporteur-israel-cant-claim-right-of-self-defence

only thing it secures is impunity for decades of violating international law and **trampling on Palestinian human rights.**²⁷⁴

Similarly, Independent Jewish Voices Canada (IJV) has responded to the *Canadian Handbook on the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism* by first noting that the *Handbook* was published by Deborah Lyons, who is not Jewish but self-identifies as a Zionist, and that its primary author, Noah Lew, is known for making discredited allegations of antisemitism during his time at McGill University. IJV concluded that “Ultimately, the IHRA definition and Canada’s *Handbook* are not about fighting antisemitism. They are instruments of censorship and repression, weaponized to silence solidarity with Palestinians and to shield Israel from accountability.”²⁷⁵

I will also take this moment to illustrate further that the western push against antisemitism is made comedically farcical when nearly the entire western bloc of the UN, including Canada, USA, UK, France, Australia among others, either voted in 2021 against (USA and Ukraine) or Abstained a UN resolution to combat Nazism. I include the full title of the resolution to highlight the Orwellian doublespeak being practiced: “Resolution 76/149: Combating glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.”²⁷⁶ Furthermore, on November 20, 2025 the U.S. Coast Guard voted for a new policy to remove swastikas (and nooses) from being identified as hate symbols; referring to them now as “potentially divisive” and no longer grounds for dismissal or covering.²⁷⁷ This is a clear demonstration that the effort to combat antisemitism is not in good-faith, but is selectively being used as a weapon for imperial design, suppression, and narrative control. By denying Palestinians the right to speak for themselves they create a narrative wherein they can use violence against Palestinians to say they are fighting against “antisemitism.”

The intention for codifying anti-Zionism or criticism of ‘Israel’ as antisemitism has been to impose a dominating position for controlling the narrative in the three spheres of liberalism:

²⁷⁴ “Jewish Voice for Peace unequivocally opposes the IHRA working definition of antisemitism,” *Jewish Voice for Peace*, 08 February, 2021. www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/2021/02/08/ihra/

²⁷⁵ “Silenced In Our Name: A Jewish Commentary on Canada’s IHRA Handbook.” *Independent Jewish Voices Canada*, May 2025. www.ijvcanda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Silenced-In-Our-Name.pdf

²⁷⁶ United Nations, “A/RES/76/149,” 16 December, 2021, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3951466?ln=en>

²⁷⁷ Chris Walker, “Swastikas and Nooses Are No Longer Hate Symbols Under New Coast Guard Rules,” *Truthout*, 20 November, 2025, <https://truthout.org/articles/swastikas-and-nooses-are-no-longer-hate-symbols-under-new-coast-guard-rules/>

political, institutional, and media. Craig Mokhiber, former director of the New York office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, wrote an op-ed which referenced media personalities who were tried at the Nuremburg Trials and stated that western media companies “Have made themselves part of the mechanism of genocide of Palestine.”²⁷⁸ As politicians and institutions are ignoring the calls of their constituents for boycotts, divestments, and sanctions, (BDS) or calling for a “ceasefire” while “standing with ‘israel’” state violence, professional suppression and intimidation has increased against Palestinian resistance and solidarity over the last two years. Albanese classifies this concept as “Third States” participation in genocide.

One of the most publicized examples of this was the UK labelling Palestine Action as a “terrorist” group for their alleged involvement of spray-painting two military planes. Palestine Action offered the statement that “The real crime here is not red paint being sprayed on these war planes, but the war crimes that have been enabled with those planes because of the UK government’s complicity in Israel’s genocide.”²⁷⁹ On August 9, 2025 the Metropolitan Police arrested at least 532 protestors at Westminster’s Parliament Square on terrorism charges including 521 individuals for displaying signs that commonly read “I oppose genocide- I support Palestine Action.”²⁸⁰ Conversely, Adam Brichto has been attending other Palestine Action demonstrations filming himself talking with the police as he tells them that he supports genocide and the killing of men, women, and children, with a placard saying the same thing. He does this not because he believes in the rubbish but to illustrate that the system is illogical and protecting genocidaires.²⁸¹

Another example includes the US where thirty-three of the fifty states have some form of anti-BDS law or restriction to punish organizations or companies that boycott ‘israel.’²⁸² Ironically, there are no such restrictions regarding boycotts of US companies. Additionally, governments at all levels have pushed for an increase in police violence against protestor

²⁷⁸ Craig Mokhiber, “Will Western Mainstream Media Be Held Accountable for Their Role in Genocide?” *truthout*, 30 August, 2024. <https://truthout.org/articles/will-western-mainstream-media-be-held-accountable-for-their-role-in-genocide/>

²⁷⁹ Imogen James and Ellie Price, “Palestine Action group to be banned, home secretary confirms.” *BBC*, 23 June, 2025. www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g83l33wdeo

²⁸⁰ Adam Hale, “Palestine Action protest arrests rise to more than 500.” *BBC*, 10 August, 2025. <http://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqjyzzlwk2go>

²⁸¹ Adam Brichto [@adam_brichto] *Instagram*, 27 November, 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DRkQRFdjWMm/?igsh=bWRkMTZzaXJzYzZo>

²⁸² Matthew Impelli, “Map Shows States Where Boycotting Israel is Illegal.” *Newsweek*, 29 April, 2024. www.newsweek.com/pro-palestinian-protest-states-colleges-illegal-bds-1895292

solidarity for Palestinian rights, most iconically focused at university campuses. The state authorized violence through the use of police forces has been weaponized to intimidate people from protesting or becoming involved as well as physically punishing those whose conscience forbids them to participate in genocide.

At the University of Waterloo, from where this thesis is being written, it is impossible to deny that the UW administration has a pro-‘israel’ bias which is clear in their leadership. I would like to illustrate the differences between two President’s statements published by UW President Vivek Goel, “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine” and “On the Israel-Hamas War.” With regards to Russia, Goel notes first that Putin is “the leader of a militarized totalitarian regime” and “continues his unprovoked assault on Ukraine and its people.”²⁸³ Putting aside NATO aggression, regime change, and escalation, Goel identifies Russia as the aggressor, Ukraine as a state with a people. Now to contrast with his statement on the people in Gaza, Goel writes about the “Devastation [which] continues to unfold as the war between Israel and Hamas escalates.”²⁸⁴ This frame names ‘israel’ as a state and shields the fact that ‘israel’ is killing Palestinian civilians by using the name Hamas. Goel continues to say, “the University of Waterloo condemns the heinous terrorist attack by Hamas that included the murders and kidnappings of innocent civilians. As we continue to bear witness to the escalating violence and loss of innocent lives, we join international voices, including the United Nations, to condemn the rapidly worsening humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The increasing impact on innocent civilians is horrific.” It is plain to see that Goel never condemns nor names that ‘israel’ is committing “heinous terrorist attacks” nor is ‘israel’ named as creating the conditions which are killing Palestinian civilians—dismissing it as “worsening humanitarian conditions.” While Goel cares enough to embed a link with a large visual button to donate to the Red Cross to aid Ukrainians, no such effort is afforded to aid the Palestinians undergoing a genocide. Plainly, for Goel, Palestinians are not deserving of the same humanitarian care as Ukrainians.

