

Temporalities of 'Return': Race, Representation and Decolonial Imaginings of Palestinian  
Refugee Life

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the representational life of return and asks: how has Israeli settler-colonialism and international rights discourse come to bear on political imaginings of return for third-generation Palestinian refugees residing in the occupied West Bank? Examining this question as a genealogical inquiry, I consider what legal and aesthetic imaginings of return tell us about the historical and on-going project of race in Palestine/Israel as it coalesces under settler-colonialism, law and protracted humanitarianism. I begin by tracing the work of race across modern political Zionist thought, appeals to Israeli nationhood and the expulsion policies used to evict Palestinians during early Israeli settlement. Next, I develop a legal history of the ‘right of return’ as a land-based reparative justice imperative and consider how it became instituted through a system of protracted humanitarian governance. In so doing, I delineate the racial grammar and juridical grounds through which Palestinian personhood came to be constituted and made legible under international governance and against settler-colonial orderings of expulsion. Against this context, chapters four and five attend to some of the ways that third-generation Palestinian refugees negotiate claims to return through decolonizing cultural production. Methodologically, I draw from six-months of research in the Southern West Bank region where I worked closely with two experimental social action projects: DAAR (Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency) and Campus in Camps. I examine their architectural and story-based imaginings of return as a history of the present but also consider what these imaginings suggest about return in its *afterlife*. I analyze this using a range of materials including open-ended interviews with Palestinian refugees and participants in the collectives, visual, media and narrative texts, and public speeches and published works by the collectives involved. Theoretically, I draw from theories of race, settler-colonialism, affect and psychoanalysis to analyze these texts and rely on theories of representation, genealogy and discourse analysis to interpret the material. Through this work, I treat representations of return as both a *racial index* of Palestinian refugee subjectivity formed across settler-colonial expulsion, legal redress and humanitarian governance and a *methodological directive* for thinking about ontological claims to Palestinian futurity.

## Dedication

**To my mother, *Amina*, and father, *Didar*. For their tender hearts and generous spirits.**

It is possible...  
It is possible at least sometimes...  
It is possible especially now  
To ride a horse  
Inside a prison cell  
And run away...

It is possible for prison walls  
To disappear.  
For the cell to become a distant land  
Without frontiers (...)

- Mahmoud Darwish, "The Prison Cell"

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This work has been a labor of spirit connected to so many people, places and ideas across time. It has found resonance with the political and intellectual legacies of feminist and post-colonial theorizing – and the struggle to keep alive histories and ideas that matter. Through these legacies, I am reminded of the potency of knowledge that dares to produce otherwise.

This work has found inspiration, curiosity and home in Palestine - in large part because of the profound generosity and spirit of so many people and communities I've had the honor to learn from and engage with. It has found support, renewal and continuity in family, friendships and mentorships in Toronto – as well as London, New York and San Francisco. This work has many people and encounters to thank.

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## **Abbreviations**

48' (Colloquial reference to historic Palestine prior to the declaration of Israeli statehood)

Addameer (Addameer Prisoner's Support and Human Rights Association)

Badil (Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights)

DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency)

OPT (Occupied Palestinian Territory)

UN (United Nations)

UNCCP (United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine)

UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees)

UN Resolution 181 (the UN Partition Plan)

UN Resolution 194(III) (United Nations resolution pertaining to the "right of return")

UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency)

## PROLOGUE

This project grew out of a curiosity about the relationship between carcerality and decolonization in Palestine. While it began – in its earliest incarnation – as a question about how imprisonment and carceral geography shape the settler-colonial condition in Palestine/Israel, it arrived in a set of questions concerning representations of *return* and the politics of imagination under settler-colonial life. This shift took place across several extended trips to the West Bank, where I lived and worked in different capacities, and learned a great deal from the struggles facing two overlapping demographics in Palestine: political prisoners and refugees. The pervasiveness of both forms of subjugation (imprisonment and expulsion) provide insight into the quotidian of settler-colonial life in Palestine. Further, these forms of subjugation reflect what it means for Palestine’s indigenous population to live under a relatively newly established settler-colonial regime and the longest standing military occupation in modern colonial history.<sup>1</sup>

Like many activists and scholars concerned with self-determination struggles in Palestine, the very condition of Palestine is often translated through accounts of suffering and terror. We anticipate stories that document humiliating strip searches of Palestinians at checkpoints and the grieving of families outside of their homes as they become demolished by Israeli bulldozers. We expect to see snipers and smell tear gas and hear the sounds of sirens. My first visit to Palestine almost ten years ago was exactly coloured by these sensory encounters. My days were filled with observing military court hearings, listening to the stories of families awaiting permits to visit their loved ones locked up behind Israeli prison bars, and reading the affidavits of prisoners describing

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<sup>1</sup> While I separate these structures of power here (settler-colonialism versus military occupation), Israel’s military occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and continued presence in Gaza are structures of militarization that support and sustain Israeli sovereignty and its iteration as a settler-colonial project. As this dissertation will reveal, it is analytically and politically useful to think through these interconnected forms of domination across territorially and infrastructural fragmented geographies (i.e. West Bank, Gaza, East/West Jerusalem and within the green line that demarcates Israel).

hours of torture and interrogation. As I worked with *Addameer*, a local prisoner rights organization that supported the struggles of detainees and their families, my understanding of Palestine and the kind of life lived here was at best, bleak. But worse, I *almost* left Palestine with a flattened understanding of subjectivity, without a space to think about, let alone inquire into the grey zones of everyday life. Before returning to Toronto, I was encouraged to meet with an ex-political prisoner who was highly active in organizing a hunger strike for women political prisoners. During the first and second intifada, she and her husband served decades in Israeli prisons. During my meeting with her, she said something to me that significantly changed how I understand the role of political prisoners in Palestinian society. She said: “We Palestinians, but especially political prisoners, are constantly being forced to speak about our lives through two positions: we are either victims of Israeli colonial aggression or heroes of a Palestinian nationalist struggle. But the truth is, on some days, we are neither of these things. I am just Rula. And what would it mean to tell that story?”

Similar to the lessons I learned throughout several trips to Palestine and in my conversation with Rula that day, what remained with me throughout the course of my research were the ways that encounters of strip searches at checkpoints, grieving families, and house demolitions were accompanied by other experiences of the ordinary: expressions of intimacy and affection everywhere, the soundscape of church bells interwoven between the *adhaan* (Muslim call for prayer), streets scented with fresh coffee and citrus, and a commitment to life and ‘return’ amidst unforeseeable futures. During the course of my fieldwork, these robust expressions of *life* coloured and textured my interviews. While these scenes may be easily written into an ethnography as backdrop, they were never just that for me. As Muna Hamzeh writes in her chronicles of Dheisheh camp in Bethlehem,

Poverty, damp and closely clustered houses, meager living conditions, overcrowding in the schools, unpaved roads and poor infrastructure are only part of the hardships that the refugees in the camps have to endure on a daily basis and have had to endure for the past 53 years. Yet in the midst of all this difficulty, families thrive, children are born, weddings and funerals take place, parents work and a mini-society grapples to find itself a warm place under the sun.<sup>2</sup>

It was in the nuances of daily life such as the ones described above that I came to appreciate what it means to access a kind of agency not bound to an escape of the ordinary or a constant negation of one's oppression but rather, as Veena Das's work inspires, the capacity to "pick up the pieces and to live in this very place of devastation;" a kind of agency that is not about transcendence from suffering but "decent into the ordinary."<sup>3</sup> In thinking about what it means to make claims to life and land from the ruins – from the place of on-going loss, displacement and indefinite suspension, this project looks at the extraordinary and contested work of representations and decolonial imaginings of return in Palestinian refugee community life.

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<sup>2</sup> Muna Hamzeh, *Refugees in Our Own Land: Chronicles from a Palestinian Refugee Camp in Bethlehem* (London and Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001), viii.

<sup>3</sup> Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 6-7.

## INTRODUCTION

Catastrophe is precisely not a chain of events where something in the past leads to something in the future. Under conditions of catastrophe, there is only one catastrophe, and it keeps on happening, “keeps piling wreckage upon wreckages” – as Benjamin puts it – in a present time that is the time of reiterated destruction.<sup>4</sup>

– Judith Butler, “What Shall We Do Without Exile?”: Said and Darwish Address the Future

In dominant Palestinian discourse, *1948* stands in as a marker of time and place. In colloquial speech, it often signals to as an imagined geography of Palestine *before* the state of Israel was established (i.e. historic Palestine). However, *1948* is also invoked to represent the Nakba (“catastrophe”), an aggressive stage of Israeli settler-colonial nation building that resulted in the destruction of 531 Arab villages, the emptying out of 11 urban neighborhoods and the massacre and forcible displacement of close to 800,000 Palestinians.<sup>5</sup> While 1948 represents a time before and a time of exile, displacement and loss, it also represents a time of, as Judith Butler proclaims, ‘reiterated destruction’. The catastrophic events of 1948 gave rise to two interconnected formations in Palestine which have followed us into the twenty-first century: 1) the creation of a settler-colonial state and 2) the creation of an unresolved Palestinian refugee population. These two formations are not only historically entangled, but as Hannah Arendt argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, their very entanglement is responsible for exacerbating the question of statelessness. As Arendt explains,

After the [Second World] war it turned out that the Jewish question which was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved – namely, by means of colonized and then conquered territory – but this solved neither the problem of minorities nor the stateless. On the contrary, like virtually all other events of our country, the solution of the Jewish

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, “What Shall We Do Without Exile?”: Said and Darwish Address the Future,” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 32: 49-50.

<sup>5</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), xxiii.

question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of stateless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people.<sup>6</sup>

While it is tempting to periodize 1948 as the origin story of Palestinian refugees, the story of their emergence, as a new classification of refugees, neither began nor ended during the years of their expulsion. Their story is, as this dissertation canvasses, an on-going racial story formed at the intersection of settler-colonial nation building and protracted humanitarian governance. Similar to other settler-colonial contexts, the story of Palestine's indigenous population is one of dispossession, land confiscation, and subjugation. It is also however, a story about how displaced Palestinians waiting to return have sustained life in a temporal state of renewed impermanence. Israel's governing structure of settler-colonialism and subsequent military occupation suspends Palestinian daily life in a perpetual state of waiting: waiting to cross-checkpoints, waiting to be released from prison, waiting for the Israeli authorities to release the dead from custody, waiting for permits, waiting for statehood, waiting for Israel's acknowledgement of the gross amount of loss, displacement and tragedy that has come to define the "Palestinian question" in modern colonial history. This colonial and racial ordering of suspended time governs life in Palestine in particular ways. Trapped in a prolonged state of waiting, this ordering of time has created a situation whereby close to four-million people are forced to negotiate a day-to-day existence organized under material and symbolic indefinite detention. Thinking further about how this temporal ordering might be understood as a kind of racial governance, David Goldberg writes,

Palestine has been marked as the first "permanently temporary" state, to use Eyal Weizman's incisive characterization. State boundaries are rendered impermanent, flexible according to the occupier's needs and whimsical determinations, visible only to the day's militarized cartographic dictates. Permanent impermanence is made the marker of the very ethn racial condition of the Palestinian [...]. Palestinianization's temporary temporality is taken as much as ontological condition [sic] as political-military condition. The Palestinian

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<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On the Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), 290.

is always between, always ill-at ease, homeless at home [...] the embodiment of enmity, almost already dead.”<sup>7</sup>

These temporal orderings of impermanence, as organized under day to day practices of settler-colonialism have had particular implications for Palestinian refugees residing within camps. For those displaced peoples who continue to be barred entry from their homes and villages, homes and villages within visible reach, this wait is animated first and foremost by a prolonged suspension of, what this dissertation examines as, the political project of *return*.

### **Research Inquiry**

This dissertation examines the following question: how has Israeli settler-colonialism and international rights discourse come to bear on political imaginings of return for third-generation Palestinian refugees residing in the occupied West Bank? Exploring this question as a genealogical inquiry and what I identify as a *history of the future*, this project examines what legal, aesthetic and temporal imaginings of return tell us about the historical and on-going project of race in Palestine/Israel as it coalesces under settler-colonialism, international governance and decolonizing cultural production. Tracing the legal emergence of return as a humanitarian imperative that emerges through the transference of colonial sovereignty between British Mandate, the United Nations and leaders of the newly established state of Israel, I consider the juridical grounds through which Palestinian personhood has come to be constituted and made legible under international governance and explain how the political question of return came to be answered through a humanitarian response. Examining these racialized orders of representation against decolonizing cultural production, I also explore the creative ways that third-generation Palestinian refugees reimagine and negotiate their relationship to return in both the present and future.

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<sup>7</sup> David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 134.

This dissertation centers the representational and imaginative landscape of return as a political and theoretical contribution to decolonial research. As a temporality attenuated to the future, the aspiration of return provides a particular lens to trace on-going colonial and decolonial orderings of life in Palestine. As I will demonstrate, the project of return is one that takes us through time – a time of what was and what came to be in the aftermath of Israel’s settler-colonial state declaration. Return also however, invites consideration of what might *come to be* following the reordering of the Israeli settler-colonial state and the dismantling of the longest military occupation in modern colonial history.

These political considerations give rise to important methodological questions. In historicizing and contextualizing the racial and settler-colonial contours of prolonged displacement, how might we also resist the urge to read this displacement through a totalizing and permanent framework of suspension? How might we account for the imaginative capacities of a people living amidst protracted refugee life? How do we analytically invest in questions of decolonial futurity and what is at stake in this work?<sup>8</sup> In thinking about the precise and routine ways that settler-colonialism and humanitarianism manages daily life in Palestine, this dissertation examines how displaced communities born into expulsion have lived, dreamt, and created imaginings of return under a prolonged state of arrest. While ideas of imagination are not easy to contain let alone “measure” in a sociological study, centering the field of imagination as a way to canvass a political project attenuated to the future provides an important and perhaps uncanny vantage point to trace the representational landscape of both Palestinian refugees and the project of return.

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<sup>8</sup> These questions are expanded upon and taken up in the subsequent chapter.

## Historical Context

As this dissertation historically canvasses, the conditions that gave rise to the representational life of return must be understood first and foremost in relation to the processes of expulsion that created Palestinian refugees for the first time in modern colonial history. While the conditions that led to the creation of Palestinian refugees are often framed around 1948, the expulsion of Palestinians entered into dominant discourse (via public record) as early as one hundred years ago in the signing of the Balfour Declaration. Between 1917 and 1947, debates about how to transfer British imperial powers to Jewish leaders for the purpose of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine were on-going. These debates began taking shape alongside the newly formed international body, the United Nations (UN), officially established in 1945. This international body was instrumental in mapping what would later become a series of failed partition plans and peace processes, beginning with UN resolution 181 (commonly referred to as the UN partition plan).<sup>9</sup> Between 1947-1948 Britain officially transferred powers over to the United Nations in the hopes that they could oversee the creation of a Jewish and Arab state. However, as Ilan Pappé insists, “Resolution 181’s most immoral aspect is that it included no mechanism to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.”<sup>10</sup> The passing of UN resolution 181 was an international decision that ultimately led to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. While it was not the UN that carried out these assaults, it was the passing of this resolution that acted as a conduit for transferring colonial sovereignty into the hands of leaders of a settler-colonial project in the making. Within months following the passing of this resolution, Zionist paramilitary organizations systematically and methodically purged close to 800,000 Palestinians from their towns and

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<sup>9</sup> UN resolution 181 will be explained further and expanded upon in chapter three.

<sup>10</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 35.

villages, either by death or forced transfer.<sup>11</sup> This mass exile created one of the world's largest unresolved refugee crisis across the region whereby close to seventy percent of the Palestinian population became refugees for the first time in history.

Between 1948 and 1967, close to two-thirds of Palestine's native population were forcibly displaced, many of whom were pushed into refugee camps scattered across the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and neighboring Arab states (i.e. namely Lebanon, Syria and Jordan and further abroad).<sup>12</sup> During the onset of Israel's 1967 military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, Israel displaced an additional 300,000 Palestinians whereby approximately 120,000 were now uprooted for a second-time by processes of militarization and expulsion. These two historical periods of wide-spread forcible displacement (1948 and 1967) have been accompanied by a slower but steady ethnic cleansing process that takes place through a matrix of Israeli settler-colonial state policies and practices such as prohibitions on planning policies in Palestinian neighborhoods, the on-going creation of illegal settlements, house demolitions, settler home take overs, the excavation of Palestinian burial sites and displacement of the dead.<sup>13</sup> After close to seventy years of living under conditions of displacement, and fifty years of living under Israeli military occupation, Palestinian refugees have expanded into four generations and become one of the longest standing humanitarian conditions world-wide.

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<sup>11</sup> The Nakba will be historicized in greater detail and depth in the chapters that follow.

<sup>12</sup> "Palestinian Refugees: An Overview," Palestinian Refugee Research Net, accessed November 2016, <http://prn.mcgill.ca/background/index.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> In recent years, a number of scholars have brought increasing attention to the ways that Israel extends colonial power onto and through the management of deceased Palestinians by means of seizing their bodies and keeping them away from their family and sacred rights to burial, holding the dead bodies of political prisoners until the end of their sentence, criminalizing visitation at Palestinian cemeteries (Shalhoub Kevorkian, 2014) , and excavating and erasing sacred burial sites (Vadasaria, 2015)

Throughout the past seven decades of Israel's state formation, the registered Palestinian refugee population has risen to approximately five million people.<sup>14</sup> The total number of displaced Palestinian refugees in the occupied territory approximates nearly two-million people. In the West Bank alone, the refugee population amounts to around 727 000 peoples, a quarter of which live in one of the 19 official refugee camps.<sup>15</sup> When we account for the total number of Palestinian refugees worldwide and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) living within the green line, what we are looking at is one of the largest and longest-standing refugee communities world-wide.<sup>16</sup> While 1948 and 1967 are often referenced in local Palestinian discourse as *catastrophic* events that put in place a *structure of settler-colonialism*, the violence made possible under settler-colonialism might also be traced by attending to the humanitarian regime put in place to manage and maintain seven decades of displacement. The international imperative to resolve an indigenous land based struggle rooted in settler-colonialism with an apolitical humanitarian solution is indeed a curious decision.

As the UN initiated humanitarian initiatives to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian refugee following the Nakba, international bodies like the UNCCP (United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine) assured Palestinian refugees that they would be able to return to their homes by 1951.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, humanitarian organizations like the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) were beginning to secure extended land leases in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan to provide “temporary” shelter for Palestinian refugees.

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<sup>14</sup> This number only includes Palestinian refugees registered under UNRWA and recipients of their shelter and aid services.

<sup>15</sup> Sophie Richter-Devroe, ““Like Something Sacred”: Palestinian Refugees’ Narratives on the Right of Return,” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 32, no. 2: 100.

<sup>16</sup> The ‘Green Line’ refers to a border that separates pre-1967 Israel from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This unofficial border was first introduced in 1948 and is otherwise referred to as the Armistice Line.

<sup>17</sup> The United Nations Conciliation Commission on Palestine was set up under UN resolution 194 with the hopes that they would mediate the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This commission appointed the first ever mediator. This context will be further elaborated on in chapter three.

These temporary land leases ultimately secured permanent shelter projects (i.e. refugee camps) for ninety-nine years. These century-long land leases were indeed signaling to the start of a *permanently temporary* refugee crisis and the creation of a new kind of refugee. While the idea of a “refugee” often signals to a kind of temporary and urgent experience – in need of humanitarian care and assistance,<sup>18</sup> the prolongation of the Palestinian refugee context – a context tethered to the arrangement of Israeli settler-colonial nation building - has introduced a new lexical item into the international legal community vernacular: “protracted refugees.” As defined by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), protracted refugees are those that live:

[i]n a long-standing and intractable state of limbo. Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years of exile.<sup>19</sup>

This description continues:

Protracted refugee situations stem from political impasses. They are not inevitable, but are rather the result of political action and inaction, both in the country of origin (the persecution or violence that led to flight) and in the country of asylum. They endure because of ongoing problems in the countries of origin, and stagnate and become protracted as a result of responses to refugee inflows, typically involvement restrictions on refugee movement (...), and confinement to camps (...).<sup>20</sup>

The definition above highlights two important things: 1) that the condition of protracted refugees is defined by a kind of liminality. This state of interstitial life is marked by a colonial ordering of temporal and material suspension; 2) the conditions that give rise to this suspended impasse are not an accidental or inevitable outcome but rather, the direct consequence of both action and inaction. In the context of Palestinian refugees, we must understand the settler-colonial

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<sup>18</sup> Ilana Feldman, “The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living,” *Humanity*, 3, no. 2: 161.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations High Commission for Refugees. “Standing Committee, 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting: Protracted Refugee Situations,” Executive Committee of the High Commissioner’s Programme, accessed October 2016, <http://www.unhcr.org/40c982172.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

context that gives texture to these political impasses. The Israeli settler-colonial state's capacity to deny the right of return while simultaneously stalling peace negotiations through their repeated and direct violation of international law forecloses the possibility of an independent Palestinian state. In the absence of statehood, Palestinian refugees have no place to return to and become indefinitely marked as extraterritorial subjects. This context is important for thinking about the material and discursive conditions that give rise to their representation as *racialized* humanitarian subjects.

Like any social subject, the figure of the refugee "is not an already constituted category."<sup>21</sup> On the contrary, Liisa Malkki's genealogy of the figure of the "refugee" reveals that the "refugee" is a particular configuration of displaced peoples that emerge in post-World War II Europe. Challenging the anthropological tendency to write about the "refugee" as an already constituted and self-delimiting category of people, Malkki points to the "constellation of sociopolitical and cultural processes and practices" that bring the "refugee" into being.<sup>22</sup> Among these conditions, Julie Peteet insists that refugees are often constituted through two interrelated processes: "violent displacement and denativization."<sup>23</sup> As this dissertation will show, while UN international bodies and humanitarian agencies have attempted to put forth solutions to the displacement of Palestinian refugees, their terms of recognition have failed to fully recognize Palestinians as indigenous subjects and ultimately suspended the political project of return into a humanitarian state of limbo. In the absence of such recognition, representations of Palestinian refugees and the project of return have entered a racialized circuit of production that persistently mute Palestinian claims to life and

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<sup>21</sup> Julie Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Desire: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 50.

<sup>22</sup> Liisa Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization," *Cultural Anthropology*, 11, no. 3: 385.

<sup>23</sup> Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Desire: Palestinian Refugee Camps*, 50.

land. Understood in this context, we are urged to consider, as this dissertation does, the complex, dynamic and historical ways that ideas about race have traveled through Israeli settler-colonialism and international rights discourse and accordingly, made the rights of Palestine's indigenous subjects illegible.

It is precisely because of this context that recourse to international rights discourse is often fraught and rife with ambivalence. While my field research examines creative representations of return and expected to tell a story about the long-term consequences of living under Israel's settler-colonial regime, I came to discover that from the standpoint of Palestinian refugees residing in camps, the settler-colonial condition is contoured by another condition: the humanitarian condition. In thinking about how Palestinian refugees make claims to return between these interconnected structures of everyday life, we are also presented with the ways that Palestinian refugees have been marked as defacto racial subjects. In this work, I explore the creative ways that third-generation Palestinian refugees negotiate their subjectivity and relationship to the project of return. Rather than examining the concept of return as a failed reparative justice approach constituted under international law or a stale symbolic gesture commemorated and upheld by humanitarian organizations, I approach the concept of return as a generative and dynamic signifier for understanding the temporal dimensions of Israeli settler-colonial nation building, humanitarian governance and its reverberations in understandings of the "human".

Methodologically, I draw from six-months of field research in the Southern West Bank region where I worked closely with two experimental social action projects: DAAR (Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency) and Campus in Camps (a "university in exile" run by third-generation Palestinian refugee communities). I analyze their architectural and story-based imaginings of return against two United Nations initiatives instituted in the immediate aftermath of the inception

of the Israeli state: 1) *UN resolution 194* - a reparative justice principle aimed at repatriation and/or monetary compensation for losses incurred as a result of displacement of Palestinian refugees and 2) the creation of *UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency)* - a humanitarian agency put in place by the UN General Assembly for support to Palestinian refugees. I canvass these legal, humanitarian and decolonial representations of return through various texts including official UN records such as correspondence letters between the first appointed UN mediator and Israeli and Arab leaders between 1947-1948, progress reports, open-ended interviews with members of the collectives involved, visual, media and narrative texts, transcripts of walking tours, public speeches, and community events organized by the collectives involved. As my methodology chapter will elaborate, I examine these texts through Foucauldian methods of genealogy and discourse analysis and draw from critical race legal theory, settler-colonialism, post-colonialism, affect theory and psychoanalysis to interpret these texts. In examining what creative works by third-generation Palestinian refugees tell us about the politics of recognition, representation and decolonial imaginings across time, I treat the concept of return as a signpost of race and decolonial futurities in Israel/Palestine.

*Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency* and *Campus in Camps* collectives inspired and animated this project in profound ways.<sup>24</sup> The first collective, *Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency*, adopts spatial and architectural practice to “decolonize” (i.e. repurpose, subvert and transform) Israel’s settler-colonial infrastructure (e.g. settlements, military posts, etc.) during the

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<sup>24</sup> I adopt the category “collective” when referring to these two groups because this is how they identified themselves in published texts and interviews I collected with them. As described to me during an interview with Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti, DAAR is technically registered as a non-governmental organization. However, they don’t see their architectural and artistic practice as one that grew out of “organization” models. Rather, as explained to me, the inception of their work emerged as a kind of “collective” that would work with architecture to intervene in political space, cultural collective imagination of actors, and legal negotiations. As described in *Architecture After Revolution*, DAAR’s work might be understood as a dynamic “archive of ideas.” See Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 189.

moments that these spatialities are “unplugged from colonial power.”<sup>25</sup> Comprised of an eclectic body of local and international practitioners including architects, artists, activists, filmmakers, scholars, curators and urbanists (and founded by Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman), DAAR’s central aim is to develop architectural projects of decolonization through subverting and repurposing the remains of abandoned colonial buildings and infrastructure (e.g. settlements, military compounds and outposts etc.). Through these spatial, artistic and architectural interventions, DAAR engages with decolonization as “an act of profanation, which speculates on the use of colonial architecture for purposes other than those they were designed to perform.”<sup>26</sup> Through these spatial and speculative practices, DAAR posits decolonization as a process of engaging in political practices of the present to enable new imaginings of Palestine across time. Moving away from statist approaches to decolonization of Palestine they look for “cracks where the potential for transformation” can emerge within “existing dominant structures – architectural, infrastructural, and legal.”<sup>27</sup> Using “spatial practices as a form of political intervention and narration,” they consider how to use the occupation against itself.<sup>28</sup> In so doing, they treat the colonial markings of space as “a terrain of speculation.”<sup>29</sup>

The second collective, Campus in Camps, otherwise self-referred to as a “university in exile” is comprised of a group of third-generation Palestinian refugees based in the West Bank. This group of students engages in temporal narratives of decolonization starting at the level of imagination, self-reflection and representation. As explained by members of this collective, the

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<sup>25</sup> Alessandro Petti, “Decolonizing the Mind,” filmed April 2011 at TEDxRamallah, Bethlehem, Palestine, video. <http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/video-lectures/>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman. “The Morning After: Profaning Colonial Architecture,” *Sensible Politics: The Visual Culture of nongovernmental activism* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 454.

<sup>28</sup> Petti, “Decolonizing the Mind, TEDxRamallah.”

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

idea behind the program was to build an intellectual community comprised of third-generation Palestinian refugee students who are interested in engaging in different kinds of narrative production through the creation of new forms of visual and cultural representation of the “refugee camp” and the “refugee.”<sup>30</sup> Challenging dominant narratives of “victimization” and return, these students engage in debates about their own life history and foreseeable future. As third-generation refugees, one of the questions they continuously reflect upon is what the “right of return” would mean in their lives. Accordingly, they question how the very idea of return impacts the kinds of social and political relations formed in and through the camp, which for many of them, has not only been a formidable force in their own sense of self and community but the only home they have ever known. Rather than returning to a fixed place of origin, the work of Campus in Camps opens up the idea of return by challenging dominantly inherited narratives. The significance of debating these ideas, as explained by students within “Campus in Camps” is that it centers the refugee camp as a site that challenges existing victimization narratives of refugees and compels people to imagine the camp as a “counter-laboratory for new spatial and social practices.”<sup>31</sup> Through examining these creative forms of decolonizing cultural production alongside legal and humanitarian representations of “return,” this project reveals how representations of return have implications for understandings of race, settler-colonialism and humanitarian governance in political imaginings of decolonization in Palestine.

## **Chapter Overview**

In chapter one, I introduce my methodology, ethical and theoretical considerations, and research process. This chapter is organized in three parts. In part one, I explain the interpretive methods, research methods and research materials that animate this project. While I rely on textual

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<sup>30</sup> Campus in Camps, “The Context,” accessed December 2014. <http://www.campusincamps.ps/about/>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

and visual sources in this project, including historical UN records, semi-structured interviews, public and published statements by the collectives involved, news media, and photographs, the *interpretive methods* that I rely upon to examine these texts include genealogy, discourse analysis and the politics of representation. Indebted to post-structuralist thought (and methodological tools advanced by Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall), I explain how the theories constitutive of these methods have important implications for studies of race and coloniality and explain more specifically how they contribute to this project. In this section, I reflect on what it means to genealogically analyze representations and imaginings of return *as a temporality* constituted under settler-colonialism, international governance and decolonizing cultural production. In part two, I introduce the ethical considerations and theoretical imperatives that came to bear on the development of my research questions, sites and analysis. In part three, I outline the frameworks that inspired my research process which include grounded theory and decolonial research.

In chapter two, “A Racial History of Modern Political Zionism, the Project of Transfer and the Creation of “Palestinian Refugees,” I primarily rely on secondary sources to construct a genealogy of race in the subject formation of Palestinian refugees. Although I rely on secondary sources to trace this genealogy, I assemble it in a way that introduces a new lens for thinking about how racial ideas traveled to Palestine via modern political Zionism (underwritten by nineteenth-century scientific racism and heterosexist anxieties) and came to constitute the ontological construction of the Palestinian refugee. Following the genealogical work of Edward Said and Joseph Massad (who inherited and expanded Said’s genealogical approach), I show the ways that the “Jewish Question” and “Question of Palestine” are ontologically linked through a racial story that ultimately led to two formations: a settler-colonial nation and a Palestinian refugee crisis. In introducing a racial history of the creation of the state of Israel (with close attention to Zionist

debates about racial science, population transfer and settlement as redemptive to discourses of “Jewish degeneracy”), my aim is to show how the figure of the Palestinian refugee – from the moment of inception, is already imbued in a racial story. I explain how the implementation of these logics via transfer policies not only gave rise to their eventual expulsion from the Israeli state but at the level of representation, dehumanized them under the Israeli national imaginary. While this chapter serves as a context chapter to introduce the centrality of race in the making of Palestinian refugees, it opens up important considerations for our understanding of race, modern political Zionism and the creation of Palestinian refugees.

In chapter three, “A Racial History of Palestinian Refugees and the “Right of Return”: Law, Humanitarianism and the Transference of Colonial Sovereignty,” I continue to examine a racial history of Palestinian refugees through a critical reading of discursive representations of the figure of the “Palestinian refugee” and the “right of return” within an international legal and humanitarian imaginary. Reading discursive representations of refugee life in the context of international governance, this chapter asks: how have UN sponsored interventions made legible the rights of “Palestinian refugees” and the project of return? How do these ameliorative vernaculars speak to and against settler-colonial imaginaries of land? Further, what implications have these forms of recognition had on Palestinian claims to historic land? To examine this, I explore two competing interventions advanced under the advisement of the United Nations: 1) UN resolution 194 – a reparative justice approach to the “right of return” and 2) UNRWA (United Nations Relief Work Agency), a humanitarian aid initiative for Palestinian refugees. Empirically, I examine the emergence of these UN projects through analyzing historical records (via progress reports and recommendations) by the UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte prepared for the dissemination between UN bodies between May 1948 and September 1948, as well as telegraphs

between the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. Through examining the debates that gave rise to the creation of UN resolution 194 and UNRWA, I argue that discourses of refugee life and the project of return – as represented through these two forms of international recognition circulate within a racialized economy of rights discourse that obscures Palestinian claims to land and recalibrates the racialization of Palestinian refugees within a global imaginary of humanitarianism. In turn, I suggest that we think about these international forms of recognition alongside a racial history that has come to represent Palestinian refugees as depoliticized humanitarian subjects in need of aid rather than indigenous subjects in contestation over land. Examining the overlapping and shifting racial logics between Israel’s settler-colonial transfer policies and UN responses aimed at amelioration, this chapter establishes the paradoxical and racialized legal terrain through which Palestinians have been denied recognition as indigenous subjects in struggles over land and consequently the project of return.

In chapter four, “The Concrete Tent: Architectural Representations of Expulsion and Return,” I examine aesthetic imaginings of exile and return in Dheisheh refugee camp as represented through an architectural art installation entitled “The Concrete Tent.” Produced by individuals involved with *DAAR (Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency)* and *Campus in Camps*, “The Concrete Tent” is a material representation of two years of dialogue with third-generation refugees. Using the “The Concrete Tent” as a locus point to explore community dialogue around spatial imaginings of “the right of return” and life in exile, I consider how this form of aesthetic practice interrupts existing local narratives of refugee community life and raises new discourses about life in the camp. More specifically, this chapter addresses the following questions: What role can cultural production, and in particular *decolonizing* aesthetics play in disrupting racialized representations of Palestinians under both Israeli settler-colonialism and

humanitarian governance?<sup>32</sup> And, how have these reimaginings of the “camp” and the project of “return,” as curated through “The Concrete Tent”, been interpreted by Palestinian refugees currently living in the camp?

To explore these questions, I draw from semi-structured interviews that I conducted with participants of the project as well as with refugees of Dheisheh and Aida camp not directly affiliated with the project. I analyze their interviews alongside visual representations of the installation at different stages (taken across several months), oral history, participant observations, local media coverage, and public statements about the project published by *Decolonizing Architecture Art and Campus in Camps*. Using “The Concrete Tent” as a site to explore community dialogue around the representational life of return, I reflect upon what kind of decolonial imaginative capacities are invited through this project. In canvassing a broad spectrum of texts and voices to examine “The Concrete Tent” and its interpretation by Palestinian refugees living within the camp structure, I argue that forms of decolonial imagining invited through this project come into tension with local memories and on-going histories of settler-colonialism and humanitarianism. While the aims of this installation is to disrupt totalizing stories of Palestinian refugees as temporally immobile, I show how considerations of the past reach into the discursive and affective field of reception and creates a dissonance between decolonial imaginings of refugee discourse, localized memories and the material consequences of living under protracted refugee life.

In chapter five, I turn to creative and futuristic imaginings of return for third-generation Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank. In so doing, I ask: what do these stories about return in its *afterlife* reveal about the affective implications of settler-colonial exile and protracted

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<sup>32</sup> I will elaborate on how this project is represented as an aesthetic of decolonization as discussed by the architects responsible for its design.

humanitarian governance in Palestine? Drawing from Dina Georgis's interpretive framework of "stories" to think about the representational life of colonial and post-colonial injury, this chapter centers "stories" to understand what these representations of return reveal about race and desire in the aftermath of and on-going reality of life in exile.<sup>33</sup> Through analyzing two sites of story-telling: a futuristic spatial essay that meditates on the question of return in the year 2040 for refugees from the West Bank and semi-structured interviews I collected with participants of *Campus in Camps*, I argue that articulations of loss and hope not only simultaneously contour the affective landscape of these futuristic imaginaries, but help us think about a racialized ordering of temporality, land and spatiality produced at the nexus of settler-colonialism and protracted humanitarian governance.<sup>34</sup> Attending to how this group of refugees attenuate their sense of self and life to the future rather than the past, I also examine the ways that refugees aesthetically and politically write themselves back into humanity and against the ontological parameters of banishment. Looking closely at bodily desires, and in particular the desire for a return articulated as *freedom of movement*, this chapter argues that these imaginative futurities of return might be understood as a reparative justice politic for decolonization unhinged from statist paradigms. The significance of these insights is that they open up new directions for thinking about questions of race and decolonial futurities in Palestine/Israel.

In the concluding chapter, I further explain the significance of thinking about the project of return as a project attenuated to mobility and its implications on race and deterritorialized readings of decolonial projects that center land. Rather than assuming a fixed and/or essentialized reading of land, I further explain how a 'decolonial aesthetics of the ordinary' as represented in

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<sup>33</sup> Dina Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East* (Albany: State University of New York, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> *Campus in Camps. Vision* (Bethlehem, Collective Dictionary, January 2013). Accessed October 2016. <http://www.campusincamps.ps/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/vision.pdf>.

this project gestures to desires for mobility under Israel's racialized structure of carceral governance. Further, I attempt to account for what these imaginings of freedom of movement lend to questions of racial difference in the context of Palestinian refugees and within a broader context of colonial modernity. In so doing, I explain how these imaginings of return in its *afterlife* open up questions about the human and decolonial imaginings of redress deemed illegible under settler-colonialism and international governance.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **METHODOLOGY, ETHICAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS, RESEARCH PROCESS**

The methodological questions that inspired this work neither began nor ended at the stage of research or writing. In many ways, my interest in exploring the representational landscape and temporality of imagination in Palestine developed over extended trips to the West Bank throughout the course of almost a decade. It was during these visits that I came to appreciate the textured, often ambivalent but nonetheless life sustaining work of imagination under indefinite and prolonged military occupation. I first came to think about the relationship between imagination, temporality and representations of return during my first visit to the West Bank in 2009. Nine years ago, I sat with a woman in Aida refugee camp (Bethlehem). She brought my attention to the bullet holes that ornamented the window frame in her living room. These shots were fired into her home from the Israeli military watchtower adjacent to the camp. As I looked out her window, I saw two things: a cemetery and the apartheid wall. She told me a story, which, in many ways, planted the earliest seeds of this project. Prior to the construction of the apartheid wall, she and her family would look out their window, past the cemetery, and on a very clear day, they could visually access 48' (historic Palestine, now Israel). As they had their morning tea, they would look deep into the horizon and ask, "how will we return"? After the construction of the apartheid wall began, the question changed from "how will we return?" to "how will we break down this wall?". The apartheid wall not only blocked the visual field of historic Palestine, but in many ways, it rerouted the kinds of questions that could be asked about the idea of return. This experience began to open up for me a question about the ways that Israel's symbolic and material orderings of settler-colonial life, and more specifically, carceral spatial planning and architecture not only enables the

usurpation of land but also reaches into the political and temporal aspirations of return at the level of imagination. This memory stayed with me as I began to think further about what it means to imagine return under an expanding settler-colonial reality. Furthermore, this memory remained with me as I thought further about how to develop a methodology for tracing the representational life of return - a decolonial aspiration attenuated to the future.

