Willing the Impossible:
Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba Through
Photograph-based Storytelling

by
Nawal Musleh-Motut

M.A., History, Simon Fraser University, 2006
B.A., Communication, Simon Fraser University, 2004

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in the
School of Communication
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Nawal Musleh-Motut

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Fall 2019

Copyright in this work rests with the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.
Approval

Name: Nawal Musleh-Motut

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy (Communication)

Title: Willing the Impossible: Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba Through Photograph-based Storytelling

Examining Committee:
- Chair: Gary McCarron
  Associate Professor
- Stuart Poyntz
  Senior Supervisor
  Associate Professor
- Adel Iskandar
  Supervisor
  Assistant Professor
- Dara Culhane
  Supervisor
  Professor, Sociology and Anthropology
- Parin Dossa
  Internal Examiner
  Professor, Sociology and Anthropology
- Jasmin Habib
  External Examiner
  Associate Professor, Political Science
  University of Waterloo

Date Defended/Approved: December 17, 2019
Ethics Statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

or has conducted the research

c. as a co-investigator, collaborator, or research assistant in a research project approved in advance.

A copy of the approval letter has been filed with the Theses Office of the University Library at the time of submission of this thesis or project.

The original application for approval and letter of approval are filed with the relevant offices. Inquiries may be directed to those authorities.

Simon Fraser University Library
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada

Update Spring 2016
Abstract

On May 14, 1948 Israel proclaimed its independence, establishing a national home for the Jewish people following the horrors of the Holocaust. However, for Palestinians this proclamation was tied to the Nakba or catastrophe, a term used to mark their displacement, dispossession, and occupation. This cycle of violence has made ethical dialogue and the witnessing of the other’s trauma difficult. To begin bridging this divide, my dissertation takes up the impossible yet necessary task of “willing the impossible” (Butler, 2012, p. 222), which entails thinking the unequal yet bound tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, morally and ethically engaging with alterity, and envisioning a new polity based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights (Said, 2003). It does this by bringing Edward Said’s (2000; 1993; 1986) theories of narrative, memory, and photography, Hannah Arendt’s distinction between “fictional” and “real” stories (1998, p. 186), and Arielle Azoulay’s concept of “the civil contract of photography” (2008, p. 85) into praxis through a unique photograph-based storytelling method. First, I conducted interviews with Palestinians and Israelis living in their respective Canadian diasporas who are of the Holocaust and Nakba postmemory generations (Hirsch, 2012). During these interviews participants narrated their stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives using family photographs. Second, participants exchanged their stories and photographs with fellow participants from both cultures. Finally, I conducted a second round of interviews in which participants reflected on the experience of narrating their stories and photographs, engaging with the other participants’ stories and photographs, and the research process as a whole. Ultimately, my dissertation demonstrates that storytelling and photography enable the “occasions” (Fabian, 1990, p. 7) and “conditions of possibility” (Culhane, 2011, p. 258) necessary for willing the impossible through “civil imagination” (Azoulay, 2012, p. 5). That is, by narrating and exchanging their postmemories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba through photographs, my participants were able to connect rather than compare their histories of suffering and exile, take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for one another, and imagine a new form of cohabitation grounded in justice and equitable rights for all.

Keywords: Holocaust; Nakba; Israel; Palestine; storytelling; photography
For Mama and Baba, always.
Acknowledgements

While it would be impossible to acknowledge everyone who has influenced and supported me throughout the conceptualizing, planning, researching, writing, and defense of this dissertation, a few special thanks are in order.

First and foremost I would like to express my deepest and sincerest thanks to my participants – Nick, Haifa Staiti, Amanda Qumsieh, Ran Vered, Itai Erdal, and Ofira Roll – for the tremendous risk-taking, openness, courage, imagination, and hopeful possibilities they demonstrated over the course of this project. I could have never anticipated the level of commitment and generosity you showed, both to this project and myself. I am truly grateful for and inspired by each of you.

