BEYOND NEGOTIATING IMPOSSIBILITES: THE ART OF PALESTINIAN CREATIVE RESISTANCE

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I explore the idea of art as creative resistance against the modern-day colonization and occupation of Palestine. I reflect on Achille Mbembe's post-colonial subjectivities in "crisis", modes of self-writing, and necropolitical models of occupation and sovereignty to suggest ways beyond negotiating impossibilities in the colonial context. I consider Mbembe's theoretical contributions to put forward an alternative perspective that recognizes the importance of art in creating living memory, preserving historical narrative, and transforming the dominant ethno-national narrative which has purposely excluded a people from its story.

INTRODUCTION

In Stephen Duncombe's (2002:8) scholarly resource on political activism, he explains how cultural resistance and political action can create a "free space" to challenge and transform the ideological and material hold of dominant power. Ideologically, cultural resistance creates a space for "new language, meanings,

and visions of the future" (Duncombe 2002:8). Materially, it provides places of community, networking, and organizational opportunities (Duncombe 2002:8). Rather than render the resistance I explore as *cultural*, in this essay I consider the possibilities for what I term creative resistance against ongoing colonization and occupation of Palestine. To suggest ways beyond negotiating impossibilities in the colonial context, I reflect on Achille Mbembe's (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Mbembe 2001, 2002, 2003) post-colonial subjectivities in "crisis", modes of self-writing, and necropolitical models of occupation and sovereignty. In considering Mbembe's theoretical contributions I put forward an alternative perspective that recognizes the importance of art in creating living memory, preserving historical narrative, and transforming the dominant ethno-national narrative which has purposely excluded a population from its story. i

While Mbembe's (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Mbembe 2001, 2002, 2003) suggestions for the exercise of self-hood apply to Palestinian resistance from within Palestine and in the greater Diaspora, there are important aspects of colonial resistance that his theoretical proposal is unable to address. This includes aspects of art that interrogates gender and utilizes dichotomous colonial categorizations to resist, challenge, and ultimately transcend historical simplifications. In this paper I retain Mbembe's (Mbembe and Roitman 1995; Mbembe 2002, 2003) thought on the impossibility of the post-colonial as the framework for my discussion on the dissonance of Palestine. However, I then shift the emphasis of my study to the novelty that art makes possible in considering the question of Palestine. Through the expression of creative resistance in Hany Abu-Assad's film *Paradise Now* (2005), Maryse Gargour's documentary film *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008), and selections from Rafeef Ziadah's spoken word album *Hadeel* (2009 a,b), I explore the use of art as a political practice that enables the formation of new ideological and material spaces. Arguably, such spaces challenge and resist the status quo discourse on Israel/Palestine. In elaborating on possibilities, I return to the beginning of my initial reflections on the creative

resistance of art to discuss how diverse strategies can be used to reshape, counter, and transform the logics of racialized exclusion and political violence that have been silenced in the storytelling of the Israeli nation.

In *African Modes of Self-Writing* Mbembe (2002) critiques the historicist thinking of Afro-radicalism and nativism, which he argues, have hindered rather than assisted the process of attaining an African selfhood. According to Mbembe (2002:240), the "current" of Afro-radicalism uses "Marxist and nationalist categories .... [to present itself as] 'democratic', 'radical' and 'progressive'", while nativism emphasizes the unique identity of Africans to assert African self-hood. Central to each "current" are the historical events of slavery, colonization, and apartheid, which are attributed with "a particular set of canonical meanings [related to self/other alienation and notions of property]" (Mbembe 2002:241). To move beyond what Mbembe calls "the dead end" of simplistic historical notions of victimization in the struggle for selfhood, he asserts that it is necessary to overcome arguments which equate identity with race and geography to reveal "intersecting practices ... to settle [not only] factual and moral disputes about the world but also to open the way for *self-styling*" (2002:242).