This dissertation examines the representational life of return and asks: how has Israeli settler-colonialism and international rights discourse come to bear on political imaginings of return for third-generation Palestinian refugees residing in the occupied West Bank? Examining this question as a genealogical inquiry that stretches between the past and *afterlife* of return, I examine what legal, humanitarian and decolonial representations of return tell us about the historical and on-going project of race in Palestine/Israel as it coalesces under international law, humanitarianism and settler-colonialism. This project is methodological and analytically inspired by theories of race, settler-colonialism, affect and psychoanalysis and comes into conversation with the field of Palestine Studies. While these are the theoretical influences that frame this dissertation, I do not explain the work of these theories in this chapter alone. Rather, my engagement with these theories and explanation of how they come to bear on my analysis is interwoven throughout the project as a whole. Further, I do hope that the subsequent chapters in this dissertation show how the questions, materials and ideas canvassed in this project contribute new ideas to these fields, including but not limited to the field of Palestine Studies.

In this chapter, I explain my methodology, ethical and theoretical considerations, and research process.<sup>35</sup> I have organized this chapter in three parts. In part one, I introduce the

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<sup>35</sup> While I have organized the chapter in this way, I understand ethical considerations and the research process as interconnected and constitutive of methodological framework as whole. I further explain in this chapter how ethical and theoretical considerations came to bear on my research question, materials selected and analysis.

interpretive and research methods and materials that animate this project. While I rely on textual and visual sources in this project including semi-structured interviews, public and published statements by the collectives involved, news media, historical UN records and photographs – as will be elaborated on shortly, the *interpretive methods* that I rely upon to examine these texts include genealogy, discourse analysis and the politics of representation. These methods are indebted to post-structuralist thought and shape my analysis in significant ways.<sup>36</sup> In part two, I introduce the ethical considerations and theoretical imperatives that came to bear on the development of my research questions, sites and analysis. In part three, I outline the frameworks that inspired my research process which include grounded theory and decolonial research.

## **Methodology**

Before explaining the methodological tools adopted in this project, a general note on methodology is required. Methodology, in the broadest sense, refers to the relationship between theory and methods. This relationship is often determined by epistemic training and approaches to theory and methods. For instance, positivist approaches to methodology might begin with a series of linear steps that include a question, a process of quantitative or qualitative data collection which gets measured, tested or assessed and then explicated for the purposes of developing theories. These approaches to research, common to both natural sciences as well as social science tradition, assume that there is a sociality that lives “out there,” independent from the epistemic training or standpoint of the researcher. Further, positivist approaches to methodology often assume an “objective” and “neutral” lens to the process of knowledge production. As Donna Haraway explains, this “view of infinite vision” [...] allows the agent to speak authoritatively about

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<sup>36</sup> While these methods emerge from post-structuralist thought, they have also shaped the intellectual and methodological tradition of scholarship on studies of race and colonialism.

everything in the world with no particular location.”<sup>37</sup> This approach to knowledge production renders invisible several important considerations: epistemic training, positionality, and the relations of power between the researcher and object/subject being researched.

As one of the research participants in this project astutely asked me, “how might we discern the differences between a soldier and a scholar in a place like Palestine?”<sup>38</sup> His point was that under conditions of heightened militarization and settler-colonial violence, Palestinians are made into objects of surveillance by state and non-state actors alike (i.e. researchers, journalists, NGO workers etc.). Furthermore, both soldiers and scholars are tasked and trained to observe, collect details, draw conclusions and report back to an institutional body. While the intentions behind this research process may vary, this person’s critical inquiry raises important ethical and contextually based questions about doing research in a hyper-surveilled context like Palestine. But his point also introduces broader methodological questions concerning the inextricable and constitutive relation between power/knowledge.

In Michel Foucault’s reflections on power/knowledge and what he names regimes of truth, he helps us think about the ways that these concepts are interconnected.<sup>39</sup> In examining the ways that specialized fields of knowledge (i.e. law or science) come to bear on assumed ideas of truth, Foucault helps us think about knowledge/power as a nexus that governs our sense of self and relationship to the world. Importantly, as Carmela Murdocca further clarifies, “he is not suggesting that knowledge is power. Rather, he argues that knowledge is a mechanism of power – a form of

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<sup>37</sup> Donna Haraway, “Situated knowledges: The Science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspectives.” In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 127-140

<sup>38</sup> Alessandro Petti, personal communication to author, May 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

power” that reaches into all spheres of life.<sup>40</sup> We might understand the power/knowledge nexus as a pervasive constituting force that assembles relations between individuals and group, as well as across institutions and central to subject formation.

As Avery Gordon captures so beautifully:

Power relations that characterize any historically embedded society are never as transparently clear as the names we give them imply. Power can be invisible, it can be fantastic, it can be dull and routine. It can be obvious, it can reach you by the baton of the police, it can speak the language of your thoughts and desires. It is dense and superficial, it can cause bodily injury, and it can harm you without seeming ever to touch you. It is systematic and it is particularistic and it is often both at the same time. *It causes dreams to live and dreams to die.* We can and must call it by recognizable names, but so too we need to remember that power arrives in forms that can range from blatant white supremacy and state terror to “furniture without memories.”<sup>41</sup>

If knowledge is a mechanism of power with expansive reach, as illustrated so poignantly by Gordon, we might think about *discourse* as a vehicle that operationalizes this mechanism.

### **Discourse and the Politics of Representation**

As Stuart Hall explains, discourse is an interpretive grid of meaning making.<sup>42</sup> Discourse might be thought about as framework for understanding an interpretation to making meaningful sense of representations. Delineating Foucault’s reading of discourse, Hall explains discourse as a “group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment...Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.”<sup>43</sup> In Hall’s discussion of the “Politics of Representation,” he introduces the politics of representation

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<sup>40</sup> Carmela Murdocca, “Michel Foucault: Theories and “Method”,” in *Criminalization, Representation, Regulation: Thinking Differently about Crime*, eds. Deborah Brock, Amanda Glasbeek, and Carmela Murdocca (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>41</sup> Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 3. Emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Stuart Hall, “Representation & the Media,” Transcript of Lecture, Media Education Foundation, 2005. Accessed April 2012, <http://www.mediaed.org/transcripts/Stuart-Hall-Representation-and-the-Media-Transcript.pdf>.

<sup>43</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,” in *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1992), 72.

as a set of tensions that signal to “the struggles over what is represented.”<sup>44</sup> This struggle takes place on two fronts: 1) How a text comes to be *represented* (i.e. imaged and depicted) and 2) What *stands* in for this imaging (i.e. discourse).<sup>45</sup> What’s important about these two ideas is that the text itself does not exist *meaningfully* in the absence of *discourse* (which simply refers to “frameworks of understanding and interpretation to making meaningful sense.”).<sup>46</sup> Thus for Hall, it is not that nothing exists outside of discourse but rather, it is that nothing can hold *meaning* outside of discourse (as it is discourse that renders meaning to an object, subject, event etc.). As Hall argues, meaning arises through culture – which he identifies as shared systems of classification that come into being through signifying practices (i.e. maps of meaning). These concepts “operate as a system of representation” that come into being through sign systems such as language and communication (including bodily, written, digital etc.).<sup>47</sup> The production of meaning (via “signifying practices”) is thus a “kind of symbolic work, an activity, a practice, which has to go on in giving meaning to things and in communicating that meaning to someone else.”<sup>48</sup> Of significance, this symbolic work does not take place prior to or after an event but is constitutive of the event itself. As Hall explains, this kind of intellectual vocation – this struggle over ideas – requires that we not only investigate representations with a critical eye but that we literally “go inside” of them - that we open up the “practice by which these closures of imagery have been presented.”<sup>49</sup> One of the ways that we might practice this is through discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is a method that refers to a procedure employed to analyze texts. It is a method used to examine “language in use or the study of actually occurring language (‘texts’) in

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<sup>44</sup> Hall, “Representation & the Media,” 2.

<sup>45</sup> Hall, “Representation & the Media,” 6.

<sup>46</sup> Hall, “Representation & the Media,” 12.

<sup>47</sup> Hall, “Representation & the Media,” 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Hall, “Representation & the Media,” 21.

specific communicative contexts (...).”<sup>50</sup> Emerging from an interdisciplinary approach, this method draws on insights from a variety of disciplines (i.e. sociolinguistics and communication studies). In the Foucauldian tradition, ‘discourse’ is understood as “organized systems of thought” and “social practices” that construct subject and their life-worlds.<sup>51</sup> This definition explains discourse as both a system of representation and practice. Throughout this dissertation, I use these interpretive methods of representation and discourse analysis to trace the imaginative and representational landscape of return. For instance, in chapter three, I read legal texts in the form of UN historical records to think about how considerations for, and representation of, return was first introduced at the level of international governance. In examining the discursive shifts in these representations, I show how Palestinian refugees come to be legally constructed as humanitarian subjects in need of aid, rather than the repatriation of land. In chapter four and five, I continue to rely on discourse analysis and representation as interpretive methods to think about decolonizing cultural production and its implications for representations of return in Palestinian refugee community life. Reading these creative sites of representation against dominant representations about Palestinian refugees and the right of return as constituted under early settler-colonial expulsion policies and international law, I analyze these works genealogically.

In thinking about how dominant knowledge about Palestinian refugee discourse came to be historically and legally crafted alongside local memories and futuristic imaginings held by third-generation Palestinian refugees, this dissertation invites the meeting of dominant knowledge with subjugated knowledge, producing what Foucault names “a historical knowledge of struggles.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Work of Representation,”

<sup>51</sup> Deborah Brock, Amanda Glasbeek, and Carmela Murdocca (eds.), *Criminalization, Representation, Regulation: Thinking Differently about Crime* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 429.

<sup>52</sup> Michel Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University, 1977), 7.

It is through this meeting of knowledges, that I attempt to offer a genealogical account of how settler-colonial expulsion and international rights discourse has come to bear on political imaginings of return for third-generation Palestinian refugees residing in the occupied West Bank.

## **Genealogy**

In the Foucauldian tradition, a genealogy refers to a “history of the present that looks to the past for insight into today.”<sup>53</sup> Following Nietzsche, Foucault relied upon genealogy as a way to uncover the “historical relationship between truth, knowledge and power.”<sup>54</sup> In this tradition, we are indebted to a particular reading of knowledge/power and time. As a historian of the present, Foucault’s genealogical method is oriented towards tracing formations of discursive arrangements across history to the present. Resisting teleological postulations, his work instead presents us with an account of how things come to be. In Foucault’s published lectures in “Society Must Be Defended,” we are provided insights into what he meant by “genealogy” and how he advanced genealogy as an explicitly anti-positivist method of inquiry.<sup>55</sup> Explaining how he thinks about genealogy, we are presented with an account of, what he calls *subjugated knowledges*: a body of “historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations...and a series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledge.”<sup>56</sup> The meeting of subjugated knowledges with dominant knowledge produces, what Foucault names “a historical knowledge of struggles.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences* (New Jersey: Princeton 1992), xi.

<sup>54</sup> See Geoff Danaher et al. *Understanding Foucault*. (London: Sage Publication, 2000), xi.

<sup>55</sup> Foucault cautions that genealogy not be mistaken as a “form of scientism that disqualifies speculation by contrasting it with the rigor of well-established bodies of knowledge” (Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, 9). Further, for Foucault, this approach to “returns of knowledge” are not “positivist returns to a form of science that is more attentive or accurate.” As Foucault explains, “genealogies are, quite specifically antisciences” (Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, 9).

<sup>56</sup> Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, 8.

The work of genealogy, for Foucault, is to account for these historical struggles – “a combination of erudite knowledge and what people know.”<sup>58</sup> As Foucault explains, “If you like, we can give the name “genealogy” to this coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics.”<sup>59</sup> In offering this particular method of excavation – a method of inquiry organized around the “insurrection of knowledges,” Foucault asks us to think about how we might “desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse.”<sup>60</sup>

As a historian of the present, Foucault’s approach to temporality is not engaged with the future (as an object of analysis). As Frederic Jameson suggests in “The Utopic/Dystopic Imagination,” it might even be possible to conclude that in the Foucauldian sense of genealogy, we have no methodology for thinking about the future.<sup>61</sup> Working through the intellectual tradition of genealogy, how might we, as this project attempts to do, develop a method for reading the historical, legal and on-going structures of violence that have come to bear on imaginings of return in Palestine (a project oriented towards the future)? My interest in exploring how return gets mobilized at the level of imagination invites further reflections on Foucault’s genealogical method. If we accept the idea that there is no methodology for thinking about the future, how then do we analytically and politically invest in the work of future possibilities? Furthermore, what methods might enable a canvassing of political possibilities on the horizon – a theoretical sensitivity towards desires on the wake of becoming? Through this dissertation, I attempt to illustrate that

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<sup>58</sup> Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, 8.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Foucault, *language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews*, 10.

<sup>61</sup> Frederic Jameson, “Utopia as Method, or the Uses of the Future,” in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility*, ed. Gordin Michael, D, Tilley Helen, and Prakash Gyan (Princeton: Oxford, 2010), 21-44.

there are in fact myriad ways that we can get more intimate with the future. Some of the imaginative sites that this dissertation travels through to get us thinking about the political project of return – a project necessarily attenuated to the future – include an architectural art installation and futuristic story (as chapter three and four examine).

### **Imagination and Futurity**

I introduce imaginings of return in this work as a site of genealogy because, as a temporality attenuated to the future, these imaginings open up space to understand the political conditions that bind refugees to the past and present. These works also open up questions about what we might come to understand differently when we prioritize the future or the *afterlife* of return. To provide further context, in many ways, the identity category “refugee” – in its discursive formation – often signals to a temporal reading of the past. The political identity of the “refugee” and specifically the “Palestinian refugee” often comes to be represented as a figure of the past – a precarious subject produced through forced expulsion or coerced migration and periodized around two moments: 1948 and 1967. These representations rely on imaginings of *past* injury as a temporal marker for indexing the political identity of refugees in the present. How might we account for the ways that Palestinian refugees determine their sense of self and identity formation in relation to other temporalities? More importantly, why does this matter? As Diana Allen suggests in *Refugees of the Revolution: Palestinian Experiences of Exile*,

[m]uch has been written on the way refugees relate to the past, and very little on how they orient themselves to the future. Barred as they are from ordinary means of personal development and advancement, how do they remain invested in the futures? What generates for them a sense of hope and prospective momentum?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Diana Allen, *Refugees of the Revolution: Palestinian Experiences of Exile* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 139.

While preoccupations around time has structured much of what has been written about the Palestinian “refugee experience,” these writings are often shaped by an orientation towards the early years of the settler-colonial establishment in Palestine. In tracing the ways that historical violence has shaped the terrain through which Palestinians understand their sense of self in the present, there is a tendency to ignore the future and what the “day after” might look like (i.e. the day after the occupation has ended, the day after camps are no longer necessary, the day after protracted humanitarian care has ended). This is especially true in the case of anthropological literature, much of which, as suggested by Allan, ignores the role of anticipation and foresight in “ethnographies of camp life.”<sup>63</sup> Yet, in the case of Palestine, representations of hope – as an affective register attenuated to the future - is woven into the very fabric of everyday parlance.<sup>64</sup>

In light of these tensions around temporal representation, Allan invites scholars and researchers to think about the significance of, what she identifies as, “dream talk”. The very idea of “dream talk,” Allan writes, “becomes more resonant when one considers how other, normative avenues of anticipation and planning have been foreclosed.”<sup>65</sup> Advancing an analytic anchored in futurity, she writes,

Fueled by coffee and cigarettes, sessions of dream talk provided respite and renewal - moments outside the daily grind, where relations were reaffirmed and views were played out, validated, negotiated, or confronted. [...]. Dream talk represents one of a number of discursive practices used to make life more bearable or facilitate continuity in the face of rupture [...]. As “projective surfaces” (Kilborne 1981, 297), dream narratives represented an ideal medium through which to explore future oriented thought and imaginative practice, individual and shared, because meaning is constructed and not confined to that which is directly experience. By interweaving internal and external worlds, the real and the imagined – and blurring temporal boundaries, dream talk allowed people to develop vocabularies for thinking and talking about the future less constrained by the present circumstances.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution*, 139.

<sup>64</sup> This idea is elaborated in greater detail in chapters four and five.

<sup>65</sup> Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution*, 29.

<sup>66</sup> Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution*, 140.

Allan makes a persuasive case for what a story-telling of the future – a kind of phenomenology rooted in the future - might repair. Orienting an inquiry into “dream talk” offers a kind of reprieve that animates anew the quotidian of settler-colonial life. Though insistent that scholars must begin to pay attention to how refugees orient themselves towards the future, she provides compelling ethical and methodological considerations for what is at stake in probing into the futures of refugees. In her own words, “ethically, it is difficult to ask refugees to probe their future (which can seem like twisting a knife in the wound).”<sup>67</sup> And methodologically, “it is difficult to research what is yet to be.”<sup>68</sup> In a context like Palestine, where protracted humanitarian governance works alongside a model of settler-colonialism aimed at slowly eroding indigenous ties to land and life, the future is necessarily always provisional. The question then is, how do we fill the gap in scholarship that attends to the ways that refugees might orient themselves towards the future when this inquiry is interwoven with ethical tensions?

Throughout my research, these were questions I attempted to grapple with though they remained for me in a state of tension. What became more and more clear to me throughout this research is that for those living with on-going foreclosures of possibility, dreams of the future are a painful place to visit and a necessary reprieve from living amidst a military occupation with no end in sight. And yet, as this dissertation attempts to signal to, the place of imagination, opens up important reflections for further readings of life under settler-colonialism and humanitarian governance. In analytically centering representations and imaginings of return, I treat the concept of return as a signpost of race *and* decolonial futurities in Israel/Palestine. Further, through canvassing the representational life of return through these methodological directives (discourse

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<sup>67</sup> Allan, *Refugees of the Revolution*, 138-39.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

analysis, representation and genealogy), I think about how on-going subjugation and decolonial aspirations for something else can simultaneously exist in Palestine.

## **Research Sources**

In an effort to develop a methodology for tracing the imaginative and representational landscape of return - a decolonial aspiration of something that has yet to come, this project analyzes a variety of texts through employing interpretive methods of discourse analysis, representation and genealogy, as explained above. I rely on discourse analysis and theories of representation to analyze written and visual texts in this project which include historical UN records, semi-structured interviews, public statements and published works by the collectives involved (including story), news media and visual images.<sup>69</sup>

In chapter two, I rely on secondary literature – in the field of Palestine Studies, and theories of colonialism (including both post-colonialism and settler-colonialism) to construct a historical account of how ideas about race (via scientific racism) were imbued in early Israeli settler-colonial debates and policies. In chapter three, I turn to the ways that international bodies like the UN began to articulate the idea of return for newly displaced Palestinian refugees. The UN records that I analyze include UN resolutions, progress reports, telegraphs and letters disseminated between UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte in transmission to other UN bodies (including the UN General Assembly and Security Council) and transcripts of correspondence records between the UN mediator with the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of the League of

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<sup>69</sup> Post-modernists often refer to “text” as something that communicates meaning. Thus a “text” might also be thought about as a phenomenon or event. Roland Barthes has argued that this communication is not politically neutral but in fact, between the sign and the signifier exists contingencies between power/knowledge. See Pauline Marie Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insight, Inroads, and Intrusions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

Arab States. The resolutions, reports and letters that I analyze are temporally organized between 1947 to 1948, a time when the British Mandate was transferring sovereign power to the United Nations and Israeli leaders. During this time frame, two important resolutions emerged, both of which I examine: UN resolution 181 (the partition plan) and UN resolution 194 (the right of return). In addition to reading what these resolutions proposed to do and how Palestinian refugees came to be represented in these records, I also analyze Bernadotte's written observations (in the form of progress reports and letters between Israeli and Arab leaders). As this chapter explains, the documents that emerged during his brief appointment, reveal the first time in history that the right of return for Palestinian refugees was debated and articulated as a resolution. Adopting discourse analysis to examine these records, I show how the idea of return shifted from a concern about the repatriation of Palestinian rights to land into a depoliticized and protracted humanitarian consideration that is now almost seven decades old. Expanding on this idea, the second half of this dissertation (chapters four and five) consider how third-generation Palestinian refugees have responded to this discourse through creative and decolonizing cultural production. Although DAAR and Campus in Camps are the collectives whose works I query, the textual sites that I examine include a range of written and visual representations of and responses to an architectural art installation entitled "The Concrete Tent" and a set of futuristic story-based representations of the project of return entitled "Visions." The materials that I examine to look at these projects include public speeches and presentations at public events and workshops, photographic images that I took or drew from local news coverage, and published works by the collectives involved including a writing project entitled the "collective dictionary." As indicated, in addition to the written texts included (i.e. transcripts of public speeches and presentations, news media and written representation), I rely on, and discursively analyze photographs in chapter four and five. Rather

than simply presenting these images, I introduce them in this work as decolonial aesthetics that tell a story about life under expulsion. As Ariella Azoulay notes, most political philosophers, historians and sociologists “do not regard photographs as a source for political, philosophical or historical research.”<sup>70</sup> Further, she suggests that the ontological framework used to discuss photography, assume, “that the photograph is a product of one stable point of view – that of the photographer.”<sup>71</sup> Treating photographs as a site of discursive struggle between signifying relations (i.e. between the signifier and the signified) – as Azoulay does, we can further think about photographs as sites of active and contested representational practice. In the process of selecting images for this project, I relied on aesthetic representations of Palestinian refugee life across different sites: painted murals in the camp, photographs of the construction of “The Concrete Tent” at different various different stages, and photographs of Al-Feniq (a community center in Dheisheh Camp). I rely on and analyze these images to explain how narratives about Palestinian refugees have been debated and imagined in community life. While these images appear only in chapters four and five, I show how these representations are connected to the settler-colonial and legal imaginings of Palestinian refugees presented in chapter two and three. In asking how these aesthetic representations come into conversation with settler-colonial imaginaries and international legal governance, I think about the complex representational life of these narratives. In reading these written and visual texts against and through one another, I explore what these discursive interventions were attempting to do and how they attempt to translate Palestinian refugee community life. While these interpretive methods and this particular selection of texts gave me insights into the kinds of community dialogue being formed around representations of

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<sup>70</sup> Azoulay, Ariella, “What is a photograph? What is photography?,” *Philosophy of Photography*, 1, no. 1 (2010): 10.

<sup>71</sup> Azoulay, “What is a photograph? What is photography?,” 11.

Palestinian refugees and the right of return, I was also interested in developing this research through the use of interviews.

One of my primary methods of research in chapter four and five included the use of semi-structured interviews. Throughout the course of my field-research, I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with organizers and participants of the collectives involved. I examine and analyze ten of these interviews in this dissertation as I found them to be the most relevant to the project at the later stage of its development.<sup>72</sup> I held interviews with architects, artists, students involved with Decolonizing Architectural Art, Campus in Camps and NGO workers. All of the participants ranged between the age of 18-60 and reflected a diverse range of social locations (i.e. gender, class, refugee versus non-refugee status). The significance of collecting diverse voices is that it helped me think about and discuss the complex layers of Palestinian community life. On average, the interviews lasted between an hour to an hour and a half and almost all of them took place in one sitting. In contrast to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews provided greater flexibility in the kinds of questions I could ask and allowed me to follow the cues and directions of the interviewees. Leaving interviews semi-structured was advantageous because while it still allowed for the questions to be organized around the themes of this work, it did not restrict the participants to only speak about said themes. On the contrary, this form of interviewing encourages participants to respond to questions with a greater degree of autonomy and self-direction, helping to uncover the matters most relevant to the lives of community members involved.

As a non-Palestinian doing research into a community life that is not my own, I found this

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<sup>72</sup> During the course of my field research, I had also collected and included interviews from a third collective by the name of *Beit Shams*. This collective is part of a growing yoga movement in Palestine that works at the level of the body to think about ideas of “freedom of movement”. While the interviews collected with participants of *Beit Ashams* provided me a more nuanced context to think about the quotidian of the occupation and how it comes to be experienced at the level of the body, I felt it was best not to include that research into this project at this time as it would widen the scope of this project too much at this stage.

strategy particularly useful as it let the participants guide the discussion, which often times took me to unexpected places. For instance, while many of my interview questions broadly queried the nature of their work and the kinds of community interactions and dialogues that emerged from aesthetic practice, the interviewees often moved into reflections about temporal narratives of life under occupation (i.e. tensions between permanent versus temporary aesthetic narratives or practices, the policing discourse of normalization in everyday life, the degrees of occupied subjectivity [i.e. as organized through ideas about a hierarchy of suffering] and hesitations in public engagement amidst heightened Israeli aggression in Gaza).<sup>73</sup> In creating an open platform to explore these themes, this approach to interviewing allowed for the participants to speak back, disagree and be more involved with the kind of conversation being generated. Interviews were also as an important method for generating knowledge through a feminist lens of standpoint theory.

At the heart of standpoint theory exist three main tenets: First, that knowledge is socially situated. Second, that the very production of dominant knowledge systems is often shaped by the standpoint of privileged subject positions. Third, that the production of knowledge about society from the margins not only provides an alternative epistemology from which to know the world, but that this site of knowledge production is, as Alison Jaggar identifies, “epistemologically advantageous.”<sup>74</sup> Rather than selecting the individual as the unit of analysis, standpoint theory turns to collectives as units of analysis because of their shared history.<sup>75</sup> This shared history does not assume that everyone within the group will have the same experience of institutionalized

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<sup>73</sup> Almost all of the participants discussed their complex feelings of attending classes or participating in community initiatives during Israel’s 2014 assault on Gaza.

<sup>74</sup> Alison, M. Jaggar, “Feminist politics and epistemology: The standpoint of women” In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 57.

<sup>75</sup> Patricia Collins, H. “Comments on Hekman’s Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited”: Where’s the Power?” In *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding (New York: Routledge, 2004), 248.

oppression or reside in the same social location. Rather, by recognizing the fluidity and multiplicity of peoples intersecting locations within communities, we are offered a “new lens that potentially deepens understanding of how the actual mechanisms of institutional power can change dramatically while continuing to produce longstanding inequalities of race, gender, and class that result in group stability.”<sup>76</sup> In the next section, I explain the ethical considerations and theoretical tensions that gave rise to my interest in centering an analytic of decolonial possibility.

### **Ethical and Theoretical Considerations**

As Edward Said insisted, the very condition of Palestine might be translated as a state of consciousness that represents “a vast collective feeling of injustice [which] continues to hang over our lives with undiminished weight.”<sup>77</sup> Over 35 years ago, Said and others took on a project of bringing the “Question of Palestine” to Western academic audiences. The challenge at hand concerned how to re-narrate the history of Palestine in a way that allowed for a different reading of Zionism – one that opened up questions about Israel as a modern colonial project.

In the field of Palestine Studies, critical scholars of Israel/Palestine have insisted that we view the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem as part of a settler-colonial structure that enables the expansion of Israel’s settler-colonial frontiers. As such, they have argued that it would be inaccurate to conceive of the military occupation of Palestinian territory as a “temporary aberration” to Israel’s state formation since the past five decades of military occupation have constituted the fabric upon which Israel’s settler-colonial nation-building is fashioned.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Collins, H. Patricia. “Comments on Hekman’s “Truth and Method, 249.

<sup>77</sup> Edward Said, “Introduction: The Right of Return at Last,” in *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return*, ed. Naseer Aruri (Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>78</sup> Although I center the occupation of the West Bank as a historical point of reference, the occupation of Palestine should be read as a strategic practice of Israeli settler-colonial nation building which began prior to the 1948 Nakba and Israel’s official state declaration. Zionist settlers began settling into historic Palestine with the intent on establishing Palestine as a Jewish homeland through processes of colonization as early as the 1882. This historical detail is theoretically significant because it situates Israel’s 1967 occupation of Palestine in a broader

These studies squarely frame the occupation as an extension of Israeli state-building and more specifically, settler-colonial expansion. While this contention might seem self-evident among scholars attentive to processes of colonialism and nation-state building, it remains a contested idea among scholars who refuse to acknowledge Israel as a settler-colonial nation in the first place. For example, in dominant Zionist historiography, the Zionist movement is more often framed as a socialist project that was aimed at “combating imperialism” through the national liberation of Jewish peoples. Read in this context, Israel’s state project is framed as a “post-colonial” movement that accomplished sovereignty through gaining “independence.” As Edward Said insists, this national narrative of the “War of Independence” continues to be celebrated without interruption or remembrance of the practices of racial violence advanced to accomplish Israel’s state formation in the first place.

### **Theorizing Palestine through Settler-Colonial Studies**

Given the centrality of modern Zionist historical accounts in the state’s national narratives, it should be no surprise that the occupation of Palestine is seldom conceived of, let alone understood as an extension of Israeli settler-colonial nation building. For example, although the occupation first took root in 1967, nineteen years following the state’s formal declaration, the first serious sociological study that linked the occupation of Palestine to Israel’s practice of state-building (let alone through a framework of settler-colonialism) did not appear until the 1980s. Until then, Israeli researchers in the social sciences dissociated the occupation from Israel’s state formation and state identity-making practices thereby disavowing the very processes by which the occupation of Palestine formed a settler nation and settler consciousness. In effect, the occupation

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settler-colonial context and therefore allows us to understand how military occupation is not a temporary response to state emergency or conflict but a structure of settler-colonialism.

was viewed as “external to the Israeli state,” thereby disavowing the settler-colonial character of the state.<sup>79</sup>

With the rise of settler-colonialism studies, there has been a growing and robust body of scholarship on Palestine/Israel that examines the occupation through a theoretical framework of settler-colonialism.<sup>80</sup> Scholars of settler-colonialism look carefully at the ways in which colonial settlement has structured the social, political, and economic fabric of nation-building projects in the colonies. Although the field of settler-colonial studies is relatively new, it theorizes alongside anti-colonial and post-colonial studies in several ways.<sup>81</sup> As such, it might be “framed beside the study of migration, colonialisms, comparative economics, environmental transformation, “transplanted” European institutional patterns, “frontier” circumstances, and national formations.”<sup>82</sup> Settler-colonial scholars have contributed to the study of colonialism in two distinct ways. First, their work has shown how settler-colonial sovereignty is contingent upon the “settler

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<sup>79</sup> The first non-Palestinian Israeli academics that took up the relation between Israel’s occupation and settler-colonial nation building were Meron Benvenisti and Baruch Kimmerling. Meron Benvenisti is an Israeli geographer and collected data on various governmental practices and regulations adopted by the Israeli state. His report was the first in-depth study of the occupation. Baruch Kimmerling approached his study as a sociologist and published this work in Hebrew. See Baruch Kimmerling, “Boundaries and Frontiers of the Israeli Control System,” in *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers* (Albany: State University of New York, 1989), 265-83; Meron Benvenisti, *The West Bank Data Project: A Survey of Israel’s Policies, West Bank Data Base Project Report* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984). Also see Adi Ophir, Michal Givoni, and Sari Hanafi, *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 20.

<sup>80</sup> For instance, see the settler-colonial journal edition dedicated to Palestine. Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, Sobhi Samour, “Past in Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine,” *settler colonial studies* 2, no. 1, 2012.

<sup>81</sup> Similar to scholars of settler-colonial studies, post-colonial and anti-colonial scholars are also concerned with the temporal and spatial ordering of modernity. Post-colonial scholars often look at processes of colonial governance that extend beyond the formal end of colonial rule. Some of the central themes and debates central to these fields include nationalism, sovereignty, decolonization, and the potentiality of anti-colonial nationalism. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, 1963); Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Post-Colonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Taiaike Alfred, *Wasáse: indigenous pathways of action and freedom* (Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 13.

capacity to control the population economy”<sup>83</sup> and second, they have argued that there is a distinct settler-consciousness that has made possible national narratives of settlement and belonging that hinge on the disavowal of practices of colonial violence and dispossession, displacement and ethnic cleansing.<sup>84</sup> The salience of connecting the occupation to structures of Israeli settler-colonialism is that it lets us think about how disparate sites of violence in Palestine (i.e. movement restrictions, aerial bombardment, massacres and invasions, house demolitions, mass imprisonment, identity card confiscation etc.) are connected to broader Zionist aims of statehood and territorial acquisition throughout all of Palestine.<sup>85</sup> Although the logic of most settler-colonial projects is one of displacement, genocide and erasure, these aims are often accompanied by policies and practices of confinement and surveillance as instituted under colonial modernity (i.e. slave plantation, reserves, residential schools, internment camps etc.).<sup>86</sup> These theoretical interventions have detailed in great theoretical and contextual rigor the ways that Palestinians, and more specifically Palestinian refugees, have been made into subjects of social and material death.

### **The Politics of Death**

In Achille Mbembe’s groundbreaking essay, *Necropolitics*, he marks the Palestinian subject as a quintessential figure of the “*living dead*” and offers an account of politics anchored in the work of death. Expanding and departing from Michel Foucault’s theory of biopower, Mbembe urges us to pay closer attention to the power of social death and in doing so, asks us to consider how colonial power is organized through “the subjugation of life to the power of death.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 12

<sup>84</sup> Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 12; Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism*, 62.

<sup>85</sup> Omar Jabary Salamanca, Mezna Qato, Kareem Rabie, Sobhi Samour, “Past in Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine,” *settler colonial studies* 2, no. 1, 2012.

<sup>86</sup> These examples are bound under colonial modernity but have different (and interconnected) genealogies and relations to the political economy of colonialism. I invoke them here as a broad reference to imaginings of carcerality under colonialism.

<sup>87</sup> Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1, 2003: 39.

Relocating the historical emergence of biopolitics, Mbembe locates the slave plantation as the earliest forms of biopolitical experimentation, noting the ways that the living dead or politically dead (slave) subject is indefinitely marked by a triple loss of political life; “loss of a “home,” loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status.”<sup>88</sup> This distribution of social death keeps the slave alive but in a permanent “state of injury, in a phantomlike world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity.”<sup>89</sup> Extending and expanding his analysis of terror formations on the slave plantation to think about Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territory, Mbembe delineates a particular configuration of terror in Palestine that operates through territorial fragmentation, a state of siege, and expansion of settlements. As a technology of modern colonial power, he argues that necropolitics organizes life in the West Bank and Gaza through “conditions of life conferring upon them the status of the living dead.”<sup>90</sup> In positing an account of power through the creation of ‘death worlds,’ Mbembe’s analysis of necropower locates the precise ways that power is ordered, organized and managed upon death, and the dehumanization of the Palestinian body. Mbembe develops his characterization of “death worlds” alongside Giorgio Agamben’s characterization of the camp. In describing the subject formation of the *homo sacer* – the figure of *bare life*, Agamben’s description of the *camp* shows how two juridical orders unfold into one juridical phenomenon: the *state of exception*. Invoking both the state of siege (whereby we see the “extension of the military authority’s wartime powers into the civil sphere”),<sup>91</sup> and the suspension of law itself – “the suspension of the constitution (or of those constitutional rights that protect civil liberties),”<sup>92</sup> the political and juridical order of the camp exists in the suspension of rights, whereby

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<sup>88</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 21.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 39.

<sup>91</sup> Giorgio Agamben. *State of Exception*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2005, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

the normalization of abnormal and exceptional state behavior becomes the routine of everyday life.<sup>93</sup> It is this context that gives rise to political and juridical structures of the camp. As scholars of race and colonialism insist, the figure of the *homo sacer* is underwritten by a structure of, what Hannah Arendt has named race-thinking, which posits this figure as one lacking in reason, rationality and civility and therefore outside of humanity itself (e.g. to borrow from Agamben, it is a place whereby political, social and juridical rights don't apply). This figure is marked outside of modernity and accordingly, the category human itself.

Drawing from Mbembe's analysis of necropolitical governance in Palestine, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian further characterizes conditions of death in Palestine arguing that "[T]he mundane power of the architecture of surveillance and colonial rule creates not only a sense of prison, of living in multiple unending traps, but also forges a necropolitical situation within an economy of life and death."<sup>94</sup> Drawing from theorists of settler-colonialism such as Andrea Smith and Patrick Wolfe, Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues that Israel's occupation policies in East Jerusalem reflect a 'logic of genocide' and 'logic of elimination.'<sup>95</sup> These interconnected logics contain the idea that indigenous people must be always disappearing, as argued by Smith, but also, to ensure that they never reappear, any traces that lead to their connections to land, life and history must also be erased.<sup>96</sup> In the context of Israeli state-building, the systematic erasure of Palestinian traces to

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<sup>93</sup> Ilan Pappé, "The Mukhabarat State of Israel: A State of Oppression is not a State of Exception" in *Thinking Palestine*, ed. Ronit Lentin. (New York : Zed Books), 2008, 155.

<sup>94</sup> Nadera, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Trapped: The Violence of Exclusion in Jerusalem". *Jerusalem Quarterly* 49, no. 7, (2010): 12.

<sup>95</sup> Nadera, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Criminality in spaces of death: The Palestinian case study," *The British Journal of Criminology*, 54, no. 1, (2014), 39.

<sup>96</sup> In the specific context of Jerusalem, these logics have direct implications on both the living and the dead. As Shalhoub-Kevorkian's thoughtful analysis of legal conflicts emerging around Bab Alsbat and Mamilla Cemetery reveals, Israeli authorities exercise and renew these settler colonial logics through criminalizing death and bereavement rituals in Jerusalem, including the act of burial itself. Analyzing the Israeli High Court's response to Israeli settler petitions against the use of Bab Alsbat cemetery for Palestinian residents, Shalhoub-Kevorkian demonstrates how the denial of Palestinian residents of Jerusalem to bury their dead is rooted in racialized

land co-constitutes the rewriting an ‘ancient history’ of the Jewish people.<sup>97</sup> Bringing these logics of genocide and elimination into conversation with Mbembe’s account of necropolitics, Shalhoub-Kevorkian demonstrates the ways the Israeli state criminalizes attempts to bury and memorialize the loss of Palestinian life. In thinking about the pervasive ways that the politics of death organizes modern colonial power in Palestine, we are invited to think about how racial violence is imprinted on day-to-day life in Palestine.<sup>98</sup>

The political significance of these scholarly interventions is that they detail precisely how the making, maintenance and expansion of the Israeli settler-colonial state relies on particular racial logics and technologies of death, thereby showing the on-going effects of modern political Zionism on Palestinians. However, in the framing of Palestinians as subjects of deaths and dying, how might we also think strategically and methodologically about the ways that Palestinians continually negotiate the quotidian even amidst proximity to death? How might we think about and perhaps even translate the condition of Palestine as one on-going survival? Rather than prioritizing grotesque acts of violence and suffering to understand the settler-state, my research was motivated by what decolonial possibilities tell us about conditions of colonial and decolonial life in Palestine. This theoretical gesture was inspired by a number of cautions that critical scholars of race and coloniality have lent to methodological considerations of racial terror and

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practices of managing historical ties to the land. It is about erasing archeological traces that might leave footprints – or in this instance bones – of the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem.

<sup>97</sup> Nadera, Shalhoub-Kevorkian, “Criminality in spaces of death: The Palestinian case study,” *The British Journal of Criminology*, 54, no. 1, (2014), 9.