For more context, it should be noted that on October 16, 2023, Marco Chown Oved published in the Toronto Star that “Already, more than 2,600 Palestinians have been killed by

²⁸³ Vivek Goel, “President’s statement on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine,” *Waterloo News*, 04 March, 2022, <https://uwaterloo.ca/news/presidents-news/presidents-statement-russias-invasion-ukraine>

²⁸⁴ Vivek Goel, “Statement on the Israel-Hamas War,” *Waterloo News*, 16 October, 2023, <https://uwaterloo.ca/news/presidents-news/statement-israel-hamas-war>

Israel's weeklong bombing effort"²⁸⁵ and quoted Samir who added "It's not a war. There's no real fighting. It's only the targeting of civilians' houses, ambulances and hospitals."²⁸⁶ While Goel uses a much more aggressive tone towards the Russian invasion it can't be stressed enough the disparity between the two situations. As reported by Yuras Karmanau in the *Toronto Star*, since the beginning of the invasion on February 24, a span of 11 days, "The UN human rights office said at least 351 civilians have been confirmed killed..."²⁸⁷ 'israel' was killing on average 289 Palestinians per day compared to Russia killing an average of 32 Ukrainians per day, thus the tone does not match the atrocity. If all lives matter equally, why the inconsistency?

Furthermore, a student activist group, UWaterloo Voices for Palestine, has been an active part of the global Intifada movement and students across the west mobilizing for Palestine. Their investigations and insight have proven that UW is actively participating and partnering with the zionist regime that is murdering the families of students, alumni, as well as former professors at UW, and students that were accepted into UW but unable to escape the world's largest open air concentration camp. A report published by the UWaterloo Voices for Palestine has determined that the "University of Waterloo Endowment Fund and the University of Waterloo Pension Plan contain holdings in companies that are directly involved in the Israel's illegal occupation and genocide. These holdings are in 63 companies with a total investment value of \$59,770,801. Of those companies, 24 are weapons manufacturers with a total investment value of \$8,920,447."²⁸⁸ The steadfast resilience and historic protesting of the student movement has pressured the UW administration into disclosing their investments which has led to the true(r) figure being revised to a massive \$230,896,949 invested in complicit companies. While UW has thus far refused to divest, which follows the precedent in which they refused to divest from apartheid South Africa, a two question referendum was voted on by the students in which 84% of students vote in favour of severing a partnership with Technion-Israel Institute of Technology due to its role in the research and development of technology used by the 'israeli' Occupation Forces. On the second question 89% of students voted in favour of UW reviewing its partnerships and investment portfolios to ensure alignment with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles and

²⁸⁵ Marco Chown Oved, "Caught in the path of war," *Toronto Star*, 16 October, 2023.

²⁸⁶ Marco Chown Oved, "Caught in the path of war."

²⁸⁷ Yuras Karmanau, "PUTIN VOWS NO MERCY," *Toronto Star*, 06 March, 2022.

²⁸⁸ "Proposal for University of Waterloo to Divest From Israeli Genocide and Occupation." *UWaterloo Voices for Palestine*, March 2025. [UW-Disclose-Divest.pdf](#)

Amnesty International, to prioritize institutions that demonstrate a commitment to human rights, peace, and international law.²⁸⁹

It should be noted that, once more, as a result of student protesting and the counternarrative exposing UW's ethical investing hypocrisy, the administration has signaled that there are "no plans to renew the partnership" with Technion.²⁹⁰ However, it must be made clear that UW has been obstinate against Palestinian human rights. The UW administration had filed a \$1.5 million dollar lawsuit on June 21 2024 against a student encampment on green space that was set up to encourage the university to divest from genocide complicity. Sarah Ahmed, one of the students named in the lawsuit stated: "This is a clear attempt to intimidate us and silence our calls for divestment from companies involved in the oppression of Palestinians."²⁹¹ Zahra Yarali offers an analysis on the ways which habitual media vilified the protest encampments, including: framing the protestors as the problem, describing the encampments as militarized and dystopian, and suggesting that the police violence against peaceful protestors was necessary and appropriate.²⁹²

The third sphere of liberalism, which has also been the most visible, is the corruption of media. Prior to the genocide and imperialist invasion of Iraq western media served to manufacture consent by lying about weapons of mass destruction and presenting liberal imperialist viewpoints. I use the example of the invasion of Iraq not only because it represents the greatest political fabrication of my lifetime, but also to highlight that the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was a chief architect of the invasion and he is once more being included in the imperialist colonization of the Arab world by being named in Trump's colonization plan for Gaza. While western media is trying to endorse the "peace plan" it was first weaponized to manufacture consent for the genocide and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The widely denounced and debunked narratives of forty beheaded babies²⁹³ and mass rape hoax were utilized to quell questions regarding the vastly disproportionate response by the 'israeli' regime. It's crucial to

²⁸⁹ "Proposal to Divest." *UWVfP*, [UW-Disclose-Divest.pdf](#)

²⁹⁰ Alicia Wang, "UW will not renew partnership with Technion," *Imprint*, 22 September, 2025, <https://uwimprint.ca/breaking-uw-will-not-renew-partnership-with-technion/>

²⁹¹ Janelle Gunaratnam, "Occupy UW holds press conference in response to \$1.5 million lawsuit," *Imprint*, 28 June, 2024, <https://uwimprint.ca/occupy-uw-holds-press-conference-in-response-to-1-5-million-lawsuit/>

²⁹² Zahra Yarali, "April: NYT and WSJ Vilify Student Organizers," *Institute for Palestine Studies*, 16 December, 2024, <https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/1656594>

²⁹³ After U.S. President "Genocide Joe" Biden lied about seeing footage of the "beheaded babies" the White House would have to walk back his statement saying he had seen footage produced by 'israel,' however, the damage and lie had already been used and could not be contained.

understand that these stories were pushed by ‘israel’ and reported by the west without verifying their veracity which is the foundation of proper journalism. Dr. Assal Rad, “The Headline Fixer,” published a segment for Al Jazeera’s “The Listening Post” wherein she explains how western media uses language to directly influence readers towards a pro-‘israel’ bias.²⁹⁴ Rad offers explicit examples of hypocrisy and double standards showing how western media’s use of language has no basis of journalistic integrity.

After Palestinians told the world through social media of the disgustingly evil killings at the GHF sites the “revelation” of the ‘israeli’ offensive force being given orders to kill civilians being starved to death was reported by Haaretz newspaper, an ‘israeli’ owned media company. It’s important to note that Palestinians have been so routinely dehumanized that their official testimonies are so often only believed when reported on by western voices. Rad offers this example and others such as the west only discussing the Hannibal doctrine after Haaretz reported it, or that Haaretz is documenting that US physicians are being barred from the West Bank by ‘israel’ despite that the West Bank is sovereign territory. These are but a few of the examples which leads Rad to denounce western media as being less competent and with less journalistic integrity. She also routinely criticizes the regurgitation of ‘israeli’ talking points and framing, such as CNN, AP News, AFP News, and the Washington Press all directing their readers to a very specific perspective as all four offer a headline that states either ‘israeli’ military or Netanyahu rejects or denounces the report that documents ‘israel’ killing Palestinians at aid sites.²⁹⁵ Rad also notes a similar occurrence when western media reported on ‘israel’ killing 104 Palestinians, including 46 children, during the “ceasefire” with an Instagram post of CBS News, NPR, Washington Post, and NBC News with headlines that begin, “Israel says” with either “ceasefire back on,” “resuming the ceasefire,” or “truce has resumed;” all with Rad’s note, “This is not journalism.”²⁹⁶

Other forms of journalistic malfeasance which the western media participates in is what Arwa Mahdawi calls the “adultification” of Palestinian children. Mahdawi highlights the particularly damning video of CNN host Kasie Hunt refer to Hind Rajab, a five-year-old girl

²⁹⁴ “Assal Rad: The headline fixer | The Listening Post,” *Al Jazeera*, 26 May, 2024.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8sPJBqnOEE