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to my supervisory committee – Stuart Poyntz, Adel Iskandar, and Dara Culhane – each of who has supported, challenged, guided, and inspired me at every stage of this journey. It has meant the world to me that you trusted me to undertake and complete such daring and exploratory work. Thank you as well to my internal examiner, Parin Dossa, and external examiner, Jasmin Habib. The publications and future research that will result from this dissertation will undoubtedly be stronger for your engagement and feedback. Thank you both for your time and generosity. I am also grateful to Gary McCarron for chairing my defense and Kirsten McAllister for her support and guidance in the early stages of my PhD.

Special thanks to my dear friend Jocelyn Roper Hallman who copyedited this dissertation, as well as various other related publications and documents. I appreciate you more than you know! To all of my colleagues and friends in the School of Communication, especially Ayaka Yoshimizu, Alysha Bains, Sylvia Blake, Graham MacKenzie, and Benjamin Anderson, thank you for your intellectual engagement, great company, and continued encouragement and support. I am also indebted to past and present staff in the School of Communication for their wonderful and continuous assistance, particularly Lucie Menkveld and Jason Congdon.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial support that made this dissertation possible. Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), COGECO Graduate Scholarship in Communications, President’s
PhD Scholarship, Shahrgon Annual Graduate Award in Critical Independent Journalism Studies for the Promotion of Citizenship and Democracy, and the School of Communication for the generous funding.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Shawki and Samira Musleh, who sacrificed everything to come to Canada so their children would not have to live under occupation. Your own courage and risk-taking was the initial inspiration for this study. Thank you for your continued support and encouragement – this dissertation is my gift to you.

I cannot express enough my love and appreciation for my husband Dan who has always supported and encouraged me to follow my dreams. I love our little family and the life we have built together. You are still my favourite!

Finally, thank you to my ever present and lazy ‘research assistants’ Sasha and Milo who have kept me company and well loved without fail.
# Table of Contents

Approval........................................................................................................................................... ii
Ethics Statement ................................................................................................................................. iii
Abstract ............................................................................................................................................... iv
Dedication ........................................................................................................................................... v
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................ vi
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................... viii

**Chapter 1. An Introduction to the Task in Hand and a Challenge Accepted** ....... 1

The Task in Hand: Contending Master Narratives & Collective Memories of the Holocaust & the Nakba .......................................................................................................................... 4
Remembering the Holocaust, Forgetting the Nakba ......................................................................... 8
The Nazi Enemy Reincarnated ........................................................................................................... 8
Creating a Land Without People for a People Without a Land ....................................................... 10
Denying the Nakba ............................................................................................................................ 13
Remembering the Nakba .................................................................................................................... 15
Beginnings ......................................................................................................................................... 16
Development ..................................................................................................................................... 18
Democratization ............................................................................................................................... 20
Palestinian Responses to the Holocaust .......................................................................................... 21
Worldliness & The Oppositional Public Intellectual ....................................................................... 25
A Challenge Accepted: Willing the Impossible ............................................................................... 28
A Series of “What Ifs?” and The Birth of a Method ......................................................................... 31
Dissertation Overview ....................................................................................................................... 33

**Chapter 2. An Impossible Yet Necessary Task: Said & Arendt in Counterpoint** . 35

The Question of Palestine: Said’s Political Vision .......................................................................... 37
Connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba: A Contrapuntal Reading ............................................... 38
Exilic Beginnings: Dispersion and Alterity ....................................................................................... 42
Envisioning a New Polity: Non-belonging and Binationalism ......................................................... 47
The Question of Israel: Arendt’s Political Vision ............................................................................. 50
Wrestling with Zionism: Thoughtless Escape, Thoughtful Action .................................................. 52
There Is Always a Choice to Be Made: The Social Parvenu or the Conscious Pariah ................. 56
Envisioning a New Polity: Non-Belonging and Binationalism ......................................................... 62