<sup>98</sup> Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe have suggested that we think about racism or racial violence in the context of *modern* power – and its circulation through an economy of life and death (Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 2003; Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 1976). In Foucault’s description of biopower, he describes racism as having two functions. The first function of racism is to distinguish racial groups across a biological field, thereby “fragmenting the field of the biological that power controls” (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255). Racism’s second function is to establish productive relations of war (in a biological-type relationship). For instance, when the biologically determined “other” is read as a “threat,” exposing their life to death (or exercising the right to kill), it is seen to produce a “healthier” society (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 255, 1976). See Michel, Foucault, *Society must be defended*. (New York: Picador, 1976).

representation. One of such inspirations came from Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*.<sup>99</sup> In Hartman's exploration of dominant representations of terror formation on the slave plantation in the United States, she encourages us to consider how we encounter slave narratives, what they do for us and what we need from them. She asks:

How are we called upon to participate in such scenes? (...) Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of world-destroying capacities of pain, the distortions of torture, the sheer unrepresentability of terror, and the repression of the dominant accounts? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance? *What does the exposure of the violated body yield?* Proof of black sentience or the inhumanity of the "peculiar institution"? Or does the pain of the other merely provide us with the opportunity for self-reflection?<sup>100</sup>

What these questions signal to is the danger in relying on gratuitous and/or sentimental stories of racial terror and suffering, even when the aim of such story-telling is to historicize the violent and constituting structures of Black life and social death. Echoing these methodological cautions concerning the circulation and consumption of suffering and sentimentality, Sherene Razack also reflects on the ways that national subjects are formed through a "peculiar process of consumption" which she identifies as "stealing the pain of others."<sup>101</sup> Examining Canadian reactions to media representations of the Rwandan genocide, Razack suggests that the very act of witnessing "Rwandan's pain has mostly served to dehumanize them further, and in the process, to reinstall us as morally superior in relation to them."<sup>102</sup> Calling into question the slippery relationship between empathy and racism, she asks, "How does it happen? Can it be otherwise? That is, how do we feel

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<sup>99</sup> Saidiya Hartman. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>100</sup> Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Sherene Razack, "Stealing the Pain of Others: Reflections on Canadian Humanitarian Responses," *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 29, no. 4: 2007, 376.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

their pain *and* see their humanity? Most of all, how do we recognize our own complicity and move through outrage to responsibility?”<sup>103</sup> These questions certainly challenge dominant sensibilities around witnessing and representations of racial terror, even when, or perhaps especially when such sites of representation might yield responses of empathy.

In Eve Tuck’s compelling methodological invitation, she asks researchers and practitioners to put a moratorium on what she calls “damage centered research.” Tuck explains “damage centered research” as a kind of scholarship that “looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy.”<sup>104</sup> The danger with this approach, as Tuck insists is that “it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community (...).”<sup>105</sup> She further argues that poor, racialized and indigenous communities often tolerate this kind of research with the hope that “stories of damage” will have a “pay off in material, sovereign, and political wins.”<sup>106</sup> Calling into question the stakes of such wins, Tuck asks us to think about if it’s worth the long-term cost of “thinking of ourselves as damaged”?<sup>107</sup> Inviting consideration for another kind of analytic, such as that rooted in desire, Eve Tuck writes, “Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*.”<sup>108</sup>

Hartman, Razack and Tuck’s work are part of a growing methodological invitation to think about how – even in our impulses to do social justice research– we might reproduce stories of

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Education Review* 79, no. 3, 2009: 413.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Tuck, “Suspending Damage,” 414.

<sup>107</sup> Tuck, “Suspending Damage,” 415.

<sup>108</sup> Tuck, “Suspending Damage,” 417.

racial violence. These methodological considerations have had tremendous impact on my own thinking on and research practices in Palestine. In many ways, these texts inspired the methodological direction of the dissertation and came to shape the framing of this project in salient ways. The desire to prove the humanness of the Palestinian subject has informed much anthropological writing on Palestine. As Julie Peteet writes in “*Landscape of Hope and Desire*”,

Another task of the anthropologist is to humanize those otherwise marginalized and demonized, giving them a voice and bringing their life experiences to others. Working with populations at risk or in a state of emergency heightens the anthropological imperative to forge beyond the constitution of the refugee by a traumatic history to explore refugee agency.<sup>109</sup>

The problem with this approach, the one that seeks to “humanize” is that it rewrites Palestinian subjectivity as one contingent upon recognition. Through coming into contact with the researcher, the anthropologist can suddenly write their subjectivity into humanity, allowing them to become agents of history, while flattening the political conditions that shape their daily lives. Furthermore, the one who writes the dehumanized subject into humanity often becomes the centre of the story, writing themselves anew. These cultural inscriptions may at times produce compelling accounts of pain and suffering without any consideration of what the work of sentimentality does. While these sentimentalist approaches are often well intentioned, they often produce a flattened and unidirectional representation of personhood.

While the intent behind theoretical framings of settler-colonial violence in Palestine is to signal to the political and juridical processes that have casted the Palestinian subject into a place of “bare life” or as an outcast of modernity, this kind of scholarship leaves little space to reflect on how the very re-writing of the Palestinian subject as only an object of death writes their dehumanization anew. The communities I found myself in conversation with in Dheisheh and Aida

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<sup>109</sup> Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Desire: Palestinian Refugee Camps*, x.

camp were actively pushing against the kind of discourses that trapped them in a binary between victimhood or sacrificial heroes as both of these representations fail to capture the complexity of what it means to create life in the midst of a slow but active genocide. The frustration that many people expressed to me was that this binary between victim-based and heroic subjectivity instrumentalizes violence against refugees without giving them space to create their own representations and political histories of life in exile. While there are robust empirical grounds for theorizing Palestine and Palestinians as subjects of death and erasure – as my own scholarship has theorized elsewhere - my experiences living and researching in Palestine and the relationships forged during this time made me sensitive to a framing of people involved in this research as more than simply dead, dying or “damaged.”<sup>110</sup> As Yen Le Espirtu explains through her account of Vietnamese refugee identity formation in the U.S., “it is still possible to acknowledge that subjects are constructed and that oppression is damaging, and *still* recognize the ability “of social beings to weave alternative, and sometimes brilliantly creative, forms of coherence across the damages.”<sup>111</sup> Inspired by scholars that have also insisted on different reference points, I was compelled to think about what other frameworks we have for making sense of the lived experiences of Palestinian refugees and the on-going conditions that structure their lives within the camp. In thinking critically about the ways this framing of social and material death fails to capture the forms of life carved out for Palestinian refugees, this dissertation relies on and comes into conversation with

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<sup>110</sup> In “Necronationalism: managing race, death and the nation’s skeletons,” I examine the ways that settler-colonial governance extends its reach into Palestinian life *after death*. Tracing the politics of death as exercised through the excavation of Mamilla Cemetery and construction of the Simon Wiesenthal Center ‘Museum of Tolerance (Jerusalem), I show how contestations over memorialization and the strategic erasure of Palestinian corporeality consolidates and maintains settler-colonial imaginaries. See Vadasaria, S. (2015). “Necronationalism: managing race, death and the nation’s skeletons”, *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, Vol. 21 (2).

<sup>111</sup> Yen Le Espirtu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: California Press, 2014), 14.

scholarship that has attempted to theorize settler-colonialism and humanitarianism through the politics of life and the living.

### **The Politics of Life and the Living**

In Ilana Feldman's analysis of what she terms "the politics of living in the humanitarian space," she asks us to consider how long term humanitarian governance has left its mark on the "lifeworlds" of Palestinian refugees.<sup>112</sup> Examining UNRWA's camp structure in Amman, Jordan (as part of a larger project of camp analysis across the Arab world), she asks: as "humanitarian practice clearly shifts from disaster relief- provision of food, clothing, emergency shelter – to efforts that look more like social service work and development projects, how are people and communities shaped by this transformation and by living, long-term, in a humanitarian condition?"<sup>113</sup> As an analytical framework, the "Politics of the Living" emerges from a reconsideration of Agamben's analysis of "bare life" and a framing of refugees as objects of compassion. The problem with Agamben's analysis is that it leaves intact a hierarchy between the helper and the helpless, while simultaneously flattening the political context that bind relations of power under conditions of armed conflict. Writing outside of this binary, Feldman instead considers the forms of life ordered under protracted humanitarian governance (i.e. "people living for extended periods of time without being either resettled or returned home").<sup>114</sup> Looking at the "politics of the living" in the context of long-term humanitarian conditions, she asks: "what forms of action are enabled by humanitarian materials and practices? What kinds of relationships are produced by humanitarian categories and procedures? What are the life worlds that take shape

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<sup>112</sup> Ilana Feldman, "The Humanitarian Condition: Palestinian Refugees and the Politics of Living," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 2, (2012): 155-172.

<sup>113</sup> Feldman, *The Humanitarian Condition*, 155.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

within the humanitarian space and through the humanitarian condition?”<sup>115</sup> In this work, Feldman’s preoccupation centers the “dynamics of being” – of surviving, claiming and acting within humanitarian governance.<sup>116</sup>

Describing humanitarianism as law, discourse and practice, Feldman’s work shows the multiple ways that the very idea of “humanitarianism” travels through various modes of production. She details the ways that humanitarianism comes into being as an arrangement of legal orders and regulatory conditions (i.e. as codified under humanitarian law), a set of “images of suffering,” a set of *practices* that ensure the provision of emergency aid and social services.<sup>117</sup> In showing how *humanitarianism* can be so many things, and so many things at once, Feldman explains the difficulty in exacting how humanitarianism responds to a calculus of life. Feldman’s approach addresses the “ways that people living in humanitarianism act within – and in response to – this biopolitical field.”<sup>118</sup> Feldman attends to the orderings of power revealed through protracted humanitarian governance and considers the ways that people, in their full sense of personhood, negotiate “dynamics of being (surviving, claiming, acting) within it.”<sup>119</sup>

As an analytical framework, Feldman’s “politics of the living” departs from Didier Fassin’s analytic of the “politics of life” which is a theory of the ways that bioinequalities organizes life through humanitarian operation.<sup>120</sup> For Fassin, the “politics of life” refers to an idea of politics that “gives specific value and meaning to human life,” thus showing how we might understand it as a dialectic between lives to be saved and lives to be risked).<sup>121</sup> Departing from Foucauldian

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<sup>115</sup> Feldman, *The Humanitarian Condition*, 156

<sup>116</sup> Feldman, *The Humanitarian Condition*, 157

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Didier Fassin, “Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life,” *Public Culture* 19, no. 3 (2007), 499-520.

<sup>121</sup> Fassin, *Humanitarianism as a politics of life*, 500.

articulations of biopolitics, Fassin's articulation of politics is not rooted in analyzing the technologies of power that explain how populations are made to let live and die; rather, his calculus of power is rooted in the ways that humanitarian care enables "the evaluation of human beings and the meaning of their existence."<sup>122</sup> His essay is guided by an inquiry into "what sort of life is implicitly or explicitly taken into account in the political work of humanitarian intervention?"<sup>123</sup> Fassin shows how humanitarian intervention is a form of biopolitics that "sets up and manages refugee camps, establishes protracted corridors in order to gain access to war casualties, develops statistical tools to measure malnutrition, and makes use of communication to media to bear witness to injustice in the world."<sup>124</sup> However, he also insists that we think about humanitarian intervention as something that asserts a politics of life premised on the "saving of individuals". He argues that agents of humanitarianism seek to humanize those in "need of saving" (e.g. "by showing them as victims rather than combatants and by displaying their condition in terms of suffering rather than the geopolitical situation").<sup>125</sup>

Both Feldman and Fassin's work offer useful frameworks for examining the mobilization of humanitarian governance in the context of refugee life. I rely on their work in subsequent chapters to think about the ways that Palestinian refugees living under conditions of protracted humanitarian governance narrate and negotiate claims to life in the camp. As this dissertation reveals, the aesthetic works examined in this project reflect a reading of subjectivity across a politics of *life, living and death* and help us think through the complexities of imagining one's relationship to decolonial aspiration at the level of the everyday. The arguments contained within each chapter animate the ways that both the politics of life and death come to be lived and

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<sup>122</sup> Fassin, Humanitarianism as a politics of life, 501

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

negotiated in different ways and across temporal and material circumstances. In treating imaginings and representations of return as a robust site to consider the material and symbolic dimensions of settler-colonialism, protracted humanitarian governance and decolonial aspiration, this project insists that we treat return as a signifying practice of race and decolonial futurities in Israel/Palestine.

### **Research Process**

The research process that I adopt to frame and organize this dissertation was inspired by two research approaches: grounded theory and a decolonial framework. My relationship to the collectives involved and research took place through a dynamic process and is reflective of a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory, broadly defined refers to an approach to theory as something that is generated from the ground rather than “off the shelf.”<sup>126</sup> Developed in the late 1960s by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, this theoretical orientation insists that,

[t]heories should be “grounded” in data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people. Thus, grounded theory provided for the generation of a theory [...] of actions, interactions, or processes through interrelating categories of information based on data collected from individuals.<sup>127</sup>

A social constructivist grounded theory approach draws from a postmodernist perspective by emphasizing the “political nature of research and interpretation, reflexivity on the part of researchers, a recognition of problems of representing information, questions of legitimacy and authority, and repositioning the research away from the “all knowing analysis” to the “acknowledged participant.”<sup>128</sup> In emphasizing the subjective interrelationship between the

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<sup>126</sup> John Creswell. *Qualitative inquiry and research design*. London: Sage, 2007), 63.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Creswell, *Qualitative inquiry and research design*, 64.

researcher, participant, and context, grounded theory acknowledges that the act of theorizing is also a process of constructing. As such, a constructivist approach to grounded theory treats “data” as something that gets “discovered” only in relation to an “interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts.”<sup>129</sup>

While I went into the research considering how ideas of return are being imagined and practiced in Palestine, I left Palestine thinking about what these creative works reveal about temporality and the unexpected debris of settler-colonialism and protracted humanitarianism in refugee community life. For instance, while I went into the work curious about imaginative possibilities under conditions of life under occupation, some of the common considerations that these collectives introduced me to concerned how to negotiate this work amidst a growing normalization discourse.<sup>130</sup> In the case of DAAR and Campus in Camps, these debates were anchored in questions concerned with how to produce architecturally inspired temporal narratives of social and political life in the camp without normalizing ideas of the camp and thus undermining discourses of the right of return. Thus, a grounded approach allowed me to develop my theories alongside the kinds of community engagement happening on the ground.

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<sup>129</sup> Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructive Methods,” in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman. K. Denzin and Yvonna. Lincoln, S. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications: 2000), 524.

<sup>130</sup> In dominant Palestinian discourse, *tatbee’* (normalization) refers to the idea of building open and reciprocal relations with Israel in all fields, including the political economic, social, cultural, educational, legal, and security fields” (Nassar Ibrahim, “What is Normalization,” *alternatives international*, November 14, 2013, <http://www.alterinter.org/spip.php?article4124>). While this might appear to be a seemingly neutral step towards transitional justice and conflict resolution, it has particular consequences when these state building initiatives are tethered to a permanently temporary military occupation and daily ethnic cleansing process that works to clear the land of Palestinian inhabitants. In this context, normalization represents the indefinite prolongation of asymmetrical warfare, whereby the violence of the everyday folds into the ordinary, thereby disavowing and sanctioning abnormal conditions of day-to-day violence (i.e. schools are invaded by armed military forces, children are arrested during late night military home incursions, camps are raided daily, Palestinians are held up for hours at checkpoints just trying to get to and from work, and at the end of the day). As chapters three and four will explain, fears of normalization shape almost every decision about infrastructural or urban development in the camp.

While there are a number of communities in the West Bank and Gaza working through all kinds of creative community practice, I was taken by these collectives because of what their work was introducing at the level of imagination. After spending a month with these collectives, I came to learn more about what their work was opening up in refugee community life. Firstly, through their aesthetic and narrative centered practices around ideas of return, these groups are generating a dynamic set of community interactions and teaching strategies organized around a methodology of experimentation and social action. Their pedagogical practices are highlighting the profound ways that Israeli settler-colonialism has shaped refugees' relationship to time and space and raise interesting discussions about refugee life in exile through creative modalities of interventions. Through teaching how to think about and practice time and space differently in community settings, their work works at the level of "imagination" as a site critical practice. In so doing, their pedagogical interventions push against the forms of regulation imposed under Israeli control but also invite new considerations of return at the level of consciousness.<sup>131</sup>

The second reason that I wanted to explore the work of these two collectives is because their work comes into tension and seeks to complicate dominant representations of Palestinian subjectivity. In ethnographic accounts of Palestinian life under occupation, the "Palestinian/Israeli conflict" is often framed around totalizing and territorial based accounts of nationalism and national struggle. As a result, these accounts often describe Palestinian subjectivity through two discursive frames: one of *sumoud* (i.e. "resilience" and "sacrificial heroes/martyrs") or as victims of trauma/colonial oppression. These accounts seldom provide a discursive space, let alone analytical space, to think about the more complex ways that Palestinians think about and choose

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<sup>131</sup> This idea has been expressed to me by the groups involved. All of them have indicated that the "impact" of their work cannot be measured or even predicted as it works at the level of consciousness. Because their work attempts to transform how people think about and imagine their spatial, temporal and corporeal life under occupation, I invoke critical pedagogy as a way to grip and contain the nature of their intervention.

to represent their own sense of subjectivity. This binary also forecloses a space to think about agency in a way that does not treat the Palestinian subject as either an object of violence or instrument of resistance. These discursive representations fail to accurately describe the way that Palestinians imagine and narrate their own political histories of the camp. In rewriting the local and international narratives of the refugee and the camp, the work of these collectives (as will be explored in chapter four and five) open up important dialogues about ideas of Palestinian refugees and the right of return. The forms of social experimentation and community dialogue emerging in these collectives are representative of a different approach to agency, not easily reduced to “resistance.” The significance of these kinds of interventions is as much methodological as they are theoretical. In very interesting ways, their work reveals the grey zones of occupation. Rather than reifying an artificial binary between victimhood and resistance, a grounded theory approach helped me think about the different ways that Palestinian refugees represent their relationship to subjectivity and the right of return.

In addition to grounded theory, the aspirations embedded in a decolonizing framework were also instructive to my research process. A decolonizing research approach centers and responds to the ways that knowledge about indigenous peoples is “inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.”<sup>132</sup> As indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues, “The word itself ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary”. She goes on to explain,

The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excess of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world’s colonized peoples [...]. Just knowing that someone measured our ‘faculties’ by *filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds* and compared the amount the of millet seed to the capacity for mental

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<sup>132</sup> Linda Tuwai Smith. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books 2012), 2.

thought offends our sense of who and what we are.<sup>133</sup>

These historical and present day practices of epistemic violence derive from both modern science (i.e. scientific racism) as well as fields of inquiry developed in the social sciences (i.e. anthropology and sociology). At the center of this epistemic orientation exists positivist assumptions about the nature of reality and the ways that such realities can be qualitatively or quantitatively measured, verified and studied. A decolonizing framework resists these assumptions and their contributions to colonial episteme. Drawing from post-modern and post structuralist theory, a decolonizing framework is methodologically attuned to the ways that indigenous peoples and ways of life are extracted for the purposes of knowledge production. As such, this approach places emphasis on questions of location, positionality and the relations of power that come to bare on the research process itself.

Doing research in Palestine gives rise to many ethical questions concerning knowledge production. The first question I contended with on a consistent basis was, as a non-Palestinian researcher, how do I conduct research in Palestine and more specifically with Palestinian communities when such communities are already over-studied and under surveillance? This question was especially important given that many of the participants in this study were already situated in politically vulnerable locations. For instance, many of the third-generation refugees I interviewed were ex-political prisoners, victims of house demolitions, and exposed to everyday expressions of settler-colonial violence. These considerations not only shaped my approach to the kinds of research questions I asked but contoured the kinds of engagements I had with the collectives involved in this study.<sup>134</sup> Rather than approach the research as a distant observer, I

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, emphasis added.

<sup>134</sup> The kinds of questions that I asked during these interviews varied across the participants involved. For instance, for members of the collectives involved, I asked questions about how they interpreted the cultural works they were producing and what they saw their work intervening in. When interviewing Palestinian refugees

spent six-months working alongside the collectives in different capacities. For instance, I took part in a residency program with *Decolonizing Architectural Art* and lived in their studio residence from which their theoretical work was discussed, debated and produced. This opportunity afforded me a kind of critical proximity with the architects and artists involved in various projects, while also providing me an opportunity to learn, engage and share my own research ideas. My direct involvement was an important way to develop deeper relations to the community members involved and their work. These preliminary encounters also allowed me the opportunity to think aloud with them as I developed the ideas for this project. I also had the opportunity to present my proposal to them and solicit their feedback. Through this close engagement, I was introduced to some of tensions that punctuated their work and the layered power dynamics that structured debates between community members involved.<sup>135</sup> While my immersion into community life was short, these relations were deepened by my direct involvement in the processes and practices of their work, and the relations formed between myself and the participants of this study. All of these experiences contoured my choice in the research practices and the kinds of discussions that took place.

At the same time that my research explores a kind of “Palestinian community life,” I was also attentive throughout my work to the fluid and dynamic locations of power always and necessarily embedded in communities, organizations, and socialites more generally. In other words, although there was in fact something politically significant about addressing and exploring the ideas of third-generation Palestinian refugees, I did not assume that the people I spoke with all held a unified or monolithic views. On the contrary, I relied on standpoint theory to develop a

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not affiliated with DAAR or Campus in Camps work, I asked questions pertaining to what they observed in these works and how they understood their own subjectivity as refugees.

<sup>135</sup> These themes and debates will be discussed in chapters four and five.

methodological practice of listening to how communities are working through their common and different histories of displacement and the ways that such historical processes of identity formation and subjectivity show up in the lives and work of communities trying to teach and imagine otherwise. Further, this methodological approach made me attentive to the ways that participants of DAAR and Campus in Camps shared different locations of power and platforms of representation. This invocation of standpoint theory challenged me to hear not only how individual stories are connected to broader processes of settler-colonialism in Palestine, but pushed me to be conscious of and sensitive towards the stories that are not told, and the reasons that certain stories become more audible or legible within international audiences. The significance of paying attention to these varied social locations (including my own) is that it also opened up questions concerning who gets to be part of these political imaginings in Palestine and what is at stake in these representational practices. As explained throughout this chapter, the theories/methods and ethical considerations that gave rise to this project animated my selection of research sites and theoretical analysis. In the following chapter, I introduce some of these theories and provide a historical context for thinking about the place of race and settler-colonialism in the historical formation of Palestinian refugees.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### A RACIAL HISTORY OF MODERN POLITICAL ZIONISM, TRANSFER AND THE CREATION OF “PALESTINIAN REFUGEES”

The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. It is important therefore to make an inventory.

Antonio Gramsci, cited in “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims”.<sup>136</sup>

Upon encountering the Palestinian Arabs, Zionism’s transformative project expanded. While it sought to metamorphose Jews into Europeans, it set in motion a historical process by which it was to metamorphose Palestinian Arabs into Jews in a displaced geography of anti-Semitism.

Joseph Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*.<sup>137</sup>

Edward Said begins his essay, “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims,” with an emphasis on tracing and inventory because, as a post-colonial scholar, his work invites us to consider the multiple and intersecting histories that bring subjects into being. His approach to tracing is anchored in a genealogical project that attempts to uncover what modern political Zionism meant to the Palestinian collective as it was experienced at the time of its territorial realization in Palestine. Said’s effort to trace the ‘question of Palestine’ is epistemically anchored in a study of the effects of Zionism, which he identifies as a territorial expansion project rooted in European imperialism via overseas colonial settlement.<sup>138</sup> In acknowledging *what* Zionism’s territorial realization did for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, he also insists that this genealogy

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<sup>136</sup> Cited in Edward Said, “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims,” *Social Text*, no.1 (1979: 7).

<sup>137</sup> Joseph Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 168.

<sup>138</sup> Edward Said, “Intellectual Origins of Imperialism and Zionism” in *Zionism and Racism: Proceedings of an International Symposium* (International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination: 1977).

must be traced contrapuntally and in relation to its *effects* on the Arab populations of Palestine. Attempting to shift existing discourse about Zionism in dominant Western discourse, Said's entry point into the study of Zionism asks: What did the victims feel as they watched Zionists arrive in Palestine? What do they think as they hear Zionism described today? Where should they look in Zionism's history to locate its roots, and the origins of its practices towards them?"<sup>139</sup> In opening up an intellectual space to think about Zionism from the standpoint of Palestinians, Said's work introduces a critical reading of Zionism that allows readers to think about what resolving the "Jewish question" meant in and for Palestine. Picking up the intellectual legacies of Said's work, post-colonial scholar Joseph Massad intervenes in this genealogy of Zionism with a close reading of race, nationalism and settler-colonial statehood in the remaking of Jewish and Palestinian subjectivity. While much of Said's work was committed to rethinking Zionism from the experiences of Palestinian subjects, Massad's work compels us to think about the ontological entanglements between the Jewish question and the question of Palestine, both of which, as his work explains, undergo radical transformation in the twentieth century through the rise of Israeli state building practices.<sup>140</sup> In an attempt to map the interconnected genealogy between the "Jewish Question" and "Question of Palestine," this chapter introduces a brief history of race and racialization as it travels into Palestine via modern political Zionism and consequently, results in the historical creation of a Palestinian refugee population.

While much of this chapter details the ways that nineteenth-century racial science and in particular racial eugenics programming gave rise to ideas about Israeli statehood, this racial history also helps us understand the forms of *race-thinking* that went into early transfer policies of the indigenous population of Palestine and the conditions upon which Palestinians became refugees

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<sup>139</sup> Said, *Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims*, 26

<sup>140</sup> Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*, 2006.

for the first time in modern colonial history.<sup>141</sup> In tracing the ways that ideas about race traveled between the “Jewish Question” and “Question of Palestine” through Zionist appeals to statehood, this chapter identifies the racialized discourses constitutive of the ontological subject formation of the “Palestinian refugee”. While the subsequent chapters in this dissertation trace how the racial story of Palestinian refugees takes on different vernaculars, as predicated upon the rise of international rights discourse and humanitarianism, this chapter offers an important entry point for understanding the common forms of race-thinking that subjugated both Jewish and Palestinian subjects as the transfer policies of Palestine were being imagined and debated by Zionist leaders.

### **Zionism, Race and Nationhood**

The umbrella category ‘modern political Zionism’ refers to Zionism as both a “nationalist ideology in the European Romantic tradition”<sup>142</sup>; and a settler-colonial venture predicated upon European imperialism.<sup>143</sup> Similar to other *territorial* based nationalist projects, the idea of a Jewish political state became *thinkable* at the end of the nineteenth-century as a result of the emergence of European nationalisms.<sup>144</sup> Further, as a *settler-colonial movement*, the nationalist project of

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<sup>141</sup> Borrowing from Hannah Arendt’s work in *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1963), Sherene Razack identifies “race thinking” as the “denial of common bond of humanity between people of European descent and those who are not” (Razack, *Casting Out*, 6). She goes on to explain race thinking as “a structure of thought that divides the world between the deserving and the underserving according to descent” (Razack, *Casting Out*, 8). Drawing on modern and political philosophies of race introduced by David Theo Goldberg, Razack outlines four distinct features of race thinking: “the rhetoric of descent, claims of common origins, a sense of kinship and belonging, and the naturalization of social relations” (Razack, *Casting Out*, 8).

<sup>142</sup> Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 176.

<sup>143</sup> Said, *Intellectual Origins of Imperialism and Zionism*, 1977; Said, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 1997. Although Zionism has been approached from a variety of disciplines and theoretical orientations (yielding different sets of inquiries), my reference to Zionism draws from post-colonial scholars, critical Israeli historians of modern political Zionism and scholars of settler-colonialism and the field of Palestine Studies.

<sup>144</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 47. Broadly defined, European nationalism can be categorized in two ways: primordial and modernist approaches. Both approaches emerged in an attempt to theorize ‘European’ nationalisms as paradigmatic of the emergence of nationalism between the eighteenth and twentieth century (Brubaker, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” 15). Though both approaches offer insight into ‘nationalism’ as a classificatory system that organizes people into a ‘nation’, the organizing principles and precise origins of this system have been subject to debate. The wave of literature classified as ‘primordial’ is characterized by a sociobiological explanation of ‘nationality’; primordial approaches view nationalism as an intrinsic, essential

Zionism was “only made *possible* by a European colonizing world, which Zionism hoped it could both assist and extend.”<sup>145</sup> Given that Zionism’s “ideological and geopolitical orientation” was anchored in the ‘West’<sup>146</sup> and constituted in relation to European epistemologies,<sup>147</sup> we might understand Zionism to be (as Edward Said has characterized it) a *product* of imperial theory and a *practice* of colonialism.<sup>148</sup> As a geographically transient movement that travelled between Europe, Palestine and the Jewish diaspora, Zionism allows us to think about Europe, nationalism and the

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and “natural part of human beings” (Ozkirimlu, *Theories of Nationalism*, 49). This premise rests on the assumption that “nations have existed from time immemorial” (Ozkirimlu, *Theories of Nationalism*, 49) and therefore primordial theorists treat the concept of ‘nationalism’ as an inevitable, timeless and natural product of the nation (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 55). Group membership within the nation, for example, is forged through a shared (and sentimental) sense of core identity and collective memory premised on what are thought to be hereditary features such as ethnicity, blood lineage, race, and kinship (Renan, “What is a Nation,” 1996). Thus proponents of ‘primordial’ approaches “claim that nations and ethnic communities are the natural units of history and integral elements of the human experience” (Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 12). Unlike primordial approaches to nationalism, theorists of modernist approaches to nationalism are concerned with the economic, technological and social/cultural processes that have given rise to the historical production of the nation and nationalism. Emerging in the mid to late twentieth century, this wave of literature began to theorize the development of the modern bureaucratic (European) state by attending to processes of secularization and print capitalism (Anderson, *Imagined Communities*), industrialization and urbanization (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*), and culture and ethnicity. These theories are distinct from primordial approaches to nationalism because they reject immemorial explanations of the nation and instead, invite historical specificity when examining the national form. Rather than studying nationalism as a timeless social phenomenon, modernist theories of nationalism suggest that the nation and nationalism is a temporally specific historical product of modernity.

<sup>145</sup> Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 178. Emphasis added.

<sup>146</sup> Ella Shohat, *Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims*. *Social Text*. 19(20):1988, 24.

<sup>147</sup> Said, *Intellectual Origins of Imperialism and Zionism*, 26. Edward Said’s reference to ‘European epistemologies’ is in direct relation to 19<sup>th</sup> century imperial thought. I will expand on this idea but for now, I should stress that Said’s genealogical reading of Zionism positions the project first and foremost in relation political philosophies and territorial expansion projects rooted in European imperialism (Said, *Intellectual Origins of Imperialism and Zionism*, 26). This claim is partially supported by showing evidence of Zionism’s investment in overseas colonial settlement (which were anchored in taxonomies of 19<sup>th</sup> century modern imperialism). Although Said acknowledges *what* Zionism’s territorial realization did for Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, he insists that its genealogy must be traced in relation to modern imperialism and its effects on the Arab populations of Palestine.

<sup>148</sup> Said, *Intellectual Origins of Imperialism and Zionism*, 29. Said makes a distinction here between ‘imperial theory’ and ‘colonial practice’ to emphasize the political and philosophical roots of imperial thinking. He explains, “Imperialism was and still is a political philosophy whose aim and purpose for being are territorial expansion and its legitimization.” (Said, *Zionism from the standpoint of its Victims* 27). Despite this distinction, Said maintains that “laying claim to an idea and laying claim to a territory – given the extraordinary current idea that the non-European world was there to be claimed, occupied, and ruled by Europe” worked hand in hand (Said, *Zionism from the standpoint of its Victims*, 27).

nation as historical products of colonialism and constitutive of the modern project of 'race.'

### **Racial Science, Lamarckian Theory and Appeals for Israeli Nationhood**

The category of 'race' not only provided a grammar for articulating nineteenth-century European nationalist thought, but racializing discourses of 'Jewish degeneracy' were central to the advent of Zionist thought. Underpinned by 19<sup>th</sup> century racial logics, including both anti-Semitic and orientalist discourse, modern political Zionism sought the territorial realization of a Jewish homeland in the form of a Jewish state. One of the interesting contradictions about Zionism is that while it was offered as a redemptive solution to anti-Semitism by pioneers of the modern Zionist movement such as Theodore Herzl and Nordau Max, such leaders relied upon racial ideas and in particular anti-Semitic discourse of nineteenth-century scientific racism to advance the very idea of a Jewish nation. Borrowing from social Darwinism (and its offspring, Lamarckian theory), Zionist sociologists and scientists adopted biological conceptions of 'race' and 'degeneracy' to make appeals for a Jewish nation. Arguing that a national homeland would remedy the social ailments of Jewish identity inherited from environmental factors of the Jewish ghettos in Europe, the project of Israel was imagined as the cure for, a "degenerate Jewish race."<sup>149</sup> During this time, social sciences in Europe, and North and South America treated the category of 'race' as a "heterogenic, multi-branched" category, "filled with contradictions, antitheses, and tensions."<sup>150</sup> As such, a variety of racial theories existed in this period, including "racial determinism," which refers to the idea that "race determines the potential of individual members of particular racial groups."<sup>151</sup> Influenced by German Romanticism, Zionist ideology borrowed from evolutionary

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<sup>149</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 277.

<sup>150</sup> Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 3.

<sup>151</sup> Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 3. During the development of these racial theories, differentiation was made between "racist" versus "racialist" theories to discern whether racial theories were used to focus on 'similarities' or 'differences'. For instance, the concept of "racial purity" which emerged at the turn

thought concerning race.<sup>152</sup>

Arthur Ruppin, the father and lead architect of Israeli settlements, borrowed from and contributed heavily towards the development of racial schemes that came out of the late nineteenth-century until the middle twentieth-century and relied specifically on scientific racism to advance his theories of race and space.<sup>153</sup> Ruppin's interest in race aligned with the traditional German framework – which produced racial sciences, treating racial differences as important indicators of individual and collective potential. His methodology relied heavily on blood quantum and statistical measurements, a common method of racial science developed during the nineteenth century.<sup>154</sup> Ruppin's theories of race emerges in his first book on Jewish people entitled in *The Jews of Today* (1913). In this book, he posits a racial union between all Jews (forged through a distinct 'racial purity'). He argues that "race unites the Jews through space and time" and that Jews

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of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was viewed as both a 'racist' and racialist' theory of the time. The racist character of this theory assumed that 'racial purity' was the consequence of a 'supreme value for health' and that "racial mixture" was "the main cause of human degeneration" (Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 4). Others viewed racial mixture as a "blessing" and fundamental advantage" (Morris-Reich, "Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 4).

<sup>152</sup> Boyarin, *Unheroric Conduct*, 276.

<sup>153</sup> Ruppin's first work, "Darwinism and Social Science" discusses race in relation to natural selection and heredity. He affirmed several beliefs: 1) that people are biologically determined but because of modern science, those weaker species that were doomed to perish are now surviving (Amos Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," *Israel Studies*, 11 no. 3: 2006, 6; and 2. He departs from the hard-deterministic view in that he did *not* believe that social welfare and education are futile, but that the state was obliged to provide these resources (Morris-Reich, Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 6). 3) He often referred to "racial difference as instinctive and to racial mixture as unnatural and undesirable" (Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 6). 4) He was invested in determining physical and mental features of race through hereditary inheritance. Ruppin's work in the 1930s and 1940s treats race more broadly, most notably in his work "*The Sociology of Jews*". Ruppin attempts to account here for the "Jew's origins and race", borrowing from the same methodology of Gunther (the leading theoretician of race in Nazi German and Himmler's mentor and founder of national-socialist (Aryan) race theory) (Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 2). Relying on the same German distinction between 'races', Ruppin concludes by suggesting that the "Jewish 'type' exhibits a strong continuity, especially with regards to the Aramaic element from the sixteenth century BCE to contemporary anti-Semitic caricatures" (Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 9). He departs from Gunther in the belief that (similar to Norse people) Jewish people also have cultural and spiritual characteristics from ancient times to the present, and most importantly, that "the spiritual characteristics of the Jews have changed in the course of generations because of the penetration of foreign racial strains and because of processes of selection and adaptation (Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 10). These characteristics are seen to be in "peoples of ancient cultures" (Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 10).

<sup>154</sup> Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 12.

in the West and East have a proximity to one another despite geographical distances.<sup>155</sup> This primordial bond is central to Ruppin's discussion of Jewish nationalism. His ideas on the relationship between 'nationalism' and 'race' become more evident in 1911 when he argues, "Jews have the right to exist as a separate *national unit*."<sup>156</sup> Ruppin's commitment to racial science is reflected in the final project that he was working on before his death. As Gabriel Piterberg explains, "So obsessed with race that, just a few days before his death in 1943 (...) he began to write an introduction for a study of the Jewish race, based on a taxonomy of noses."<sup>157</sup> These racial theories intersected with pseudo-scientific ideas around gender embedded in 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-Semitic discourse.

In "The Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and Mimicry," Daniel Boyarin argues that the political project of Zionism was aimed at 'curing' and transforming Jewish men into the ideal muscular 'Aryan male'. As he explains,

Nordau's call for a 'new muscle Jew' was based on ideas of the degeneration of the Jew in the narrow confines of the ghetto [...] The project of political Zionists was to transform Jewish men into the type of male that they admired, namely, the ideal "Aryan" make. If the political project of Zionism was to be a nation like all other nations, on the level of reform of the Jewish psyche it was to be men like all other men.<sup>158</sup>

The desire to transform the anti-Semitic image of the effeminate "feminized – queer – Jewish male" to the heterosexual muscular military hero was anchored in supremacist ideas around the Anglo-Saxon white man.<sup>159</sup> The project of Zionism promised a restoration of 'manliness, honor, and civility.'<sup>160</sup> For Herzl, nationalism was viewed as the means of attaining the manliness as well

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<sup>155</sup> Morris-Reich, "Arthur Ruppin's Concept of Race," 7.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Gabriel Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel* (New York: Verso Books, 2008), 84.

<sup>158</sup> Boyarin, *The Returns of Zionism*, 277.

<sup>159</sup> This idea was confirmed by Sigmund Freud. He believed that Zionism was a mode of "overcoming his Jewish homosexual effeminacy" (Boyarin, *The Returns of Zionism*, 274- 300).

<sup>160</sup> Boyarin, *The Returns of Zionism*, 300.

as whiteness. The irony of Herzl's logic was that in order to be European, Jews would have to leave Europe, ridding themselves of their "parasitical" qualities.<sup>161</sup> Racial logics of nineteenth-century science not only underpinned the nationalist logic of Zionism, but constituted the very grammar of Israel's state formation, transforming the "Jewish Question" into a "National Question." This transformation is explained further in Herzl's book "The Jewish State." Invoking the suffering of Jews under anti-Semitism as both reason and cause for the creation of a nation, Herzl collapses the "Jewish Question" into a "National Question" leaving few alternatives to anti-Semitism but the creation of a Jewish state. Arguing that the cure to anti-Semitism is a secular nationhood, he writes,

I think the Jewish question is no more a social than a religious one, notwithstanding that it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, which can only be solved by making it a political world-question to be discussed by the civilized nations of the world in council.<sup>162</sup>

Herzl's cry for nationhood is further complemented by his invocation of the particular and universal. The particularity of the suffering of Jewish people is described in this work as the worst and most extreme oppression in the history of the world. He gestures to this quite blatantly when he says "No nation on earth has survived such struggles and sufferings as we have gone through."<sup>163</sup> In claiming a monopoly on human suffering, Herzl also universalizes the aim of Zionism by demonstrating how it will be the solution to other forms of discrimination around the world. "In solving it (the Jewish question) we are working not only for ourselves, but for many other overburdened and oppressed beings also."<sup>164</sup> It should be emphasized that the logic of entering into history (and becoming a member of the human race) via 'nation' aligned with the

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<sup>161</sup> Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 168.