Mbembe's (2003) conceptualization of *necropower* and *necropolitics* provides a fitting image for the impossibility of the present-day situation of Palestine. As such it encapsulates Israel's policies and practices of apartheid, ongoing colonization and continued appropriation of Palestinian land for the expansion of Jewish-Israeli settlements (Abu El-Haj 2010:39, Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:644, 646, 651, Goldberg 2008:40). Rather than the Foucauldian notion of the biopolitical as a regulation and determination of life (Foucault 2003:241), necropower places the sovereign's right over death at the fore of the political. According

to Mbembe (2003:40), necropower marks the contemporary political space of "death-worlds. Bureaucratic discourse and Western rationality show state sanctioned killing as justified and something other than murder (Mbembe 2003:23). Mbembe (2003:18) underscores the relationship between the technical advancement for putting people to death and the racist ideologies of the nation-state including class-based racism. This, he asserts "in translating the social conflicts of the industrial world in racial terms, ended up comparing working classes and 'stateless people' of the industrial world to the 'savages' of the colonial world" (Mbembe 2003:18). Accordingly, with the rise of the nation-state, race is imposed upon groups based on constructed differences such as class or statelessness that are not necessarily connected to biological notions of race difference. The racialization of certain human bodies diminishes their value and worth as people. Furthermore, racialization facilitates the removal and destruction of human bodies, which are consequently seen as less than human.

Mbembe's (2003:17) discourse on the significance of racism to nation building and the colonial enterprise is similarly shared in Hannah Arendt's (1973) renowned work *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Arendt (1973:159) contends that while it is possible to trace what she describes as *race-thinking* and the racist practices that race-thinking inspired sometime between the eleventh to the early nineteenth century, the idea of racism based on a single ideology rather than a multitude of conflicting opinion only took hold in the early twentieth century. It was during this period of imperialism and colonialism, and upon the foundation of the eighteenth century scientific revolution that the systematic genocidal application of race theory began to be employed to categorize race difference for political purposes (Arendt 1973:158-9). For Arendt (1973:158), race thinking associates "dignity and importance" to the idea of racism and moves the conception of hierarchical race difference beyond that of a matter of opinion to the construction of knowledge. This is based on the uncontested notion of a 'hierarchy of races'

or in other words on "the ideology of race" (Arendt 1973:158). To Arendt (1973:158), race-thinking ideology during and following the enlightenment period was based on pseudoscience and anthropological difference that syncretically merged religious, nationalist, economist, cultural, and biological categories to create distinct racial groups. The pursuits of imperialistic and totalitarian power at this time link directly to the emergence of race-thinking as an ideology through which political powers identify the legal mechanisms to legitimize the segregation and killing of populations: the escalation which occurred in tandem with the rise of the nation-state (Arendt 1973:161).

The political ability to separate and kill populations with legal sanction leads Mbembe (2003:12) to interrogate the apparent contradiction between the sovereign's right over life and death: "Under what practical conditions is the right to kill, allow to live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right? [....] Imagining politics as a form of war, we must ask: What place is given to life, death, and the human body? ". Mbembe's (2003) variation on Foucault's biopolitics and biopower focuses on the rule and regulation of death rather than life to transform the perspective of analysis from that of the sovereign to that of the ruled. ii

COLONIAL OCCUPATION

According to Mbembe (2003:25) all forms of colonial occupation create "a new set of social and spatial relations" that "seize, delimit, and assert control over a physical geographical area". The creation of such new spatial relations or "territorialisation" establishes colonial "boundaries and hierarchies, zones and enclaves", "subverts existing property arrangements", "classifies people according to different categories", "extracts resources", and "manufactures large reservoirs of cultural imaginaries" (Mbembe 2003:25). As he explains:

*These imaginaries give meaning to the enactment of
differential rights to differing categories of people for
different purposes within the same space; in brief, the
exercise of sovereignty. Space is therefore the raw material of
sovereignty and the violence it carries with it. Sovereignty
means occupation, and occupation means relegating
the colonized into a ... zone between subjecthood and
objecthood.*
(Mbembe 2003:25)