**Chapter 3. Willing the Impossible through Storytelling & Photography: Said & Arendt in Praxis** ................................................................. 68

The Possibilities of Narrative & Photography: From Representation to Emancipation ... 68
The Possibilities of Storytelling: “Fictional” Versus “Real” Stories ................................................. 74
Willing the Impossible through Civil Imagination & the Civil Contract of Photography ... 83

**Chapter 4. Creating the Occasions & Conditions of Possibility Necessary for Willing the Impossible** ............................................................................. 89
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5.</td>
<td>Nostalgia, Continuous Hauntings &amp; Melancholic Resilience: Palestinian Life Stories, (Post)memories &amp; Associated Photographs</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td></td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haifa Staiti</td>
<td></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Qumsieh</td>
<td></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ran Vered</td>
<td></td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itai Erdal</td>
<td></td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofira Roll</td>
<td></td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td></td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haifa</td>
<td></td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td></td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ran</td>
<td></td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itai</td>
<td></td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ofira</td>
<td></td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinians' Responses to Their Own Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinians' Responses to the Other Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israelis' Responses to Their Own Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israelis' Responses to the Other Community</td>
<td></td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 8.</td>
<td>Willing the Impossible in the Contemporary Moment</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revisiting the Question of Palestine</td>
<td></td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba: A Contrapuntal Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exilic Beginnings: Dispersion and Alterity</td>
<td></td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning a New Polity: Non-belonging and Binationalism</td>
<td></td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

Revisiting the Question of Israel ................................................................. 309  
Wrestling with Zionism: Thoughtless Escape, Thoughtful Action ................ 309  
There Is Always a Choice to Be Made: The Social Parvenu or the Conscious Pariah ................................................................. 313  
Envisioning a New Polity: Non-belonging and Binationalism .................... 319  
Revisiting Willing the Impossible through Storytelling and Photography ........ 322  
The Possibilities of Narrative & Photography: From Representation to Emancipation ................................................................. 323  
The Possibilities of Storytelling: “Fictional” Versus “Real” Stories ............... 328  
Willing the Impossible through Civil Imagination & the Civil Contract of Photography ................................................................. 332  

## Conclusion  Reflections on an Intentionally Utopian Ethnographic Project & the Possibility for Multiple New Beginnings ......................................................... 336  
Successes & Strengths .................................................................................. 337  
Limitations & Weaknesses .......................................................................... 339  
A Method in Development ........................................................................... 341  
The Possibility for Multiple New Beginnings: The Contemporary Moment & Beyond ................................................................. 343  

## References .................................................................................................. 345  
Appendix A ...................................................................................................... 360  
Appendix B ...................................................................................................... 375  
  Recruitment Cover Letter/Email (Version: October 16, 2014) .................... 375  
Appendix C ...................................................................................................... 376  
  Recruitment Notice (Version: October 16, 2014) ...................................... 376  
Appendix D ...................................................................................................... 378  
  Initial Consent Form (Version: October 16, 2014) ...................................... 378  
Appendix E ...................................................................................................... 389  
Appendix F ...................................................................................................... 392  
  Addendum to Appendix E: Semi-structured Questions for Photograph-based Oral History Interviews (Version: December 9, 2014) ............................................ 392  
Appendix G ...................................................................................................... 393  
  Supplemental Consent Form (Version: June 22, 2015) ............................... 393  
Appendix H ...................................................................................................... 400  
  Semi-Structured Questions for Reflective Interviews (Version: October 16, 2014) ................................................................. 400  
Appendix I ...................................................................................................... 402  
  Second Supplemental Consent Form (Version: February 22, 2016) ............. 402  
Appendix J ...................................................................................................... 405  
  Third Supplemental Consent Form (Version: May 17, 2019)  ......................... 405  

x
Chapter 1.