<sup>162</sup> Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, Filiquarian Publishing: 1896, 15.

<sup>163</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 15

<sup>164</sup> Herzl, *The Jewish State*, 14

prevailing discourses of liberalism and nineteenth-century romantic nationalism.<sup>165</sup> These appeals to Zionism as a national project were often represented as an anti-assimilationist movement in the sense that it encouraged the rights of Jews to culturally and religiously express themselves in a homeland of their own instead of assimilating into Europe. For instance, in a 1947 public hearing with the UN, Shertock and Horowitz, representatives of the Jewish Agency Organization, were asked to comment on their observations on the situation in Palestine with respect to past and future possible relations between Jewish people and Arab people and prospects for future Jewish settlement. The following passage is an excerpt from this public meeting between representatives of the Jewish Agency Organization and members of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine,

As a national movement, the Jewish Agency was against Jews assimilating with the nations of the world and losing their distinct identity. In Palestine, however, the Jewish Agency welcomed the process of assimilation, because the Jews were assimilating among themselves and emerging as a people re-united and rebuilt.<sup>166</sup>

While this passage illustrates an invitation for the assimilation of Jewish people across geographical and cultural lines, the early writing of early modern Zionism and immigration policies give us reason to think about this project of assimilation as one indebted to desires for assimilation into European identity or whiteness. As many critical scholars of Zionism have argued, the desire to *be* European was one of the driving forces behind the idea of a national homeland in Palestine.<sup>167</sup> This idea is echoed by Herzl himself when he declares: “I am a German-

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<sup>165</sup> Raphael Falk, “Zionism, Race and Eugenics” in *Jewish Tradition and the Challenge of Darwinism*, ed. G. Cantor & M. Swelitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2006), 139.

<sup>166</sup> United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, *Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Oral Evidence Presented at Public Meetings, Supplement No. 11, Volume III, 1947*, 2.

<sup>167</sup> See Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, 2008; Boyarin, *The Returns of Zionism*, 1997; Falk, “Zionism, Race and Eugenics” 2006.

speaking Jew from Hungary and can never be anything but a German. At present I am not recognized as a German. But that will come once we are over there.”<sup>168</sup> The ‘over there’ that Herzl refers to is not located in Germany but in Palestine. How does one become ‘European’ by establishing a national homeland outside of ‘Europe’? This question invites us to think further about the place of ‘race’ and colonialism in the establishment of Israel’s early immigration policies.

### **The Creation of an Israeli National Imaginary: Race, Immigration and the Politics of Transfer**

Addressing the question posed above, post-colonial scholars of modern political Zionism such as Joseph Massad have insisted that the creation of a settler-colony was “to be the space of Jewish transformation.”<sup>169</sup> Drawing from ideas presented by Theodore Herzl in his writings on Zionism, Massad further explains,

To become European, Jews must exit Europe. They could return to it and become part of it by emulating its culture at a geographical remove. If Jews were Asians in Europe, in Asia they will become European. Herzl affirms that it is not a question of taking Jews away from “civilized regions into the desert,” but rather that the transformation “will be carried out in the midst of civilization. We will not revert to a lower stage but a higher one.” In the new colony, Jews would no longer be “dirty,” “cunning,” “parasitical,” “lazy,” “superstitious,” “weak,” “effeminate,” as anti-Semitism and Zionism posited them, but would become hardworking, scientifically minded, strong, rational, clean, and civilized – in short European.<sup>170</sup>

While the settler-colonial project of Israel was imagined as the platform that through which this transformation could take place, the transferring of the ‘fit’ Jewish body was central to demographic strategies advanced in early Zionist thought. In 1911, Ruppin (wrote an article

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<sup>168</sup> Boyarin, *The Returns of Zionism*, 287.

<sup>169</sup> Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 168.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

entitled “The Selection of the Fittest.”<sup>171</sup> Advancing a pro-eugenics framework, this article, above all else, points to the necessity of strategic “selection of human material” with regards to Israel’s future immigration policies.<sup>172</sup> The criteria of such selection includes profession, health, and social elements, but it also made heavy reference to ideas predicated on race. Jews from Europe were regarded as the ‘stronger’ type and viewed as the healthier race (read: white/European). As Massad argues, the very idea of recruiting non-Ashkenazi Jews into Israel came after the end of the second world war whereby six million (mostly European) Jewish people were killed.<sup>173</sup> Debates about which Jews were the fit Jews to establish Israel were debated between Israeli leaders and European dignitaries. Massad cites a passage from Israel’s foreign minister Moshe Sharett in 1948,

There are countries – and I was referring to North Africa – from which not all Jews need to emigrate. It is not a question of quantity as of quality... We are very anxious to bring the Jews of Morocco over...but we cannot count on the Jews of Morocco to build this country, because they have not been educated for this...So we need people who will remain steadfast in any hardship and who have a high degree of resistance. For the purpose of building up our country, I would say that *the Jews of Eastern Europe are the salt of the earth...* [emphasis added].<sup>174</sup>

The selection process for Jewish emigration was indebted to the racial eugenics thinking of the nineteenth-century. Racial logics entered into formal Israeli immigration policy in the early years that followed the inception of Israeli statehood. As cited by Massad in his discussion of Ashkenazi racial anxieties over Mizrahi Jews presented in the dominant Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz (1949),

This is an immigration of a race we have not yet known in this country... We are dealing with people whose primitivism is at a peak, whose level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance, and worse who have little talent for understanding anything intellectual. Generally, they are only slightly better than the general level of the Arabs,

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<sup>171</sup> Arthur Ruppin, “The Selection of the Fittest,” in *Three Decades of Palestine: Speeches and Papers on the Upbuilding of the Jewish National Home*. Trans. n/a (Jerusalem: 1936) 66-80.

<sup>172</sup> Amos Morris-Reich, “Arthur Ruppin’s Concept of Race,” *Israel Studies*, 2(3).

<sup>173</sup> Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 59.

<sup>174</sup> This passage comes from Israel’s foreign minister Moshe Sharett. It is cited from *Sharett Report*, December 12 1948, State Archives, Foreign Ministry, 130.11/2502/8 in Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 60.

Negroes and Berbers in the same regions. In any case, they are at an even lower level than what we knew with regard to the former Arabs of Eretz Yisrael [i.e. the Palestinians]...*These Jews also lack roots in Judaism, as they are totally subordinated to the play of savage and primitive instincts.*<sup>175</sup>

These examples urge us to consider the copious and insidious ways that Zionist adaptations of race-thinking entered into imaginings of Israeli nation-building. Tracing early Zionist racial logics reveal the ways that the very demand for Jewish statehood was already imbued in a civilizing state-building discourse supported by hetero-patriarchal European anti-Semitism discourse. The desire to secure the ideal Jewish demography may have begun with the adoption of race eugenics to make claims to Jewish Nationhood and later entered into Israel's early immigration policies but this obsession with race and demography certainly did not stop there. As this next section will explain, while the racial story of Israeli nation-building begins with racial eugenics programming to determine the right demography for Jewish statehood, Israeli nation-building also required deliberate planning policies to transfer the existing Arab population of Palestine.

As Lorenzo Veracini writes in *Settler-Colonialism*, “the very possibility of a settler project – a collective sovereign displacement – is premised on...the capacity of shifting substantial clusters of peoples across oceans and mountain ranges.”<sup>176</sup> The settler fantasy, as he suggests, often relies on ideas about “exchanging indigenous people with exogenous Others.”<sup>177</sup> As studies of settler-colonial nation building have demonstrated, the idea of transfer can be understood as a process of rearranging indigenous bodies within rather than across borders. Processes of “transfer” can operate discursively and/or at the level of practice. The nationalist project of Zionism is a quintessential example of a state-building imperative that required ideas about transfer across

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<sup>175</sup> Massad, *Zionism from the standpoint of its victims*, 69. original emphasis.

<sup>176</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler-Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (United Kingdom, Palgrave Macmillan: 2010), 33.

<sup>177</sup> Veracini, *Settler-Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, 34.

racial lines, as demonstrated across discursive and material means. As Nur Masalha's work demonstrates most astutely, "the concept of transfer lies at the very heart of mainstream Zionism."<sup>178</sup> This idea is demonstrated by Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime-minister in the following way,

Zionism is a transfer of the Jews. Regarding the transfer of the Arabs this is much easier than any other transfer. There are Arab states in the vicinity...and it is clear that if the Arabs are removed [to these states] this will improve their condition and not the country.<sup>179</sup>

As previously explained, the transfer of Jewish people out of Europe and into Palestine was predicated on race-thinking and bound to anti-Semitic ideas about Jewish degeneracy central to the settler-colonial formation of Israel. As both Nur Masalha and Joseph Massad persuasively argue, resolution to the 'Jewish Question' was imagined through the transfer of Jews to Palestine and the transfer of Palestinians into the West Bank and Gaza and outside of the country entirely. The ideology of transfer was not necessarily novel to the Zionist project advanced in 1948. Rather, as suggested by Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, the ideology "emerged the moment the leaders of the Zionist movement realized that the making of a Jewish state in Palestine could not be achieved as long as the indigenous peoples of Palestine remained on the land."<sup>180</sup> The founding father of Zionism, Herzl had advanced the strategy of expulsion as one of inevitable necessity for establishing a pure Jewish homeland in Palestine, as evidenced in his diary entries dated June 12, 1895.<sup>181</sup> In June of 1938, David Ben-Gurion, a central leader and architect of the Zionist movement in Palestine unapologetically declared to the Jewish Agency Executive: "I am for compulsory

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<sup>178</sup> Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The concept of 'transfer' in Zionist political thought, 1882-1948* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992), 210.

<sup>179</sup> Cited in Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 159.

<sup>180</sup> Ilan Pappé, "State of Denial: The *Nakbah* in Israeli History and Today," in *After Zionism: One State for Israel and Palestine*, ed. Antony Loewenstein, Ahmed Moor (London: Saqi Books), 79.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

transfer; I do not see anything immoral about it.”<sup>182</sup> To illustrate this point even further, consider this excerpt by a leader of the revisionist Zionist movement, Vladimir Jabotinsky: I am going to make a “terrible” confession. Our demand for a Jewish majority is not our maximum – it is our minimum”.<sup>183</sup> Jabotinsky’s declaration demonstrates how the concept of ‘transfer’ was intrinsic to the settler-colonial nationalist project of Zionism - in both its planning and execution.

As Nur Masalha explains in *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of ‘Transfer’ in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*, policies of ‘transfer’ were heavily debated among Zionists seeking to establish colonies in Palestine and British imperial powers. Although a few differences emerged throughout the various proposals advanced by both Zionist leaders and the British, the underlying racial logic behind these proposals was maintained; the ‘Arabs’ of Palestine did not have an affective affinity to the land of Palestine. Rather, because a homogenous and static ‘culture’, ‘climate’ and agricultural based economy was shared by the Arabs of neighboring lands, they could be easily uprooted with little interruption to their lifestyle. The logic was that since the final destination point would be familiar, it was not necessarily ‘displacement’. This sentiment is echoed by Edward. A. Norman (an influential Zionist leader),

It must be remembered that a transportation such as suggested by Arabs from Palestine to Iraq would not be a removal to a foreign country. To the usual Arab there is no difference to between Palestine, Iraq, or any other part of the Arab world. The boundaries that have been instituted since the war are scarcely known to many of the Arabs. The language, customs, and religion are the same. It is true that a moving of any kind involves leaving familiar scenes, but it is not a tradition of the Arabs to be strongly attached to a locality. Their nomadic habits still have that much influence, even among the settled elements.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Pappé, “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine”, xi.

<sup>183</sup> This excerpt comes from a letter submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission in 1937 by one of Zionism’s founding figures. Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Evidence submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission, House of Lords,” in *Seeds of Conflict* (Nendeln, Kraus: 1978).

<sup>184</sup> Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 143.

The theme of ‘familiarity’ is a central logic used to rationalize Zionist desires for ‘Arab transfer’. The ‘Ben-Horin Plan’ (1943-1948), for example, builds on this idea to uproot 1,200,000 Palestinians to the Iraq-Syrian state. He explains that “The Palestinian Arabs will not be removed to a foreign land but to an Arab land...the distance between their old and new homelands is small, involving no crossing of oceans or seas, and the climatic conditions are the same.”<sup>185</sup> Viewed in this light, the process of ‘transfer’ is understood simply as a ‘shift’ rather than exile. Although not all the ‘transfer’ plans were accepted by British imperial powers, they all attracted general support by mainstream officials (including American and British powers) as well as by leading labor Zionists such as Ben-Gurion, Weizman, Shertock, Kaplan and Meir. The significance of this backing is that it reveals - what Masalha refers to as – “the ideological intent that made the Palestinian refugee exodus in 1948 possible.”<sup>186</sup> The salience of thinking about the logic of transfer in modern political Zionist thought as a particular form of “race thinking” is that it helps us understand how race comes to play an organizing role in the *Nakba*, or what Ilan Pappé refers to as the “Story of 1948.”

### **The Story of 1948**

The story of 1948 is often framed within two competing historical narratives: “The Nakba” (the “catastrophe” and/or “disaster”) and “Israel’s War of Independence.” In dominant Israeli historiography, the victory of achieving a Jewish state on the land of Palestine is remembered through the paradigm of war and thus commonly referred to as Israel’s ‘war of independence’. Dominant Israeli discourse about the “war of independence” also rests on the idea that Israel’s project of statehood was in effect a project of decolonization. Tracing the discursive shifts within articulations of the political and ideological aims of Israeli statehood during and after its state

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<sup>185</sup> Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 162.

<sup>186</sup> Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 165.

declaration, Massad examines a variety of primary texts produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century (i.e. speeches, letters, and newspaper articles), and shows precisely how the Zionist establishment shifted from presenting itself as a colonizer – that will act as “transmitters of European civilization” in Palestine, to an anti-colonial movement aimed at national liberation for Jewish survivors of the Nazi regime.<sup>187</sup> One of the ways this discursive shift took place was through the renaming of Israel’s “Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel” to the “Declaration of Independence”. The discursive strategy of this name change in popular parlance is that it helped Israel institute itself as a ‘post-colonial’ state rather than a settler-colonial project predicated upon ethno-racial (European) Jewish supremacy. Through these discursive shifts, the State of Israel re-presented itself from the image of a colonial establishment to a territorial entity fighting *against* colonialism and fighting for state independence. However, as Massad astutely asks, “independent from whom, however remains unclear.”<sup>188</sup> When considering that this declaration of Independence was proclaimed after the British had voluntarily left and no Arab armies had sovereign control of Palestinian land at the time, Massad asks: “from whom then were the Zionists declaring their independence?”<sup>189</sup> Massad’s argument challenges Zionist historiography that sought to “rehistoricize the new Zionist era as a post-colonial one” thereby obscuring the rights of Palestine’s indigenous population from Israeli historical memory.<sup>190</sup>

Despite the extensive debates about Arab “transfer,” Israel’s official narrative of statehood rests on the idea that Palestinians voluntarily left their homes and villages in 1948. This narrative suggests that the alleged reason for this “voluntary departure” is that Arab leaders invited Palestinians to their home countries during the ‘war’ and that these bordering Arab states would

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<sup>187</sup> Massad, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 15.

<sup>188</sup> Massad, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 19.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

eventually arrive in an “imminent victory over the newly established state of Israel and eventual return of Palestinian Arabs to their homes.”<sup>191</sup> The problem with this narrative is that it assumes a “voluntary departure” rather than a coerced and methodically deliberated forced removal of peoples from their towns and villages. For instance, Masalha documents that “122 Arab localities were expelled at gunpoint by Jewish forces; 270 localities were evacuated under assault by Jewish troops; 38 localities were evacuated out of fear of attack or being caught in the cross fire; 12 localities were evacuated as a result of psychological warfare methods, spreading rumors and whispering campaigns.”<sup>192</sup> Laleh Khalili and Isabel Humphrey have expanded on these psychological warfare methods and detailed the ways that the threat and enactment of rape against Palestinian women played a central role in deterring Palestinian families from remaining in their towns and villages. Drawing on Israeli revisionist historian Benny Morris, Khalili and Humphrey write “the news of the rape, though subsequently silenced by both perpetrators and victims, spread as quickly as the news of massacres, aided by the fear and horror of the Palestinians and the ‘whispering campaign’ of the Yishuv military commanders.”<sup>193</sup>

While many Palestinian historians have meticulously researched, and documented the historical events of this partition as a structure of violence imposed on Palestinians, a recent wave of Israeli revisionist historians have also begun to take on this task as well. For instance, in “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine,” Israeli revisionist historian Ilan Pappé challenges Israeli nationalist narratives of “war” and “conflict” and instead places this historiographical account within a paradigm of ethnic cleansing. Analyzing documents from Israel’s archives, Pappé’s work details

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<sup>191</sup> Shahira Sammy, *Reparations to Palestinian Refugees: A comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 14.

<sup>192</sup> Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 45.

<sup>193</sup> Isabelle Humphries, Laleh Khalili, “Gender of Nakba Memory” in *Nakba: Palestine, 1948 and the Claims of Memory*, ed. Ahmad Sa’aidi and Lila Abu-Lughod (New York: Columbia University Press 2007), 211.

the Zionist army's methodology for transferring Palestinians from their land through processes of eviction and material destruction. In his archival study of this 20-month period of mass expulsion between 1947-48, he reveals the ways that the displacement of Palestinians from the pre-state borders of Israel did not reflect a paradigm of symmetrical warfare but one of deliberate and systematic displacement. To contextualize how this process of transfer was executed, Pappé alerts our attention to the implementation of Plan Dalet (often referred to as Plan D). Plan D is unique because unlike Plan A (Aleph), Plan B (Bet), and Plan C (Gimel) that came before it, Plan D put in place a set of militarized operational plans to seize as much of the land as possible, in direct violation to the partition plan advanced by the United Nations.<sup>194</sup> Following the blueprint of Plan D, Zionist armies were persistent in the systemic and total destruction of Palestinian villages in both rural and urban areas, and the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland.<sup>195</sup> As documented in the Plan D blueprint crafted in part by Ben-Gurion and ordered by the Hagana Zionist army:

These operations can be carried out in the following manner: either by destroying villages (by setting them to fire, by blowing them up, and by planting mines in their rubble), and especially those population centers that are difficult to control permanently; or by mounting combining and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the villages, conducting a search inside them. In case of resistance, the armed forces must be wiped out and the population expelled outside the borders of the state.<sup>196</sup>

As mapped out in the blueprint for Plan D, the project of Zionism as a pure Jewish state could only be accomplished through the annihilation or forced expulsion of non-Jewish bodies, as well as full occupation and de-Arabization of Palestinian land. Plan D was partially accomplished within six-months in 1948, resulting in the uprooting of over 800,000 Palestinians, destruction of 531

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<sup>194</sup> Ilan Pappé, "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine" (London: Oxford, 2006), 28.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Rashid Khalidi, "All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948" (Washington: Institute for Palestinian Studies, 1992), 290.

villages, and emptying of 11 urban neighborhoods.<sup>197</sup> The first phase of plan D, effectively accomplished the cleansing of the coastal and inner plains of Palestine.<sup>198</sup> The completion of this project demanded two principle requirements to finalize the master plan of Zionist colonial settlement: full control over the geographical territory, and a fierce fully equipped military.

It should be noted that immediately after Israel's state declaration, the state claimed the right to exercise permanent control over the remaining parts of Palestine by arguing that it was essential for state security. Israel's capture of the remaining areas of historic Palestine was not an accident of war, but a strategic extension of settler colonialism, predicated on the racialized idea of transfer. This vision was best reflected in 1948 by Israel's first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, in his deliberate decision not to declare precise borders for the new state, while maintaining a strong hold on the idea of transferring the remaining Arab population out of Palestine.<sup>199</sup> These accounts also help us consider how the emptying of Palestinian land was essential to Israel's state formation as a settler-colonial project. As Palestinian scholars such as Nur Masalha and Joseph Massad have detailed at great length, the idea of "population transfer" was central to fulfilling the Zionist myth that declared Palestine as empty land. These historical accounts point to the ways that the very idea of "voluntary departure" obscures the direct and indirect methods of expulsion directed at Palestinian peoples in 1948 and shortly thereafter.<sup>200</sup> Further, they help us think about the ways that the project of race under modern political Zionism became mobilized across both discursive and militarized lines allowing for the creation of, what David Theo Goldberg has called a quintessential racial state.

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<sup>197</sup> Pappé, "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine" xiii.

<sup>198</sup> Although I only detail the first phase of the ethnic cleansing operation, it should be noted that stages two and three continued well into the 1950's. See Ilan Pappé "The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine", 2006.

<sup>199</sup> John Collins, "Occupied by Memories: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency". (New York: New York University Press 2004), 229.

<sup>200</sup> See Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 1992 and Massad, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, 2006.

As this chapter has attempted to contextualize, nineteenth century imaginings of Israeli statehood emerged at the intersection of racial science (via anti-Semitism), European nationalism, and settler-colonialism. Tracing these intersecting discursive logics helps us think about the ways that modern political Zionism is a product of “race-thinking” that matured into a settler-colonial project of statehood. As Sherene Razack explains in her discussion of “race thinking” (via Arendt and Voegelin), “race thinking matures into racism through its use as a political weapon.”<sup>201</sup> She explains further, “when race thinking unites with bureaucracy, when in other words it is systematized and attached to a project of accumulation, it loses its standing as a prejudice and becomes instead an organizing principle.”<sup>202</sup> This chapter has shown how race might be understood as an organizing principle of two arrangements: 1) the Israeli State and 2) the Palestinian Refugee. By attending to the structure of racial thought constitutive of early Zionist appeals to nationhood, we are presented with the ways that scientific racism and imaginings of transfer gave rise to the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland and construction of a new population of refugees. The significance of reading these historical accounts with close attention to the relationship between race, modern political Zionism and settler-colonialism is that they challenge the foundational myths relied upon to consolidate Israel’s official national narrative of statehood. These foundational myths also help us think about the logics that would later inform international governance vis-à-vis the UN bodies. While this chapter has illustrated the ways that racial discourse was adopted to establish Zionist claims to statehood, I also hope that it has raised questions about the disregard Zionist leaders had for Palestinians as indigenous subjects of the land they sought to inherit. The debates presented here between Jewish leaders of the Zionist movement became important sites of consideration for the imperial power at the time as they

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<sup>201</sup> Razack, *Casting Out*, 8.

<sup>202</sup> Razack, *Casting Out*, 9.

transferred custodial oversight to the United Nations and Israeli leaders. In the chapter that follows, I attempt to chart this transference of colonial power and in doing so, explain how these scientific racial logics found renewed currency through law and more specifically, at the level of international recognition. In tracing how ideas about race came to inform debates about partition and consequently the “right of return”, I explain next how Palestinian refugee subjectivity came to be inscribed with signifying practices of racial difference under international law and humanitarian governance.

## CHAPTER THREE

### A RACIAL HISTORY OF PALESTINIAN REFUGEES AND THE “RIGHT OF RETURN”: LAW, HUMANITARIANISM AND THE TRANSFERENCE OF COLONIAL SOVEREIGNTY

We have tried for years to solve the problem of Palestine. Having failed so far, we now bring it to the United Nations, in the hope that it can succeed where we have not. If the United Nations can find a just solution which will be accepted by both parties, it could hardly be expected that we should not welcome such a solution. All we say – and I made this reservation the other day - is that we should not have the sole responsibility for enforcing a solution which is not accepted by both parties and which we cannot reconcile with our conscience.<sup>203</sup>

- UK Representative addressing Special Committee on Palestine, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1947

In concluding this part of my report, I must emphasize again the desperate urgency of this problem. *This choice is between saving the lives of many thousands of people now or permitting them to die.*<sup>204</sup>

- Count Folk Bernadotte, “Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine,” 16 September 1948.

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<sup>203</sup> United Nations, General Assembly, UN Special Committee on Palestine. Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Supplement No. 11, A/364, (September 3rd, 1947), 4.

<sup>204</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 52. Emphasis added.

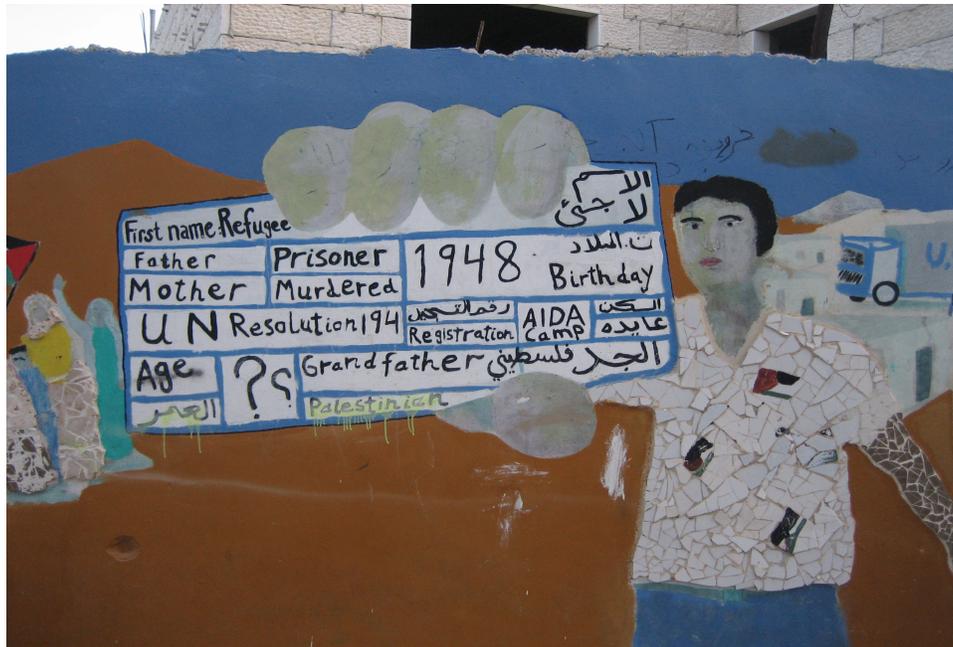


Figure 2 Wall Mural, Aida Refugee Camp, Bethlehem - unknown artist(s).<sup>205</sup>

The first two epigraphs that open this chapter are written just over a year apart: September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1947 and September 16, 1948. The first excerpt is a passage that illustrates a decision made by British imperial powers to transfer sovereign control of Palestine into the United Nations, an international body that was less than two years old at the time. This decision was entangled with the aspiration to divide Palestine (via partition) into two sovereign states, allowing for the creation of a Jewish state and an Arab state. While the decision to carve out a section of Palestine for the purpose of building a Jewish state had been debated as early as the beginning of the twentieth century,<sup>206</sup> it was not until the creation of the United Nations that an official body was appointed to draw up and execute what would become historically remembered as UN resolution 181, the partition plan.<sup>207</sup> One of the conditions of this future partition, as outlined by British imperial

<sup>205</sup> This photo was taken by me during a 2009 visit to Aida Refugee Camp.

<sup>206</sup> For public record of this this, see the 1917 “Balfour Declaration.” This document will be discussed in greater length in this paper.

<sup>207</sup> For a full description of this document, see United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181 (III), Future Government of Palestine, A/RES 181 (II), 29 November 1947.

powers at the time, was that the vision be agreed upon and accepted by both parties and that the final resolution be one that everyone agreed upon in good conscience.

The second epigraph that opens this chapter, written approximately one year later, contains the concluding remarks of a *progress report* submitted to the UN General Assembly by Count Folke Bernadotte, the first ever appointed UN mediator on Palestine/Israel.<sup>208</sup> This passage illustrates the immediate aftermath of the UN's proposed partition plan. In this report, Bernadotte provides a first-hand account and broad survey of the conditions in Palestine/Israel that ensued between May 1948 to mid-August 1948, the first few months following Israel's declaration of statehood. The warning that Bernadotte presents in his closing remarks are made in reference to Palestinian refugees and what would become of their future if the situation of expulsion was not immediately resolved. What he puts forward in this progress report is a blueprint of, what later becomes adopted as UN resolution 194, commonly referenced as the Palestinian "right of return". The day after this report was submitted to the UN General Assembly, Bernadotte was assassinated in Jerusalem by militants of a Jewish extremist paramilitary organization group known as "Lehi" (also known as "Stern Gang").<sup>209</sup> Although Bernadotte did not live to see what would become of this report, the cautions he laid bare in his closing remarks: "*This choice is between saving the lives of many thousands of people now or permitting them to die*" echoes the visual epigraph that follows the opening two passages.

The photograph imaged below Bernadotte's closing remarks is a mural taken from inside of Aida refugee camp in the West Bank.<sup>210</sup> This mural represents one imaging of Palestinian

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<sup>208</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948).

<sup>209</sup> Anna N. Osipenko, "Two Plans of Folke Bernadotte – First Attempts to Search for Peace," International Journal of Social Science and Humanities, 6, no. 9 (2016): 705.

refugee life almost seven decades after British imperial powers transferred colonial sovereignty into the hands of the United Nations and subsequently into the leaders of the newly formed state of Israel. As a visual index of refugee identity, we are presented with a number of signifiers: next to the figure's birthday reads 1948 (the year that officially marks Israel's declaration of statehood). In the absence of a name, reads the blanket statement: "refugee". In the absence of his father's name, reads "prisoner". In the absence of his mother's name, reads "murdered". These conditions of social and material death signal to the direct consequences of an unresolved and pending project of return. While this mural signals to the on-going conditions of life and death for Palestinian refugees as organized under an on-going settler-colonial project, this image also points to another arrangement of governance that maintains the settler-state. Behind the figure of the refugee is a United Nations aid truck. Underneath the figure's parent's names, reads "UN resolution 194" (the "right of return"). The symbols of UN intervention weaved throughout this mural invite us to consider how international bodies such as the UN have intervened in – the unresolved question of return. In this chapter I ask, how did the question of return, a political question rooted in rights to land, repatriation, and property, get answered through humanitarian solutions? Put another way, how Palestinians come to be treated as objects of humanitarian governance rather than Indigenous subjects in struggle for the return of land? In attending to these discursive shifts, this chapter addresses these questions through a closer look at the UN aid truck and its passage through law, humanitarian discourse and the modern project of race in Israel/Palestine.

In this chapter, I explore dominant and shifting representations of Palestinian refugee discourse as articulated by the United Nations in the context of international law and humanitarian governance. Through examining the representational life of return in the context of international rights discourse, this chapter builds on chapter two and addresses how these forms of international

recognition might be read alongside a racial history of Israeli state-building via modern political Zionism and scientific racism (as presented in chapter two). Turning now to the work of race under international law, I explore two interventions advanced under the advisement of the United Nations: 1) UN resolution 194 – a reparative justice approach to the “right of return” and 2) United Nations Relief Work Agency (UNRWA), a humanitarian aid initiative for Palestinian refugees. Empirically, I examine the emergence of these UN projects through analyzing historical records (i.e. progress reports and recommendations) by Bernadotte prepared for the dissemination between UN bodies between May 1948 to September 1948, as well as telegraphs between the Israeli minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.<sup>211</sup> The time frame of these records is significant. Between May 1948 to September 1948, we see the first ever iteration of the Palestinian right of return as evidenced in the writings of Bernadotte. In examining UN records during this time frame, we begin to see a notable shift in the discursive legal imaginaries used to represent Palestinian refugees. This chapter reads these discursive shifts to further account for the ways that Palestinian refugees have become constituted as racialized subjects at the level of international recognition.

Through examining the debates that gave rise to the creation of UN resolution 194 and UNRWA, I argue that discourses of refugee life and the project of return – as represented through these two forms of international recognition circulate within a racialized economy of rights discourse that obscures Palestinian claims to land; and recalibrates the racialization of Palestinian refugees within a global imaginary of humanitarianism. In exploring these historical representations of international rights discourse, this chapter establishes the racialized terrain

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<sup>211</sup> While some research has been done on the life-history of Count Folke Bernadotte, little scholarly attention has been paid to his written submissions during his appointment as mediator on Palestine/Israel. I attend closely to his writings in this chapter because I view his recommendations on the right of return as an essential step in the subsequent drafting and implementation of UN resolution 194.

through which Palestinians have been forced to articulate their identity and right to return to historic Palestine. In so doing, I explain how international rights discourse on the right of return has further constituted Palestinian refugees as racialized subjects.

This chapter is organized in three parts. In part one, I introduce a legal history of UN resolution 181 (“the Partition Plan”) put in place by the UN and explain how this international resolution recognized and sought to reorganize claims to land for Palestine’s Indigenous population and the incoming settler-community. Contextualizing UN Resolution 181 as a failed UN initiative that ultimately leads to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and the creation of a Palestinian refugee population, section two follows a paper trail of UN records to explain how the creation of UN resolution 194 emerged. In this section, I examine the observations and recommendations put in place by Bernadotte who was appointed in the aftermath of Israel’s declaration of statehood and explain how these observations and recommendations give rise to the legal blueprint of UN resolution 194. Of significance, I explain how the observations offered within his final report (and at this critical historical juncture), shift from recommending the “right of return” as an urgent political necessity to lasting peace between Palestine/Israel to a humanitarian endeavor which has now lasted close to seven decades. In section three, I explain how Bernadotte’s final recommendations before his assassination eventually become adopted up by the UN resulting in the creation of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Work Agency). Through tracing the genealogy of UN resolution 194 and UNRWA as sites of recognition birthed through the transference of sovereignty between British imperial powers to the United Nations, I show how these forms of international recognition are constitutive of a racial and colonial history in Palestine/Israel and have represented Palestinians refugees as apolitical humanitarian subjects rather than Indigenous subjects in a struggle for the return of land. Further, through this genealogy,

I illustrate how the project of race in Palestine/Israel traveled between pseudo-scientific discourse (as presented in chapter two) to humanitarian discourse (via international rights discourse).

### **UN Resolution 181 - The Partition Plan**

On November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted UN Resolution 181, the official legal doctrine which proposed the partition of Palestine and subsequent territorial realization of the Israeli state.<sup>212</sup> If implemented according to its original mark up, the partition plan would have effectively divided Palestine into a Jewish State, an Arab State and an international territory of the City of Jerusalem placed under the jurisdiction of a Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem. In addition to the splintering of land and title put forward in the proposed partition plan, UN resolution 181 also put forward two other substantive changes: a motion for economic unity between Palestine and Israel and the creation of a United Nations Palestine Commission which would consist of one representative of five member states (which at the time included Bolivia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Panama and Philippines).<sup>213</sup> This commission would assist in the transference of administrative authority from British Mandatory Power to the Commission of Provincial Councils of Government of the respective parties (Palestine and Israel). The Commission would also supervise the functioning of the newly formed Governments, delimit frontiers between the states, exercise political and military control over the armed militia groups, prepare the Economic Union, distribute assets, maintain administration of public services, protect holy places and be a liaison between the Mandatory Power and Jewish Agency for Palestine.<sup>214</sup> For reasons that will be explained shortly in this chapter, UN resolution

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<sup>212</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181 (III), Future Government of Palestine, A/RES 181 (II), 29 November 1947.

<sup>213</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 181 (III), Future Government of Palestine, A/RES 181 (II), 29 November 1947.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

181 was rejected by both Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Israeli leaders rejected this offer because they wanted closer to eighty percent of the total land rather than the sixty percent of Palestinian land that was being offered to them. Palestinians rejected this offer because at the time they made up the overwhelming majority of the population and were being asked to settle for less than forty percent of the land. As Edward Said astutely asked in relation to this plan, “by what moral or political standard are we (Palestinians) expected to lay aside our claims to our national existence, our land, our human rights?”<sup>215</sup> To appreciate how such an offer of disproportionality could be offered in the first place, it’s useful to visit the history of British Mandate and the relations between British imperial administrators and Zionist leaders.

In the ten years leading up to UN resolution 181, British imperialists in Palestine and Zionist protégés had actively collaborated in planning for the transfer of Palestine from the hands of British Mandate into a predominantly Jewish state. The presentation of a Jewish state had been considered quite seriously by British colonial powers as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century. By November 2, 1917, the British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Lord Balfour welcomed the idea of establishing Palestine as a national homeland for Jewish people.<sup>216</sup> As described in what is now famously known as the “Balfour Declaration,” Balfour declares the following:

His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice

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<sup>215</sup> Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Times Books, 1979), xiii.

<sup>216</sup> The Balfour declaration refers to a letter written on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1917 by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild, who was a leader of the Jewish community at the time. In this letter, Balfour agrees to the terms outlined in a Cabinet meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1917. For an electronic copy, see Jane Corbin, “The Balfour Declaration: My ancestor’s hand in history,” *BBC News*, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41763648>. The original document is housed at the British National Library.

the civil and political rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.<sup>217</sup>

The significance of this brief but weighty document is that it was the first time in history that the British government publically endorsed a national and territorial based home for Jewish people in Palestine.<sup>218</sup> Approximately thirty years after the signing of the Balfour Declaration, the British government tasked the newly established United Nations the responsibility of crafting a partition plan between Palestine and Israel. This partition plan was presented to both parties in 1947. As discussed in chapter two, what ensued from the rejection of this plan was a Zionist paramilitary led ethnic cleansing process which left close to 800,000 Palestinians forcibly displaced and massacred. While the year 1948 is often periodized as the official start of Israeli settler-colonialism, scholars such as Rashid Khalidi have insisted that we think about the passing of the Balfour Declaration as the beginning of a settler-colonial project in the making. In his recent address to the United Nations, Khalidi was asked to speak to the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the signing of the Balfour Declaration.<sup>219</sup> During this speech, he explains how leaders of the Zionist movement and British imperialism imagined what would become the future state of Israel without any consideration of how this national imaginary would affect the existing population in Palestine. Referring to the Balfour declaration, Khalidi explains,

For Palestinians, this statement was a gun pointed directly at their heads, particularly in view of the colonialist ambience of the early twentieth century (...), the Balfour Declaration in effect constituted a declaration of war by the British Empire on the indigenous population of the land it was promising to the Jewish people as a National Home. (...) Zionism was both a nascent national movement and a colonial enterprise in

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<sup>217</sup> Arthur James Lord Balfour, "Balfour Declaration," November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1917. See Jane Corbin, "The Balfour Declaration: My ancestor's hand in history," *BBC News*, October 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-41763648>.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Rashid Khalidi, "The Balfour Declaration from the Perspective of the Palestinian People," (Lecture, United Nations, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017).

search of a metropolitan sponsor. After having failed to find that sponsor elsewhere, Chaim Weizmann succeeded with the wartime British cabinet.<sup>220</sup>

In thinking about how colonial sovereignty was transferred from British imperial power to this newly formed international institution and simultaneously into the hands of Zionist leaders, one might ask who stopped to consider what weight this would have on the indigenous population of Palestine, who at the time made up the overwhelming majority of the population. As further explained by Khalidi, “they were not described as a people – notably, the words “Palestinian” and “Arab” do not appear in the text of the Declaration.<sup>221</sup>

By the mid 1930’s, the British Mandatory authorities had aided the Zionist movement in carving out a relatively small space for the future state of Jewish settlers, enabling Zionism’s abstract vision as an exclusive Jewish homeland to slowly take root. By the early 1940’s, David Ben-Gurion and his fellow planners of the Zionist settler-colonial project were well beyond imagining the formation of a purely Jewish state. By this time, Zionist leadership had mapped out their vision for Palestine, demanding the entire land of Palestine excluding the West Bank.<sup>222</sup> Britain responded to such demands by suggesting the creation of a bi-national state, a solution rejected by the Zionist leaders and viewed as unfavorable by the Palestinians leaders at the time. After much frustration, Britain effectively withdrew from the conflict all together and ultimately transferred the deciding powers into the hands of the United Nations.<sup>223</sup> The transference of colonial power from British Mandate into the hands of the United Nations was the beginning of a series of rapid shifts in decision making which would eventually give rise to the 1948 Nakba

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Khalidi, “The Balfour Declaration from the Perspective of the Palestinian People,” 2017.