Thus, Mbembe (2003:26) identifies the zone between subjecthood and objecthood as common to occupation. Yet he notes that the "spatialization of colonial occupation" embodies particularized structural forms. For instance, Mbembe states that in South Africa

*"…the functioning of [reserve] homelands and [structural]
townships entailed severe restrictions on production for
the market by blacks in white areas, the terminating of
land ownership by blacks except in reserved areas, the
illegalization of black residence on white farms (except
as servants in the employ of whites), the control of urban
influx, and later, the denial of citizenship to Africans"*
(2003:26).

In comparison, the spatialization of the French colonial occupation of Algeria divided space through force which was both discursive and material to create "boundaries and internal frontiers epitomized by barracks and police stations; ... regulated by the language of pure force, immediate presence, and frequent and direct action; and ... premised on the principle of reciprocal exclusivity" (Mbembe 2003:26).

In both cases the relations of rule in the colonial project enabled the sovereign "to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not" (Mbembe 2003:27). The ability of the sovereign to determine death is therefore common to

all colonial projects. What differs is the practices for regulating, disciplining, and destroying the human body. Consequently, the methods and means of resistance and agency also differ.

While past and present colonial regimes share many commonalities, Mbembe (2003:27) maintains that "late-modern colonial occupation differs in many ways from early-modern occupation, particularly in its combination of the disciplinary, the biopolitical, and the necropolitical". The necropolitical is governed by the regulation of death rather than the life. Through the regulation and control of death in the form of "the terror of the sacred", the late-modern colonial state claims "sovereignty and legitimacy from the authority of its own particular narrative" of historical suffering, or in Foucauldian terms, its *counter-history* (Mbembe 2003:27). This is further complicated by the notion of its "divine right to exist" (Mbembe 2003:27). The use of such narratives not only obscures the nature of the colonial project, but further attempts to distort the understanding of who is colonizer and who is colonized.

For Mbembe (2003:27) three major characteristics are at work in relation to "the specific terror formation". First, the colonizing power fragments territory using the mechanisms and techniques of modern colonial projects to seal off and expand settlements. This "render[s] [the] movement [of the colonized] impossible and ... separate[es] [the colonized and the colonizers] along the model of ... [an] apartheid state" (Mbembe 2003:27-8). The fragmentation of territory under late-modern occupation is also vertical in a three-dimensional manner "though schemes of over - and underpasses … [that separate] airspace from the ground"(Mbembe 2003:28). iii Second, these colonial surveillance techniques are both "inward" and "outward" looking (Mbembe 2003:28). Despite such constant surveillance, the segregated colonized populations are also secluded in what Mbembe (2003:28) refers to as a "splintering occupation". Third, the use of technology, which facilitates "the occupation of the skies" and targeted precision-killing is combined with what Mbembe (2003:29) identifies as "the tactics of medieval

siege warfare adapted to the networked sprawl of urban refugee camps". These three mechanisms and techniques of ruling mark the most distinctive differences between what Mbembe (2003) identifies as the archetype of late-modern colonial occupation in Palestine and that of the modern colonial occupation of Algeria and South Africa.

CREATING LIVING MEMORY

In documenting the modern-day actualization of the policies and practices of the racialized Israeli colonial state that seizes, limits, and asserts control over Palestinian "bare life" (Agamben 1998), the art of Abu-Assad's film *Paradise Now* (2005) poetically illustrates the frustrating experience of a people who exemplify the living dead. In doing so, Abu-Assad's (2005) film creates a space for conversation that interrogates the West's notions of modern "democratic" governing rationalities. *Paradise Now* (2005:00:30-01:58 min) opens with a checkpoint scene - a routine part of daily life for Palestinians. Armed Israeli soldiers check personal identification and bags. Long lines of taxis and people on foot wait for permission to enter and exit within the occupied territory that is their home. The everyday is marked by an inability to move freely or to live with reasonable security. The materialization of barbed wire fences and concrete walls of separation, military vehicles, watchtowers, and invisible drones soaring above ground are symbolic of the imprisonment of the population. Through the necropolitical governing techniques of verticality over land, water and air, Israel produces and regulates Palestinian death (see Mbembe 2003:27-28).