²⁹⁵ Assal Rad (@assalrad), “Look at how Western media frames the story of Israeli troops deliberately shooting at Palestinians getting aid...,” Instagram, 28 June, 2025,

www.instagram.com/p/DLbL_zVOAzY/?igsh=ejZrbmF3dXJxNmtr

²⁹⁶ @assalrad, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DQZxrWygDOP/?igsh=MTc4MmM1YmI2Ng==>

targeted and killed by 'israel' as a "woman who was killed in Gaza."²⁹⁷ In a Prism investigation regarding the double standards of western media they determined through interviews with numerous journalists that newsroom leadership would designate one reporter to lead the coverage, typically white, male, and with little knowledge about the region. Furthermore, "The perception in newsrooms, the journalists told Prism, was that having Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim heritage made a reporter biased and unable to accurately cover Palestine and Israel."²⁹⁸ The investigation also includes the interactive dossier created by Writers Against the War on Gaza as they illustrate how *The New York Times* is not objective in its reporting, listing 21 current and former staff with ties to 'israel' or the 'israeli' lobby. Faras Ghani, writing for *Al Jazeera* pulls from numerous investigations which all determine the same fact of western double standards towards pro-'israel' bias. Ghani quotes Rad: "You see Haaretz using words like genocide, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, and Jewish terror to describe settlers and settler violence in the West Bank against Palestinians. You see none of that language on the Western side. It just doesn't exist. It will never be described that way in the West."²⁹⁹ Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME) also highlighted how a CBC anchor, Natasha Fatah, corrected and limited the language of Palestinian-Canadian Israa Alsaafin, who was mourning the killing of her brother and the genocide by responding that "war" is more appropriate and stating that "we [CBC reporters] cannot use that word [genocide] to describe what is happening."³⁰⁰ CBC would be later pressured to issue an apology, but once more the suppression already served its purpose.

As traditional western media focuses on pro-'israel' rhetoric and motivation while producing anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian racism, humanity turns to social media to understand the true horror of the genocide as it is being live-streamed. The 'israeli' regime refuses to allow independent journalists to enter Gaza while also systematically assassinating over 274 Palestinian journalists.³⁰¹ Social media has proven to be a lifeline for Palestinians to be heard and for the world to witness the cruelest acts of barbarity. However, as social media is also a

²⁹⁷ Arwa Mahdawi, "The adultification of children has consequences from Palestine to the US," *The Guardian*, 04 May, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/may/04/adultification-children-palestine-us>

²⁹⁸ Laura Albast, "'I'm so dehumanized': Journalists say U.S. newsrooms treat Palestine with fear and contempt," 09 September, 2025, <https://prismreports.org/2025/09/09/journalists-news-media-bias-palestine/>

²⁹⁹ Faras Ghani, "The Sharp Contrast: How Israeli and Western Media Cover the War on Gaza," *Al Jazeera*, 05 March, 2025, <https://institute.aljazeera.net/en/ajr/article/3081>

³⁰⁰ The CJPME Media Centre Team, "CBC tells Palestinian Mourning her brother's death on air that they cannot use the word genocide," *CJPME*, https://www.cjpmemap.ca/2025_01_22_ai_cbc_a_final

³⁰¹ "Israel's war on Gaza deadliest conflict ever for journalists, says report." *Al Jazeera*, 02 April, 2025. www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/4/2/gaza-war-deadliest-ever-for-journalists-says-report

controlled entity, this has led to widespread and unequal suppression. In December 2023, Human Rights Watch released a 51-page report called, “Meta’s Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook.” In the report’s summary they stated: “While this appears to be the biggest wave of suppression of content about Palestine to date, Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, has a well-documented record of overly broad crackdowns on content related to Palestine.”³⁰²

³⁰² “Meta’s Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook.” *Human Rights Watch*, December 2023.

Appendix II

zionism: Settler-colonialism

I feel it necessary to explain the history of zionism as the hegemonic narrative attempts to sanitize settler-colonization and genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Without understanding the true history of zionism we have a distorted view of the nature of zionism which it has implications for how we view the resistance against zionism.

Zionism has its origins in the late 1800s as a response to European antisemitism. In 1896 Theodor Herzl published a pamphlet called *Der Judenstaat* which called for collusion with a European power to colonize a non-European land as a Jewish State.³⁰³ European organizations, largely motivated by imperialism and antisemitism, began preparing and funding Jewish colonization efforts. Eventually, Herzl's European power came from British Imperialism in the form of the Balfour Declaration in 1917 which promised a Jewish state in Palestine.³⁰⁴ It should be noted that the zionists had debated numerous options of where to colonize including Argentina, Cyprus, and Mozambique. Elsewhere are full accounts of the true history of violence and massacres which were always at the foundation of zionism, as ethnic cleansing and genocide are implicit elements of settler-colonialism. However, in order to provide context certain atrocities and consequences must be understood as they provide the background politics of Fadwa Tuqan and Leila Khaled, as well as creating the framework for the intensified genocide which Bisan Owda is attempting to survive.

In his book, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, Dr. Rashid Khalidi notes of the Great 1936-39 Arab Revolt against British rule that 14-17 percent of the adult Palestinian male population was killed, wounded, imprisoned, or exiled as the British used overwhelming military force to quell the Indigenous population. Additionally, Jewish immigration raised the Jewish population from 18 percent of the

³⁰³ Samir Abed-Rabbo, "Herzl's Zionism and Settler Colonialism in Palestine," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1, (Winter 2024), 31.

³⁰⁴ Jamal Nabulsi, "Reclaiming Palestinian Indigenous Sovereignty," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 52, No. 2, (2023), 35.

total population in Palestine in 1932 to 31 percent in 1939.³⁰⁵ The devastating violence which the British used created the conditions necessary for the Zionist colonization of Palestine.

Although Zionists could not have gained their foothold without the British forces they eventually grew impatient with British immigration policy and became increasingly antagonistic and eventually outright hostile. The Zionist terrorist militia known as the Stern gang assassinated British officials in 1944 and in 1946 blew up the King David Hotel—which was the British HQ and killed 91 people.³⁰⁶ *Al-Nakba*, ‘the catastrophe,’ which unfolded between 1947-1949 was at the time the most devastating years in modern Palestinian history. Khalidi writes, “some 80 percent of the Arab population of the territory that at war’s end became the new state of Israel had been forced from their homes and lost their lands and property. At least 720,000 of the 1.3 million Palestinians were made refugees. Thanks to the violent transformation, Israel controlled 78 percent of the territory of former Mandatory Palestine.”³⁰⁷ The United Nations affirms that “over 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee massacres and mass expulsions and forcible transfers...”³⁰⁸ The *Nakba* threatened and displaced Khaled, but Tuqan was safe in Nablus as the terrorist campaign did not reach her until after 1967.

The Zionist invasion was organized in advance and known as Plan Dalet, which included 13 operations “to capture cities and villages in the part of Palestine which the Partition Plan of November 1947 had allotted to the Arabs, thus making impossible an Arab Palestinian state as proposed in that Plan...”³⁰⁹ Rosemary Sayigh also notes Plan Dalet used terrorism as a tactical and strategic mechanism:

*Terrorism was deliberately used not merely to create panic, but also to ensure that each man would be concerned primarily with the safety of his own family. Mass killing and rape were selectively used to build up an atmosphere in which men were forced to put the honour of their womenfolk and the lives of their children ahead of their patriotism.*³¹⁰

³⁰⁵ Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917-2017*, (New York: Picador, 2020), 8.

³⁰⁶ Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine*, 71.

³⁰⁷ Khalidi, 58.

³⁰⁸ “Right of return of Palestinian refugees must be prioritised over political considerations: UN experts.” *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, 21 June, 2023. www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2023/06/right-return-palestinian-refugees-must-be-prioritised-over

³⁰⁹ Rosemary Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, (Zed Books Ltd., 1979), 74.