<sup>222</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 32.

<sup>223</sup> For an empirical record of this discussion, see United Nations, General Assembly, UN Special Committee on Palestine. Official Records of the Second Session of the General Assembly, Supplement No. 11, A/364, (September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1947).

(ethnic cleansing of historic Palestine). While it was not the UN that carried out these assaults, it was the passing of this resolution that acted as a conduit for transferring colonial sovereignty into the hands of leaders of a settler-colonial project in the making. As Ilan Pappé insists, “Resolution 181’s most immoral aspect is that it included no mechanism to prevent the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.”<sup>224</sup> In short, UN resolution 181 softened the ground for what would soon become a wide scale militarized campaign of systematic displacement and massacre.

It was in response to the systematic expulsion of Palestinians and rising levels of armed conflict which gave rise to the creation of the state of Israel, that the United Nations attempted adopted resolution 186 (S-2) which declared the appointment of a mediator (as chosen by a committee of the General Assembly).<sup>225</sup> While the role assigned to Bernadotte was intended to be a neutral peace broker that reported on the on-going conditions in Israel/Palestine, in many ways, his observations during this time planted the earliest seed of, what would later be enshrined as UN resolution 194 (the right of return). In the next section, I will examine the last progress report submitted to the Secretary General and explain how his recommendations in this report provided a legal blueprint for UN resolution 194 and UNRWA.

### **UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte – The Legal Architect of Return**

On 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948, the day that Israel officially declared their independence, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 186 (S-2), which effectively replaced the Palestine Commission with the position of a UN mediator between Arab and Israeli leaders.<sup>226</sup> The person

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<sup>224</sup> Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, 35.

<sup>225</sup> The committee who selected Count Folk Bernadotte was made up of representatives of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom and the United States of America (see United Nations General Assembly, *Appointment and Terms of Reference of a United Nations Mediator in Palestine*, A/RES/186 (S-2), (14 May 1948).

<sup>226</sup> The United Nations Palestine Commission was established through the partition plan advanced under UN Resolution 181. When Britain effectively withdrew Mandatory Power, they transferred decision making on matters concerning Palestine to this commission. The commission was thus responsible for arranging the transfer of administrative authority from the Mandatory Power to the commission and Provincial Councils of

appointed to the esteemed position of Mediator would provide the safety and well-being of Palestinians and Israelis and prepare monthly progress reports to the Security Council and to the Secretary-General for transmission to the United Nations.<sup>227</sup> The duties enlisted in this position echo almost verbatim the duties outlined for the UN Palestine Commission. Essentially, the responsibilities of the mediator would replace the UN Palestine Commission which was put in place to withdraw British Mandate from Palestine. Put another way, as British imperial powers began phasing out their presence in Palestine, they transferred sovereign control to the United Nations who put in place the UN Palestine Commission and UN resolution 181 – the partition plan. The messy transference of power (via the failed partition plan) resulted in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, which gave rise to the creation of the State of Israel (beyond the territorial limits approved by the UN) and essentially the denial of Palestinian statehood, which continues to haunt the question of Palestine today. In light of the heightened militarized conditions and escalated violence that shaped the newly formed state of Israel, the UN dissolved the Palestine Commission and instead put in place a mediator that would assume the responsibilities entrusted by British Mandate to the UN Commission. In light of this context, the UN mediator was fulfilling the weighty obligations at a critical juncture in the history of Palestine/Israel relations.

The person assigned to this role, as previously mentioned, was Count Folke Bernadotte. Prior to his appointment, Bernadotte was the head of the Swedish Red Cross and a leading figure in mediating the release of more than 30, 000 prisoners from German concentration camps at the

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Government, supervise and maintain public order during the transition period following the termination of British Mandate, delimit the frontiers of the Arab and Jewish States and the City of Jerusalem, exercise political and military control over the armed militia groups on the ground, prepare the establishment of the Economic Union, negotiate the distribution of assets, and maintain the administration and essential public services.

<sup>227</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 3.

end of World War II. Three years following this rescue mission - often referred to as “White Buses Campaign,” Bernadotte was appointed the mediator position which lasted approximately four months before his assassination by members of the Stern Gang (a Zionist extremist paramilitary organization).<sup>228</sup> Before his assassination, Bernadotte undertook several notable tasks which included: 1) the negotiation of a one-month truce between Arab and Israeli armies which lasted between June 11<sup>th</sup> to July 9<sup>th</sup> 1948; 2) The ordering of a second truce on July 15<sup>th</sup> 1948, and two more revised partition plans created with consideration of the existing conditions on the ground. The first plan was proposed on June 1948 and the second plan was proposed in his final progress report published before his assassination in September 1948.

On May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1948, a week after UN resolution 186 was passed (which also marks the week after Israel officially declared statehood), Bernadotte began his post as mediator which lasted until his assassination on September 17<sup>th</sup> 1948, the day after his last progress report was officially submitted to the Secretary General for transmission to the members of the United Nations. While the tasks outlined in the role of mediator were grand in nature and had the capacity for expansive reach, Bernadotte yielded great caution in his meetings with Israeli and Palestinian Arab leaders. After a month of assuming his role as mediator, he presented the president of the UN Security Council a four-page letter regarding his observations and suggestions on the current situation. As with other written submissions, he begins by reiterating that his “prime objective is to determine on the basis of the fullest exploration, whether there is any possibility of reconciling, by peaceful means, the divergent and conflicting views and positions on the two sides.”<sup>229</sup> He goes on to state,

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<sup>228</sup> “White Buses” was an operation advanced by the Swedish Red Cross and Danish government in 1945 in an effort to rescue Jewish and non-Jewish prisoners from Nazi concentration camps and transport them to Sweden. See “Killing the Count,” Al Jazeera English, last modified June 13, 2014. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2014/06/killing-count-20146282143931887.html>

<sup>229</sup> United Nations Security Council, Text of Suggestions Presented by the United Nations Mediator on Palestine to the Two Parties, S/863. June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

I have thoroughly studied, weighed and appraised the positions taken by the two parties. I interpret my role as Mediator not as one involving the handing down of decisions on the future of Palestine, but as one of offering suggestions on the basis of which further discussions might take place and possibly counter suggestions be put forth looking towards a peaceful settlement of this difficult problem. Suggestions at this stage, then, must clearly be of such nature as to provide a reasonable framework of reference within which the two parties may find it possible to continue their consultations with me towards the end of a peaceful adjustment.

During the first truce secured by Bernadotte, he closely supervised relations between the respective armies involved and observed the needs of Palestinian refugees. While the context of this report was intended to comment on what Bernadotte observed during the four-week truce, he outlines quite clearly the broader considerations that must be taken into account for a lasting and durable solution in Israel/Palestine. In his own words,

The fundamental issues in Palestine today are partition, the Jewish state, Jewish immigration and Arab refugees. While the formal attitudes of the parties on the first three of these issues have not changed, it is unquestionable that since the adoption by the General Assembly, on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1947, of resolution 181 (II) providing for the partition of Palestine, there have been changes in the Palestinian scene which are so decisively significant as to make some of the prevalent attitudes quite unrealistic.<sup>230</sup>

The changes that Bernadotte is referring to is the failure of the partition plan and peaceful transference of power. As Bernadotte further explains,

The most significant development in the Palestinian scene since last November is the fact that the Jewish State is a living, solidly entrenched and vigorous reality. That it enjoys *de jure* or *de facto* recognition from an increasing number of States, two of which are permanent members of the Security Council, is an incidental but arresting permanent fact. The Provincial Government of Israel is today exercising, without restrictions on its authority or power, all the attributes of full sovereignty. *The Jewish State was not born in peace as was hoped for in the resolution of 29 November, but rather, like many another States in history, in violence and bloodshed.*<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> United Nations Security Council, Text of Suggestions Presented by the United Nations Mediator on Palestine to the Two Parties, S/863. June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1948, 4.

<sup>231</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 5, emphasis added.

This excerpt highlights the asymmetrical relations of power between the newly formed State of Israel and Palestinian leadership at the time. Not only does Bernadotte acknowledge here that the form of international recognition and backing lent to the Provincial Government of Israel is permanent (insofar as the Security Council is concerned), but his observations also attest to the fact that Israel's very expressions of sovereignty hinges on the making of a state through processes of "violence and bloodshed."<sup>232</sup> It is also noteworthy that the violence he refers to includes both the outcome of the rise of paramilitary violence led by Zionist groups and hostilities of Palestinian and other Arab armies which took succession following the declaration of Israeli statehood. Explaining their refusal to accept "the fact of a Jewish State in Palestine," he identifies their resistance as a "tragic mistake in employing force in Palestine."<sup>233</sup> At the same time that he condemns their resistance to Israeli sovereignty and potential threat to the state of Israel, he also sympathizes with Palestinians in response to their fear that Jewish immigration would take up the whole of Palestine and Transjordan and "not stay within its defined boundaries." This was compounded by Zionist demands for unlimited settler migration.<sup>234</sup> Bernadotte's critiques of undefined territorialisation and unlimited Jewish settlement was signaling to the dangers of a settler-colonial project in the making.

In the first written submission to the UN General Assembly, Bernadotte provides several suggestions to mitigate the hostilities between Jewish and Palestinian relations. His interest was in finding a lasting and peaceful solution to the situation. These suggestions pertained to the outlining

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 6.

<sup>234</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 7.

of territorial boundaries (in consultation with the boundaries commission), economic unity, future immigration policy, the protection of religious and minority rights, the preservation of Holy Places, religious buildings and sites and of notable significance, recognition of the right of Palestinians to return. The significance of the last point is that it is first and earliest iteration of the *Palestinian right of return* at the level of international recognition. Before the right of return even enters into the archive of UN General Assembly Resolutions, it is declared in a four-page letter written submitted on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1948. His gesture to the right of return is drafted in the following way:

That recognition be accorded to the right of residents of Palestine who, because of conditions created by the conflict there [sic] have left their normal place of abode, *to return to their homes without restriction and to regain possession of their property.*<sup>235</sup>

Not only does Bernadotte affirm the right of Palestinians to return, he provides the political context for the conditions upon which they left and/or were expelled. In doing so, he gestures to a reparation approach that includes both repatriation and restitution in the following way:

It is not yet known that the policy of the Provincial Government of Israel with regard to the return of Arab refugees will be when the final terms of settlement are reached. It is, however, undeniable that no settlement can be just and complete if recognition is not accorded to the right of the Arab refugee to return to the home from which he has been dislodged by the hazards and strategy of the armed conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. The majority of these refugees have come from territory which, under the Assembly resolution of 29 November, was to be included in the Jewish State. The exodus of Palestinian Arabs resulted from panic created by fighting in their communities, by rumours concerning real or alleged acts of terrorism, or expulsion. It would be an offence against the principles of elemental justice if these innocent victims of the conflict were denied the right to return to their homes while Jewish immigrants flow into Palestine, and indeed, at least offer the threat of permanent replacement of the Arab refugees who have been rooted in the land for centuries.

There have been numerous reports from reliable sources of large-scale looting, pillaging and plundering, and of instances of destruction of villages without apparent military necessity. The liability of the Provincial Government of Israel to restore private property to its Arab owners and to indemnify those owners for property wantonly destroyed is clear,

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<sup>235</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 8. Emphasis added.

irrespective of any indemnities which the Provincial Government may claim from the Arab States.<sup>236</sup>

Bernadotte's comments above might be read as a radical gesture of international recognition that sympathized with the Palestinian cause. These passages highlight the forms of racial violence and more specifically ethnic cleansing practices that resulted in the creation of a Palestinian refugee context. In acknowledging the rootedness of Palestinians in Palestine, he also gestures to their location as Indigenous subjects with ties to land. These comments do much to challenge the Israeli settler-colonial state's founding mythologies predicated on the idea of settling on empty land. As with other settler-colonial state projects, Israel's national narrative relies on a kind of amnesia, and a particular adaptation of the quintessential colonial doctrine of *terra nullius*.<sup>237</sup> As Israel's forth prime minster Golda Meir so eloquently professed, "There was no such thing as Palestinians...It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. *They did not exist.*"<sup>238</sup> In recognizing the forms of displacement and dispossession required for the inception of the Israeli state, Bernadotte's declarations provide a haunting symbolic record of what the state has attempted to systematically erase. The capacity to persistently renew the modern Zionist motif that represents Palestine as a "land without a people for a people without a land" requires more than just the erasure of the Palestinian 'other'.<sup>239</sup> Rather, as Saree Makdisi insists, it requires the

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<sup>236</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 26. Emphasis added.

<sup>237</sup> See Almog Oz. *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*. Berkeley, University of California Press: 2000.

<sup>238</sup> Barbara, Parmenter, "Giving Voice to Stones: Place and Identity in Palestinian Literature," Texas: University of Texas Press: 1994, 21.

<sup>239</sup> This Zionist motif was first formulated by Israel Zangwill towards the end of the nineteenth century Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 9.

persistent erasure of the very process of erasure itself. Referring to the colonial practice of double erasure as a “second-order kind,” Makdisi explains:

[t]his form of Zionist subjectivity is premised on the act of denying that there has been a denial, erasing the fact that an erasure has taken place. Rather than denying the rights of the Palestinians, it denies that their rights have been denied. The form of subjectivity and identity that emerges from this second-order denial is then not premised on repression but rather on the repression of repression itself or a kind of psychological foreclosure.<sup>240</sup>

The forms of colonial displacement enabled through the ‘second-order kind’ of erasure signals attention to an expression of sovereignty that hinges on the persistent disavowal of colonial violence and, what I have described elsewhere as an expression of sovereignty defined through a “calculus of absences.”<sup>241</sup>

During the remainder of the time that Bernadotte served as mediator for the UN, he kept the issue of Palestinian refugees on the table and discussed it in greater detail in his final report. What is noteworthy in his final writings are the ways that he attends to the rights of Palestinian refugees first and foremost as a political question which he later addresses as a humanitarian endeavour. Bernadotte’s shift in representations of Palestinian refugees might be understood in relation to the Israeli state’s responses to his recommendations. In the annex of his final progress report, is a transcript of correspondence letters (via telegrams) between him and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Provincial Government of Israel. On August 1, 1948, the Minister for Foreign Affairs replied to Bernadotte’s recommendations for the right of Palestinians to return by insisting that the return of Palestinian refugees would be of compromise to the political, security and economic interests of the newly formed state of Israel. Take for example, the following passages:

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<sup>240</sup> Saree Makdisi, “The Architecture of Erasure,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3(2011): 558.

<sup>241</sup> Shaira Vadasaria, “Necronationalism: managing race, death and the nation’s skeletons,” *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 2015: 21, no. 2, 118.

We are not unmindful of the plight of the Arabs who, as a result of the present war, find themselves uprooted from their homes and cast adrift. Our own people have suffered too much from similar tribulations for us to be indifferent to their hardships. If nevertheless, we find ourselves unable to agree on their readmission to the Israel-controlled areas, it is because of over-riding considerations bearing on our immediate security, the outcome of the present war and the stability of the future peace settlement. We feel convinced that any measure of repatriation undertaken solely on humanitarian grounds, in disregard of the military, political and economic aspects of the problem, would prove to have been falsely conceived; it would defeat its purpose and result in graver complications than those which already exist.<sup>242</sup>

In the reasons cited above, what we begin to see take shape at the level of public discourse is a logic of securitization that normalizes the expulsion of Palestinians even though the expulsion had taken effect only a few months prior to these communications. Continuing on the theme of security and the rights of Jewish people, the Israeli Foreign minister explains,

There can be no doubt that the return during the truce of thousands of displaced Arabs to the State of Israel – which is still beset by enemy armies, forms the target of violent political attacks and may yet again become the object of a renewed military onslaught – would, in fact gravely prejudice our rights and position...Against this background, your reference to the return of Arab refugees as being one of the questions under dispute which it is the duty of both parties to try and settle peacefully, appears to us to miss the main point at issue. The root cause of the present conflict – of which the mass flight of Arabs and their consequent suffering are mere corollaries – is the refusal of the Arab League to accept the State of Israel either as a matter of right or as an accomplished fact.<sup>243</sup>

Although the majority of displacement of Palestinians happened with months prior to this correspondence, these passages reveal the Israeli state's refusal to negotiate the repatriation of refugees in the present or long term context. The reason provided – as one predicated on the recognition of the State of Israel – is a governing logic that continues to rationalize and exonerate Israeli war crimes today. The longevity and pervasiveness of this securitizing logic within Israeli

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<sup>242</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 27.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid

discourse is noteworthy. These claims for recognition – as a logic used to deny the right of return conceals the economic interests of settler-colonialism. These economic interests of the settler-state are evidenced in the ways that the Foreign minister discusses the question of economic livelihood and day-to-day life.

On the economic side, the reintegration of the returning Arabs into normal life, and even their mere maintenance, would present an insoluble problem. The difficulties of accommodation, employment and ordinary livelihood would be insuperable. *You will, we feel sure, readily admit that the international assistance which you envisage is for the time being purely hypothetical. On the other hand, the Provincial Government would resist as utterly unjust an attempt to impose on its limited and heavily strained resource any part of the financial liability for the relief and resettlement of Arabs.*<sup>244</sup>

In refusing both the repatriation of Palestine's indigenous population and financial support in their immediate assistance, Bernadotte concludes the last ten pages of his report along the lines of humanitarian urgency. As he declares, "By the middle of July the refugee problem had become grave and it was apparent to me that urgent measures had to be taken for humanitarian reasons."<sup>245</sup>

Drawing from an excerpt of an appeal from the League of Arab States to the Secretary General of the United Nations, he cites,

It is felt that the situation of misery and distress of a large number of refugees merits the attention of the United Nations Organization concerned with the assistance and welfare of refugees, and this request is therefore being made to Your Excellency with a view to initiating such action as is required to relieve the acuteness and gravity of the situation.<sup>246</sup>

It is here, towards the end of his report, that Bernadotte gestures to the need for the creation of a humanitarian agency to ameliorate the situation. In his concluding remarks, he declares the following

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<sup>244</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 27.

<sup>245</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 47.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

The situation of the majority of these hapless refugees is already tragic, and to prevent them from being overwhelmed by further disaster and to make possible their ultimate rehabilitation, it is my earnest hope that the international community will give all necessary support to make the measures I have outlined fully effective. I believe that for the international community to accept its share of responsibility for the refugees of Palestine is one of the minimum conditions for the success of its efforts to bring peace to that land.<sup>247</sup>

Bernadotte's conclusions also come after the arrival and opinion of officials from the Department of Social Affairs and the League of Red Cross Society. He outlines several key features of Palestinian refugee life that provide reason for immediate humanitarian assistance. These include the fact that Palestinians were in a stateless position without protection from any recognized government and that a large majority of refugees were children, pregnant women and nursing mothers, and already sick. In addition to observations about the displaced demography, other humanitarian observations included lack of water, food, shelter, clothing and protection from the climate.<sup>248</sup> The immediate needs identified by these humanitarian officials included:

- a) Food and protected water supplies adequate in quantity and regularly distributed;
- b) Preventive medical provisions against epidemic disease by inoculation, and hospital provision on an emergency basis;
- c) Work of activity to occupy the attention of the refugee
- d) Tentage accommodation for 60,000 persons before 15 October
- e) Clothing and bedding<sup>249</sup>

While it may seem obvious that officers of a humanitarian agency would pay attention to immediate relief and aid requirements, what is noteworthy is that these considerations for humanitarian aid also included recommendations at the time with regards to the question of repatriation. As Bernadotte summarizes,

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<sup>247</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 52.

<sup>248</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948).

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

The immediate solution of the problem appeared to be the return to their homes of those refugees who desired to return. Even though in many localities their homes had been destroyed, and their furniture and assets dispersed, it was obvious that a solution for their difficulties could be more readily found there than elsewhere.<sup>250</sup>

Bernadotte's conclusions in this report lays the ground for what soon becomes the mandate of UNRWA. In the final words of his report – some of which open this chapter, he declares the following:

In concluding this part of my report, I must emphasize again the desperate urgency of this problem. The choice is between saving the lives of many thousands of people now or permitting them to die. The situation of the majority of these hapless refugees is already tragic, and to prevent them from being overwhelmed by further disaster and to make possible their ultimate rehabilitation, it is my earnest hope that the international community will give all necessary support to make the measures...I believe that for the international community to accept its share of responsibility for the refugees of Palestine is one of the minimum conditions for the success of its efforts to bring peace to that land.<sup>251</sup>

The reflections that Bernadotte leaves us with in his final address to the international community is haunting for several reasons. After close to seventy years, the displacement of Palestinian refugees has not been resolved. Lasting peace has not been achieved. Perhaps most significantly, the very question of return has become further and further annexed from official negotiations.

During the “Oslo Years” (1993-2000) the question of return became both a pressing and under recognized issues at the negotiation table. At the time of peace negotiations, the PLO Chairman, Yaseer Arafat came very close to forgoing the right of return in exchange for a peace agreement with the State of Israel. Yet, what would this have meant for the millions of Palestinian refugees waiting for return? Unlike the attempted peace negotiations that took place during the “Oslo Years,” the Camp David Summit was the first official political process that took seriously

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<sup>250</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 48

<sup>251</sup> United Nations Mediator on Palestine. Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator on Palestine Submitted to the Secretary-General for the Transmission to the Members of the United Nations, Supplement No. 11, A/648, (September 16<sup>th</sup>, 1948), 58.

the question of Palestinian refugees. Amidst these discussions of refugee rights, significantly Israel only acknowledged the needs of Palestinian refugees in the context of ‘humanitarian grounds’ (i.e. family unification) and as ‘humanitarian subjects’. Furthermore, during this negotiation, the Israeli state’s consideration of accepting Palestinian refugees into the state borders of Israel was limited to 100,000 refugees.

While UN resolution 194 clearly outlines a form of reparative justice rooted in repatriation and/or monetary compensation, the terms and conditions of delivery remain very unclear. As Rashid Khalidi notes in his critique of UN resolution 194, three specific considerations should be observed. First, that the Palestinian Liberation Organization has made several concessions on the absolute right of return including, the endorsement of financial compensation for the property of Palestinians rather than general encouragement of returning to the homeland itself.<sup>252</sup> Second, the precondition of the PLO’s interpretation of return stipulates the precondition “to live at peace with their neighbors” and thus become law-abiding citizens of their colonial entity, thereby “fully accepting its jurisdiction and sovereignty”.<sup>253</sup> Thirdly, and this is perhaps one of the most insidious clauses to consider, the PLO’s interpretation of the “Right of Return” has left the destination of return rather ambiguous.<sup>254</sup> For instance, some PLO spokespersons have suggested that the right of return be applied in the context of the future Palestinian state, rather than within Israel proper. Given the territorial fragmentation of the region and its devastating impact on the viability of a two-state solution, the idea of Palestinians returning to a discontinuous and bantunized state is not what the architects or proponents of UN resolution 194 had imagined during its inception. The combination of these concessions not only weakened the political call for return but essentially

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<sup>252</sup> Rashid Khalidi, “Observations on the Right of Return,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2: 1992, 36.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

caused a rift between political leadership and Palestinian refugee communities at large. In the absence of the implementation of the “right of return”, what has emerged is a protracted refugee context sustained by humanitarian governance.

### **UNRWA and the Emergence of Humanitarian Governance**

On August 31<sup>st</sup> 2016, over forty community activists, popular committee members, academics and representatives from human rights and humanitarian organizations in Palestine gathered to discuss the future status of UNRWA (United Nations Relief Work and Agency) for Palestinian refugees. This event, organized by *Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights*, a leading refugee rights organization in the West Bank, brought together a panel of international legal experts on reparations and human rights in Israel/Palestine more broadly defined. To my surprise, the main talking points during this panel had nothing to do with the consequences of living under, what the UN has declared - a protracted humanitarian condition or prolonged military occupation. Further, there was little mention of the settler-colonial context that gave rise to, and continues to renew the expulsion of Palestinians from their land and legal rights to self-determination. Instead, at this event, international experts testified to the dangers facing UNRWA’s financial crisis. The main question that animated this event concerned, as one of the scholars on the panel asked “what will become of UNRWA 30 years from now?”<sup>255</sup> Most shocking to me about this question was how little reaction it garnered. It seemed to me the speaker’s question came into stark contrast with local and international discourse on the Palestinian right of return, an internal legal right enshrined under UN resolution 194. Throughout the entirety of the event, I wondered about the long-term effects of living under humanitarian governance which began almost seventy years ago.

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<sup>255</sup> The significance of this time frame (30 years) is that it will mark the conclusion of UNRWA’s 99-year land lease for Palestinian refugee camps.

On May 1<sup>st</sup> 1950, less than two years following Israel's state declaration, UNRWA began their operations as a kind of relief and work agency. Set up by the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), UNRWA emerged as a response to the newly born crisis of Palestinian refugees. As an international humanitarian agency put in place by the UN General Assembly, its mission was to sustain the survival of Palestinian refugees by providing education, employment, medical care, shelter and basic rations. At the time of this displacement, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) set up a cluster of tents to house recently displaced refugees. Throughout the past sixty-six years, UNRWA camps have undergone a series of material transformations starting with the tent, which was later replaced with shelters and eventually the formation of new housing structures made up of dense and "solid urban spaces."<sup>256</sup> Throughout these years of living in exile, the architecture of the camp has transitioned from being a triangular tent cemented in mud to a shelter with vertical walls to a kind of permanently temporary urban space. In addition to shelter programs, UNRWA has been one of the major sources of aid in the region, and a primary economic source of refugee survival throughout the past seven decades. While these interventions into the precarious conditions of refugee existence are indeed life sustaining, they also come to constitute Palestinian refugee subjectivity in particular ways.

Examining the idea of "aid" in the Foucauldian sense of governance, Julie Peteet argues that we might also understand aid as something that is simultaneously "constraining and productive, as sites of contest for control over strategic resources."<sup>257</sup> She invites us to think about the productive capacities of 'aid regimes' in producing a kind of modern colonial subject and

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<sup>256</sup> Alessandro Petti, "The Concrete Tent" (Inauguration Speech), *Campus in Camps*, accessed May 2016, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/>.

<sup>257</sup> Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Desire: Palestinian Refugee Camps*, 49.

“productive citizens.”<sup>258</sup> In the context of aid projects like UNRWA, Peteet’s work shows how these forms of population management are advanced first and foremost through processes of “classification, enumeration, the census, the rations and medical system that objectified the refugee body and its basic needs, and the educational system.”<sup>259</sup> These techniques of biopower and international governance, have turned the refugee body into a site of colonial intervention, whereby abnormal conditions become normalized, maintained and protracted.

These examples also illustrate that at the same time that UNRWA has worked to sustain a refugee population in a state of exile, its dubious role has imposed “new categories of identity” that only become legible through a terrain of humanitarian rights discourse. Further, these examples also help us think about how humanitarian rights discourse, which I identify next as a racial discourse, shapes the discursive field through which Palestinian refugees and their struggle for land becomes legible at the level of international recognition.

Humanitarianism, broadly defined might be understood as a “mode of governing that concerns the victims of poverty, homelessness, unemployment, and exile, as well as of disasters, famines, epidemics, and wars – in short, every situation characterized by precariousness.”<sup>260</sup> Describing humanitarianism as law, discourse and practice, Ilana Feldman explains humanitarianism as an arrangement of legal orders and regulatory conditions (i.e. as codified under humanitarian law), a set of “images of suffering”, a set of *practices* that ensure the provision of emergency aid and social services.<sup>261</sup> That *humanitarianism* can be so many things, and so many things at once helps to explain the difficulty in exacting how it responds to a calculus of life. As

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<sup>258</sup> Peteet, *Landscape of Hope and Desire: Palestinian Refugee Camps*, 50.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>260</sup> Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, trans. Rachel Gomme, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012, x.

<sup>261</sup> Feldman, *The Humanitarian Condition*, 156.

Linda Tabar argues, humanitarianism is not just an imperative of “saving life.”<sup>262</sup> Rather, we might understand humanitarianism as “rooted in a much more ambivalent notion of human agency.”<sup>263</sup> While humanitarian organizations often represent their work and mandate as apolitical, objective and neutral, the modern history of humanitarianism is premised on an affective and asymmetrical story of sentimentality, benevolence, and compassion. Triangulating a genealogy of humanitarianism, humanism and the category of the “human,” Talal Asad tells us a story about the ways that humanity, and in particular, a secular humanism comes to be articulated under modernity.<sup>264</sup> This reading introduces an understanding of humanitarianism as a discourse indebted to the moral sensibilities that emerge through Christian moralism, liberal secular reason (which for Asad are interconnected projects) and a commitment to the violence inherent in declarations of compassion, benevolence and freedom. The caution that Asad and scholars of colonialism have asserted, is that doctrines of human rights, humanitarianism, and reparations often rescale suffering at the very moment they work to ameliorate historical and on-going wrongs. The danger in humanitarian discourse is that it often obscures and makes unrecognizable the ways that ideas of human difference are continuously rewritten to do the messy work of state-building. Destabilizing the linear narrative of humanitarianism, Tabar further explains how humanitarianism organizes compassion for the “other” in ways that are constitutive of a “racialized hierarchy that

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<sup>262</sup> Linda Tabar, “Disrupting Development, Reclaiming Solidarity: The Anti-Politics of Humanitarianism,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, no. 4: 2016, 17.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> As Asad explains, the story of humanitarianism begins to take shape in the Renaissance era whereby ideas of universality and reason interact with “European voyages of discovery” and alongside the emergence of colonial cartography via mapping techniques. Fuelled by Christian moralism which establishes ideas about human difference along a vertical “chain of being,” the project of humanism sets in motion what comes to be understood as humanity. As scholars of post-colonial studies have articulated, the paradox of establishing hierarchies and taxonomies of social difference under the guise of universality is that renders invisible the structures of power that maintain and reproduce the forms of violence constitutive of modernity. See Talal Asad, “Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism,” *Critical Inquiry* 41, no. 2: 2015, 390-427.

predicates humanitarian compassion on the non-Westerner's conformity to a subordinate position that denies their voice and agency."<sup>265</sup>

In "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," Prem Kumar Rajaram also provides reflections on the question of agency, representation and discursive contours of humanitarianism.<sup>266</sup> As he argues,

the figuration of the 'refugee' as 'speechless' (Malkki 1996: 377)...abstracts individual experiences of displacement from the political, social and historical context while putting in their stead a depoliticized, dehistoricized and universalized figuration of the refugee as mute victim.<sup>267</sup>

Rajaram's point here is that when we think about the visual economy of the refugee, representations of the refugee are often represented through a generalizable depoliticized and dehistoricized imaging whereby they are "helpless victims" and "consigned to their body". Their corporeality is bound to a "speechless" visuality of "suffering and need."<sup>268</sup> These decontextualized representations signal to a kind of universal stock narrative of victimhood tethered to their corporeality alone. These racialized visualities not only represent a sentimental kind of "depersonalized" representation but enter a visual economy whereby their corporeality is also "stuck in static signification."<sup>269</sup> Although representations of "refugeeness" don't share the same circuits of production or genealogy (thus inviting different forms of reception), they represent examples of the ways that race gets signed to a static and immobile corporeality. The figure of the refugee is thus not only trapped in visual representations of the camp, but also trapped in a visual economy of humanitarian discourse that racially maps something onto their corporeality.

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<sup>265</sup> Tabar, "Disrupting Development, Reclaiming Solidarity: The Anti-Politics of Humanitarianism," 18.

<sup>266</sup> Prem Kumar Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 15, no. 3: 2002, 247-264.

<sup>267</sup> Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," 248.

<sup>268</sup> Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee," 253.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

The racialized formation of refugee subjectivity is textured by the absence of statehood. Similar to the refugee camp, the figure of the refugee is often represented as liminal and in effect a kind of “extraterritorial” subject. The idea of extraterritoriality signals to a kind of “homelessness” whereby populations are forced to live in a kind of “extended temporary condition of precarity, marginalization, and exclusion.”<sup>270</sup> In the context of Palestinian refugees, representations of both the camp and the refugee invoke a spatialized and racialized temporal imagining of disposability; the embodiment of ruination, a temporary condition not meant to last. This “homelessness” and “placelessness” is contoured by where and how the nation draws its national colonial frontiers – marking who does and does not belong to the desired and permanent “imagined community.”<sup>271</sup> As “stateless peoples” and/or subjects of “extraterritoriality,” dominant representations of Palestinian refugees are often represented outside of colonial modernity – a modernity defined by, what Rajaram identifies “state centric political imaginings” of identity and politics.<sup>272</sup> In being casted outside of colonial modernity, the figure of the refugee is also marked outside of occidental rationality and in effect, the category human. What I have tried to illustrate through this discussion on representations of humanitarianism are the ways that such discourses recast refugees as subjects of racial difference. In thinking about the historical and on-going expulsion of Palestinians through this register, we are alerted to the ways that Palestinian refugees have been co-signed to a racialized ordering of humanitarian governance that denies their claims to land and consequently, bars them from liberal imaginings of the human under colonial modernity.

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<sup>270</sup> Petti, Hilal, and Weizman, *Architecture After Revolution*, 39.

<sup>271</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso Press), 1991.

<sup>272</sup> Rajaram, “Humanitarianism and Representations of the Refugee,” 251.

## Conclusion

As this chapter has explained, the question of return was not always framed as a humanitarian crisis. Rather, we can trace, as I have done, the historical moments and events that gave rise to this discursive shift at the level of international recognition. The replacement of return with humanitarian initiatives can be historically accounted for by examining Israel's refusal to repatriate Palestinian refugees back into the newly formed state of Israel. As the newly declared state of Israel entrenched their claims to sovereignty under international law, Palestinians were slowly but steadily made into subjects of humanitarian governance. The consequences of this humanitarian discourse has made the right of return further out of reach for Palestinians refugees today.<sup>273</sup>

Not only does humanitarian discourse replace the political question of return with questions about aid, it suspends the project of return within a racialized economy of rights discourse which in effect, renders Palestinian refugees as depoliticized subjects in need of aid rather than in lawful title to their land. As this chapter demonstrates, when we look at the emergence of UN resolution 194 and UNRWA side by side, it becomes clear that neither of these responses resolve the question of return. On the contrary, aid agencies like UNRWA suspend the cessation of illegal settler-colonial nation building policies and do little to support the work of reparative justice. In the absence of monetary restitution, repatriation or even symbolic recognition, the question of Palestinian refugees has been answered through a depoliticized aid regime disinterested in decolonizing struggles toward land reclamation. Rather than working towards the project of return, these humanitarian interventions circulate within a racialized economy of human rights and

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<sup>273</sup> In "Illegible Humanity: The Refugee, Human Rights, and the question of Representation," Bishupal Limbu describes representational narratives about refugees as ones that render them "illegible." See Bishupal Limbu, "Illegible Humanity: The Refugee, Human Rights, and the question of Representation," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 22, no. 3 (2009): 257-282.

humanitarian discourse that obscures historical and on-going connections to land. In effect, such representations have refashioned how Palestinians come to be represented within a global imaginary. In thinking about how humanitarianism has enabled these racialized and temporal representations of Palestinian refugees, we might also consider, the turning points of representation.

Palestinian refugees and the camp represent the embodied debris of a settler-colonial project not yet complete. It is here, in the place of incompleteness, that we might also be invited to imagine another representation all together – one that lives in the place of *potentiality*. While representations of Palestinian refugee came into being through processes of subjugation and expulsion rooted in racialized logic of disposability, this disposability also represents the impermanence of the settler state. As founders of *Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency* have frame this idea, “The homelessness of the refugee and the provisional nature of the camps also make temporary and questionable the existence of the Israeli state.”<sup>274</sup> Read in this context, we might understand the same logic of disposability mapped onto the Palestinian subject as one that interrupts Israeli sovereignty and state efforts towards securing an exclusive Jewish state. Trapped in a prolonged state of wait and protracted camp conditions, the right of return is not just a failed reparative justice principle but a decolonial aspiration attenuated to the future. In recognizing how the displaced Palestinian subject can hold refugee and Indigenous status, a representation of both the debris of settler-colonial nation building and its reversal, a blueprint for something yet to be known but on the horizon, we are invited to imagine possible reorderings of sovereignty in Palestine/Israel.

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<sup>274</sup> Petti, Hilal, and Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution*, 145.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “THE CONCRETE TENT”: ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF EXPULSION AND RETURN

The most radical art is not protest art but works that take us to another place, envision a different way of seeing, perhaps a different way of feeling.

- Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams, The Black Radical Imagination*<sup>275</sup>



Figure 3 This image was taken by a photo journalist of Ma'an News.<sup>276</sup>

On June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, a group of architects, artists, scholars, journalists, photographers, and residents of Dheisheh, Aida and al-Azzeh refugee camp gathered in Al-Feniq (the Phoenix)

<sup>275</sup> Robin Kelley, *Freedom Dreams, The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 11.

<sup>276</sup> Alex Shams, “Concrete tent embodies contradictions of Palestine refugee life,” *Ma’an News*, June 27, 2015, <https://www.maannnews.com/Content.aspx?id=766191>.

Garden, located on the outskirts of Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, West Bank.<sup>277</sup> The auspicious occasion that drew this eclectic constellation of people together was the inauguration ceremony of “The Concrete Tent”. “The Concrete Tent” is a material representation of two years of dialogue that took place between Campus in Camps – a local experimental educational collective comprised of third-generation Palestinian refugees from the Southern Bethlehem region and DAAR (Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency) - a collective comprised of local and international practitioners and scholars, including urban planners, architects and artists. “The Concrete Tent” is a project intended to give material and aesthetic form to the experimental learning and dialogue that took place between these two groups. At the heart of this dialogue, were debates about temporal representations of Palestinian refugee community life including the right of return, the camp, and what it means to identify as a Palestinian refugee.