The subjective experiences of the characters in *Paradise Now* (2005) speak to the miserable and humiliating conditions of the everyday crisis of Palestine. Yet, it is precisely the necropolitical landscape presented in the film, which urges viewers to question how one population can have such control over an other and how people continue to struggle against this domination.

The observation of the everyday subjective experience of the crisis that is recognized as banal and ordinary, institutionalized and further normalized (Mbembe and Roitman 1995:325) is what *Paradise Now* (2005) seeks to resist, counter, and ultimately transform.

The main character in the film, Said, chooses political action that will inevitably bring about his own death. Through his death he chooses to lay to rest his father's transgression as a collaborator, and simultaneously to resist the on-going violation of his humanity. Said's death represents his agency to choose freedom over a living death. Arguably, it is the film's capacity to provoke a desire to comprehend a political situation in which freedom exists through death, rather than the subjective experiences of individual characters, which reveals a way forward beyond the agency of death. The dialogue between other characters in the film, Suha and Said, Khaled and Suha, and later Khaled and Said, exposes the complexity in the choice of martyrdom, which beckons the audience to contextualize everyday life in contemporary Palestine. For example, Suha argues that the use of suicide bombings as a tactic will never enable Palestinians to achieve freedom since they only result in further oppression by the Israelis, while Khaled contends that other methods of struggle have also failed to achieve this end and that life has become a continuous process of death (Abu-Assad 2005: 66:07-68:06 min). The seemingly equivalent number of martyr and collaborator videotapes further signifies the impossibility of negotiating freedom for Palestinians under occupation (Abu-Assad 2005:61:46-62:17 min). Choices other than death as resistance exist for Suha and Khaled. Said, however, is limited by the reality of historical conditions of occupation connected directly to his family. While Said negotiates the impossibility of his freedom in choosing the agency of death, it is through the characters' exchange of ideas that Abu-Assad's (2005) narrative creates a "living memory". As a result, one comes to understand the complexity of responsibility and accountability in the modern-day colonial situation.

In the film *Paradise Now* (2005:20:00-21:15 min), Suha questions Said about why the cinema was destroyed in a Palestinian demonstration against an Israeli invasion. Said's response to this question expresses the futility of living a life in which arbitrariness, even the arbitrariness of the initial colonial exploit, reigns: "Why us?", he retorts. Said's provocative question is considered in Gargour's documentary film *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008). In many ways, the Zionist movement chose Palestine arbitrarily. Zionism was and is not a religious movement but has rather used and continues to use religious dogma as moral authority to justify the choice of Palestine for the creation of an ethno-nationalist Jewish state (Pappe 2006:10). Through an intersection of discourses *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008) provides an account of the history of Palestine from the beginning of the Zionist movement in the late 1800s until al-Nakba or the colonial establishment of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948. iv Gargour's film presents the work of religious scholar and historian Dr. Nur Masalha. Masalha uses archival data of official Israeli documents, Zionist literature, and British and American newsprint to recount how the Zionist movement structured a narrative based on the falsified notion that the land of Palestine was uncultivated and almost barren. Following this Zionist myth - as Palestine was inhabited by only a few nomadic peoples with no established communities and because Jewish peoples had been persecuted for centuries and needed security - it made for the perfect Jewish homeland (see Said 1992:5,7). v As Mbembe (2001:25) points out, when sovereign right is used arbitrarily or under the "right of conquest" there appears to be some rationale, however illogical and irrational, behind actions and ideologies.