³¹⁰ Sayigh, *The Palestinians*, 76.

This particular passage is important because it challenges the master narrative that tries to hold zionism in a positive light; the false slogan of “a land without a people for a people without a land” is clearly seen as violent settler-colonialism that used terror, rape, and massacres as strategy. While massacres and dispossession continued, the next “big” event was in 1967.

Al-Naksa ‘the setback’ followed in 1967 also known as the Six-Day War which saw the ‘israeli’ regime, having gained the support of the United States, seize control over the remaining territory of Palestine and enforce a military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem.³¹¹ Continuing their eradication doctrine the ‘israeli’ regime bombed and invaded Lebanon in 1982 as an attempt to destroy the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization). The ‘israeli’ regime used warplanes to bomb buildings in Beirut, including residential, before an invasion and ten-week siege of Beirut.

Like Plan Dalet, the ‘israeli’ invasion of Lebanon, wherein 300,000 Palestinian refugees were camped, was also deliberate terrorism for the eradication of Palestinians, both in body and the spirit of resistance. Despite a supposed “cease-fire” on August 12th ‘israel’ continued to carry out massacres on the twin Palestinian Sabra and Shatila camps in Beirut in September. Within the ten-week invasion and siege ‘israel’ killed more than nineteen-thousand Palestinians and Lebanese, mostly civilians, and injured more than thirty thousand.³¹²

Khalidi offers the findings of the Kahan Commission which names ‘israeli’ defense minister (and chief architect of the Invasion plan) Ariel Sharon along with ‘israeli’ prime minister Menachem Begin as being directly and indirectly responsible for the Sabra and Shatila massacres—which saw more than thirteen hundred Palestinian and Lebanese men, women, and children murdered over a month after the August ceasefire.³¹³ This same Sharon would be found guilty in 1995 of killing 270 Egyptian and Sudanese prisoners of war during the 1956 Invasion of Egypt.³¹⁴ He earned the nickname, “the Bulldozer” when in 1971 in the Gaza Shati Refugee camp “he destroyed some 2000 houses, uprooted, displaced, and deported 16,000 Palestinian refugees, and killed an unknown number of civilians and fighters.”³¹⁵ Ramzy Baroud reports that during the 1982 Invasion of Lebanon Sharon became known as “the Butcher of Beirut” after “an

³¹¹ Yumna Patel. “56 years of occupation: Explaining the ‘Naksa.’” *Mondoweiss*, 05 June, 2023.

<https://mondoweiss.net/2023/06/56-years-of-occupation-explaining-the-palestinian-naksa/>

³¹² Khalidi, 143.

³¹³ Khalidi, 159.

³¹⁴ Ramzy Baroud, *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People’s Struggle*, (Pluto Press, 2006), 30

³¹⁵ Baroud, *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, 30.

estimated 2200 people were slaughtered between 6pm, September 16, 1982 and 8am, September 18, 1982.”³¹⁶

The ”Butcher of Beirut” would also instigate the Second Intifada, also known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, when he knowingly incited outrage from Palestinians by forcing his way into Al-Aqsa Mosque surrounded by over 1000 ‘israeli’ troops. Al-Aqsa Mosque is the third most revered holy site for Muslims and Palestinians and others all warned Sharon once he announced his plan that he would be instigating violence. Baroud writes “As predicted, a volcano of hostilities erupted and scores of Palestinians were killed and wounded on the grounds of the site.”³¹⁷ This boastful ‘israeli’ terrorist would be the ‘israeli’ prime minister during the Intifada. What this is demonstrating is that zionism and ‘israeli’ society reward sadistic killers of Palestinians; that carrying out vile atrocities does not inhibit ones career, but emboldens it.

The ‘israeli’ regime continued, nearly unabated, their genocidal bloodlust using terrorism referred to as “mowing the lawn.” The renowned scholar Dr. Norman Finkelstein, whose parents were Jewish Holocaust survivors, clarified the phrase as an “...Israeli expression. You go in, and you kill a thousand people, destroy everything in sight, and Israel calls that ‘mowing the lawn.’”³¹⁸ When Hamas was democratically elected as the seat of government in Gaza in 2006 the US/‘israeli’ regime immediately imposed harsh sanctions on Gaza and attempted a coup in 2007 while imposing a more severe siege on Gaza.³¹⁹ The ‘israeli’ regime followed the siege with ground and air invasions in 2008/9 called “Operation Cast Lead” wherein ‘israel’ killed at least 1,400 Palestinians, 1000 of whom were civilians.³²⁰ The ‘israeli’ regime’s next terrorist attack was Operation Pillar of Defence in 2012 which killed 100 Palestinian civilians in Gaza.³²¹ The ‘israeli’ regime’s most genocidal campaign happened in 50 days of 2014 in the name of “Operation Protective Edge” wherein they killed 2,251 Palestinians, 1,426 of whom were

³¹⁶ Baroud, 30.

³¹⁷ Baroud, 23.

³¹⁸ Norman Finkelstein, “Gaza Ceasefire: After 1,800+ Dead, What Led Israel to Stop the Assault – And what Comes Next?” interview by Aaron Maté and Amanda Goodman, *Democracy Now!*, 14 August, 2014, www.democracynow.org/2014/8/5/ceasefire_after_gaza_assault_leaves_1800

³¹⁹ Noam Chomsky, “Ceasefires in Which Violations Never Cease,” in *On Palestine: Noam Chomsky & Ilan Pappé*, ed. by Frank Barat (Penguin Books, 2015), 184.

³²⁰ Norman Finkelstein, *Gaza: An Inquest into Its Martyrdom*, (University of California Press, 2018), 68-69.

³²¹ Finkelstein, *Gaza*, 205.

civilians and 551 being children.³²² The west continues to use the façade of offensive killing campaigns targeting civilians as defending ‘israel.’

This “incremental genocide,”³²³ the term which Ilan Pappé used to describe the ‘israeli’ regime’s policy towards Palestine, has culminated into the on-going intensified genocide—a name which does not offer a full account of the reality. Beyond genocide the ‘israeli’ regime can be charged with urbicide, domicide, politicide, ecocide, scholasticide, culturcide, and medicide. As these sentences are being typed ‘israel’ is starving Palestinians in Gaza to death or killing the desperate souls that are forced into ‘death traps’ that dangle food at the end of the barrel of a gun.³²⁴

Each day ‘israel’ kills more men, women, and children, huddled in tents or trying to survive the most public and open evil while the global citizens demand humanity from their complicit governments. A report from ‘israeli’ professor, Yaakov Garb, published June 1st 2025 stated that the ‘israelis’ have “disappeared” more than 377, 000 Palestinians from Gaza; this is a drastic increase from the estimated 64,000 Palestinians killed from the official count and the conservative estimate of 187, 000 by the Lancet medical journal from June 2024.³²⁵ Despite having obligations to prevent a genocide many western governments offer little more than words or PR stunts, such as the air drops of aid which at best dehumanize and humiliate Palestinians, and at worst prove entirely ineffective, financially preposterous, and even fatal, such as killing 15-year-old Muhannad Zakaria Eid.³²⁶

After ‘israel’ convinced the west to sanction and remove United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) from the management of humanitarian aid distribution the regime designated the U.S. Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) to the role. Palestinians and global journalists alike have pointed out that the GHF operations are akin to a fantasy of evil as dramatized in The Hunger Games or Squid Games. Sandra Gathmann reports that the ‘israeli’

³²² United Nations, *Report of the detailed findings of the independent commission of inquiry established pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution S-21/1*, 25 June, 2015, A/HRC/29/CRP.4, www.ochaopt.org/content/key-figures-2014-hostilities-ftn1, 153.