One of the reoccurring questions and themes that animated their debates was what does it mean to return to an inherited memory? For many of the participants of Campus in Camps, the local narrative of return signals to a temporal ordering of the past; life before the Nakba. The Nakba periodizes an imagining of life before the state of Israel was created. In dominant oral histories, life and land is remembered in relation to memories of villages that no longer exist. Despite the erasure of many of these villages, the idea of return is often tethered to returning to a way of life connected to historical relationships to land. But these memories of land also produce a temporal ordering of return that renders life in exile as and “impermanent”. Viewed as a temporary and disposable structure, the camp is often discussed as a place that should be “demolished” or “burned to the ground” upon the day of return. Yet, this temporal framing of *impermanence* – a temporality

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<sup>277</sup> Dheisheh is one of fifty-nine refugee camps scattered around the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Located in Bethlehem (West Bank), it is comprised of Palestinians originally from forty-five villages west of Jerusalem and Hebron. The population is comprised of roughly 11,000 inhabitants, who share a camp that is less than one square kilometer of land.

tethered to the political project of return - often forecloses a space to memorialize that which has been accomplished throughout almost seven decades of exile. The very act of commemorating what has been accomplished in the camp is seen to undermine what might be imagined for the future of Palestinian refugees – a future predicated on the enactment of the right of return. Consequently, this discourse of “disposability” often erases the political history and subjectivity of Palestinian refugees that have now lived through seven decades of expulsion. Narrating against humanitarian logics of “helplessness” and “victimhood”, Alessandro Petti, one of founders of DAAR explains the vision of “the Concrete Tent” as another way forward. In his own words, he declares the following,

Claiming that life in exile is historically meaningful is a way to recognize refugees as subjects of history, as maker of history and not simply victims of it. Claiming the camp as a heritage site is a way to avoid the trap of being stuck either in the commemoration of the past or in a projection into an abstract messianic future that is constantly postponed and presented as salvation. This perspective offers instead the possibility for the camp to be a historical political subject of the present, and to see the achievements of the present not as an impediment to the right of return, but on the contrary, as a step towards it (...).”<sup>278</sup>

While local discourses of the camp certainly resist the view that the camp might possess a sense of permanency, the third-generation Palestinian refugees that I spoke with during the course of this research often related to *the camp as home*. For those born and raised in the camp, the camp is often described – albeit ambivalently- as home. Despite the fact that most camps in the West Bank have taken on an urban structure and have been in existence for close to seven decades, viewing the camp as home is often interpreted as a negation of the Palestinian “right of return”. Further, ideas about permanence in the camp are often viewed through a logic of normalization and viewed to support Israeli settler-colonial nation building. In claiming a temporal ordering of

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<sup>278</sup> Alessandro Petti, “The Concrete Tent” (Inauguration Speech), Campus in Camps, accessed May 2016, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/>.

the camp as something that can be both permanent and temporary, “The Concrete Tent” invites spectators to consider what other imaginative possibilities for decolonial futurities exist in Palestine; and how third-generation refugees might curate their own forms of representation that redefine refugee discourse about life in exile and the right of return. Narrating against homogenous stories of the refugee as only a subject of injury awaiting the right of return, the aim of this installation is to unsettle the disposability narratives of the camp. While this installation attempts to intervene in representations of the material and symbolic orderings of settler-colonial expulsion and humanitarian governance, this chapter explores the affective and temporal tensions that arise between localized memory and decolonial aesthetics.

Unlike the image of the refugee identity card that opens chapter two, an image that represents a humanitarian story of a nameless, homeless, and socially dead Palestinian refugee, the image that opens and animates this chapter attempts to tell a different tale. In contrast to the identity card photo, where we are provided discursive cues about the humanitarian story of the refugee, the image of the tent does not tell a self-evident story. In fact, its aim, according to the architects of its design, is to “give form to contradictions,”<sup>279</sup> to experiment with material forms of narration that open up new forms of dialogue about, and different imaginings of, what it means to create life in exile. While it is tempting to interpret the image that opens chapter two and the image that opens this chapter as discrete representations of refugee subjectivity – one curated as a humanitarian narrative (albeit - that also tells a story about social and material death) and one curated through a representational story about political history and agency, this chapter asks: *what binds them?* What role can cultural production, and in particular *decolonizing* aesthetics, play in disrupting racialized representations of Palestinians as organized under both Israeli settler-colonialism and

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<sup>279</sup> Interview transcript, Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti

humanitarian governance? And, how have these reimaginings of the camp and the project of return, as curated through this installation, been interpreted by Palestinian refugees who reside and remain in the camp?

To explore these questions, I draw from semi-structured interviews that I conducted with participants of the project, as well as with refugees of Dheisheh and Aida camp not directly affiliated with the project. I analyze these interviews alongside visual representations of the installation at different stages (taken across several months), oral history, participant observations, local media coverage, and public statements about the project published by *Decolonizing Architecture Art and Campus in Camps*. Using the “The Concrete Tent” as a locus point to explore community dialogue around the representational life of return, I reflect upon what kind of decolonial imaginings are invited through this project. In canvassing a broad spectrum of texts and voices to examine “The Concrete Tent” and its interpretation by Palestinian refugees living within the camp structure, I argue that the forms of decolonial imagining invited through this project come into the tension with local memories and on-going histories of settler-colonialism and humanitarianism. While the aim of this installation is to disrupt a totalizing story of racial violence, I show in this chapter how this racial violence reaches into the discursive and affective field of reception and creates a dissonance between decolonial imaginings of refugee discourse, localized memories and the material consequences of living under protracted refugee life.

This chapter is divided in three parts. In part one, I give context and history to the site location of “The Concrete Tent”. This context is important for understanding the spatial and political implications of this work. In part two, I draw from interviews conducted with architects and participants involved in the design and construction of the project, and official public statements, local media coverage, and speeches by members of the two collectives involved

(Campus and Camps and Decolonizing Architectural Art) and examine the methodological considerations that gave rise to this project. In so doing, I contextualize this project and explore what this architectural intervention aims to accomplish within Dheisheh refugee camp. In part three, I explore some of the ways that interpretations of this architectural project come into conversation with the local and dominant representations of return. By way of conclusion, I explore some of tensions that arise between decolonial imaginings within a settler-colonial context sustained by protracted humanitarianism and explain how these tensions come to bear on decolonial imaginings in Palestine today.

### **Anton Mountain and the Emergence of Al-Feniq (The Phoenix)**



Figure 2 - This picture was taken by the author in November 2014. It captures the garden in Al-Feniq community center prior to the construction of “The Concrete Tent.” The “platform” in the center of this picture is where “The Concrete Tent” currently resides.

“The Concrete Tent” sits in the Edward Said garden in Al-Feniq (the Phoenix) Cultural Center. This community space serves as a community center for Palestinian refugees from

Southern refugee camps, including Dheisheh, Aida, Beit Jebrin and Arroub camp. The name “Al-Feniq” was not always the name of the cultural center that now resides over Anton Mountain. The name chosen for this community center holds symbolic importance that represents the political and historical meaning of this place. The phoenix represents a long-lived mystical bird that arises and regenerates itself from the ashes of its predecessor. Some interpretations of Greek, Egyptian and Arab mythology suggest that when the phoenix feels its end approaching, it creates a nest with the finest of wood and sets itself on fire. Other interpretations suggest that the phoenix flies into the city of the sun (Heliopolis) and decomposes from there. Regardless of how it destructs, the story of the phoenix is that at the moment of its ashes, this bird consistently claims its life anew.

The name Al-Feniq was adopted to represent, as participants of Campus in Camps describe, “an epic history of destruction and re-building (...), manifesting the human and intellectual vitality of the refugee community, despite the military occupation and without undermining the right of return.”<sup>280</sup> Although this center came into being in the mid-90s, it underwent several reconstructions over the years, particularly during the second-intifada when the Israeli military drove tanks into the center to demolish the walls. During these military incursions, the military frequently reoccupied the space through squatting on the roof and homes of people to enact surveillance over the camp.<sup>281</sup> It was during the re-construction of the center that the name Al-Feniq (the phoenix) was adopted.

Before the center was created, Anton Mountain, where the center sits today, was a contested site of surveillance and militarization between three governments: the Jordanian

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<sup>280</sup> Campus in Camps Initiatives, *The Garden: Making Place* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2013), 13, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/01-the-garden/>

<sup>281</sup> Campus in Camps Initiatives, *The Garden: Making Place* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2013), 35, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/01-the-garden/>

Authorities, Israeli Authorities and finally the Palestinian Authority (PA).<sup>282</sup> Given its height and location in the West Bank, it allowed for optimal vertical and horizontal surveillance over the area. Between 1948-1967, Jordanian authorities used the mountain as a military base. This changed in 1967 when the Israeli authorities began their military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. As this time, the Israeli military civil administration controlled the mountain and used it for military training and surveillance until 1990. After the Oslo Accords (peace negotiations) in 1993, the Israeli army partially withdrew from certain urban areas, leaving the mountain to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA divided the area into two parts, an airstrip for helicopters and a Palestinian police station. Rather than allocating the land to the neighboring refugee camps in need of space, the PA continued to use this area as a militarize site for surveilling and disciplining Palestinian society.<sup>283</sup> While this was happening, popular committees in Bethlehem made up of Palestinian refugees were campaigning for autonomy over the area, arguing that the camps already suffered from “a lack of space and over crowdedness.”<sup>284</sup> In a letter addressed to Yasser Arafat (President of the Palestinian National Authority of the time) on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1997, the Dheisheh people Popular Committee of Dheisheh declared,

We in Dheisheh Refugee Camp – children, elderly, women, sons of martyrs, prisoners and returnees – are writing to you Mr. President with our trust in you, appealing for you to help us to provide a residency for more than 150 families, as it is no longer possible to build in the camp, whether for burial (our dead have no graves) or for the living ones that have no

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<sup>282</sup> Campus in Camps Initiatives, *The Garden: Making Place* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2013), 23, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/01-the-garden/>

<sup>283</sup> Campus in Camps Initiatives, *The Garden: Making Place* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2013), 25 <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/01-the-garden/>.

Very little has been published on the history of Al-Feniq. The details that make up this brief history come from the text produced by Campus in Camps entitled “The Garden, Making Place” (2013), oral history and informal conversations that I had with people who run Al-Feniq center during my research.

<sup>284</sup> Campus in Camps Initiatives, *The Garden: Making Place* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2013), 27, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/01-the-garden/>. The term popular committee refers to local and community based organizing formed by prominent activists across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and across different Palestinian political parties. It is a kind of community based organizing that reflects traditions of the first Palestinian Intifada.

place to live [...]. Yes Mr. President, we are writing to you to instruct the concerned authorities to provide the camp with the neighboring land of the camp which is a state property known as – Anton Mountain – which is the only, and the last space left, to solve the issue which the sons of the camp are facing. Also, we received information regarding this land that there are some investors who want to use it for tourism business. This has raised worries among the people, as the business could be moved elsewhere while it is impossible to move the camp. In addition this piece of land has always been used by the people of the camp.”<sup>285</sup>

This appeal to late Yasser Arafat is revealing. That the *dead have no place for burial and the living have “no place to live”* reflects the urgency of spatial needs in and around the refugee camps set up in the West Bank and Gaza, and Bethlehem in this case. Rather than continuing the legacy of Anton Mountain as a site of surveillance and militarization, and future site for tourism, refugees from Dheisheh took it upon themselves to demand autonomy over the land and repurpose it for the use of a cultural community center. Within a few years after the petition had started, the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) approved the building of the center on Anton Mountain, which is now run and managed by popular committees and organizations from the neighboring camps in Bethlehem.

The transformation of this site from a carceral space to a refugee centered cultural center has created possibilities for new and unique arrangements of sociality in the camp. Currently, it has a large banquet hall where weddings and funeral ceremonies take place, an Edward Said library that has recently been renovated and restored by Campus in Camps, a women’s gym, a common kitchen, a health and business advice center and a guesthouse for sleeping accommodations, which

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid. This letter (translated from Arabic) was submitted on 31 May 1997 and signed by the following organizations: Fatah, Dheisheh children kindergarten, Twinning committee between French cities and Palestinian refugee camps, Ibdah – Dheisheh refugee camp Families of Martyrs Association, Al-Amal club, Martyrs Mosque, Local Committee for Disabled Rehabilitation, Dheisheh Popular Committee. The original letter was collected and translated by participants of Campus in Camps and reprinted in, Campus in Camps Initiatives, *The Garden: Making Place* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2013), <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/01-the-garden/>.

often serve residents from Gaza coming into the West Bank for medical treatment.<sup>286</sup> One of the most striking and scenic areas of Al-Feniq is the Edward Said garden. Prior to renovations of the garden and construction of “The Concrete Tent”, it once held a playground for children of the camp, as well as a platform used by participants of Campus in Camps as illustrated in figure four below.



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<sup>286</sup> Renovations to the Edward Said Library was recently done by members of DAAR and Campus in Camps. See Nathan Witt, “The library in exile: Verso donates books to Campus in Camps, West Bank,” *Verso Books*, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2148-the-library-in-exile-verso-donates-books-to-campus-in-camps-west-bank>.

Figure 3 Photo taken in November 2014 by author. It captures the other side of the garden adjacent to “The Concrete Tent”.



Figure 4 - This photo of the “platform” was taken by the author in November 2014 prior to the construction of the tent. This area of the garden is where “The Concrete Tent” currently sits. In addition to the building where Campus in Camps headquarters was, this space was also used for gatherings. When the weather permitted, participants of Campus in Camps would hold sessions here, share food, and discuss ideas.

In presenting this short history of Al-Feniq, a history pieced together through oral history, Campus in Camps publication material and photographs of the garden between 2014-2016 prior to and after its reconstruction, I have attempted to contextualize the broader implications of this architectural installation within the community center. To appreciate the full context of this project, it is

important to read it alongside the pedagogical aims of DAAR and Campus in Camps and the forms of community dialogue that gave rise to the project in question.

### **The Methodology of “The Concrete Tent”**

The ideas that came to inform “The Concrete Tent” were theorized and imagined over the course of two years. My observations of its development took place in the last six months of its creation. During my time participating in DAAR’s residency program, the theoretical debates that informed its imagining were being spatially planned, blueprinted onto graph paper and materially constructed. As I discovered during this time with the collectives, the meaning of this tent was never intended to be fixed or concrete, despite its aesthetic form. In contrast, in many ways the aim of the tent emerged through a kind of social experiment aimed at speculation and inquiry. In this regard, the idea behind the tent was to mirror the kind of pedagogical praxis that came out of relationships between Campus in Camps and Decolonizing Architecture Art. As I slowly discovered throughout observing and participating in meetings, on-site field visits, walking tours, and informal dinners, the vision of this project, and the vision of DAAR and Campus in Camp’s work is difficult to contain. Bringing together “architects, artists, activists, urbanists, filmmakers and curators” interested in working “collectively on the subject of politics and architecture,” their aim is to “use spatial practice as a form of political intervention.”<sup>287</sup> While it is tempting to identify their work as a kind of activism, they see their work as anchored in experimentation and speculation rather than activist or “solution” based frameworks. Adopting a methodological framework of “critical proximity,” they position their work as something that combines “research and practice” and invokes spatial practice to provoke politics to reveal itself and act upon it.”<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 28.

<sup>288</sup> Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 25.

Rather than intervening through “solution” or statist frameworks for the Palestine/Israel conflict, their work opens space for imaginative capacity and critical inquiry. Resisting the category “activist,” DAAR explains,

We do not work in an ameliorative manner; we have never proposed the kind of informal architecture we see worldwide promoted as a solution to alleviate poverty; we do not use photography to reveal injustice or protest it. Rather we have sought to establish a different balance between withdrawal and engagement, action in the world and research, fiction and proposal. Our work should neither be interpreted as an attempt to articulate an architecture utopia nor as a political instrument for “denouncing” or “mobilizing public opinion”. Our practice is not reactive to dominant forms of power, instead, it has a different temporality.<sup>289</sup>

Of significance, the temporality that they experiment with attempts to “produce a space from which it is possible to operate in the here and now but with radical long-term transformative visions”.<sup>290</sup> In the context of working in and around Palestine/Israel, their reluctance to name their work as “solution” based has particular implications. As explained to me by Alessandro Petti during an interview with him and Sandi Hilal,

It's a different strategy that works at the level of practice rather than at the level of solution... We use architecture as a way to enter into this conflict and these are changes that can happen from the way we open a door or a window or think about how a house gets organized. And these are very concrete examples... You can read a lot about the forms of domination and struggles in countries through its architecture.<sup>291</sup>

In recognizing the centrality of architecture in spatial orderings of power in asymmetrical conflicts like Palestine/Israel, they also ask, what can be done or imagined differently?

Commenting on the relationship between colonial orderings of time and architecture, one of the Palestinian architects that worked with DAAR further explained this relationship to me by invoking a narrative about the “plastic table”.

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<sup>289</sup> Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 26.

<sup>290</sup> Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal, and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 27.

<sup>291</sup> Alessandro Petti & Sandi Hilal, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

Whatever we think, we think in a temporary way. My dad and my mom. All the people around us. Let's say they buy a table, they will buy a plastic table because they say it's temporary. And one day we'll buy a better one. If we build a wall in our home, it's temporary. It's temporary material. It's not strong enough. It's not like old buildings for example. Today, everything is built in such an unfinished way.<sup>292</sup>

Asking her to expand on why things are so temporary, she said:

It's the occupation. We are in a constant feeling that everything is going to change one day. We have this mindset. Right now, we are living in an unstable condition; a permanent condition of instability. And it's connected to the occupation. When you build a house, you know that it's temporary because something might happen soon...The more geography shrinks, the more the future becomes vague. It's something unclear.<sup>293</sup>

Although Athar herself is not a refugee or had experiences living in the camp, her village (Wadi Fakin) is one of the many seam zone villages in the West Bank. Barricaded by illegal settlements and the wall, her physical and symbolic sense of land is subject to both incarceration and shrinkage. Throughout the course of six months, we would talk frequently about the increasing settler-violence impacting her immediate community: damage to water wells, erection of additional settlement, attacks on Palestinian agriculture as well as the farmers. Connecting this violence to an unstable sensibility towards time, she explained:

Let's say you are a farmer. Even this job is temporary. Because your land is being taken away from you. So how you will make a future living is unclear as well. And where are you going to build a house for your children? It's so important here. Where to expand? Where to go? Where to live?<sup>294</sup>

The inclination and theft of land that Athar describes is one of the many discussions I had that helped me think about the relationship between colonial orderings of time and architecture. While this relationship resonates for almost all Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, the

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<sup>292</sup> Athar Mufreh, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>293</sup> Athar Mufreh, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>294</sup> Athar Mufreh, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

particularities of this colonial ordering of temporality for refugees and in the context of the camp is striking.

Following the Nakba, the camp and all that it embodied was supposed to be a temporary solution to an impermanent situation. As discussed in chapter three, the humanitarian response to the newly displaced Palestinian refugee context was not meant to substitute the political project of return, but rather the humanitarian interventions were meant to provide the kind of relief that the Israeli state was unwilling to provide. The displacement of Palestinian refugees and consequently the camp structure is now a sedimented reality in its seventh decade. In Dheisheh camp alone, the space is populated by over 15,000 refugees who were forced to flee from their homes in villages west of Jerusalem.”<sup>295</sup> At the time of this displacement, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) set up a cluster of tents to house recently displaced refugees. Throughout the past sixty-nine years, the “camp” has undergone a series of material transformations starting with the tent, which was later replaced with shelters and eventually the formation of new housing structures made up of concrete solid urban spaces.<sup>296</sup> Throughout these years of living in exile, the architecture of the camp has transitioned from being a triangular tent cemented in mud to a shelter with vertical walls to a kind of permanently temporary urban space. The tents that once sheltered refugees, as Petti explains underwent many changes. They were “reinforced and readapted with vertical walls, later substituted with shelters, and subsequently new houses made of concrete have been built, making camps dense and solid urban spaces.”<sup>297</sup> However, as Petti and Hilal argue, “as the years passed and no political solution was found for the plight of the displaced Palestinians, tents were substituted with shelters in an attempt to respond

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<sup>295</sup> Shams, “Concrete Tent Embraces Contradictions of Palestinian refugee life”, 2015.

<sup>296</sup> Alessandro Petti, “The Concrete Tent” (Inauguration Speech), *Campus in Camps*, accessed May 2016, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/>.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

to the growing needs of the camp population without undermining the temporary condition of the camp, and therefore undermining the right of return.”<sup>298</sup> In this regard, the camp, as we know it today, does look very different from the kind of “fragile structure” once put in place by UNRWA.<sup>299</sup> Given that the camp was birthed out of the Nakba – a period of violent dispossession – its structure and history is often memorialized in public discourse through a politics of mourning and temporal ordering of that which should remain temporary. Accordingly, transformations made in and around the camp were often met with political debates about whether the improvement of infrastructure and transformation of the camp into something more durable might undermine the right of return.

Despite the material changes that have taken place in the formation of the camp today and its increasingly permanent material form, one of the local narratives that organizes decisions around changes to the camp is that the camp should always be treated as temporary. That upon the day of return, the refugee camp will be demolished, or as one of my research participants expressed, “burnt to the ground.”<sup>300</sup> The paradox of this statement lies in the relationship between time and subjectivity. Take for instance the metaphor that Alessandro Petti gives during the inauguration ceremony:

Let us assume that camps have a history, and that this more than sixty-years of existence could be personified to correspond to their life expectancy of a person. A sixty-seven year-old person would not be denied their history; they would not be denied all the experiences and events that brought them to that point. How are we to reconcile this condition with the fact that the camp is always understood and described as a temporary situation of the present with no past, as something that has been established in order to be quickly dismantled and destroyed?<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> “Shu’fat School,” *Campus in Camps*, accessed January 2015, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/school-in-exile/>.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> Qussay Abu Aker, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>301</sup> Alessandro Petti, “The Concrete Tent” (Inauguration Speech), *Campus in Camps*, accessed May 2016, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/>.

The question that Petti raises through this metaphor concerns the tension of narration, subjectivity and time. If the very idea of the camp holds a temporary narrative of impermanence, is it possible for refugees to commemorate a robust social and political life without undermining the right of return? During an interview with Qussay Abu Aker, one of the participants in my research and a member of Campus in Camps, he expressed to me a kind of affective dissonance between oral histories of impermanence and representations of return. He did so in the following way,

When we talk about ourselves as refugees and the refugee camp as temporary, and if we only talk about the camp as temporary, and the very limited definition of temporality, it's a waste. What has been accomplished in the camp is seen as a waste. I was one of the people that thought about demolishing the camp when we return. But then thinking about the value of the last 67 years of being in the camp, the camp is not only a site of material construction, but it brought together people and communities. I think about how 46 villages met in one spot. And I think if we remained in our villages and never met, or if the catastrophe didn't happen in 48, the 46 villages may have never met. And then finding a constant way of living while we come from different backgrounds. We are taking about 46 villages with different mentalities. We have different mentalities now between each refugee camp, even if we are all refugees.<sup>302</sup>

Qussay's reflections take us through his own experiential, political and intellectual journey of life in the camp. Although socialized to believe that the camp is nothing but a temporary measure put in place to sustain life in exile, his life-long experiences of living inside a Palestinian refugee camp also made him intently aware of the rich connections and community building that emerges within the camp life itself. This conversation emerged alongside deeper considerations for what it means to make the camp a more sustainable place to live. Although the idea of sustainability in the camp comes into contradiction with local narratives of the right of return, Qussay's point is that it is also essential to understand how the very idea of sustainability is central to surviving under occupation. This idea comes into tension with local suspicions of "normalization".

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<sup>302</sup> Qussay Abu Aker, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

In the Western lexicon, “normalization,” broadly defined refers to a process whereby something *returns* to a prior condition or state of affairs. This particular articulation of normalization, as extracted from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), signals to a temporal ordering of the past, a desired movement towards something that existed prior to something. In the context of Palestine however, the idea of normalization is not about returning to something that once was, but rather its antithesis; the fear of never returning to a normal state of affairs at all. In contrast to the concept of normalization as defined by the OED, the Arabic word for normalization, *tatbee’* refers to “a process by which *normal relations are manufactured in a context of abnormal circumstances.*”<sup>303</sup> These abnormal circumstances signal to forms of everyday violence that are built into the fabric of everyday life under occupation and considered “business as usual”. People are forced to, as Lori Allen argues, continuously improvise their encounters with daily life.<sup>304</sup> But practices of normalization also work to conceal the more insidious processes of settler-colonial nation building via slow and systematic ethnic cleansing practices; the replacement of villages with settlements, the razing of olive groves, the removal of livestock and fertile land, and the eventual disappearance of an indigenous people. For forcibly displaced Palestinian people, and specifically those still residing in the camp, the risk of normalization not only speaks to the acceptance of loss of land, but consolidates the camp as a permanent and ordinary existence. While local narratives of the “right of return” are not static and take on new meanings across diverse refugee demographics, many people from the Nakba generation certainly did believe that Palestinian refugee camps would be a temporary response to settler-colonial expulsion. That upon the enactment of the right of return, Palestinians would be free to return to their original homes

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<sup>303</sup> Nassar Ibrahim, “What is Normalization,” *alternatives international*, November 14, 2013, <http://www.alterinter.org/spip.php?article4124>).

<sup>304</sup> Lori Allen, “Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3: 2008, 473.

and villages. And that on this day, *the refugee camps would be demolished*. Accordingly, any improvements to the camp were seen as a strategy that gave permanence to displacement. In light of this challenge, refugee communities have struggled with the consequences of bringing a sense of comfort to the conditions of their daily life, including at the level of architecture.

“The Concrete Tent” is a material representation of this discussion and intervention into this normalization discourse. It attempts to represent a narrative that poses a challenge to the stock narrative of a camp as a “temporary” humanitarian condition. In developing this tension alongside participants of Campus in Camps, the aim of “The Concrete Tent” attempts to “embrace the contradictions of an architectural form that emerges from exile.”<sup>305</sup> Read alongside this context, “The Concrete Tent” intervenes in localized representations of the camp and the figure of the refugee across two discursive registers: spatial and temporal. On a spatial level, the tent partially represents a historical representation of the camp as it looked in its earliest incarnation of temporary shelter. These material transformations over the past seven decades have also emerged alongside a kind of institutional life that constitutes public and social relations in the camp itself. The camp is unique, in that, despite its interaction with formal institutional bodies like UNRWA, decisions in the camp are not overdetermined by an overarching institutional body. On the contrary, as many participants in this project expressed, the camp has its own social and political life. The challenge for DAAR and Campus in Camps has been how to narrate this modality of community life. In Petti’s own words, “We lack the right vocabulary to describe this new condition as the prolonged exceptionality of its condition has produced different social, spatial and political structures.”<sup>306</sup> The challenge that DAAR articulates here is rooted in an aesthetic crisis in time.

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<sup>305</sup> Shams, 2015 “Concrete Tent Embraces Contradictions of Palestinian refugee life” Ma’an News Agency, June 27<sup>th</sup> 2015.

<sup>306</sup> Alessandro Petti, “The Concrete Tent” (Inauguration Speech), Campus in Camps, accessed May 2016, <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/the-concrete-tent/>.

The imaging of refugees is often tethered to a temporal register of suspended time and place. Read as immobile subjects, the figure of the refugee is seen to reside within an interstitial existence. Marked by the violence of the past and uncertainties of the future, the Palestinian refugee is represented as a liminal subject. Barred from representations of the present, let alone the future, images of refugees circulate through a memorialized archive of injury. While the idea behind “The Concrete Tent” was to induce a new set of questions to narrations of refugee community life, what became evident to me throughout interviews with witnesses of “The Concrete Tent” and refugees from camps in Bethlehem is that this attempt to narrate a new imaginings of refugee life did not always open up new imaginings of subjectivity. As the next section demonstrates, interpretations of this project were often fraught and read through inherited memories of settler-colonial expulsion and existing humanitarian discourses of life in exile.

### **Part Three: Community Interpretations of “The Concrete Tent”**



Figure 6 - This photo was taken at the inauguration ceremony and by Sara Anna (Ma'an News).

At the level of spatiality, “The Concrete Tent” provokes many questions. As many people from Dheisheh camp explained to me, the garden is the only green space in the camp. It is a space where children can run and play in the sun, a stark contrast to the narrow and damp confines of the camp. Given the scarcity of space in the camp, some of the participants that I interviewed raised questions about the implications of taking up space in the garden. As a non-refugee Palestinian architect who was also working on the project explained to me,

It's not clear to me why they need to make this huge concrete tent? Why not just upgrade the park? Make swings? Or add more playground, more seating areas for the mothers when they come with their children. Add more trees and shading elements. It doesn't have to be so expensive and concrete. *Did they ask people from Al-Feniq or Dheisheh camp if they wanted this tent?* Why do we have to remind people about the miserable conditions that came after displacement? Why not just work to upgrade the current conditions of their life with improvements to the park? We don't need more concrete. It's already crowded. Dheisheh camp is already crowded. Why build more structures of confinement? Why don't

we construct in a way that creates a good atmosphere, where people can be outside of the camp?<sup>307</sup>

The questions and suggestions that this person raises highlights several contestations concerning the aim of the project. Her grievances with the project are not about the theoretical narratives and questions that gave rise to its construction. Rather, on a material level, she raises questions about the utility of the installation, in relation to the garden and against the broader architectural landscape of refugee camps as spaces of confinement. Throughout the course of informal chats that I had with residents of Dheisheh camp, this point about the utility of the installations came up frequently. As one shopkeeper inside Dheisheh camp asked me, “Where did the garden go? Why is it being replaced by this tent? This was the only place our kids had to run freely and play.”<sup>308</sup> Pointing to the narrow streets of the camp outside of his shop, he continued, “look the kids have nowhere to run here.”<sup>309</sup> I probed further by asking whether it is useful to have a representation of the history of the camp at Al-Feniq. In response, he replied,

We know the history of our life, it’s in our hearts. How can we ever forget that we are refugees when we still live in the camp? What we need is more space. Gardens. Somewhere where we can take our kids to play.<sup>310</sup>

Reiterating these concerns, another second-generation refugee in Dheisheh camp explained to me:

Why did they build this? Who built this? Why replace the garden with a concrete tent when our kids don’t have a place to play? Our garden was so green. It is so much more important to have a space for kids to play. We have 100 places to remember the Nakba. The Nakba is in our heart, we can never forget.<sup>311</sup>

Interrupted in thought, his friend said, “no I think we’ve already forgotten the Nakba. But still, the kids need somewhere to play.”<sup>312</sup> Their emphasis on play and the desire for access to green space

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<sup>307</sup> Anonymous interviewee, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Anonymous interview with resident of Dheisheh Camp, taken by Shaira Vadasaria June 2016.

<sup>310</sup> Anonymous interview with resident of Dheisheh Camp, taken by Shaira Vadasaria June 2016.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

<sup>312</sup> Anonymous interview with resident of Dheisheh Camp, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

in the camp was something I often heard from Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. In making demands for lived space, as represented in the comments above, we are reminded of the material scarcities of life in the camp and asked to think about what it means to negotiate spatialities of confinement in the quotidian of camp life. In a context where, as Razack has noted, spatial arrangements work to “memorialize power on the bodies of the colonized in occupied Palestine,” what does it mean to claim space as a site of memorialization?<sup>313</sup> Further, what is at stake in memorialization through spatial practice even if such practices are rooted in an invitation for counter-memory? Somewhere between the excavation of the garden and the sedimentation of concrete memories, a story got lost. For first and second-generation refugees that I spoke with, having land to live, use and play on was often more important than aesthetic representations of historical loss. This opinion however was not the only conclusion about “The Concrete Tent”. My conversation with third-generation refugees often adopted a different sensibility.

One of the interviews that helped me think through what “The Concrete Tent” invokes for Palestinian youth, took place with Ahmad Hammash, a third-generation refugee from Dheisheh camp and researcher for Badil Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights. When I asked him what this architectural installation means to him, he replied in the following way:

It’s a reminder of what camps look like nowadays. In the past, we used to live in tents, but now we have concrete houses, in the same place that tents were, in the same space. So what I understand about the concrete tent, the very first thing that comes to my mind is *regardless of the economic conditions that took place within refugees, it is still a camp, and this is still a tent.*<sup>314</sup> In the past, refugees used tents, and then UNRWA came along and constructed cement rooms. This came after refugees demanded improvements in their lives. They got concrete houses, even fancy houses, you can see the fancy houses today. But it’s still a camp. *Regardless of these fancy things, it is still a camp.* And these people are still refugees. So this is how I see the tent. I don’t know the reasons behind the construction of the tent but regardless of its aim, and the economic changes that took place

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<sup>313</sup> Sherene Razack, “A Hole in the Wall: A Rose at a Checkpoint: The Spatiality of Colonial Encounters in Occupied Palestine”, *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry*, 1, no. 1 (2010): 92.

<sup>314</sup> Emphasis added.

in sixty-eight years of refugee life, it doesn't change the fact that this is still a camp and these people are still refugees.<sup>315</sup>

Ahmad's reflections on "The Concrete Tent," as both a third-generation refugee of Dheisheh camp and witness of, rather than participant in the project, signals to one of the ways that this architectural intervention lands for refugees in the camp. What Ahmad sees in this installation is a representation of the modernization of the refugee camp from the past to the present. While these changes are marked by economic and infrastructural development, they do not alter the reality that these humanitarian developments (*vis-à-vis* UNRWA's aid regime discussed in chapter three), are still taking place within the confines of a camp. Ahmad's reflection suggests that existence within a refugee camp should not be normalized, no matter how developed they become. Further, his reminder that these forms of development are taking place within a camp and for "people that are still refugees" made me wonder about how he thought about the political subjectivity of refugees.

I probed further:

Shaira: So when you say "*refugee*," what comes to mind?

Ahmad: I don't get your question.

Shaira: How do you, and how does this representation of the tent, make you think about the category "refugee"?

Ahmad: As a refugee, refugees have a tale – we are a category of people that have been violated. So you think of loss of rights. I would think about...yanni (you know)...a coercive environment. And each one implies a lot of things, like shortage of economic conditions, funds, maybe the social destruction of the social cohesion that took place in Palestine, now we talk about a strong social cohesion, but at the beginning it wasn't like that.<sup>316</sup>

Ahmad talks about the identity of "refugee" as one marked by several things: violation, loss of rights, economic deprivation and the destruction of social bonds created as a result of settler-

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<sup>315</sup> Interview with Ahmad Hammash, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

colonial displacement that took place in Palestine during the Nakba. These indicators illustrate his interpretation of “The Concrete Tent” as reminiscent of a dominant “tale” of the Palestinian refugee story. Rather than advancing a new tale, “The Concrete Tent” is an anchor point to revisit memories of the Nakba. For Ahmad, it is an architectural reminder of the material reality of settler-colonial displacement. This kind of tale was animated anew for me in interview with another youth from Dheisheh camp.

In a discussion with a third-generation Palestinian refugee from Dheisheh refugee camp contracted to work on the construction of the project, we discussed what he perceived as the purpose of this architectural installation. I contacted him in particular because he was hired to construct “The Concrete Tent” in its material form. Unlike the architects and participants of *Campus in Camps* that contributed to the theorization and design of this project, his work on the tent involved working with the raw materials at the level of manual labor. At the onset of our discussion, I asked him to describe to me what he was building and what exactly it was. He responded in the following way,

This tent I hear is what we had when we started the camp. When we came from our villages we built this tent. And this tent was very simple. UNRWA gave us these tents and we started to make them a little bit bigger over time, with scarfs and blankets...But because some of the new generation of the camp started to forget we started from the tent, the idea is to remind them that we started here. And this was our home.<sup>317</sup>

His response here emphasized a necessity for the newest generation of refugees to remember the past, to remember how the refugee camp began. Curious to know more, I asked him why it was important to remember. More specifically, I asked, “why is it important that the younger generation know the history of this camp? Why do they need to be reminded of the tent”? In response, he said,

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<sup>317</sup> Personal communication with third-generation Palestinian refugee from Dheisheh and construction worker, May 2015.

*The old generation will die. And the new generation will forget.* This kind of activity will remind those people where they come from. To keep reminding them where they come from. And to teach them their history. It's about not forgetting where we came from because only by remembering we are refugees, can we remember the importance of returning.<sup>318</sup>

His response forced me to pause. I came to appreciate how the ideas that “The Concrete Tent” represents more than a fixed past. It is a story about the future. It is a story about how the past and future are deeply intertwined. At the same time that he complicates a temporal relationship between the past and future, his response here also echoes almost verbatim the words of Israel’s first Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. Addressing his hope for the gradual disappearance of the Palestinian refugee population, he declares, “the old will die and the young will forget.”<sup>319</sup> The interviewee’s emphasis on “remembering” and transferring memories of life during the early days following the Nakba introduces the significance of preserving “memory” as a robust challenge to settler-colonialism. For my interviewee, the aim of “The Concrete Tent” was not to invoke new forms of representation about refugee subjectivity. It was not only about reading Palestinian refugees as agents of history. Rather, it was to remind refugees in the camp what the camp looked like before it took on the temporal and material properties of a permanent structure. But it is also a strong statement on the politics of memory as a counter-site to settler-colonial history.

In a conversation with Mustafa Alaraj, another participant from Campus in Camps, he likened the aim of “The Concrete Tent” to a different aesthetic project located in Aida refugee camp, known as “The Key.”

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<sup>318</sup> Personal communication with third-generation Palestinian refugee from Dheisheh and construction worker, May 2015.

<sup>319</sup> Asa Wintanley, “The old will die and the young will forget” – Did Ben Gurion Say it?,” *Electronic Intifada*, August 11, 2013, <https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/asa-winstanley/old-will-die-and-young-will-forget-did-ben-gurion-say-it>.



Figure 7 Art Installation of “The Key” in front of Aida Refugee Camp. Photo taken by the author in December 2009.

The photo above is an image of a rather striking monument located at the entrance Aida refugee camp, and the Lajee Center, a community-based grassroots creative cultural youth centre. As a symbolic reminder of the birth of the protracted Palestinian refugee crisis, “The Key” – in its most literal sense – represents the key to homes that once belonged to Palestinian families prior to the arrival of a newly arriving settler population. The key also represents a historical artifact of life before the camp, life pre-Nakba and a symbolic reminder of the birth of the protracted Palestinian refugee crisis post-Nakba. As one of my participants from Aida camp explained, “the key is there to remind the new generation where they came from. When they see the key, we tell them that our

grandfather kept his key in hopes that they would return.”<sup>320</sup> Although the key might be symbolically interpreted as evidence of a historical and on-going settler-colonial displacement, it might also be thought about as an aesthetic for decolonial memorialization.