While *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008) makes reference to the Second World War, it does not discuss the Holocaust, as the Nazi concentration camps did not initiate the design of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Instead the documentary corrects the misinformation concerning the establishment of the Israeli state

to reveal the premeditated design to transfer the Palestinian population and colonize the land (see also Pappe 2006:10-15). The perspective which Gargour invites in her film on the question of Palestine, demonstrates the existence of a dynamic population of Arab-speaking Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Palestinians living in urban centres as well as in the countryside prior to the establishment of Israel. The film suggests that it was the idea of transforming Palestine into an all-Jewish state that created problems with Palestinians, which at the beginning of this process included Jewish Palestinians. Accordingly, the Zionist colonization of Palestine was not based on questions of religion or immigration but based on the injustice of the colonial project. Before 1919 there was very little Jewish immigration to Palestine. Indeed, as is well documented in much of the literature on Zionism, Jewish people comprised one-third of the population and owned less than seven percent of all the land of Palestine prior to May 1948 (Davis 1987:22; Falah 1996; Khalidi 2001:12; Pappe 2006:29-30; Yuval-Davis 1987:39). However, since Zionism set Israel out to be *the* nation for Jews, regardless of where they resided or claimed citizenship at the time, there was a perceived need to make Jews the majority of the population (Davis 1987:9).

Gargour's film outlines the processes used to establish the Israeli state, which involved forced expulsion, exile, murder, massacre, and the political assassination and imprisonment of Palestinians. Through visual and narrative means she also illustrates the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages that although implemented and performed by Zionist rule, were facilitated through the laws and governance of Western colonialist forces. vi As a direct result of British rule, in particular the Balfour Declaration, concrete steps were taken to ensure the creation of the Zionist state (see also Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:647; Pappe 2006:13). According to the Palestinian story put forward in *The Land Speaks Arabic* (2008), drastic demographic changes began to occur in the period from the 1920s to the 1930s when Palestine was under British colonial power. Since the late 1800s until the 1930s officials in the public do-

main spoke of cooperation with Palestinians and the legitimate purchase of land (Gargour 2008:28-30:20 min). Privately, however, they deliberated on the idea of "organized transfer" - the engineered removal of the Palestinian population (Gargour 2008:28-30:20 min). Archival documents such as meeting minutes reveal the plans to transfer non-Jewish Palestinians to TransJordan and Iraq. The Zionists and their supporters determined that transfer was the only solution to what they determined to be the Palestinian problem. As the 1941 Director of the Land Department of the Jewish National Fund Yozef Weitz stated: "They [the Palestinians] are too much and too rooted. The only way is to eradicate them and cut them at the roots" (Gargour 2008:33:22-33:33 min).

Gargour's film also documents the popular Palestinian uprisings against such acts - much which remains out of the dominant Western purview - in the 1935 rebellion in countryside as well as the 1936 strikes in Jaffa. The British ultimately crushed the rebellion (Gargour 2008:34:20 min; Qumsiyeh 2011:72-73). Additionally, throughout the period from 1936 to 1939 the British supported the Zionist cause by disarming the Palestinians, which prevented them from being able to engage in military action in 1948 (Gargour 2008:34:38-34:40 min). At the same time, the Zionists were permitted to have an arms industry and were trained as a military garrison (King 2007:54-55; Qumsiyeh 2011:87,96). Gargour's film reveals that after 1948 the idea of transfer became a Zionist military project. People were driven out of their homes and off their land by a variety of methods - grenades, shooting, and bombs. The first Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion clearly articulates the project of Israel in terms of war. For him the notion of transfer can only apply in a situation of war as the "idea of ours and not ours is a concept of peace" (Gargour 2008:46 min).

TRANSFORMING THE DOMINANT ETHNO-NATIONAL NARRATIVE

At the heart of population transfer is the question of ethno-demography (Kanaaneh 2002:28; Pappe 2006:13,34-5). According to Himani Bannerji (2003:99), all ethno-nationalist projects construct a "hierarchical set of differences between people living within a national/political territory on grounds of racialized ethnicities, including religion, thus calling for their erasure from and subordination in the main frame of society, culture and history". Remarkably, in colonial contexts, indigenous populations are racialized as 'the Other' while white colonizers represent themselves as citizens who belong to the land. Natives are thus transformed into "aliens" (Abdo 2003:133; Bannerji 2003:102). The mechanisms and techniques used to create differences between colonizers and indigenous peoples in the ruling apparatus of colonial states are easily identifiable in the case of Israel/Palestine.