³²³ Ilan Pappé, “A Brief History of Israel’s Incremental Genocide,” in *On Palestine: Noam Chomsky & Ilan Pappé*, ed. by Frank Barat (Penguin Books, 2015), 147.

³²⁴ “Israeli soldiers ‘ordered’ to shoot unarmed Gaza aid seekers: Report.” *Al Jazeera*, 27 June, 2025.

www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/27/israeli-soldiers-ordered-to-shoot-at-unarmed-gaza-aid-seekers-report

³²⁵ “New Data Suggest The Death-Toll From The Gaza Genocide Is Much Higher Than Previously Listed,” *The Dissident*, 24 June, 2025. <https://the307.substack.com/p/new-data-suggest-the-death-toll-from>

³²⁶ “Palestinian boy killed in Gaza aid drop as starvation toll rises to 217,” *Al Jazeera*, 09 August, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/9/israeli-forces-kill-aid-seekers-as-gaza-starvation-death-toll-rises>

regime, in coordination with the GHF distribution sites, uses drones with a green light to signal to the Palestinians, whom they are starving to death, that they have five minutes to collect the humanitarian aid and then after five minutes the drones signal a red light which unleashes waves of targeted machine gun fire to wound and kill the aid seekers.³²⁷ It has also been reported that the GHF has hired anti-Islamic biker gang members from the Infidels Motorcycle Club as “security” at the distribution sites.³²⁸ Charlie Jaay reports that both the UN and Doctors Without Borders (or Médecins Sans Frontières/MSF) warned that the GHF model “risks the safety and dignity of Palestinians seeking aid,” with MSF calling the GHF “a mechanism of dehumanisation and orchestrated killing.”³²⁹ This is the evil that is zionism; it cannot be reformed and must be destroyed. This is what generations of Palestinians have been resisting against.

³²⁷ “Gaza aid killings | Start Here,” *Al Jazeera*, 01 July, 2025. www.aljazeera.com/video/start-here/2025/7/1/gaza-aid-killings-start-here

³²⁸ Andy Verity, Tom Beal, and Will Dahlgreen, “Anti-Islamic US biker gang members run security at deadly Gaza aid sites,” *BBC*, 10 September, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cm2zy4l8jgeo>

³²⁹ Charlie Jaay, “Bigoted biker gang run security at GHF aid sites in Palestine,” *The Canary*, 11 September, 2025, <https://www.thecanary.co/global/world-analysis/2025/09/11/biker-gang-ghf/>

Appendix III

Arabic Autobiography

I wish to state that this introduction of the Arabic tradition of autobiography in no way implies that Palestinians are monolithic nor that they strictly adhere to the (in this case generalizing) Arabic tradition.

There is a misconception imposed upon the literary genre of autobiography that intentionally promulgates the notion of autobiography as western. Western culture agitates itself as the dominant culture with its grip on literary scholarship to adopt a paternalistic and dismissive view of non-western literature—especially within the field of autobiography. Thankfully, postcolonial and CRT scholarship continues to prove such coloniality to be inventive and prescriptive.

There is a long tradition of Arabic autobiography which, according to Dwight F. Reynolds, “was clearly established in the Arabic tradition no later than the early twelfth century, although the earliest examples of Arabic autobiography can be traced back at least as far as the ninth century.”³³⁰ Within the exclusionary and naturally biased creation of a “canon” for autobiography, it was determined, by western literary critics within the mid-twentieth century, that autobiography belonged to the western tradition, a “cultural product unique to modern western civilization.”³³¹ Reynolds provides this quote from Georges Gusdorf who writes in 1956:

*It would seem that autobiography is not to be found outside our cultural area; one would say that it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men of other cultures; but those men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonizing to a mentality that was not their own...*³³²

Gusdorf explains the “concern peculiar to Western man” as:

*The concern, which seems so natural to us, to turn back on one’s own past, to recollect one’s life in order to narrate it, is not at all universal. It asserts itself only in recent centuries and only on a small part of the map of the world.*³³³

³³⁰ Dwight F. Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Tradition*, (University of California Press, 2001), 2.

³³¹ Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Tradition*, 17.

³³² Reynolds, 17.

³³³ Reynolds, 17.

This coloniality is, obviously, racist, dehumanizing, and narrow-minded. To believe that societies outside the global minority do not reflect on their lives to tell stories is an absurd assumption. Within Gusdorf's essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," are repeated assertions that any "non-western" groups are "primitive," which alone I suggest discredits his utility. To believe, worse yet publish, in 1956 that you believe ethnologist claims that "primitive societies" possess an "unconsciousness of personality,"³³⁴ suggests a flawed and racist grasp of humanity as a concept and one in which a group believes it is upon themselves to determine the humanity of others as if humanity was not inherent.

Reynolds also includes translations of early Arabic autobiographies which prove inept Gusdorf's assertion that it is only a western man that "recollects one's life in order to narrate it." Michael Cooperson translates part of *Khatm al-awliya* (The Seal of the Saints) as part of the autobiography of al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, born approximately 820-830 CE. Quickly does the translation disprove Gusdorf:

*My career began because God favored me with a father—God rest his soul—who pressed me to take up the pursuit of knowledge. When I was eight years old, he began to instruct me and to encourage me to study...He thus acquainted me, still a youth, with the sciences of hadith and legal reasoning.*³³⁵

Reynolds provides further examples of literary critics attempting to gatekeep the genre within the western cultural sphere, such as the French critic Georges May, who situates autobiography specifically within the cultural influence of Christianity, and Roy Pascal.³³⁶

Reynolds details various forms of Arabic biography and autobiography, including *sira*, *tarjama*, *barnamaj*, *fahrasa*, and *manaqib*, though he narrows only the *sira* and *tarjama* as biography that would develop also into autobiography. Reynold's explains that *sira* is:

*Derived from the verb sara, meaning 'to go' or 'to travel,' the noun sira denoted a path or journey, one's manner of proceeding, and by extension, the behavior or conduct of an individual. It eventually came to mean a biography, in particular that of the Prophet Muhammad. The form soon came to serve as a vehicle for the retelling of other famous lives,...*³³⁷

³³⁴ Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," trans. James Olney, in Olney's *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, (Princeton University Press, 1980), 30.

³³⁵ Reynolds, 121.

³³⁶ Reynolds, 18.

³³⁷ Reynolds, 37-38.

Reynolds continues to note that “The term *sira* grew to encompass autobiographies as well, as seen in the case of the work of another al-Mu’ayyad, al-Mu’ayyad al-Shirazi (d. 1077), who recounts the events of his own life...”³³⁸

The *tarjama*, which developed into a second form of autobiography, consists of:

*an account of the subject’s name and ancestry, date of birth (and death if applicable), a catalog of teachers (mashyakha, mu’jam, or thabat), a bibliography of works written by the subject (fihrist or fahrassa), travel and pilgrimage accounts (rihla), and collections of entertaining or illuminating anecdotes (nawadir and akhbar). In addition, depending on the subject’s professional affiliation, a tarjama might include collections of personal letters and formal epistles (rasa’il and ikhwaniyyat), selection of poetry (shi’r), accounts of visions and dreams (manamat or manazir), and accounts of minor miracles (karamat) and virtues (manaqib).*³³⁹

I found the inclusion of teachers to be particularly interesting and informative. In reading Tuqan and Khaled both writers include the names of their teachers, both their literal teachers, such as Ibrahim or Amirah, but also in their indirect mentors, be they poets like Tuqan or revolutionaries like Khaled.