Unlike much of the resistance graffiti plastered on the apartheid wall – much of which is written in English by internationals that visit to educate other internationals on the situation, the key monument in Aida camp serves a very different function. The aim of this aesthetic gesture was not for the purpose of educating internationals visiting the camp, although it serves this function too. On the contrary, as one of my interviewees explained to me, this monument was built as an educational tool to serve the new generation of refugees. “For the generation born in the camp, this key reminds them where they came from”.<sup>321</sup> The key stands in as a living artifact of both the past and an opening to the future. As reflected in my conversation with Ahmad, the construction worker of “The Concrete Tent,” and Mustafa, these aesthetic representations of exile and return are often interpreted as pedagogical artifacts aimed at preserving memory. Throughout the course of my field research in general and pertaining to “The Concrete Tent” in particular, this emphasis on “remembering the past” and “not forgetting where we came from” played a central role in narrating the loss of historic land for Palestinian refugees.

As Erica Lehrer and Cynthia Milton ask in “Curating Difficult Knowledge,” “How do we – as scholars, curators, artists, activists, survivors, descendants, and other stakeholders – attempt to bear witness to, give space and shape to absent people, objects and cultures, to present violent conflict without perpetuating its logic?”.<sup>322</sup> Examining curation as a kind of “truth-telling,” they

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<sup>320</sup> Interview with Mustafa Alaraj, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>321</sup> Interview with Mustafa

<sup>322</sup> Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton, “Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing,” in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, eds. Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton, and Monica Patterson, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

go on to ask, “What is our responsibility to stories of suffering that we inherit? Is the goal of curation to settle, or rather to unsettle established meanings of past events?.”<sup>323</sup> In considering these questions alongside a discursive analysis of “The Concrete Tent”, we might also ask, what does it mean to curate something – or act as “custodians of memory” in a context where memories of settler-colonial displacement are persistently relived and the injuries are on-going? In thinking about how memory might function as a politicized site for transformation, the writing of feminist scholar bell hooks comes to mind;

our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting; a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.<sup>324</sup>

The distinction hooks make between memory as a passive practice of nostalgia versus memory as an active site of transformation poses important questions to decolonizing struggles in settler-colonial contexts. In places like Palestine/Israel, the salience of this insight should be read against the ways that settler mythologies of discovery and possession require the persistent denial of indigenous ties to land, memory, history and the category human. As with other settler-colonial projects, Israeli sovereign power might be best understood as a calculus of power defined through the capacity to decide upon which histories are rendered absent from the place of the memory and mourning. Contestations over memory are waged through a variety of tactics that function to rewrite the history of Palestine through a Zionist teleology. As I have argued elsewhere, attempts to erase Palestinian ties to land through the management of memory is an expression of settler-colonial power that has its reach in the management of both the living and dead.

Whether we turn to the rewriting of history via archeological sites, architectural landscaping of the occupation (i.e. the apartheid wall), Zionist curriculum, or what Lisa Hajjar has

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 147.

theorized as “lawfare,” the Israeli state – a relatively recent state formation –requires a number of techniques and technologies to rewrite its history. One of such sites is the criminalization of memory against the Nakba. As argued by Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian in her analysis of the Nakba Bill, which was amended in the Israeli Knesset 2011 to “allow the Minister of Finance to penalize institutions receiving state funds if they commemorate Israel’s Independence Day as a ‘day of mourning’,”<sup>325</sup> the Israeli state’s attempt to criminalize what is remembered and mourned in dominant Palestinian narratives and historiographies as the Nakba (“catastrophe”) or 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine “embodies state surveillance over the memory of Palestinian citizens of Israel and Palestinians in OEJ.”<sup>326</sup>

Another example of the Israeli state’s effort to erase (albeit through criminalization) Palestinian memories of the Nakba took place on April 10th 2017, when the Israeli police, announced for the first time since the Nakba march event was established close to twenty-years ago, that permits would be denied to organizers of this year’s “Nakba march of Return”. Although the official reason that was provided for the ban of the Nakba march was that “there is a shortage of officers to oversee the march,”<sup>327</sup> Israeli authorities have put in place a number of strategies to, as Yousef Jabareen, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Parliament expressed, encourage “young Palestinians to forget their identity, their history and their connection to the lands their grandparents were expelled from.”<sup>328</sup> In the face of systematic state attempts to manage and rewrite national mythology, the preservation of memory, especially for Palestinian generations born into

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<sup>325</sup> Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian. “Necropolitical Debris: The Dichotomy of Life and Death”, *State Crime Journal* 4, no. 1, 34.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Jonathan Cook, “Why is Israeli afraid of the Nakba’s March of Return?,” *Al Jazeera*, April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/04/israeli-police-block-palestinian-march-return-170409055747446.html>.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

loss, is, as hooks described, is a “struggle against forgetting”.<sup>329</sup> The questions that my observations of “The Concrete Tent” challenged me to think about concerned, what is at stake in creative forms of representation in settler-colonial struggles so intimately tied to erasure? *Who gets to imagine otherwise?* Further, what kinds of conditions are required for a different field of reception?

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s groundbreaking essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” she asks us to consider - not whether or not the subaltern can speak - but the extent to which her subalternity, as an “object of colonial historiography” and dehistoricization can be heard.<sup>330</sup> The question then, “can the subaltern speak”, is not a question concerning the subaltern’s “agency” or even “consciousness” for that matter, but the discursive terrain through which such forms of speech are rendered audible within a European colonial imaginary.<sup>331</sup> Interpreted in this way, we might think about Spivak’s question, as Dina Georgis does, as one that invites an inquiry into the field of listening. As Georgis asks, “how might we teach ourselves the art of listening?”<sup>332</sup> Turning to affect and more specifically “injury” as a way to canvass the representational crisis of collective loss, Georgis insists that if we fine tune our listening, we might be better equipped to hear her shadow, or as Amit Rai posits, her “ghosts.”<sup>333</sup> While it is ethically persuasive to recalibrate the question of agency to one of listening rather than speaking, we might pause to consider whether these empathetic gestures of listening escape the discursive trap and representational limits of racial difference. Put another way, the question I am raising here is not whether the subaltern can

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<sup>329</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 147.

<sup>330</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak,”? in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 82-83.

<sup>331</sup> Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak”?, 90.

<sup>332</sup> Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East*, 56.

<sup>333</sup> Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East*, 50.

speak under conditions of settler-colonial violence, or what modes of listening are required to hear her, but what ghosts appear in the representational life in question. In the context of this project and chapter in particular, the ghosts that haunt the representational life of return are tied to the racial terror of suspended time. The prolonged suspension of the “right of return” creates an ordering of time and subjectivity bound to historical violence and on-going loss. Under these conditions, decolonial aesthetics such as “The Concrete Tent” may reintroduce the hauntings of historical trauma. The representational dissonances that foreground this chapter are instructive for helping us think about how, at the level of representation, abandoned communities relate, respond and interpret other imaginaries of life under expulsion.

Using “The Concrete Tent” as my primary object of analysis, this chapter examined this architectural installation across two interrelated discursive fields: 1) temporal and spatial representations of the camp, and 2) representations of refugee subjectivity. Through this discussion, I have attempted to illustrate that although “The Concrete Tent” was intended to “give form to contradictions,”<sup>334</sup> perceptions of these contradictions did not always escape the discursive trap of local narratives produced about settler expulsion, humanitarian governance and the camp itself. As evidenced in some of the interviews, “The Concrete Tent” is understood through a lens that seeks to preserve memories of a violent past because that “past” is essential to how people make sense of their lives in the present. The desire to “remember” rather than reconstruct or repair is tethered to a kind of melancholia produced at the intersection of on-going settler-colonial violence and humanitarian governance. Read in this context, we might argue that the “Nakba” is not only an on-going structure of settler-colonialism,<sup>335</sup> but an active psychic archive that contours

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<sup>334</sup> Interview transcript, Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti

<sup>335</sup> Shalhoub-Kevorkian, *Necropolitical Debris*, 34.

the ways refugees make sense of the past in the present. In the chapter that follows, I think about this idea in relation to the future. I think about how the representational life of return in its *afterlife* – is imagined by third-generation Palestinian refugees.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FUTURE IMAGININGS OF RETURN: DECOLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LIFE AFTER EXPULSION

We Palestinians suffer from an incurable malady: hope – Mahmoud Darwish <sup>336</sup>

As a Palestinian refugee, I grew up in a refugee camp where all the stories and narrations you hear around you are about the right of return and the case of refugees. You grow up in a refugee camp with a passion and loyalty towards the case of Palestinian refugees (...). The case of return is the major story in Palestinian refugee camps. I'm now talking about the old generation that lived during the Nakba, who felt the responsibility of talking about the Nakba, of talking about the original villages that they were displaced from. And the most important part is that you not only listen to or tell stories about your own village but about other villages as well. Because a refugee camp is a combination of people that came from different villages. So most of the stories that you hear are about return, and funny things that happened during the Nakba. Like the hope that the old generation, my grandfather's generation held, the hope that they still have to return to their villages. <sup>337</sup>

- Ahmad Hammash

Stories do many things. Under settler-colonial nation building projects, national stories in general, and racial stories in particular, produce mythologies that disavow processes of indigenous displacement and settlement. <sup>338</sup> These stories license a willful denial of historical violence, thereby dehistoricizing and decontextualizing the conditions that structure on-going acts of settler-colonial violence. But stories might also be thought about as the terrain through which anti-colonial struggles are waged. As Ahmad explains in the epigraph above, stories enable the preservation of memory before and during violent dispossession. Stories have the capacity to convert emotions of loss to laughter, to transfer memories of displacement to hope and provide a space to mourn the loss of something beyond the reach of international recognition. Viewed in this context, we might

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<sup>336</sup> Cited in Antoon and Amira El-Zein, "We Have an Incurable Malady: Hope," in *The Trip to Palestine*, Paris: Editions Climats (2003).

<sup>337</sup> Interview with Ahmad Hammash, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>338</sup> Sherene Razack, "Introduction," in *Race, Space and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society*, Toronto: Between the Lines (2002), 2.

think about stories as a political repository for rethinking whose life, as Judith Butler asks, “makes for a grievable life?”<sup>339</sup>

In “The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East,” Dina Georgis introduces stories as a theory of representation for reading the affective and psychic landscape of colonial and postcolonial traumas. Inspired by Frantz Fanon’s teachings on the psychic life of race and racial violence, her theory of representation draws from an interpretive approach that centers the emotional life of stories. In her own words:

Stories, I propose, are emotional resources for political imagination and for political renewal (...). Story, understood psychoanalytically and metonymically, stands for the way we narrate the past, seek and transmit knowledge, and imagine our future. Story is the principle of how we make sense of human experience (...). [S]tories not only give us insight into social constructs, but also help us understand why we give our “selves” over to collective imaginaries, histories and identities (...). In our stories we imagine our safety, we resist threat, we construct the terms of community, we find ego ideals. Our stories offer psychic consolation to pain. They are indeed our strategies to abate suffering and difficulty. We live by our stories; sometimes we even die for them.<sup>340</sup>

Treating stories as a “method for social inquiry,” Georgis’s point is not that stories should be read as absolute Truth, but rather that we might look to stories to consider “what they psychically perform” and what might be gained from social insights that thread “fiction, personal narrative, political and collective constructions of identity, and history, all through “the better story.”<sup>341</sup> In treating stories as a kind of pedagogy for “human survival,” Georgis invites us to think about how stories might provide a different way for accessing ideas about the social and political conditions that give rise to colonial and post-colonial traumas across time.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence* (Verso: London): 2004, 20.

<sup>340</sup> Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East*, 1-2.

<sup>341</sup> Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East*, 1.

<sup>342</sup> Georgis, *The Better Story: Queer Affects from the Middle East*, 2.

Drawing from Georgis' interpretive approach to story as a representational theory of colonial and racial violence, this chapter asks, what do third-generation Palestinian refugee stories of return reveal about the affective debris of historical displacement and on-going injuries of everyday life under Israeli settler-colonialism? This specific inquiry is driven by another: how do these representations of return in the future, a concept I refer to in this chapter as, "imaginative futurities," provide insight into the persistence of protracted humanitarian governance in Palestine?

As I explain in my methodology chapter, the project of return – a project that has not yet been actualized – is difficult to study, let alone represent. In stories like Ahmad's account above, we are asked to think seriously about the place of hope in story-telling settler-colonial tragedy, and its particular meaning in Palestine. As Diana Allen writes, "Palestinian refugees have become experts of hope, existing as they do in a condition of indefinite existential suspension."<sup>343</sup> Throughout the course of my research and time living in Palestine, this sentiment was expressed to me time and time again. Every time that someone showed me the original key to their home prior to the Nakba, a key they still hold onto with the hope to one-day return, I was reminded of what gestures of hope look like almost seventy years after violent and disruptive settler-colonial displacement. But it was often in the stories, in the way stories were told, in the things said and not said, the silent pauses, hesitations and complex range of emotions, that I came to appreciate how this articulation of hope animated a representation of intergenerational loss; and how, a story of intergenerational loss animated anew the very concept of hope. This chapter reveals that such affective animations of return represent a creative site for thinking about the politics of repair.

In "Loss: The Politics of Mourning," David Eng and David Kazanjian introduce a reading of loss as a collective, generative and creative process. They argue that the question "what is lost"

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<sup>343</sup> Allen, *Refugees of the Revolution*, 140.

is invariably tethered to another, “what remains?”. They insist that we might think about the idea of loss as something that is creative and generative rather than absolute. Situating loss within a framework of “hopeful and “hopeless politics,” they think about “a politics of mourning that might be active rather than reactive, prescient rather than nostalgic, abundant rather than lacking, social rather than solipsistic, militant rather than reactionary.”<sup>344</sup> Thinking about the relationship between loss and hope for third-generation Palestinian refugees rather than for instance, the Nakba generation (the first-generation of refugees), introduces important considerations. What does it mean to creatively attend to stories of collective loss for third-generation refugees, a generation born into dispossession? Can they mourn the loss of something they never had? What is the object of this mourning? Is it possible to *inherit* grief, nostalgia and even melancholia? That is, can these affective states be transferred intergenerationally? What does this sense of loss mean at the level of the collective psyche, and more specifically, in the context of an expanding settler-colonial reality? While this chapter alone cannot respond to all of these questions, I will look more closely at the question of how intergenerational representations of return reveal aspects of the affective and temporal dimensions of Israeli settler-colonialism and humanitarian governance in the lives of third-generation Palestinian refugees in the West Bank.

Drawing from a method of social inquiry that centers stories, this chapter examines the representational life of *return* through two sites of story-telling: a futuristic spatial essay that meditates on the question of return in the year 2040, and semi-structured interviews that I collected with participants of this narration project. The futuristic essay that I analyze entitled “Vision” emerged as part of a writing series entitled the “Collective Dictionary” which was generated and produced by *Campus in Camps*. This collection of texts emerged as a kind of community praxis:

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<sup>344</sup> David Eng and Shinhee Han, “Introduction,” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David Eng and David Kazanjian (California: University of California Press), 2003, 2.

the result of direct action initiatives and dialogues with the local camp community. It also emerged in an effort to introduce new terms of reference to existing discourse on refugees and the camp from the life experiences of third-generation refugees. In “Vision,” we are presented with accounts of refugees and the camp through “written reflections on personal experiences, interviews, excursions, photographic investigations (...).”<sup>345</sup> The particular book I examine represents a collection of “tales, narratives, simulations of guided tours and media conferences,” and reflections on the reality of refugees in the year 2040.

Reading this text alongside interviews that I collected and theoretical literature attentive to settler-colonialism, race, affect, and spatial theory, this chapter shows how political imaginings of return signal to entanglements between protracted humanitarian governance and settler-colonialism in the lives of third-generation Palestinian refugees. Reading these textured imaginings of future life in Palestine alongside the interviews that I collected, this chapter explores the ways that affect is woven throughout two central threads: 1) spatiality – as it relates to the confines of humanitarian camps and 2) land – as it is thought about in relation to settler-colonial nation building. As will become clear through this chapter, the significance of orienting our intellectual and political sensibilities to the creative force of loss and its impact on imaginings of the future is that it gives us another way into thinking about the human condition and *the things that come to matter most* after or amidst violent ruptures.

Participants of “Vision” were asked to explain what they imagine when they speak of the “*right of return*”. They were asked to write a story that responds to the following question:

It’s the year 2040 and you have obtained the right of return to (place, civil right or else). In your original camp, you are guiding a group or a person. You are someone with a decisive role here. Describe the environment, the people and what is happening around you. And

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<sup>345</sup> Campus in Camps Initiatives, *Vision* (Bethlehem: Campus in Camps, 2012), <http://www.campusincamps.ps/projects/vision/>.

then describe the other camps – Dheisheh, Fawwar, Arroub and Azzah, where your friends live. Compare it with 2012.<sup>346</sup>

### **Spatialities of Humanitarian Governance under Settler-Colonialism**

In Ayat Al-Turshan’s essay titled “Between Dreams and Reality,” she offers a rather unique reflection on Palestine’s spatial future. Rather than speaking from her future self in the year 2040, she speaks in third-person and from the vantage point of a grandmother addressing her grandchildren.

The grandmother leaned on her cane, burdened with life and happy about something her grandchildren were unaware of. She started to walk slowly, carefully looking and examining the details of her surrounding as if asking them to tell her story. *The first thing they faced was a twelve-story high structure.* The grandmother gazed up until she saw its top and said: it’s a great thing to witness the accomplishments and success of your country and people and be proud of it.<sup>347</sup>

Pivoting from the future to the past, she continues,

I remember we used to suffer a lot when one of us needed urgent medical assistance. They had to wait to exit the camp border and leave to get medical care. How many people lost dear ones as they waited for that Zionist soldier and his mood to allow them to pass. I remember how many children were born at the checkpoint and that same Zionist soldier witnessed their births. How many. Look at this tall building in this little place. It’s the hospital in our camp. No more suffering and casualties.<sup>348</sup>

In Ayat’s account of Palestine in 2040, the story-teller (grandmother) passes along memories of life in the camp to the next generation. Rather than imagining what life would look like outside the camp itself, she returns to the camp and describes a vision of self-determination organized through camp improvement initiatives. Institutions such as an in-camp hospital allow for camp residents to avoid confrontation with Israeli soldiers and the checkpoints.

These accounts signal to the pervasive forms of movement restrictions imposed upon Palestinians and its impact on access to medical treatment. A study conducted by the Palestinian

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<sup>346</sup> Campus in Camps, *Vision*, 12.

<sup>347</sup> Ayat Al-Turshan, “Between Dreams and Reality,” in *Campus in Camps, Vision*, 79.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

Red Crescent Society between September 2000 and October 2003 documents that over 991 cases of Palestinians traveling to medical services were denied medical access as a result of checkpoint blocks.<sup>349</sup> These statistics raise alarming concerns regarding the contemptuous attitude towards Palestinian's needing urgent medical care. These systematic forms of killing highlight precisely why accounts like Ayat are anchored in a desire for an in-camp hospital. This narrative of return also gestures to memories of Israel's surveillance technologies including their military presence and imposition of movement restrictions.

This image took me back to the time when I was unable to take my final exam due to the same mad soldier manning the checkpoint at the entrance of the camp and refusing to allow anybody to leave, shouting words that are not easy on the ears (...).<sup>350</sup>

In Ayat's representation of the future, the right of return is still tethered to a spatial reality defined by the persistence of Israeli military control and the confines of the camp. In addition to hospitals, the camp now also includes: "A university that is flourishing with staff, faculties, and students that can't be matched by education or intellect."<sup>351</sup> The significance of having an in-house university within the camp is that it allows students to avoid missing classes because of prohibitions on movement.

In addition to the reflections on continued restrictions on movement, some of these spatial stories also reflect the ways that life within the humanitarian structure of the camp, and in particular, the vertical spatiality of the camp might be improved. Ayat was not the only participant to narrate a vision of decolonization predicated on access to vertical spaciousness. Desiring to reclaim space in, as Fanon characterized, a world without spaciousness, participants often

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<sup>349</sup> Yehudit Kirstein Keshet, "Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine" (New York: Zed Books, 2005), Keshet, 20. This study also documents that during this time, 83 patients died at checkpoints due to denial of access, 25 medical personnel were killed while 425 were injured by military and police guards, and over 57 women were forced to give birth at the checkpoint, in which 32 infants died.

<sup>350</sup> Ayat Al-Turshan, "Between Dreams and Reality," in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 80.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

referenced a vision of the camp that grows in height.<sup>352</sup> For instance, in Saleh Khannah's account of al-Azzah camp in 2040, he writes:

Through my experience in Azzah camp, I noticed that the camp is a cage inside the city. Horizontal expansion is absolutely not possible. Vertical expansion is the only choice. Buildings will keep getting taller until they seem like skyscrapers with helicopter airstrikes (reflecting how bad the situation will be).<sup>353</sup>

After achieving the right of return, Qussay writes,

Also, we notice children who are playing in the streets, and this is one of the things that the building process couldn't solve because of the lack of space, since the camp can't expand wider, it only goes up as you can see. So there are no playgrounds for children to practice their simple basic childhood the way it should, and their way to do it is the streets.<sup>354</sup>

Addressing a group of visitors to the camp, Bisan al-Jaffarri narrates the past from the future:

My current life is very different from how our life was when it was in the camp. Now we have the right to build houses, own farms, and enjoy natural environments...Houses were developed off the basic shelters that UNRWA built. They expanded them vertically to manage the increased population.<sup>355</sup>

Rather than accessing an imagining of life outside the camp, Bisan's articulation of spatial expansion are still represented within the confines of the camp, signaling to ways that humanitarian logics and spatial planning have come to leave its mark on the hope and desires of refugees. This reflection on vertical rather than horizontal expansion reflects Fanon's description of the Manichean world. In explaining the spatiality of racial difference, he argues "The town belonging to the colonized people...is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there, it matters not where, now how. *It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other.*"<sup>356</sup> While some of these participants insist that

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<sup>352</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

<sup>353</sup> Saleh Khannah, "The Vision," in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 22.

<sup>354</sup> Qussay Abu Aker, "Tour in Dheisheh, Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> May 2040," in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 91.

<sup>355</sup> Bisan al-Jaffarri, "Remembering," in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 48.

<sup>356</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 37-39.

the future of humanitarian camps in Palestine will continue to exist but with the added advantage of vertical sovereignty, others read the potential use of space through urban development.

It is important to note that we are not talking in 2040 about a refugee camp but rather a developed residential neighborhood that looks like its surrounding city. This neighborhood has become an integral part of the city. There is a hall for sports, a park, a swimming pool, a wedding hall, flowers, trees, roads and paved streets...the areas of the camp have developed more than or equal to the surrounding cities and villages due to the return of many Palestinians from abroad and the need to develop buildings and consider commercial needs. We see modern solid infrastructure as well as adjacent housing with enough open spaces, wide roads, parking stations, pavements for vehicles and pedestrians, margins decorated with trees, lighting, amusement parks, and activities that exist in modern cities.<sup>357</sup>

These stories about space, about vertical expansion, the building of roads, and parks and hospitals are not random, but a direct reflection of the forms of loss of land inherited by third-generation refugees. Spatial stories about vertical and horizontal expansion, the building of roads and hospitals provide insight into the effects of protracted existence within humanitarian governance. To understand how these spatial desires are connected to broader visions of decolonization, it's important to think about how orderings of space are tethered to colonial modernity. As critical scholars of spatial theory have insisted, space is not a neutral or innocent phenomenon. Space is not just a container that gets "filled up with things."<sup>358</sup> Rather, we might understand space *as ordering system of power that constitutes and represents processes of inclusion and exclusion*. Scholars attentive to race and colonialism have explain in great detail the ways that "place becomes race" through symbolic and material orders of imagined difference.<sup>359</sup> In approaching a theory of space as something that *organizes* social life and *represents* and reproduces ideas about difference, we are urged to consider what these discursive and material spatial orders tell us about settler-colonial life and its impact on imaginings of freedom under occupation.

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<sup>357</sup> Shadi Ramadan, "Target," in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 72.

<sup>358</sup> Razack, *Race, Space and the Law*, 8.

<sup>359</sup> Razack, *Race, Space and the Law*, 5.

What was striking to me throughout the course of my discussions and interviews were not only the ways that people described the kinds of violence organized through space but the ways that they came to mourn the absence of space never had. This mourning of spatial absence was often experienced for them when they would travel outside of Palestine. It was upon traveling outside of Palestine that they noticed most acutely the kinds of spatial conditions that were not available to them. Consider for instance my discussion with Zaina, a local resident of Bethlehem who spent nine years in Greece:

When I was in Greece, I saw the children and how they lived (begins crying). I'm sorry. I saw the children in the summer, and how they would vacation. After school, they would go and learn another language, or learn piano, or go swimming. And we don't have this. I was thinking how we don't have any of this. We just spend our time thinking about bombs. Whether they will blow us up today or...you know (long silent pause). It's unfair. I was, I don't know how to explain...but I've seen them (Israelis) make our life this way over the years. We can't even access the sea."<sup>360</sup>

In Zaina's account of loss, she mourns the basic pleasures she never had. In the fuller transcript of this interview, she explains to me that it was only through leaving Palestine that she could begin to experience and grieve the occupation. Rather than mourning something that was taken away, accounts of loss for Palestinian youth might be likened to the psychoanalytic concept of melancholia. In David Eng and David Kazanjian's reading of Freud's interpretation of melancholia, we are presented with a depoliticized sense of attachment to individual loss, a grieving with no closure or resolution. In contrast to this kind of mourning, Eng and Kazanjian reread melancholia as a state of collective loss that "remains steadfastly alive in the present" and in an "on-going and open relationship with the past."<sup>361</sup> Melancholia "bring its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present."<sup>362</sup> Read in the context of collective loss, Eng and

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<sup>360</sup> Interview with Zaina, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>361</sup> Eng and Kazanjian, "Introduction," 4

<sup>362</sup> Ibid.

Kazanjian interpret melancholia as an open wound that “generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimaginings of the future.”<sup>363</sup> In the absence of closure, melancholia rejects mourning’s tendency to lay objects of suffering to rest, thus keeping alive the injury itself. In applying this concept to think about the ways that people might experience intergenerational loss and the grief of losing something they could have had (i.e. access to parks and the sea), stories like Zaina’s provide an understanding of not only what was displaced, but what might have been in the absence of colonial settlement and the creation of refugee camps.

These representations of futurity signal to the ways that collective loss not only contours representations of hope, but the parameters of imagination itself under protracted humanitarian governance. Signaling to the reverberations of humanitarian governance on the aspirations of refugees, one of my participants from Dheisheh camp explained to me, “Even our dreams are limited inside the apartheid wall. Because if we dream about something we can’t achieve, it will drive us crazy.”<sup>364</sup> Asking him to expand on what kinds of dreams are possible in the camp, he replied,

Everybody here is sharing the same hopes and dreams. But when I went to Italy for example, people were dreaming of very fancy things. But here, we know each other, everyone is the same, and we share everything. And our hopes and dreams are very simple things for each other.<sup>365</sup>

Reading this participant’s commentary on the necessity of dreaming “simply” invites us to consider the ways that the spatial parameters of the camp route the imaginative landscape of dreams under militarized occupation. These discussions help us think about the ways that protracted humanitarian governance depoliticizes and impacts the imaginative capacities of

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid.

<sup>364</sup> Personal communication with a third-generation Palestinian refugee from Dheisheh Camp, May 2015.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

refugees. But, these desires also animate what happens when, as Ilana Feldman asks, “humanitarianism moves from crisis response to a condition of life?”<sup>366</sup>

In response to Ilana Feldman’s query, these futuristic imaginaries point to some of the long-term affective consequences of the “politics of living” within a humanitarian condition. These representations of Palestine in 2040 indeed signal to the robust presence of humanitarian governance even when the right of return is obtained. But they also point to the ways that the nexus between settler-colonial expulsion and protracted humanitarian governance come to constitute a complex affective relationship to the camp itself for many of the participants involved. Returning to Ayat’s essay, she writes:

Puzzled by the grandmother’s enthusiasm over the camp, one of the grandchildren in Ayat’s story asks: “I see you are very connected to this place, but I can’t understand your insistence that your world, dreams and home is not here but far away from this place.”<sup>367</sup>

The grandchild was asking here how the grandmother could be both invested in the “right of return” to her original village and so emotionally connected to the camp itself.

In response, Ayat writes,

The grandmother leaned on his shoulders and looked at him with tears in her eyes that looked as if they were mapping the borders of this place. It appeared as if the grandmother was waiting for this question to be asked. She answered, “my son, we do not deny this place that was forced on us. We made it look like heaven. We colored it so as to not lose hope and keep desperation from infiltrating our souls...Because the texture of human beings and identity is connected to the birth place, where our grandfathers were buried, its history and livelihood, the place where dignity comes.”<sup>368</sup>

Ayat’s travel through time and subjectivity echoes the ways that refugees across different generations negotiate a complex relationship to UNRWA camps and humanitarian care more generally. Unlike the first-generation that were initially taught to believe the camp would be a

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<sup>366</sup> Feldman, “The Humanitarian Condition,” 155.

<sup>367</sup> Ayat Al-Turshan, “Between Dreams and Reality,” in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 82.

<sup>368</sup> Ayat Al-Turshan, “Between Dreams and Reality,” in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 83.

temporary response to displacement, the generations raised and later born into humanitarian shelter had to ambivalently come to terms with the camp as *home*.

As one of my interviewees explained to me most clearly,

As a person who has lived his whole life in a refugee camp, it's a combination of emotions and relationships...Any place that you spend a lot of time – of course you will have memory, you will have relationships, you will have social ties to that place. A refugee camp, regardless of the negative things of a refugee camp, the people still succeeded to create very strong social cohesion among themselves. And you can feel how good the social life is in the camp. But that is not an alternative to your right of return. So there are a lot of good things about the camp, but at the end of the day they are still camps. You didn't choose to be there, you are forced to live there.<sup>369</sup>

In this passage, we see Ahmad's ambivalent response as he pivots between acceptance and contestation. On the one hand, his reflection highlights the ways that social relationships formed in and through the camp energize day-to-day existence. He describes an intimate emotional connection forged through building and living in close proximity to a community with extended social ties. On the other hand, he emphasizes here that he did not choose this existence, and "at the end of the day, they are still camps."<sup>370</sup> What we might infer from this sentiment, a sentiment also echoed in Ayat's story above, is that the affective and spatial debris of settler-colonial expulsion and protracted humanitarian care (*vis-à-vis*) the camp has configured a complex set of relationships to home and identity. Building on this discussion, I'd like to now consider the ways that participants canvassed imaginings of return in the context of land, and what these representations of land reveal about the on-going project of race in Palestine.

### **Contested Land, Contested Meanings: The Affective Reverberations of Displacement**

It's now 2040 [...] I'm now standing on the land we used to live happily on. The land we once lost. The land which caused death both for my family and my family's neighbors. The land which was taken to let other people live on. The land where happy people lived. The land which made me a refugee. The land which made me resistant. I'm now standing on the field, the sun is setting with its own melody, the wind is blowing softly on me, and the

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<sup>369</sup> Interview with Ahmad Hammash, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

scent of flowers is filling my soul. I still cannot believe that I'm home. I'm looking around, and I do not know if I should cry or laugh. My body is shaking, but my heart has found its peace. I feel so free, I feel like I'm dreaming, I feel so released [...] I cannot keep my tears back. I start to cry. I cry and laugh. I still cannot understand that I'm home. I'm on the land that I have been hearing stories about, the land which I have been dreaming for, for years. I'm here now [...]. I'm here now. In this moment, I'm standing on the beach. Even if I always have been afraid of seas, I'm dipping my feet into the water. I feel like I'm at peace.<sup>371</sup>

It an emotional connection. It's not so much a physical connection because I was only there once. But its an emotional connection to the village. Because you know in the narration of the older generation of the Nakba, these villages were pictured as a paradise, as a *lost paradise*. So there was a lot of emotion in the narration of the Nakba for the whole generation. So yes I feel connected to the land in terms of my right, my grandfather had a property right there, I'm supposed to have a property right there. So in terms of emotions yes I am emotionally connected to the land, throughout the narrations, the stories that I heard about my village, but also in terms of rights, do I not have a right to restitute my property there?<sup>372</sup>

These two excerpts invite us into affective interpretations of land. In Marwa's description of the land, as extracted from her essay, this future imagining of return enables a physical and temporal passage to historic Palestine whereby Palestinian refugees are free to return to lost villages or a visit to the sea. In this description of return, land takes on a multiplicity of affective meanings. Land is at once a source of loss and joy. Settler-conflicts over land brought upon the literal death of her family members and community during the Nakba. With the right of return, we see that the right to move freely not only allows Marwa to return to historic Palestine, but allows her to reclaim a different sense of subjecthood. When Marwa writes, "the land which made me a refugee," we might think about this identity formation in relation to Achille Mbembe's description of "necropolitical subject". Although the context of his writing is anchored in an analysis of the biopolitical and necropolitical conditions that gave rise to the emergence of the slave subject, his analysis of colonial power is useful here. He argues that that the *living dead* or *politically dead*

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<sup>371</sup> Marwa al-Lahham, "My Home," in *Campus in Camps*, *Vision*, 57.

<sup>372</sup> Interview with Ahmad Hammash, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

(slave) subject is indefinitely marked by triple loss: “loss of a “home,” loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status.”<sup>373</sup> Read in this light, we might think about Marwa’s journey into historic Palestine as a reclaiming of residency – both in her body and sense of home. We might even interpret this passage as a declaration of re-entry into humanity. The day where Palestinians are not primarily marked as refugees of the past but subjects that can move freely, where and how they choose in a different time-space scheme all together. This reading of ‘home’ challenges the ways that liminal subjects are barred entry from legal and political rights and excluded from the imagined boundaries of the nation-state.

Relying on her senses to imagine what a return to Palestine might be like, she continues to narrate this affective vision of return:

What comes to my mind right now is the sea. I want to see, hear, smell the scent of the sea I only have heard stories about. I take my car, still overwhelmed that I’m here, I take the car and drive to the sea [...]. I’m dipping my feet into the water. I feel like I’m at peace. I feel like swimming [...]. From the sea, I then drive into all the cities. I see the landscape, I see how the Palestinians are living, I feel the different climates, I see the churches, and I see mosques. I’m now driving home, my home I have been dreaming about for years. I’m finally home in Beit I’taab.<sup>374</sup>

What we might understand from Marwa’s description is that the project of return did not begin in Beit I’taab, her original village. In fact, Marwa’s home village was the last stop in her return to historic Palestine. What took priority was access to the sea, to the landscape, and to sacred sites for prayer and ritual. What also became clear throughout my interviews is that the project of return, for this generation, might not even be about returning to a previous relationship to the land as it existed prior to the Nakba, if that was even possible. In fact, when I asked the question, “if you had the right of return, *where* would you go,” I was often provided answers such as Ahmad’s response below:

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<sup>373</sup> Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 21.

<sup>374</sup> Marwa al-Lahham, “My Home,” in *Campus in Camps, Vision*, 57-58.

It's a very big question. In the case of return, in the first place I believe that the concept of return doesn't mean to the original place. Like I could go back to my village. But not the exact place where my grandfather used to live. And not like going back to the exact life that my grandfather lived. My grandfather lived as a farmer. Maybe I want to go and live in Yaffa, not in my own village. So the concept of return is much more about a concept of choice. You should have the right to choose where you want to live (...).<sup>375</sup>

Thinking across similar lines, Qussay writes:

I'm not a farmer. I know nothing about farming. Why do I have to have a relationship to the land? Maybe my grandfather did because he was the one to work in the field, he knew how to do it. If you give me a piece of land to do it, I'll just ruin it [...] Return for me means simply, the *right to movement*. In the camp I have an organization I work with. In Beit Jala I have a house that I live in. Our old village, for me, is nothing. For my grandfather, its everything. But he's the first generation [...]. And when you have a permit, you don't go to your village, you go to the sea."<sup>376</sup>

In contrast to Marwa's description of return, the excerpt of Ahmad and Qussay's interview points to a very different reading of land. For Ahmad, the idea of return is not about returning to the house his grandfather is from, and for Qussay, it's not even about returning to the village his family is from. In contrast to Marwa's description, they push back against primordial and sentimental narratives they inherited from Nakba generation (the first-generation of Palestinian refugees). They both distance their sense of identity from the traditional role of the fellah (agricultural laborer) and position life in relation to non-profit and legal advocacy work.

Further, as both excerpts demonstrate, the right of return is tethered to, first and foremost, freedom of movement, and of importance, the capacity to decide to visit the sea or not. To visit the village or not. When Qussay states, "And when you have a permit, you don't go to your village, you go to the sea" his commentary is alluding to the ways that local narratives of the right of return as passed down intergenerationally do not always reflect the desires of Palestinian refugees today.<sup>377</sup> Expanding on Israel's permit regime system, he explains this idea further by considering

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<sup>375</sup> Interview with Ahmad Hammash, taken by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>376</sup> Qussay Abu Aker, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

how Palestinian use their “permits” when they get permission to visit historic Palestine/Israel.<sup>378</sup> As he explains, these permits are seldom used to visit old villages (partly because many of these villages have been destroyed and no longer exist). But the explanation he provides is that people want to access and experience parts of the land – such as the sea – that is not available to them in the West Bank and denied entry to them as West Bank ID holders. Commenting on the surplus of Israeli permits for West Bank ID holders often issued during the month of Ramadan, Qussay writes,

How come when you have the right to practice return, even with the permit, to go to your village, you go to the beach? But when you talk about the right of return, you talk about your village. So before decolonizing land or decolonization, I think we have to decolonize the ideas that we have. The oral histories that we have [...]. My friends and I think, what are we going to do in our home village? It's now a bunch of stones. I visited it, it's a bunch of stones.<sup>379</sup>

Although the example of permits are not synonymous with the right of return, this comparison does enable Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza legal access into historic Palestine/Israel. Re-reading dominant stories about land, Qussay's discussion here points to a kind of affective dissonance between history and practice; a disconnect between how the right of return as an affective discourse gets mobilized through the memory of these villages – what Ahmad referred to as stories of “lost paradise,” and what is actually taking place on the ground, the practicalities of what return might look like. As Qussay notes, many Palestinians have come to realize that the village that they once knew is gone. That although the dominant narrative of return is about returning to a historical sense of home, how people exercise their freedom of movement often

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<sup>378</sup> Beginning in 1981, the introduction of travel permits was created to allow for continued exploitation of Palestinian laborers. These permits continue to be imposed today for Palestinians that want to move freely or work within major cities in the occupied Palestinian territories or Israel, and are subject to a long and delayed bureaucratic process. See Eyal, Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso Press, 2007.

<sup>379</sup> Qussay Abu Aker, interview by Shaira Vadasaria, June 2016.

times leads them to the beach rather than the village. *And that the right of return might actually be practiced in vastly different ways than the local narratives allow for.* The significance of this insight is that it helps us think about how even within imaginings of decolonization, land does not hold one single meaning. Further, even when there is a dominantly agreed upon meaning, such as local and historically accepted dominant oral discourse, people's relationship to land as a set of practices might take on a different meaning and performance all together. For instance, these reflections help us think about the ways that desires for mobility intervene on localized narratives of land. The significance of this insight is that it provides important implications for decolonial projects rooted in the repatriation or return of land.