An Introduction to the Task in Hand and a Challenge Accepted

...[I]n a situation like that of the Palestinians and Israelis, hardly anyone can be expected to drop the quest for national identity and go straight to a history-transcending universal rationalism. Each of the two communities, misled though both may be, is interested in its origins, its history of suffering, its need to survive. To recognize these imperatives, as components of national identity, and try to reconcile them, rather than dismiss them as so much non-factual ideology, strikes me as the task in hand (Said, 1984, p. 47).

He also said: If I die before you,

my will is the impossible.

I asked: Is the impossible far off?

He said: A generation away.

I asked: And if I die before you?

He said: I shall pay my condolences to Mount Galilee,

and write, “the aesthetic is to reach

Poise.” And now, don’t forget:

If I die before you, my will is the impossible.

-Mahmoud Darwish, “Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading,” translated from Arabic by Mona Anis

On May 14, 1948 the state of Israel proclaimed its independence establishing a national home for the Jewish people following the horrors of the Holocaust. However, for Palestinians this proclamation was fundamentally tied to the Nakba or ‘catastrophe,’ a term used to mark their displacement, dispossession, and subsequent occupation by the
This cycle was strikingly evident to me when, on January 25, 2009, I received the email that inspired this dissertation (Appendix A). Its subject line simply read “HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS…” however, the body of the email began by proclaiming that “THE GRANDCHILDREN OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS FROM WORLD WAR II ARE DOING TO THE PALESTINIANS EXACTLY WHAT WAS DONE TO THEM BY NAZI GERMANY…” As I scrolled down, the email revealed itself to be a photo essay comprised of 84 juxtaposed images: on the left, black and white or sepia coloured photographs documenting the persecution and destruction of Jews by the Nazis during the Holocaust; on the right, colour photographs documenting the oppression and killing of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. The contrasting sets of images were grouped under five headings: “BUILDING WALLS & FENCES TO KEEP PEOPLE IN PRISONS,” “CHECKPOINTS NOT TO ALLOW PEOPLE BASIC FREEDOMS OF MOVEMENT,” “ARRESTS & HARASSMENTS,” “DESTROYING HOMES & LIVELIHOODS,” and “GIFTS (WITH LOVE) FROM THE CHILDREN OF PEACE-LOVING & CIVILIZED COUNTRIES.” The photographs document various acts of political violence, as well as the suffering and trauma they entail, beginning with the erection of fences and separation barriers, and ending with the charred, maimed, and broken bodies of young children. These unsettling photographs are followed by a final block of text:

---

1 Throughout this dissertation I use the terms “Jewish,” “Israeli,” and “Zionist,” as well as “Arab” and “Palestinian.” My choice of wording in each instance was carefully thought through and thus deliberate, often reflecting the terminology used by the scholar whose work I am engaging with and/or the topic, issue and/or events being discussed at the time. Because of the complexity of these words and their meanings, both separately and together, it would have been impossible and misleading to try and standardize the terminology.

2 Please note that this email is comprised of numerous photographs related to the Holocaust and the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people and thus contains graphic content. Furthermore, research regarding the original source and/or author of the photo essay indicates that it most likely originates from a January 16, 2009 post on the website of American political scientist Norman Finkelstein (2009). That said, an October 9, 2015 post on the blog Citizen Action Monitor states that the photo essay was originally compiled by the head of the Norwegian Embassy in Saudi Arabia (DesertPeace, 2015). The email has been reproduced in this dissertation under the fair dealing provision in Canada’s Copyright Act, as determined by Simon Fraser University’s (SFU) Copyright Office.
THE CLASSIC PROPAGANDA MACHINE – YOU WILL FIND IT IN BLACK & WHITE IN ALL AMERICAN AND SOME OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES HISTORY BOOKS, ENCYLOPEDIAS, LIBRARIES, MUSEUMS... THAT DEPICTS A YOUNG JEWISH BOY WITH HIS HANDS UP WHILE NAZI TROOPS POINT THEIR GUNS AT HIM AND HIS FAMILY IN ORDER TO EXPEL THEM FROM THEIR HOMES...