The *tarjama* focused less on the narration of the life story which was called the *sira* of the *tarjama*, but it also differed significantly from the western autobiography from the wealth of its inclusivity. Reynolds notes that “In the West, it is relatively rare for this narrative to be coupled directly with a person’s literary, artistic, or intellectual output; even personal letters are often edited and published separately.”³⁴⁰ It must be noted that both Fadwa Tuqan and Leila Khaled include in their autobiographies a sample of their poetry, and in the case of Khaled, copies of letters from Bantam Books which did not to publish the autobiography, feeling it was “not an appropriate moment.”

Reynolds proves that Arabs had a version of biography and autobiography which was their own and was established with the works of Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 CE) However, Reynolds also includes a quote from Richard N. Coe which is entirely imperialistic and grossly denigrating towards the Global Majority which characterizes the western attitude towards autobiography:

The Childhood [autobiography] is a genre which presupposes a sophisticated culture. It is inconceivable among primitives; even in the contemporary Third World, it emerges only in imitation of culturally more advanced models. It demands a sense of form, and the intellectual ability to adapt the ill-balanced and misshapen material of experience to the

³³⁸ Reynolds, 38.

³³⁹ Reynolds, 42-43.

³⁴⁰ Reynolds, 43.

*harmony of literary expression without much distortion of the original truth.*³⁴¹ (Bold to clarify Reynolds original emphasis)

The sheer narcissism to imagine that only European culture was sufficiently sophisticated enough and that they were the only peoples on Earth with the compacity to write honestly and intelligently about one's own life is astounding and disgusting. This arrogance and sense of entitlement helps explain why Eurocentric ideology believes it can or *must* speak for others. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson also criticize such limitations imposed by western theorists noting that:

*Early twentieth-century theorists installed this master narrative of 'the sovereign self' as an institution of literature and culture, and identified a canon of representative self life writings. Implicit in this canonization, however, is the assumption that many other kinds of life writings produced at the same time have lesser value and were not 'true' autobiography—the slave narrative, narratives of women's domestic lives, coming-of-age and travel narratives, among others.*³⁴²

Reynolds also argues that western literary scholars and social historians continuously “imputed changing forms of literary expression, somewhat ingenuously, to historical changes in ‘self-consciousness.’”³⁴³ Reynolds sums up the practice:

*Thus, the structural and rhetorical characteristics of the western chronological, narrative-based autobiography have become the gauge by which scholars seek to measure the level of ‘self-consciousness’ and ‘individual identity’ present in other historical periods and other cultures, bypassing the changing literary conventions that mediate these expressions of the Self. The almost inevitable result is that other, particularly nonwestern, forms of autobiography are discounted as immature and underdeveloped, as pale shadows of the ‘real’ or ‘true’ autobiography known only in the modern West, and therefore as literary productions clearly not born of the same sense of individual identity.*³⁴⁴

Smith and Watson echo this sentiment by elaborating that many postmodern and postcolonial theorists find the term *autobiography* “inadequate to describe the extensive historical range and the diverse genres and practices of life writing not only in the West but around the globe.”³⁴⁵

Smith and Watson also collaborated on another book, *De/Colonizing the Subject*, which admonishes western gatekeeping:

³⁴¹ Reynolds, 18.

³⁴² Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.

³⁴³ Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Tradition*, 19.

³⁴⁴ Reynolds, 19.

³⁴⁵ Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 3.

*Western autobiography colludes in this cultural mythmaking. One of the narratives that brings this Man into being, it functions as an exclusionary genre against which the utterances of other subjects are measured and misread. While inviting all subjects to participate in its practices, it provides the constraining template or the generic 'law' against which those subjects and their diverse forms of self-narrative are judged and found wanting. In order to unstick both this Man and his meanings, we need to adjust, to reframe, our understanding of both traditional and countertraditional autobiographical practices.*³⁴⁶

I find this concept of “cultural mythmaking” becoming more relevant as I continue to escape beyond majoritarian narratives.

After confronting what he refers to as “The Fallacy of Western Origins” Reynolds’ direction focuses on the discoveries of proper scholarship and offers four criteria which are most typically found within Arabic autobiography. In order to construct individual identities Arabic Autobiography includes: “portrayals of childhood failures, portrayals of emotion through the description of action, dream narratives as reflections of moments of authorial anxiety, and poetry as a discourse of emotion.”³⁴⁷ Reynolds also concludes that albeit expressed differently, Arabic autobiography is no less an expression of a developed sense of the identity of the individual.³⁴⁸ In Appendix IV I will apply these four categories to the autobiographies of Tuqan and Khaled.

For Reynolds, whose focus is on the Arabic tradition, proper scholarship within Arabic autobiography can only be effective by understanding the imposed limitations which have plagued the genre. According to Reynolds, there are three major, and false, assumptions regarding Arabic autobiography which have aggressively limited both the appreciation and vitality of the genre. The first assumption is that there are too few Arabic autobiographies and thus they are a rarity. However, there is evidence that scholarship is quite literally being revised to reflect Arabic autobiography is not as rare as previous scholars had been led to believe. The second assumption, which correlates to the first, is that the “few” examples of Arabic autobiography were viewed as anomalies; special and unique so as to not fit within the historical tradition or as part of the genre. The third assumption is based on early judgements in scholarship which categorized texts as non-autobiographical, thereby providing a false precedent

³⁴⁶ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds), *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xviii.

³⁴⁷ Reynolds, 243.

³⁴⁸ Reynolds, 243.

for successive scholars to follow. These judgements determined work to not be “true” autobiography and their critics were for more than half a century uncritically analyzed.³⁴⁹

In addition to the misplaced emphasis (or lack thereof) of scholarship in autobiography Reynolds invites critics to consider the non-western influence on the so-called European tradition. Such foundational material of the western tradition was written outside of the western cultural boundary. Galen and Nicholas lived and wrote in Asia Minor and Augustine’s childhood and youth were spent in North Africa. Reynolds also shakes the foundations asking why Europeans consider themselves as heirs to Greek thought and culture when the Islamic culture, in Arabic linguistic form, adopted, nurtured, and added to the body of knowledge for centuries before its transmission to Europe proper.³⁵⁰

Turning towards modern autobiography Nawar al-Hassan Golley notes, the nineteenth century saw a revival in Arabic autobiography which was a century marked by “the beginning of the European intervention and domination of the Arab world. The influence of western cultures was felt on Arabic literature in general.”³⁵¹ Likewise, Margot Badran, a feminist historian of modern Egypt writes that “As far as we know, however, only in this century (twentieth century) have Arab women written accounts of their lives;... In Egypt the rise of the modern autobiographical tradition occurred following independence in 1922.”³⁵²

Golley also confirms that while Arab women have written biographical texts, typically of men, it is only at the beginning of the twentieth century that references appear of Arab women’s autobiographical writings, though Golley makes sure to note that the absence of published material does not equate to the absence of writing.³⁵³ Golley’s work provides significant alignment and direction for my reading of Fadwa Tuqan, especially with her concept of “writing back.”

³⁴⁹ Reynolds, *Interpreting the Self*, 27, 28, 29.

³⁵⁰ Reynolds, 31.

³⁵¹ Nawar al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story*, (University of Texas Press, 2003), 77.

³⁵² Margot Badran, “Expressing Feminism and Nationalism in Autobiography: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Educator,” in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds) *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women’s Autobiography*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 274.

³⁵³ Golley, *Reading Arab Women’s Autobiographies*, 79.

Appendix IV

Reynold's Four Criteria of Arabic Autobiography

I decided to include Reynold's Four Criteria of Arabic Autobiography in my appendix because I felt it did not overly contribute to my theme of counterstorytelling. However, I found it interesting as I had no such background into Arabic autobiography and think our literary studies are hindered by not including Arabic voices. I also wanted to demonstrate that both Tuqan and Khaled fit within the Reynold's criteria. Once more, Reynold's four criteria of Arabic Autobiography includes 1) portrayals of childhood failures; 2) portrayals of emotion through the description of action; 3) dream narratives as reflections of moments of authorial anxiety; and 4) poetry as a discourse of emotion.