Rafeef Ziadah's (2009a:00:00-02:18 min) personal story as a refugee in her spoken word "Savage" contests the Israeli state's moral authority to create an all Jewish state and further interrogates the notion of homeland, indigenity, and terrorism as well as self-determination and resistance in the Israeli-Palestinian context:

> *Tonight, tonight, I make no apologies/ ... I am what I am indigenous from Palestine/... I am your savage, your terrorist/ ... Demographic threat, born to a demographic threat and inshaallah will give you your next demographic threat/ Wrap her in a hattah and name my baby girl Yafa/ ... My mother rubbed olive oil in my hair and in my skin until the smell of Palestine seeped through to my veins/ I have an immune system you can only dream of/ Built on UNRWA hommous and foul vii/ [....] explain this to me - I have lived a refugee while you took my home and they tell me you're Polish and some god promised you my land/ Can I have a phone number, a fax, an email for your god? I'd like to have a chit*

chat/ Don't know when god became a real estate agent/ And of all the world decided to promise away my land/[....] Don't you see, don't you see? The colour of my skin is the colour of the soil in Palestine/ Every rock in Jerusalem knows my last name/ And every wave hitting the Haifa shore is waiting for me to return/ And I will return and I will always be on your mind/ ... In the stones of your homes, in the cactus plants/ I will always be on your mind/ ... I am your savage/ your terrorist/ ... Always there to haunt you.

Through Ziadah's (2009a) poetic verse, she urges listeners to question the historical narrative they may be familiar with and the current stories that are offered in the mainstream media which portray Palestinians as savages and terrorists. She begins with an assertion that she will not apologize for her position as a political subject/object that her identification as a Palestinian woman necessarily entails. Through the dominant Israeli ethno-national narrative she has been made alien and other - a demographic threat, a savage, a terrorist. She responds to this otherness with her personal story that roots her life to Palestine through the metaphor of the landscape in the cactus, olives, soil, stones, and sea. Rooting herself firmly in Palestine, her prose figuratively alludes to her newborn child as a "demographic threat" which she will wrap in a "hattah", a term used for the now iconic black and white chequered scarf symbolic of Palestinian resistance; while the name Yafa is a reference to the historical Palestinian city, also spelled Jaffa in what is now Israel. Her symbolic use of language also pays homage to the artistic resistance of her Palestinian predecessors, especially the poetry of the infamous Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. viii In this way Ziadah establishes relational ties to the histories of Palestinian peoples who have had similar experiences as refugees or exiles.

While Ziadah's (2009a) account does not tell of the dispossession of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, her words compel listeners to question why one group of people should have more right over a territory than another based on a biblical claim. She

puts forward an alternate narrative of her life as a refugee unable to return home to Palestine. This is a story shared by what is now one of the largest refugee populations in the world that has been disappeared through near silence in the (re)telling of the Zionist myth. Ziadah tells of her life in one of the many United Nations Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA)-run refugee camps in Lebanon notorious for poor sanitation and living conditions, as well as for dogmatic restrictions on building and movement inside and outside of the camp boundaries. ix Her stated desire to have a "chit-chat with your god" mocks the notion of Israel's biblical claims to land and also points to the hypocrisy of Israel's desire to be recognized as a liberal democracy. The challenge to the audience listening to Ziadah's (2009a) work is to recognize that the conflation of Judaism and Israel has been constructed for the benefit of the governing elite. This is to the detriment and devastation of the Palestinian people.