(IT’S SUPPOSE TO MAKE YOU SYMPATHIZE WITH THE VICTIMS & TO SUPPORT THEIR CAUSE FOR JUSTICE & A HOMELAND).

THE ISRAELIS PRACTICE THE SAME TACTICS.

Two final sets of contrasted images conclude the essay. Repeated twice on the left is one of the most iconic images from the Holocaust. Taken in 1943 during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the photograph, as described above, shows a Jewish boy holding his hands up in surrender as a SS soldier stands behind him with his machine gun raised. The photograph is juxtaposed on the right by two lesser known photographs: the first shows a Palestinian boy being arrested and/or detained by six Israel Defense Force (IDF) soldiers – his fear apparently so great that he has wet himself; in the second a Palestinian toddler looks up into the barrel of the machine gun pointed toward him by a lone IDF solider.

As I arrived at the end of the email I found myself flooded with ambivalence. Born, raised, and educated in Canada, I learned of the enormity of the horrors enacted during the Holocaust and thus have deep respect and empathy for the uniqueness of Jewish suffering. As such, I was frustrated by the email’s reductive and crass comparison of these two distinct traumas. Yet the email was also a stark reminder of how these problematic master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba continue to fan the fires of the now decades long and ever worsening Palestinian/Israeli conflict. As a second generation Palestinian-Canadian and a member of the Nakba postmemory generation, my own life has been impacted by the trauma and suffering my family has experienced because of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the resultant displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians, and their subsequent occupation by the Israeli state from 1967 to the present. 3 Through this lens, I recognized and appreciated the attempt to highlight the ironic yet organic connection

---

3 For more on mine and my family’s memories and postmemories of the Nakba, see my pieces Negotiating Palestine Through the Familial Gaze: A Photographic (Post)memory Project (2012) and From Palestinian to the Canadian Diaspora: The Multiple Social Biographies of the Musleh Family’s Photographic Archive (2015).
between the Holocaust and the Nakba. Exasperated by reductive comparisons of Jewish and Palestinian suffering, yet simultaneously eager to explore their natural connection, particularly with regard to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, I tasked myself with trying to reconcile the contending master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba. Little did I know that I had just accepted the challenge of “willing the impossible” (Butler, 2012, p. 222).

The Task in Hand: Contending Master Narratives & Collective Memories of the Holocaust & the Nakba

Geoffrey Cubitt (2007) defines collective memory⁴ as “the species of ideological fiction...which presents particular social entities as the possessors of a stable mnemonic capacity that is collectively exercised, and that presents particular...representations of a supposedly collective past as the natural expressions of such collective mnemonic capacity” (p. 18). While he acknowledges that the very notion of a homogenous and static national collective memory understood and adhered to by all is highly problematic, Cubitt rightly contends that such forms of remembering nevertheless often play a role in the formation of national identities and the privileging of certain versions of the past over others. States, for instance, often use national commemorative practices as a tool to solidify political and social cohesion by designating particular events as “symbolic markers” of their national collective identity and then “enlisting members of society collectively in the articulation of that vision” (p. 222). However, Cubitt warns that such forms of collective remembering can generate a “dangerously idealized” (p. 223) notion of the function of social memory⁵ whereby these powerful processes are used by one group to the detriment of another. Put another way, as a means by which to legitimize their power, agendas, and policies, these groups and institutions often work to produce...

---

⁴ It should be noted that not all scholars working within the field of memory studies equate collective memory with national and/or state memory, a distinction that Cubitt himself acknowledges. However, I have chosen to use Cubitt’s general definition of collective memory and his analysis of national collective memory here as I believe they effectively illustrate the manner in which collective memories of traumatic events are made manifest by governmental and cultural institutions.