Portrayals of Childhood Failures: Khaled's narrator recounts a failure of composure and hyper-competitiveness, as well as her classism, towards Samirah:

*My self-assurance was undermined by Samirah, a little girl from the camps—the scum of the earth, so I thought. I was terribly upset when I learned that she stood first in the class, way ahead of me. I despised her, my jealousy overwhelmed me. I think I even hit her, and I certainly insulted her. Once we even fought in the classroom.*³⁵⁴

As Khaled reflects on and shares this failure it's plain to see that she attaches significance to her inherited bias and classism which would be a significant focus of her training through the PFLP. This functions somewhat as the presentation of her journey as a Revolutionary Palestinian.

Tuqan's "failure," such as it is, seems to be her fear of speaking up for herself which also manifests later in life as she is a victim of her father's oppression. As Tuqan is drifting in thoughts while watching bees buzzing on a tray of *kunafa* her eldest brother accuses her of making their mother look bad by looking like a beggar. The narrator's silenced is expressed as: "I looked at him in amazement without saying anything. I didn't try to set him right. Always unable to defend myself I somehow felt that whatever others supposed to be right, even if it was wrong, was what I had to accept."³⁵⁵ She later writes after Ibrahim seemed to have ended their lessons as a test: "Being naturally timid, I was not bold enough to impose myself upon others, even Ibrahim. I waited anxiously for him to say something."³⁵⁶ Fortunately, Tuqan does gather her

³⁵⁴ Khaled, 34-35.

³⁵⁵ Tuqan, 18.

³⁵⁶ Tuqan, 60.

courage to ask her brother, but she did not have that same courage to challenge her father when he ended her schooling.

Portrayals of Emotion Through Description of Action: Khaled explains that her motivations for hijacking a plane were her indignation towards the hypocrisy of Zionism and international law. Equally present is her pride and unwavering commitment to the application of moral and honour to the task. Khaled's narrator explains:

I do not see how my oppressor could sit in judgement on my response to his oppressive actions against me. He is in no position to render an impartial judgement or to accuse me of air piracy and hijacking when he has hijacked my home and hijacked me and my people out of our land...Indeed, I am under a moral obligation to resist and to fight to death the enemy's moral corruption. My deed cannot be evaluated without examining the underlying causes. The revolutionary deed I carried out on August 29, 1969 was an assertion of my spurned humanity, a declaration of the humanity of Palestinians.³⁵⁷

In my leftist discourse there is a reflection that those who have a monopoly on violence will demand that the liberation from that violence must be non-violent. It seems as though Khaled is directly addressing the liberalist view that to this day expects Palestinians to be well-behaved victims of genocide.

One of the most rewarding, and tragic, anecdotes that Tuqan shares is the freedom she experiences when she is able to join her friend Alya to get away from the family estate and oppression. Her narrator states:

Feelings of freedom of breaking right away from the atmosphere of the ancient house choked with its prohibitions, endless commands and restraints, exhilarated me. Those dazzling moments overwhelmed me with a sensuous, insatiable desire to devour what was around me. I was overcome with a yearning to possess the world around me; I wished that those living shapes leavened with the yeast of unfolding life were something I could grasp with my hands or fold to my bosom, in order to take them and hide them under my pillow, along with the childish possessions secreted there.³⁵⁸

Tuqan will eventually share similar expressions of joy as she is able to travel freely and without supervision, but only after she escapes conservative Palestinian society.

Dream Narratives as Reflections of Moments of Authorial Anxiety: Tuqan, I believe, more "appropriately" fits within this category as she offers, after being forced by Yusef to stay within the family compound, an example of a specific dream:

³⁵⁷ Khaled, 129-130.

³⁵⁸ Tuqan, 40.

*Throughout these difficult months, the same dream kept haunting me over and over again: I would see myself running in a dark alleyway, fleeing from an old man who was pursuing me and whose features bore an aggressive, hostile look. But a solid wall would prevent me escaping. I would turn into another alley only to find the same dead end. The old man kept running after me like an enraged wild beast while I panted with fear, breathless from this perpetual chase. Then I would awake bathed in perspiration and gasping for breath. Fear of this suffocating dream made me hate to go to sleep.*³⁵⁹

Whether the dream was real or rhetorical the implications of her oppression at home as being suffocating and inescapable are clear.

Khaled does not specifically recount dreams in her autobiography, but there are multiple references to “dreams” both her own and the dreams of Palestine/Palestinians. Such examples include: “For eighteen long years, he lived in Lebanon dreaming of returning to Haifa. I, as his daughter, am attempting to realise that dream. I shall not fail my father and my nation. If I am unable to return and live in freedom in Palestine, my children will return;”³⁶⁰ or “Expecting Arab victory I refused to believe the outcome. I did believe it when Nasser offered his resignation on June 9, 1967. I awoke from my dream. I smashed my radio and went into a prolonged period of silence. My whole world collapsed. It seemed every Arab had become a slave;”³⁶¹ or “It was a momentous second in my life when I put my fingers on the trigger and ordered the enemy to obey my command. All my life I dreamt of carrying arms to aim at the enemy—that vengeful enemy who raped our land and has expropriated our homes without compensation.”³⁶²

Poetry as a Discourse of Emotion: For Khaled poetry is certainly less of her focus however, she includes her writings and poetry while in Syrian custody after her safe hijacking. Her emotions run from elation to somber and vindication to duty. I include these excerpts:

Yes, we have lost everything:
we have lost life and its meaning;
we have lost the humanity of man;
we are a people that lost its land;
and he who loses his land
loses his life—for land is
the source of life.

...

my dear father...a thousand greetings I send
to your soul, my father, and

³⁵⁹ Tuqan, 50.

³⁶⁰ Khaled, 26.

³⁶¹ Khaled, 92-93.

³⁶² Khaled, 150.

the souls of Palestinian fathers in the beyond.
Tortured, you left Palestine and
uprooted you lived;
desire replaced health,
sadness joy, hatred love,
humiliation pride.

...

Henceforth we shall not bend our heads.
The enemy may be strong...but we are much stronger.
Our cause is right and just
and we have begun to believe in ourselves.
We no longer know fear.
Wait for me. Wait for victory.
We shall return!³⁶³

While Tuqan's autobiography contains much more poetry, as she is a poetess, I have chosen to focus specifically on her inclusion of two poems within her prose. The first is when she began seriously composing poetry, which she addressed to Rabab al-Kazimi:

Rabab, crown of all poetesses
Rabab, you've exceeded all intelligent women
By god you are worthy
Of praise among young women!
Your father bestowed upon you
A rich treasure overflowing with delights
Al-Kazimi, who is al-Kazimi?
He is the composer of eloquent verse
Oh poets
Do not stand in the way of women poets!³⁶⁴

This poem, in brief, seems to reflect Tuqan's own views as a poetess not wanting to be impeded by men, both within her family, as she finds a path beyond Ibrahim's lessons and even publishes without his prior approval, but also in the wider realm of Arab poetry with its adherence to classical styles. The second poem I include are the lyrics to a song Tuqan was asked to translate. While they are not of her own work the lyrics present the reader with the poetic articulation of her own sense of joy and freedom as she "was delighted with [her] new world, happy to be far away from the stern rule of [her] family."³⁶⁵

My youth has faded; my stem has withered

³⁶³ Khaled, 154-156.

³⁶⁴ Tuqan, 61.

³⁶⁵ Tuqan, 99.