Although the labelling of criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic creates an impossibility in critically assessing the state's laws, policies and practices, the work of Abu-Assad (2005), Gargour (2008), and Ziadah (2009a) presents historical narratives of Palestine. These narratives are unknown to many in the West, which allow for possibilities to overcome this impossibility. These overlooked stories of Palestine demonstrate the complexity of narratives that have been stifled through violence. In providing alternative discourses to Israel's dominant myth of biblical renaissance, the Zionist myth is made known and the current understanding of Israel can be transformed.

PLAYING ON DICHOTOMIES

Colonial rule creates categories of differentiation for the purposes of divisiveness and assimilation: native and non-native, black and white, and civilized and savage. Mbembe (2002) argues against such efforts to (re)establish selfhood. In his opinion, these dichotomies only perpetuate colonial discourses of sepa-

ration and crude difference rather than generate conversations that account for the plurality of people and perspectives as well as examine the ambivalence of custom. Yet, to "challenge the fiction of race", it is not enough for the colonized to assert its common humanity (Mbembe 2002:253-254). Instead of calling into question the discourse and historical falsification of Marxist and nativist attempts to assert self-hood, Mbembe (2002:254) proposes methodological challenges to philosophical, anthropological and sociological levels of inquiry. Philosophically he suggests that history must be interrogated to address actual experiences of the subject; anthropologically the thematics of sameness must oppose the "obsession with uniqueness and difference" to include "multiple ancestries"; and, sociologically the subjective experience of the everyday through which one's own experiences are constructed must be examined to expose the familiar and the general (Mbembe 2002:258).

Gargour's (2008) documentary explores these constructed divisions in the Palestinian context. The interviews with Palestinian men and women who lived through the period prior to the 1948 al-Nakba, Georges, Leyla and Saada, attest that Palestinian Jews were not considered any different than Palestinian Muslims or Palestinian Christians. According to their accounts these distinctions were simply not made and they were simply all Arabs. Their personal narratives question how such racialized divisions came to be. This question is answered through Masalha's significant historical research, which he presents in the film prior to the creation of the modern Israeli state. The purposeful conflation of Judaism with the Israeli state masks the inconsistencies and contradictions in the dominant Israeli ethno-national narrative, which attempts to portray Israel as victim. The West's unfamiliarity with the Palestinian narratives of colonization and dispossession unearthed in Gargour's (2008) film and in Ziadah's (2009a) spoken word, challenge the accepted dominant discourse, which understands Israel and Judaism as equivalent, and the Palestinians as alien.

Significantly what motivated the British Empire's assistance

in bringing the Zionist plan to ethnically cleanse Palestine to fruition was their own desire to relocate the Jewish people - at the time considered to be non-white - outside of Europe (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:647). The white Christian peoples of Europe had long discriminated against and held racialized beliefs about Jewish peoples (Arendt 1973:158). However, as Arendt (1973:158-161) shows, the escalation of racism against Jewish peoples -anti-Semitism- intensified as a result of early twentieth century European colonial and imperial expansion. At this time race thinking required claiming sovereignty over territory and exercise control over an 'other'- played a crucial and prominent role in defining people as racially inferior and backward (Mbembe 2003:17). Notably, the increase in European anti-Semitism during the Nazi period resulted in increased support for the Zionist movement which had not received a great deal of backing from Jewish peoples previously (Abu-Laban and Bakan 2008:645-6; Davis 1987:2-3).

SPACES AND COMMUNITIES

Art, which interrogates the historical understandings of the accepted Zionist narrative, extends beyond the Palestinian community in Palestine and the Diaspora and creates shared material as well as ideological spaces, in a transnational sense. In Ziadah's (2009b:00:00-01:14 min) *Trail of Tears* she presents the feminized association of silence against the masculinized brutal force of colonization in the experiences of colonized peoples to reveal the contradictory notions of democratic ideals in colonial narratives:

> *This call is not written for you/ ... It is for the sun and the moon/ For the earth brown like us/ ... For the rivers, the waters that know and saw what you did [....] Trail of tears/ ... From Baghdad to Tyendinega/ We're still walking a trail of tears from Palestine to Six Nations [....] Their gods*

promised them our lands/... Bury their fears in our skin/ ...
Uprooting our olive groves/ Stealing our land/ ... bury their
dead in our skin/ And build golf courts on our corpses/ Call
death machines Apaches/ ... and their cars Cherokee

Rather than a dead-end of simplistic historical notions of victimization in the struggle for selfhood, Ziadah (2009b) uses the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized to present an untold story that is similar for many indigenous people. In doing so, she invokes solidarity not solely amongst colonized people but also for those who have been ignorant of a past that has been hidden to maintain a status quo. The connection between similar colonial narratives and the cognizance of silenced stories also works towards creating a space beyond territorial boundaries and towards communities of social justice.

CONCLUSION

Art is a dialogical process. As such it initiates conversations and provides responses to previous discussions. Although each art form presented in this paper stands alone as a testament to a silenced Palestinian narrative, the intersection of these diverse works provides a more precise understanding of contemporary Palestine. Thus, this understanding enables the necessary transformation of the Zionist narrative. The reliance on both religious and secular Zionist narratives reveals a profound contradiction that is obscured through the constant recollection of historical Jewish suffering. By reason of the Holocaust, Zionist discourses reconfigured race along nationalist rather than explicitly biologically racist lines (Goldberg 2008:30-1; Abu El-Haj 2010:32; Lentin 2004; Yuval-Davis 1987). Yet as Foucault (2003:73) argues, when power is revealed to be unjust, the "discourse of race struggle" overrides that of the history of sovereignty. In this way the possibility for a Palestinian counter-history as a truly revolutionary discourse that will overcome that of Zionism is found in

the questioning of "dissymmetries, disequilibriums, injustice and the violence" perpetrated by the Israeli state on the Palestinian people "despite the order of laws, beneath the order of laws, and through and because of the order of laws" (Foucault 2003:79). Each work of art referenced in this paper recognizes a common and silenced history. However, none have purely nationalist or nativist intentions. Their purpose is to reveal the joy and pain of Palestinian stories. In so doing, these narratives provide novel ideological spaces that counter the dominant ethno-national Israeli discourse. Materially, each offers a space for communicating possibilities through the polyphony of voices engaged in the arduous conversation required to uncover Palestinian narratives. Both from within Palestine and in the greater Diaspora such accounts will ultimately transform the dominant Zionist myth.

NOTES

i I use the term *art* throughout this paper to refer to all creative works of fact and fiction including documentary, film, and spoken word.

ii See also page 68 of Honaida Ghanim's (2008) Thanatopolitics: The Case of the Colonial Occupation in Palestine

iii For more on what Eyal Weizman (2007) terms the "politics of verticality" see *Hollowland: Israel's Architecture of Occupation*.

iv The term al-Nakba (Arabic for "the Catastrophe") describes the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel as experienced by Palestinians, and as understood in Palestinian collective memory.

v This is not to dismiss or deny the very real persecution of Jewish peoples, particularly in the European context

vi For more detailed information on the destruction of Palestinian villages, and the expulsion and exile of Palestinians see also Uri Davis (1987:17-18); for data on the destruction of Palestinian villages, and the expulsion, exile, political assassination and imprisonment of Palestinians as well as terrorist acts committed by the Jewish forces of Hagana, Irgun

and the Stern Gang see Ghazi-Walid Falah (1996), and Ilan Pappe (2006: 13, 28, 39, 40, 56-60).

vii Foul is the name of a popular Arab dish made with fava bean which has no English equivalent. The pronunciation is similar to fool but transliterated into foul.

viii For more on the symbolism and imagery in the work of Mahmoud Darwish see Hala Khamis Nassar and Najat Rahman (2008).

ix UNRWA is short for the United Nations Refugee and Works Agency, created to aid and responsible for the Palestinian refugee population both inside and outside of Palestine.

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