As some scholars of settler-colonialism have insisted, the project of settler-colonialism and more particularly, the project of decolonization is first and foremost driven by a conquest over and return of land. Rather than conflating decolonization with social justice projects broadly defined, scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang insist that the project of decolonization must be anchored in a repatriation of land. In "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," they write,

Decolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation. In reality, the tracks walk all over land/people in settler contexts. Though the details are not fixed or agreed upon, in our view, decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, *all* of the land and not just symbolically.<sup>380</sup>

When considering the ways that Tuck and Yang think through the relationship between decolonization and land, it's useful to look carefully at the question of what land means to differently situated peoples and liberation projects. As excerpts of *Vision* and my interviews revealed, conceptions of land not only vary across Palestinian generations, but vary between

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<sup>380</sup> Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization, Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 7.

people even within the same demographic. In contrast to the first and second-generation of refugees, Richter-Devroe's analysis of "Palestinian Refugees' Narratives on the Right of Return" shows that third and fourth generation of refugees often envision and articulate a sense of return not bound to the same territorial based nationalist frameworks of statehood. Instead, they provide a representation of return that prioritizes "choice, and regaining ownership and control of the land of Palestine, the homeland."<sup>381</sup> Thus rather than returning solely to one's village, the youth generation generally think about returning to the "whole of Palestine."<sup>382</sup> When reading Richter-Devroe's analysis alongside the articulations of return presented above, we are indeed invited to think about the complex ways that refugees of different generations come to articulate and envision a reparative justice politic rooted in sovereignty over land. While it is tempting to conclude that all indigenous struggles are rooted in the desire for the repatriation of land, the reflections cited above help us think about the ways that for third-generation refugees – a community that's almost lived the entirety of the life under Israel's movement restriction regime - decolonization might resemble something closer to access to movement within and between the land. Rather than assuming a fixed meaning to land, the narratives of participants in this project invite consideration for imaginings of land and decoloniality that allow for mobility. These interpretations of return encourage us to understand the weight of restrictions on movement in to day-to-day life.

While almost all Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and Israel suffer from movement restrictions, Palestinian youth and as these reflections reveal, third-generation Palestinian refugees have a particular relationship to movement restrictions. During the early Oslo

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<sup>381</sup> Sophie Richter-Devroe, "“Like Something Sacred”: Palestinian Refugees' Narratives on the Right of Return," *Refugee Richter-Devroe* 32, no. 2 (2013): 107.

<sup>382</sup> Sophie Richter-Devroe, "“Like Something Sacred”: Palestinian Refugees' Narratives on the Right of Return," *Refugee Richter-Devroe* 32, no. 2 (2013): 108.

years, Israel increased their restrictions on movement by instituting checkpoints into the OPT.<sup>383</sup> Instituted in 1991 – at a time when most third-generation Palestinian refugees were just coming into childhood - this system of movement restrictions put in place a spatial order that would control flow between the OPT and Israel as well as between Palestinian towns and villages.<sup>384</sup> In the West Bank alone, there are approximately 200 separate, sealed-off militarized zones constructed through the checkpoint infrastructure.<sup>385</sup> The checkpoints vary between fixed and temporary infrastructure and are permanently staffed by the Israeli army and/or border police. The occupation soldiers responsible for regulating the zones are fully equipped with military weapons including tear gas and grenades, and can enact the use of such weapons at their own discretion. The towns and villages situated between the checkpoint zones are accessorized with complete watch towers, armored vehicles and tanks. With the assistance of these mechanisms, the checkpoint zones function to restrict the movement *of* Palestinian civilians as well as the movement *between* Palestinian civilians. Upon arrival to the checkpoints, Palestinians are forced to present compulsory numbered identification cards which are organized through a color-coded system.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Until 1966, the Israeli military administration was imposed upon Palestinian citizens of Israel, regulating their movement through checkpoints set up in around predominantly Palestinian populated towns and villages, ensuring separation between Arab and Jewish populations. Following the 1967 occupation, the Israeli government imposed a general policy regulating the flow and entry of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza Strip into Israel. What began as an “Open Bridge” policy which monitored and to some extent allowed for the flow of Palestinians into Israel for economic reasons has now become the heart of Israel’s draconian policies regarding corporeal and spatial control. The idea of the “Open Bridge” policy was to exploit Palestinian laborers into the Israeli workforce while providing them with the illusion that they were allowed to exercise sovereignty over their lives. This policy was designed by Israel’s Minister of Defense with the intent of contributing to a larger policy of the ‘invisible occupation’. See Wiezman, *Hollow Land*, 142

<sup>384</sup> Yehudit Kirstein Keshet, “Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine” (New York: Zed Books, 2005), xiv.

<sup>385</sup> Yehudit Kirstein Keshet, “Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine” (New York: Zed Books, 2005), xiv.

<sup>386</sup> Palestinian cards are either blue for residents of East Jerusalem or green for West Bankers, and they identify the name, place of birth, religion, sex and place of resident.

Although checkpoints are not official border crossings, they mark an imaginary boundary between space, serve the function of collective punishment, and disrupt territorial continuity, making the viability of a Palestinian state impossible.<sup>387</sup> The elastic nature of these colonial frontiers allows for the consistent transformation of the geography of occupied Palestine. These spatial technologies organize a system of racial violence through temporal control of Palestinian daily life. Restrictions on movement are deliberately administered to rob Palestinians from control over time. In effect, Israel's checkpoint system has transformed the OPT into a series of isolated territorial cells, resembling the racial configuration of Bantustans seen in Apartheid South Africa.<sup>388</sup>

Within three years following the 1991 inception of Israel's checkpoints policy, Israel created a checkpoint-closure-curfew system tightening the restriction of passage for Palestinians between the northern and southern West Bank, and Gaza, as well as East Jerusalem from the West Bank and Gaza. As argued by Yehudit Kirstein Keshet on behalf of the human rights organization *Machsom (Checkpoint) Watch (CPW<sup>389</sup>)*, the curfew-closure-checkpoint policy is a sophisticated method of ethnic cleansing exercised by Israel's apartheid system of governance.<sup>390</sup> It is difficult to discuss the racial effects of the checkpoint policy in isolation from Israel's system of closures and curfews as these techniques work in harmony with one another to advance settler-colonial violence in the public and private spheres of Palestinian daily life. This system of violence relies upon seizing corporeal and spatial control, and functions to transform Palestinian homes and camps into literal sites of prison.

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<sup>387</sup> Keshet, *Checkpoint Watch*, 57

<sup>388</sup> Weizman, 15

<sup>389</sup> Checkpoint Watch was founded in 2001 by a small group of Jewish Israeli women as well as Palestinian women residing in Israel who protest against the occupation and do particular forms of activism around the checkpoints. See "Checkpoint Watch: Testimonies from Occupied Palestine" for more detail.

<sup>390</sup> Keshet, 33

The act of closure for instance, prohibits the passage of Palestinian civilians from moving in and between the formal and illegally occupied borders proclaimed by Israel. The closure can be declared at any time depending on the discretion of the Israeli government and can last anywhere between hours to days. The rationale behind this system is anchored in the belief that “the less Palestinians are permitted to circulate through space, the more secure the space will be.”<sup>391</sup> During the time of declared closure, Israeli tanks and jeeps are able to navigate through Palestinian streets while Palestinians are placed under house arrest and often times subjected to military home incursions.

One of the cruelest features of the checkpoint-closure policy is the use of curfews. The curfew policy began in 1965, where they were used as a system of collective punishment for Palestinians residing inside of Israel. Since the 1967 occupation, the imposition of curfews has been a consistent and regular mechanism of Israeli military rule. This policy can be exercised at any time and in any location in the OPT, depending on the military commander of each village. The curfew can last between hours to several weeks, while offering only erratic and momentary breaks in between.<sup>392</sup> Similar to the closure policy, the imposition of curfews on Palestinian residents in the OPT prohibits them from leaving the confines of their homes. In short, this policy serves the function of house arrest. In contrast to the experiences of Jewish settlers, this carceral arrangement is deliberately imposed upon the Arab population in occupied Palestine. By analyzing these particular technologies of movement restriction, we see how Israel maintains sovereign power through a racialized structure of carcerality.

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<sup>391</sup> Keshet, 147

<sup>392</sup> According to a study done between June 2002 and December 2004, the recorded hours of curfew imposed on Nablus totaled 4,688 hours, while Hebron was subjected to 5,828 hours of curfew, amounting to roughly 25-35 percent of the entire period.<sup>392</sup> What these figures demonstrate is that curfew policy serves as a time depleting mechanism, and has become a salient tool for paralyzing Palestinians from access to basic necessities such as work and education. See “Checkpoint Watch” for greater detail on this subject.

Carcerality, more broadly defined, is an interdisciplinary and conceptual framework for thinking about systems of confinement across disparate sites of confinement. an interdisciplinary and conceptual framework for thinking about systems of confinement across disparate sites of confinement. As an analytical concept, carcerality opens up space to think through several ideas. Firstly, as argued by Michelle Brown, carcerality studies allows for us to think about the human experience of confinement and the disparate sites of *prison-like* conditions outside of sociology of punishment models. An analytic of punishment doesn't always account for the ways in which sites of confinement such as slave plantations, migrant detention centers, new war prisons, refugee and concentration camps, and military occupation are connected to broader processes of colonial modernity. As such, reading these formations of confinement through a paradigm of "punishment" fails to explain how these sites of carcerality are connected to broader processes of land theft, forced migration and displacement, colonial nation-building and globalization. Furthermore, Brown argues that the conditions of life imposed upon carceral subjects (i.e. refugees, internally displaced peoples, political detainees etc.) are not exclusively represented through discourses of criminality or penalty. By way of illustration, Brown argues that while refugees are rarely identified as penal subjects, many inhabitants often characterize the camp as an "open-air prison," rather than a kind of humanitarian space. This categorical shift changes the very discourse upon which carceral subjects may represent themselves. Further, Brown argues that a broad framework like carcerality opens up a space to think about the parallels between struggles of imprisonment (via expulsion and confinement), "resulting in practices of urban banishment, school to prison pipelines, and the criminalization of the poor, the mentally ill, and the most socially vulnerable." Brown is signaling to the relationship between carcerality, state violence (i.e. carceral regimes), and the forms of "slow death" enabled through this configuration. This approach to carcerality

helps us think about the constitutive relationship between displacement and confinement, as manifested in the very production and continuities of the protracted Palestinian refugee condition.

### **Carcerality and Immobility**

The condition of Palestine has been defined and debated in several ways (i.e. military conflict and war, colonialism, annexation, apartheid, etc.). While these taxonomies are seldom invoked to describe everyday life in Palestine by communities not associated with civil society (i.e. the NGO sector), what does find its way into everyday parlance is the common phrase “Palestine is a prison”. Palestine (including both the West Bank and Gaza) represents a state of arrest(s). Like a matryoshka doll, the occupied Palestinian territory reflects a constellation of prisons that fit into one another, ultimately forming a mega prison. This assemblage of arrest takes place through a splintered colonial geography comprised of material and symbolic cells that restrict daily movement. Some of these cells work to detain Palestinians for a few hours a day (i.e. checkpoints, roadblocks, and the apartheid wall), while others extend generations and have given way to new forms of social and political life (i.e. refugee camps, seam zone villages, and Gaza). These material and visual signifiers of the occupation operate through one another and create a multilayered sense of daily entrapment. The combination of Israeli occupation, apartheid and colonial policies have produced what Ilan Pappé refers to as two versions of a mega prison:

The official Israeli navigation between impossible nationalist and colonialist ambitions turned a million and half people in 1967 into inmates of such a mega prison. But it was not a prison for few inmates wrongly or rightly incarcerated [...]. Some of its architects searched genuinely for the most possible humane model for this prison; probably because they were aware that this was a collective punishment for a crime never committed [...]. The government offered two versions of the mega prison to the people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. One was an open-air Panopticon prison and the other a maximum security one. Should they not accept the former they will get the latter.”<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Ilan, Pappé. “Revisiting 1967: the false paradigm of peace, partition and parity,” *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2013, 3, no. 3 (2013): 348.

Pappe's reference to the West Bank (as an open-air prison) and the Gaza Strip (as a maximum security open air prison) is not meant to stand in as a metaphor of oppression in Palestine. As a way to maintain sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza, Israel's occupation regime is organized through a set of colonial legal orders underwritten by a logic of carcerality.<sup>394</sup>

In the specific context of Israel's occupation of Palestine, carcerality signals attention to a system of racial violence that is still very rooted in a colonial conquest for *land*, but enacted through a sustained renewal of mechanisms of containment and surveillance. As such, in the context of Palestine/Israel, it is useful to think about carcerality as a capillary of power that animates, renews, mobilizes and conceals modern political Zionism particular ways. Israel's settler-colonial regime, and in particular military occupation of Palestine is principally organized through a constellation of spatialized prison-like structures. Routine and systematic imprisonment in Palestine takes place through a dispersed set of militarized spatial encounters structured by legal,

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<sup>394</sup> Read alongside this context, carceral studies does not entirely depart from Foucauldian studies of social regulation but does open up an interesting question: How does carceral studies differs from Foucauldian approaches to the study of criminalization, regulation and securitization? One way to answer this question is by returning to Foucault's original reading of the carceral. In *Discipline and Punishment*, Foucault introduces the concept of the carceral and locates the precise moment and exact place that the carceral comes into being. He attributes this formation to January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1840, where we see the emergence of the first institution that operates as a "prison, but not entirely". For Foucault, the carceral first emerges as a penal colony in the village of Mettray, France (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 293). Reflecting the spatial structure of a carceral archipelago, Mettray was a kind of "carceral city" made up from a "multiple network of diverse elements – walls, space, institution, rules, discourse" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 307). Intended to *reform* delinquent youth, Mettray Penal Colony was an exemplar model of the carceral structure. Foucault describes this penitentiary as the place where the "art of power relations" were taught (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 295). Arguing that Mettray enabled "disciplinary form at its most extreme", this carceral structure mastered the art of "coercive technologies of behavior" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 293). Some of the distinguished features of this penal colony was the employment of "technicians of behavior" (i.e. "engineers of conduct"), permanent observations, the production of knowledge about the behavior of inmates, and the creation of a school programme that would enable prisoners to later discipline their peers (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, 295). While it is tempting to draw on Foucault's reading of the carceral to think about settler-colonial techniques of confinement in Palestine, I would suggest that Foucault's genealogy is inattentive to the ways in which the carceral is tethered to colonial modernity and the project of race in particular ways. For instance, Mbembe's description of necropolitical experimentation on the slave plantation compels us to consider how ideas of mass confinement were first tested, prior to both the prison system and Foucault's discussion of the 19<sup>th</sup> century penal colony. While Foucault's discussion of the carceral is not necessarily the most useful model to explain the settler-colonial occupation of Palestine, I still work with the concept of carcerality to examine the occupation and expand on Foucauldian inspired conceptions of power.

infrastructural and architectural orders of Israeli settler-colonialism (e.g. the permit regime, apartheid wall, network of checkpoints, roadblocks, seam zones, watch towers etc.). This assemblage of carceral power restricts freedom of movement, prevents visitation rights between Palestinians separated by the wall, traps bodies within militarized spatialities like checkpoints and seam zone villages, and maintains a permanent and pervasive surveillance regime throughout the West Bank. These dispersed orderings of spatial and embodied containment signal to the *multiple* power formations that organize Israel's occupation of Palestine. But they also animate for us the ways that spatial violence comes to be organized as a particular expression of racial terror.

As Sherene Razack (2010) has argued, racial violence is often and relentlessly “anchored spatially,” and graphed onto the body of the colonized.<sup>395</sup> As Razack notes,

the checkpoint, like the opening in the wall, must physically reduce the body to a state of insignificance; and to the status and movements of a trapped animal (...), they imprint the power arrangements of colonialism on the bodies of the colonized, laying bare for all to see and to know *in an embodied way* who can have human dignity and who cannot.<sup>396</sup>

Expanding on Lindsay Bremner and Achille Mbembe's analysis of the racial graphing of skin (via the mapping of territory and geography), Razack articulates a kind of “memorializing” that takes place in and through the skin of the colonized. “To memorialize power on the bodies of the colonized requires an apparatus.”<sup>397</sup> The apparatus that Razack refers to are spatial practices used to organize segregation, jailing, and eviction.<sup>398</sup> In addition to working through spatial practice, this carceral network also works through the regulation of bodies, allowing for demographic management. It enables the separation of Palestinians and Jewish people, as well as the gradual

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<sup>395</sup> Sherene Razack, “A Hole in the Wall: A Rose at a Checkpoint: The Spatiality of Colonial Encounters in Occupied Palestine”, *Journal of Critical Race Inquiry*, 1, no. 1 (2010): 98.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Razack, “A Hole in the Wall: A Rose at a Checkpoint,” 95.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

disappearance of Palestinians from the West Bank.<sup>399</sup> The visible erasure of Palestinians from Israeli Jewish day-to-day life is organized through carceral mechanisms of exclusion and containment that ultimately shrink the visibility of a Palestinian presence.<sup>400</sup> In thinking about the racial ordering of Israel's spatialized practices of containment, I suggest that desires for access to movement as narrated through the stories above, are not just about a desire for the repatriation of land, although it certainly is this too. Rather, what I contend is that these futuristic articulations of mobility might be understood as a broader commentary on the ontological register of the category human.

In Frantz Fanon's writings on colonial violence in Algeria, he gestured to the salience of bodily movement in fantasies of anti-colonial freedom. In an effort to transcend the boundaries set forth by the Manichean colonial order, Fanon's psychoanalytic analysis of the colonized subject's dreams were often interpreted as hyperactive muscular dreams, fused with aggressive vitality. It is precisely because the "colonized's affectivity is kept on edge" that their mode of expression lives in muscular spasms, taking the form of dance.<sup>401</sup> Fanon argues that "the colonized's way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channeled, transformed, and spirited away."<sup>402</sup> As explained by Fanon, it is during the hours of the night that the colonized subject frees himself, and it is through dreaming of

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<sup>399</sup> Nadera, Shalhoub-Kevorkian. "Terrorism and the Birthing Body in Jerusalem". In *At the Limits of Justice: Women of Colour on Terror*, Suwendrini Perera and Sherene Razack (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2014), 39.

<sup>400</sup> As Eyal Weizman has shown, the architectural planning of the landscapes of the West Bank enable a kind of vertical and horizontal politics of sovereignty that rests within the Israeli state as well Israeli settlers' control over the airspace and landscapes. The Jewish settlements and military outposts are accessorized with bypass roads and tunnels for the use of Jewish people only while the densely populated Palestinian towns and villages are spatially organized through dirt roads and paths. This expression of sovereignty affords Jewish settlers spatial privilege and does so through the attempted visual erasure of the Palestinian population. See Eyal, Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*. London: Verso Press, 2007.

<sup>401</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 19.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

activities of swimming, running, climbing and leaping for instance, that the colonized finds a space of decarceration.<sup>403</sup>

If the violence of colonial modernity and processes of racialization are tethered to the capacity to decide on spatial and discursive arrangements of who can move, I argue that articulations of *freedom of movement* as reflected in these imaginative futurities might be understood as a reparative justice politic for decolonization and foregrounded in a politic of anti-racist struggle. That we might think about desires to move freely as a creative response to the ways that racial and spatialized violence are organized under Israeli settler-colonialism and graphed onto the body of the Palestinian subject. The significance of thinking about the political project of return as one that hinges on freedom of movement, and a practice of mobility more broadly defined, is that it points to a reconfiguration of what it means to “be” Palestinian, and consequently to “be” human. In contrast to the forms of recognition that have attempted to bring redress to Palestinian refugees, as illustrated throughout this dissertation, imaginings of mobility interrupt a spatiality of racial difference organized under Israel’s carceral regime. These imaginings insist on a way of life that is not bound to territoriality, thereby destabilizing what it means to be deterritorial subjects – to be a subject casted outside of the confines of the nation-state and colonial modernity itself. In addition to thinking about ideas of return as a decolonial project that restores displaced subjects to land, this chapter shows how we might also think about return as a decolonial project that recalibrates an ordering of racial difference. Further, we might also interpret these stories of mobility as a site that opens up the affective tensions between loss and hope. As reflected in this set of futuristic stories, the very idea of mobility in Palestine is not bound to physical space but also represents the terrain through which competing emotions around ties to land, temporality and

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<sup>403</sup> Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 15.

home are met. These representations of mobility signal to the ways that some third-generation Palestinian refugees retain historical claims to memory but also find access to an imagining of return in its afterlife in Palestine/Israel.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has reflected on what futuristic stories of return might reveal about the affective and spatial reverberations of settler-colonial expulsion and protracted humanitarian governance in the lives of third-generation Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. In thinking about how third-generation refugees have responded to these racialized spatialities, this chapter has looked at the representational life of return and imaginings of Palestinian refugees as represented through futuristic story. In so doing, I read the ways that Palestinian refugees invoke ideas about land, spatiality and temporality to imagine their own experience of return. Centering an analytic of stories to understand what these representations of return perform, this chapter argued that loss and hope not only simultaneously contour the affective landscape of these futuristic imaginaries, but also point to a particular reading of mobility that intervenes in temporalities of the past and future.

In attending to how this group of refugees attenuate their sense of self and life to a future project of return, I also attempted to think about the ways that people creatively and politically write themselves back into humanity itself and imagine against a racialized ordering of settler-colonial displacement and ontological exile. Although at moments, this chapter writes about the camp as a racialized space produced at the intersection of settler-colonial nation building and protracted humanitarian governance, I do hope that readers will also recognize the ways that the camp, in many of these stories, are detailed as more than that. That almost seventy-years of life within the camp, the camp is home for many third-generation refugees. As discussed throughout

this chapter, representations of return are neither temporally static nor emotionally linear. On the contrary, imaginings of life within and outside the camp also signaled to a kind of emotional ambivalence – a process of recovery and decolonial aspiration that also demands an insistence on historical memory; a vision of moving forward without forgetting the forms of life built under expulsion. Understood in this way, these imaginings of return might also be understood as a postcolonial gesture. As Derek Gregory has asserted, “[P]ostcolonialism revisits the colonial past in order to recover the dead weight of colonialism, to retrieve its shapes, like the chalk outline at a crime scene, and to recall the living bodies they so imperfectly summon to presence.”<sup>404</sup> Through this act of remembering, Gregory asserts that “postcolonial critique must not only counter amnesiac histories of colonialism but also stage a “return of the repressed” to resist the seduction of *nostalgic* histories of colonialism.”<sup>405</sup>

As discussed here, for many third-generation Palestinian refugees, orienting oneself towards the future cannot negate or disavow the forms of intergenerational loss distributed across settler-colonialism and humanitarian governance. Rather, as reflected in the stories contained here, the project of return is one that carries historical memories of the past, while also opening space for a different interpretation of sovereignty. While the very concept of refugeeness is defined by a kind of “homelessness” produced in the aftermath of systematic displacement and loss, I hope this chapter has also captured the complex ways that Palestinian refugees negotiate life, loss and decolonial futurities under on-going times of expulsion.

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<sup>404</sup> Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, 9.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

Historically we have been regarded as a population that is essentially disposable.<sup>406</sup>

– Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*

If the past is only an experience, make of the future a meaning and a vision [...] Let us go. Let us go into tomorrow trusting the candor of imagination and the miracle of grass.<sup>407</sup>

- Mahmoud Darwish, “Farewell address to Edward Said”

This dissertation has examined the representational life of *return* in the context of Palestinian refugees. Throughout this work, I examine the idea of return across a set of imaginaries and temporalities that travel between the past and extend into what I identify in this work as a decolonial futurity in Palestine/Israel. Taking up representations of return across a range of discursive fields, the research question that guided me through this work asked: How has Israeli settler-colonialism and protracted humanitarian governance come to bear on decolonial imaginings of return for third-generation Palestinian refugees residing in the occupied West Bank? Examining this question as a genealogical inquiry, this work thinks through what the representational and - as the latter chapters explore - imaginative landscape of return tells us about the historical and on-going project of *race* in Palestine/Israel as it coalesces under settler-colonialism, law and protracted humanitarianism. While this dissertation examined the formation and mobilization of return across a few historical, legal and aesthetic sites, this archive is instructive for thinking about how a land-based and material question concerning the right to return in a post-World War II era comes to be represented – almost seventy years later - as a set of symbolic ideas concerning embodiment and mobility under protracted humanitarian governance. As I attempted to work

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<sup>406</sup> Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, New York: Columbia University Press: 1986, 130.

<sup>407</sup> “Mahmoud Darwish’s Farewell to Edward Said,” YouTube, accessed December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmPCZhk3y1E>.

through the historical and on-going conditions that account for this shift, I came to treat the idea of return as a socio-legal and cultural signifier of race and temporality. From this standpoint, I was able to see the epistemic and ontological conditions that have expelled Palestinian refugees from juridical orderings of the human and casted them as subjects of racial difference. Rather than treating the project of return as a static or anachronistic reparative justice principle, I treat the concept of return as a marker of racial difference that demarcates the historical and on-going ways that Palestinian refugees have been, as Edward Said poignantly notes, *regarded* as “a population that is essentially disposable.”<sup>408</sup> I argue that this racialized and temporal inscription of dehumanization takes place at the nexus of settler-colonial expulsion and a racialized economy of rights discourse that responds to Palestinian claims to land through the distribution of food, aid and shelter. Through closely examining the work of race as it is operationalized at the intersection of these two forms of governance, I show how the question of Palestine - a question that is very much rooted in a struggle for self-determination and sovereignty over land has been flattened by a juridical global ordering of human rights and humanitarian discourse that denies recognition of their full humanity in the first place. Within this context, I insist that we understand the representational life of return as a racial index of Palestinian refugee subjectivity formed across settler-colonial expulsion, legal redress and humanitarian governance. This argument however, opens itself onto another and compels considerations of the question of ‘agency’ or what I take up in this work as a kind of ‘decolonial aesthetics of the ordinary’.

While many of the narratives introduced in these chapters hinge upon localized memory and oral histories of historical injustice, and point to the reverberations of settler-colonial expulsion and humanitarian governance in daily life, they also open up consideration for thinking about

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

return in its past, present and *afterlife*. These discussions point to a reading of return as a decolonial aspiration that not only takes on a representational life, but literally holds life within a political repository of hope. The imaginings of return discussed in this work open up questions about Palestinian futurity barred from the settler-colonial imaginary and consequently, signal to the instability of the Israeli settler-colonial national project. Within this framing of agency, I think about how the imaginative capacities of third-generation Palestinian refugees, and in particular their capacity to imagine movement across a racialized temporality attenuated to the future – is a robust site of decolonialism. Articulating *return* as an imaginary of *embodied mobility* challenges the carceral structure of Israeli settler-colonialism and shores up new ways for thinking about how Palestinian refugees make claims to land and subjectivity not delineated by statist solutions and/or spatial orders of segregation and exclusion. In thinking about how rights discourse has come to bear on imaginings of return, and what these creative narrative interventions tell us about the intersection of settler-colonial life and protracted humanitarian governance, this project treats the concept of return as a signpost of race and decolonial futurities in Israel/Palestine. I work up to and across these ideas in three parts.

In part one, I delineate the role of racial science in modern constructions of political Zionism and early imaginings of Israeli statehood. Establishing the epistemic and ontological grounds that underwrite the conditions of Palestinian displacement, I introduce the figure of the Palestinian refugee as a subject already marked by discourses of race and racialization. Following the genealogical work of Edward Said and Joseph Massad, I show the ways that the “Jewish Question” and “Question of Palestine” are ontologically linked through a racial history of expulsion. Tracing this racial history through attention to Zionist debates about racial science, population transfer and settlement as redemptive to discourses of Jewish degeneracy), I show how

the figure of the Palestinian refugee – from the moment of inception, is already imbued in a story of racial difference.

In part two, I trace the legal emergence of return in Palestine, as articulated by the first ever appointed UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte and consider the juridical grounds through which rights to land and Palestinian refugee personhood came to be constituted and made legible under international governance in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba. In so doing, I explain how a land-based question of displacement came to be answered through a protracted humanitarian response which has now extended into its seventh decade. Empirically, I analyze historical records (via progress reports and recommendations) by Bernadotte between May 1948 to September 1948, as well as correspondence letters between the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. Through examining the debates that gave rise to the creation of UN resolution 194 and United Nations Relief Work Agency, I argue that discourses of refugee life and the project of return – as represented through these two forms of international recognition circulate within an economy of rights discourse that obscures Palestinian claims to land and co-signs their subjectivity to a racialized humanitarian order. This representational landscape is one that further expels Palestinian refugees the category human. Through this analysis, I suggest that we understand these international forms of recognition through a racial history that represents Palestinian refugees as depoliticized humanitarian wards in need of aid rather than sovereign political subjects in contestations over land.

In part three (chapters four and five), I read these racialized juridical and humanitarian orders alongside decolonizing cultural production of imaginings of return and consider how third-generation Palestinian refugees negotiate their relationship to land, time and sovereignty. This section of the dissertation is animated by the works of two social action collectives: DAAR

(Decolonizing Architectural Art Residency) and *Campus in Camps*. To examine these experimental imaginings of return, I explore two narration projects: 1) “The Concrete Tent” – an architectural art installation inside of Dheisheh refugee camp and 2) a collection of futuristic spatial essays that ruminate on the question of return. Empirically, I work through a range of field research materials including semi-structured interviews with third-generation Palestinian refugees and participants with the collectives, published works produced the collectives, visual texts and local news media. Using these two narrative projects as sites for exploring decolonial cultural imaginings of return, I consider what they reveal about the intersection of settler-colonial life and protracted humanitarian governance. In tracing imaginings of return as narrated through these architectural and story-based representations, these two chapters explore the ambivalent ways that Palestinian refugee youth today negotiate an affective, temporal and spatial landscape of return. As the interviews in chapter four and five highlight, these temporal representations of return in the future point to the spatial and affective dimensions of life in the camp and complicate inherited sensibilities about physical repatriation of land and property. Attending to this ambivalence as one that reveals the complexities of ‘home’ for third-generation Palestinian refugees in the camp, I argue that articulations of loss and hope not only simultaneously contour the temporal and psychic landscape of these futuristic imaginaries, but help us think about orderings of time produced at the nexus of settler-colonialism and protracted humanitarian governance.

My analysis in these two chapters also highlight the ways that racial violence is not only produced through spatial, and in particular carceral violence, but a temporal violence inscribed through colonial orderings of the body as it moves through space. Viewed within this context, I look at imaginings of mobility as decolonial aspirations that challenge state-centered conceptions of sovereignty anchored in dominant frameworks of the nation-state. These claims to mobility can

be understood as a counter-imaginary to the national subject and the national project. Rather than waiting on redress or recognition from the settler-state or international governance, these imaginings of mobility open up important questions for thinking about decolonial projects in the absence of statehood and under conditions of settler-colonialism and carcerality more specifically.<sup>409</sup> While these imaginings emerge in the specific context of this historical moment of Palestine, these articulations of mobility might also be understood as a vision of anti-colonial and/or Indigenous sovereignty that resist the carceral orderings of the nation-state under increasing conditions of militarization, imprisonment and securitization.

In thinking about how the concept of return opens up important possibilities for political imaginings of sovereignty under conditions of extraterritoriality, this research offers an analytical space to rethink the human as a rights-bearing subject belonging to an imagined community of the nation-state. This reconstitution of the human (via imaginings of embodied mobility) reflects a relationship to land that offers an important antidote to the forms of racialized spatial subjugation instituted under carceral technologies of late colonial modernity. Looking closely at bodily desires, and in particular the desire for return articulated as mobility across colonial frontiers and territorial limits, chapters five shows how these futuristic narratives of return reflect a decolonial ordering of time and space that open up inscriptions of the racialized and immobile refugee subject. As Marwa Al-Lahham describes in her narration of the *afterlife* of return – as taken up in chapter five,

It's now year 2040, and at this point, I feel like I'm a new born [...] who just opened her eyes to discover her world. *I do not want to lose any more time.* I want to see, I want to discover, I want to take my first steps into my world. What comes to my mind right now is the sea...I take the car and I drive to the sea...I'm reminding myself that I'm taking the tour I always have dreamed to take, the tour which has been completed with my grandparents' stories and experiences [...]. I want to see everything. It reminded me of how I wanted the

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<sup>409</sup> To be clear, I am not writing against the call for a one state-solution, as many Palestinian activists and scholars have long advanced. I am, however, insisting that we look to alternative “post-colonial” solutions that do not reproduce the violent structures of the nation-state which are often birthed at the inception of post-colonial independence.

visitors to see everything [...] we lived in a limited area, where we were not allowed to do anything outside the [sic] borders. I was not allowed to see the big cities like Haifa, Jaffa, Nazareth, Jerusalem, the sea and the rest of my country. In this moment, I'm standing on the beach.<sup>410</sup>

This account of return as a kind of rebirth or re-entrance into humanity is noteworthy. Al-Lahham's reference to mobility signals to the specific ways that some third-generation Palestinian refugees rewrite their own subjectivity against the ontological parameters of banishment. But these accounts also compel us to consider how an aesthetics of the ordinary opens up decolonial imaginaries of land. More specifically, these narratives help us reflect on how an aesthetics of the ordinary attenuated to the future in a place like Palestine – a place under the constant threat of erasure - is a robust site of decolonialism. Aesthetic claims to land like the those cited throughout chapters four and five offer a vernacular to Palestinian subjectivity that is illegible under humanitarian and human rights discourse. I read these decolonial aesthetics of the ordinary to show how claims to land - even at the level of mobility - is an ontological claim to the human. To illustrate this point further even further, I once again - and by way of conclusion this time - introduce the work of the late Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.

In “Ala Hadihil Ard” (On this Land), Darwish makes claims to the following:

On this Land, we have that which makes life worth living  
On this Land, we have *all of that* which makes life worth living  
April's hesitation  
The aroma of bread at dawn  
A woman's beseeching of men  
The waiting of Aeschylus  
Love's beginning  
Moss on a stone  
Mothers standing on a flute's thread  
And the invader's fear of memories  
We have on this land that which makes life worth living

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<sup>410</sup> Marwa al-Lahham, “My Home,” in *Campus in Camps, Vision*, 56. Emphasis added.

September's end  
A woman leaving 'forty' behind  
With all of her apricots  
*The hour of sunlight in prison*  
A cloud reflecting a swarm of creatures

A people's applause for those who face their own erasure with a smile  
And the tyrant's fear of memory.

We have on this land all of that which makes life worth living  
On this land  
The lady of our land  
The mother of all beginnings  
And the mother of all ends  
She was called Palestine  
Her name later became Palestine  
My lady...  
Because you are my lady  
I have all that makes life worth living

In this poem, Darwish's words capture an imagining of Palestine worthy of pause. This poem does not centre the visual landscape of carcerality inscribed upon and through Palestine. His poem does not teach us about the multiple and unstable prison cells that constellate Palestine's splintered geography. Darwish's poem lends no visual cues to the apartheid wall, or military checkpoints ornamented with barbed wire and watchtowers, or the terminal cells that enrage people daily. In Darwish's sketch, we are invited into an imaginary that centers "the aroma of bread at dawn," "the tyrant's fear of memory" and the "hour of sunlight in prison". In filling a representational void, poems like *Ala Hadihil Ard* capture a framing of life under occupation through the subtleties of ordinary life, not forged through the denial or the disavowal of Israeli colonization, but one that centres the nuances of Palestinian life despite the grave and pervasive realities of living under Israel's occupation regime. In this poem, Darwish allows us to think about what it means to practice life in a political context marked by slow but steady death. Put another way, this poem compels us to think about what it means for Palestinians to make claims to life

when their proximity to death lies in the hands of their occupier. This kind of methodological inquiry is one that represents an alternative to totalizing narratives about Palestinians as only subjects of or opponents against colonial injury.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork this poem continued to show up. Excerpts of it were recited to me during interviews with participants and in conversations with friends over dinner. It showed up for me on long walks home between Beit Jala and Beit Sahour and in late June when the apricots began to bloom and excitement over *mish mish* (apricot) season was contagious. In many ways, the ideas that spawn this dissertation more generally are indebted to this poem because it stands in as a reminder of all the things that forced me to pause. Similar to my encounters in the field, this poem asked me to take seriously the moments where I was taken by surprise and compelled to rethink assumptions I had about the totalizing narratives of colonial domination and resistance under occupation. Throughout it all, I spent a great deal of time coming to appreciate how even in the midst of military occupation, Darwish and my research participants could unapologetically reference Palestine as a “land that *makes* life worth living.”<sup>411</sup>

At the writing stage of this dissertation, I frequently revisited this poem as a way to remember why this project matters and what ethical considerations gave rise to its methodological design. While this work is indebted to genealogy – a method creatively crafted and refined by the methodological work of Foucault and his interlocutors, this method could not translate the temporalities of hope that punctuated the narratives introduced by third-generation Palestinian refugees in this project. Relying on poetics as a method of translation, Palestinian writers like Mahmoud Darwish invite cultural sensibilities of decolonial life in Palestine. Darwish’s ideas in *Ala Hadihil Ard* and his writings more generally open up the theoretical lens of this work and

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<sup>411</sup> Darwish, “Ala Hadihil Ard.” Emphasis my own.

influence, and perhaps even reconcile for me, what it might mean to engage with Foucault's method of genealogy and simultaneously remain invested in an analytic of decolonial futurities as it applies to the question of Palestine. As a poet who theorized across modern colonial time, Darwish's work introduces for us a way of thinking across historical temporalities – across historical violence and an affective and visual imagining attenuated to the future. His writings not only influence how we might come to think about temporalities of hope under historical conditions of on-going loss but also offers a sustained conversation about Indigenous claims to life and land. I end this work on reflections of decolonial aesthetics of the ordinary to reveal another way of seeing and/or knowing the complexities of imaginings of freedom under colonial orderings of subjugation.

As Ma'ale, one of the research participants in this project declared to me at the end of an interview, "Freedom lives inside of us. We can't always see it or show it to the world, but it lives in us. Inside of our body, there is freedom. Although we don't have the language to often name it, we can feel it."<sup>412</sup> In tending to Palestinian subjectivity with a methodological commitment to questions of freedom, I do hope this work has also opened up space to think about how claims to the human are made in the thick of racial terror. The very condition of Palestine can represent both "a vast collective feeling of injustice" as Edward Said insisted, and a decolonial blueprint of *what lives in the hold*.<sup>413</sup> I reiterate these ideas here in the hopes that they open up methodological directives that contribute to the field of Palestine Studies as well as other studies of race, settler-coloniality and decolonial theory. Further, I offer these closing reflections here in the hope that

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<sup>412</sup> Interview with Ma'ale, a third-generation Palestinian refugee from Dheisheh, May 2015.

<sup>413</sup> Edward Said, "Introduction: The Right of Return at Last," in *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return*, ed. Naseer Aruri (Sterling: Pluto Press, 2001), 1. My invocation of the "hold" emerges out of Afro-Pessimist accounts of racial terror constitutive of transatlantic slavery and its afterlife.

they open up rather than conclude a conversation about the political possibilities of return and its reach across time, imagination and decolonial futurities in Palestine/Israel.

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