Though I'm still in the spring of my life
Oh this life of mine that was young and fresh,
Now consumed by the fire of passion
Heart's desire, come close to me,
You will restore my bloom of youth,
You will restore the life to my soul,
I live again by the touch of your hand.
Suffering has bowed down my head
Since I lost the fragrance of my early days.³⁶⁶

While perhaps not all the above examples apply universally it should be noted that as the criticism of western autobiography of being too stringent and inflexible amounts to strict barriers of entry, so too, should the applicability of Arabic Autobiography be flexible.

³⁶⁶ Tuqan, 98-99.

Appendix V

The Palestinian Connection to Home

In my research I read Amiry's autobiography and loved her writing and wit as she described her experience living in Ramallah while under Occupation. I would love to compare her autobiography with Tuqan's second volume. A missing aspect of my understanding while reading Tuqan and Khaled, however, was the Palestinian connection to home. Tuqan, and similarly Tawil, experience home an imprisonment. Khaled's home is remembered only as the staircase that protected her from Zionist bombs while she watched a man die in the streets. Khaled has a longing for Haifa and the fields, Tuqan similarly writes about the nature around her that she loves and wants to escape to, but not the warmth and connection to home that so often accompanies *Nakba* stories. It is for that reason that I explore here through Amiry the connection to Home.

I include this section because in Amiry's autobiography she provides an anecdote that I found both incredibly moving which also provides a greater context to understanding Palestinians returning to their homes during this "ceasefire." First, however, I will offer Sayigh's explanation of the sacredness of home to Palestinians as she includes Palestinian anthropologist Tawfiq Canaan after he completed his survey of Palestinian peasants on their understanding of households. Canaan learned that the peasants offered "many folk sayings on the sanctity of the home, and on the network of superstitions and magic practices that surrounded it."³⁶⁷ Sayigh also notes that "home" for Palestinians is different from other Arabs as Palestinians enjoy domesticity for its own sake while Egyptian or Algerian peasants are described as spending most of their time outside of the home. Sayigh also notes this concept of home as being inseparable from family noting: "The words most commonly used for house, *beit* or *dar*, are also synonyms for family."³⁶⁸

Amiry testifies against a particular injustice which Palestinians have been facing since the inception of Zionism but which also must be understood to better appreciate a particular psychological effect suffered from this intensified genocide. The story she recounts is as she is

³⁶⁷ Sayigh, 15.

³⁶⁸ Sayigh, 15.

trying to reach her mother-in-law, Um Salim, during the Second Intifada. Amiry recounts the third lifting of the curfew in Ramallah and the perilous journey to rescue her ninety-one year old mother-in-law from the area besieged by the IOF. On April 8th, 2002 Amiry parks her car and jumps through backyards and over garden walls in order to avoid the front of the complex which was blocked by ‘israeli’ tanks and jeeps. Amiry meets Jad and Zuheir, Um Salim’s neighbours. They pressed Amiry: “‘You must get your mother-in-law out, *haram* (have pity),’ they said. ‘It has been hell here—there have been no water, no electricity and no telephones for twelve consecutive days now. The shelling was terrifying. Just take her away.’ I felt so guilty and tried to explain to them that I had been trying but the army turned me back.”³⁶⁹ Amiry continues noting that when Um Salim first sees Amiry she began to cry with frustration and fear.

As the two women frantically try to pack so they can escape it’s clear that Um Salim is not prepared and mentally unable to understand the need to rush. Amiry, growing fearful of losing the chance to escape together, keeps trying to get through to Um Salim that they need her clothes, money, and jewellery. As Um Salim forgets where her money and jewellery are hidden Amiry, panicking says, “Never mind, just leave it. We’ll come back soon and get it.” Um Salim’s response is as heartbreaking as it must feel relevant to Palestinians today in Gaza and the West Bank: “That’s what we said in 1948 when we left our house in Jaffa; it was May then.” Amiry writes how she was left speechless as she stood and cried.³⁷⁰ This should be the context when discussing the displacement of Palestinians, the history of dispossession and the deceit and illusion of return. When western commentary asks why Palestinians don’t just flee when ‘israel’ gives evacuation orders and return after they bomb the area they are not understanding the Palestinian experience of expecting to return to their homes only to find them stolen by Jews and being left to wander aimlessly in exile.

This is the sentiment which Owda and many other Palestinians are able to document as they publish videos of families returning to destroyed homes, or refusing to abandon them to ‘israel.’

³⁶⁹ Amiry, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law*, 146.

³⁷⁰ Amiry, 149.

Appendix VI

Poem: She Freed Me

I have chosen to include this poem which I wrote for an open mic event in solidarity for Palestine. I explained to the audience that it is the story of my advocacy with Palestinian activism and my learning and growth as I researched and wrote my thesis. I am incredibly indebted to the Palestinian women I have met either in person, virtually, or in books as they have helped shaped the person I am and the perspective I carry.

October 2023 a Palestinian woman met me
and she shook the pages from my mind.
She convinced me and through her presence
these words are written.
With hands gentle or hands rough
She tore the narrative and dismantled
Hegemony—this story is hers as she moves me
from subject to object
From author to scribe

She stood, dominant
She was rooted, defiant
Her voice loud, born to sing
Her stories reached the sky
And inspired feet to march
She is everything the movement needed
Everything for her people, for herself
Better for her
she could not be found in the white man's lie

They said she were naught
The lie: a timid shell wrapped in exotic
The bloodiest voices said
She was of men and for men
They said anything but the truth
Because the truth is dangerous
And not theirs—No!
They fear her
As only she can bring them to their knees

Your eyes pierce mine
Imbued with a strength never seen by me
A strength you know I never will have

Your arms wave with the power to shake
foundations and crumble empires
You shook me
And you collapsed
my coloniality

I was a child and they called me progeny
They said within my heart beats civilization
The word wherein humanity dies
But questions were forbidden, orders absolute and
critical thinking remained untaught
They said only white voices tell the truth
As if only white people had tongues
As if only white voices understood humanity
I learned it in the home, in the street,
in schools and on TV.

But then a Palestinian woman saw me
She saw me, a nameless entity
Next she saw me, sprouting a keffiyeh—
the seed she had planted

She inspires more than support or solidarity
She occupies discourse and theory
She is history and future
She is cold steel and warm affection
She is calloused hands and gentle words
She is the hakawati and protector of culture
She holds her people in one hand
Pushing back the invader with the other
If men are the spear, she is the shield

She is the women armed with stones
that descended upon the British barracks
to free their village men
She is the women who sold their jewellery
to buy weapons
She is the social network that kept exiles and resistance fighters
hidden and safe
She is the women who led the First Intifada and
the women who claimed all children as her own
She is the women who put their body between children
and terrorist
She is the Muslim women who have helped to shape Islam
and gender politics
She is the women who led marches against

conservatism and patriarchy and
It is she who embodies the soil and resistance
changing the slogan to "land before honour"

And even though her story might not be found
in the pages of masculine history;
she is passes it through a mother's milk,
a mother's love,
and teta's stories.

Her voice is winning the war of narrative
Stretching beyond the bars to cage her
She created entire worlds
for battles to be fought
as men limped desperate to isolate and
silence her
They wanted her to forget -
she made it her mission to birth you in stories and stones
She looks down on flailing world orders;
Dismisses centuries and Billions of propaganda
She is Leila Khaled's future Arab woman

She sharpened the colonizers language
until each word became a stone thrown
And each poem she recites a tank destroyed
She is the flower which bears fruit,
the wheat which feeds galaxies,
the olive and thobe which are written in
praise and resistance.

She didn't know me but

She freed me
She forgave me
She befriended me
She taught me
She supported me
She never gave up on me
Because she knew
she had the power to change the world

She made me human again