⁵ Cubitt defines social memory as “the process (or processes) through which a knowledge or awareness of past events or conditions is developed and sustained within human societies, and through which, therefore, individuals within those societies are given a sense of a past that extends beyond what they themselves personally remember” (pp. 14-15).
and maintain adherence to a shared collective history that centralizes certain experiences while marginalizing, if not excluding, others.

However, divergent understandings of the past, particularly those relating to traumatic and violent events, undoubtedly complicate attempts to establish a static and homogeneous national collective memory. As such, memories of the past that challenge national master narratives of these events are often actively negated or ‘forgotten’ by the groups and institutions responsible for the creation, dissemination, and maintenance of collective national histories and identities. Cubitt conceptualizes such forgetting as “a deficiency of public recognition” that fails to accord these events and their victims “their due place in the stories of the past [which] politicians refer to in their speeches, that textbooks impart to schoolchildren, that public monuments evoke, and that historians compose” (p. 54). Importantly, he also asserts that forgetting “is not a lapsing of awareness, such as might arise by accident or through the simple passage of time, but [rather] a form or expression of injustice that cries out to be rectified” (p. 54). Calls for social justice and the recognition and/or rectification of such forgetting can be found in the articulation of alternative memories of traumatic events, thus complicating, disrupting, and/or contradicting the master narratives promoted by national collective memories. Such counter-narratives serve as a significant form of counter-memory, defined by George Lipsitz (2001) as:

…a way of remembering and forgetting that starts at the local, the immediate, and the personal. Unlike historical narratives that begin with the totality of human existence and then locate specific actions and events within that totality, counter-memory starts with the particular and the specific and then builds outward toward a total story. Counter-memory looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myth that seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past. Counter-memory embodies aspects of myth and aspects of history, but it retains an enduring suspicion of both categories. Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experiences. (p. 213)

---

6 Molly Andrews (2004) defines counter-narratives as “the stories which people tell and live which offer resistance, either implicitly or explicitly, to dominant cultural narratives” (p. 1) or master narratives.
Leading from this, Cubitt contends that “the prevention of forgetting” (p. 55) entails remembering traumatic events and “the moral claims” (p. 54) of their victims previously relegated to oblivion, fulfilling the “moral obligation” (p. 55) of providing a truthful accounting of the past, and the attainment of justice for those wronged and/or injured – goals assisted by the articulation and circulation of counter-narratives and counter-memories.

This dynamic cycle of remembering and forgetting is clearly enacted in the contending master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba, which have helped create and continue to sustain the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Of particular importance are the conflicting narratives and memories of the contentious events of 1948. The traditional Israeli narrative generally goes as follows: The establishment of the Israeli state was crucial for Jewish survival given the ever-present threat of anti-Semitism and fears of annihilation, particularly during and after the Holocaust. Although Zionist leaders agreed to the establishment of two separate states in Palestine – one Jewish and one Arab as per the November 1947 United Nations partition resolution – the Arabs rejected it. When the British Mandate of Palestine expired in May 1948, the Israeli state was proclaimed and the armies of five surrounding Arab countries (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan) attacked. As a newly birthed state, the Israelis viewed themselves as “a Jewish David” against “an Arab Goliath” (Shlaim, 2004, p. 162) and heroically fought for their survival, ultimately winning against enormous odds in the War of Independence. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians did flee during the war, but they did so voluntarily and/or at the bidding of Arab leaders, rather than the goading of Jewish authorities and/or paramilitary groups. Since 1948, it has been the stubbornness of Arab leaders and violent acts of Palestinian terrorism that have forestalled the peace process (Adwan, Bar-on, Naveh, & PRIME, 2012; Pappé, 2007; Shlaim, 2004; Zertal, 2005).

The Palestinian counter-narrative of 1948, however, generally precedes as follows: Early Zionist colonization of Palestine culminated in the Nakba or catastrophe of

---

1948, which brought about the end of Palestinian society as it had been known. Approximately 600,000 to 760,000 Palestinians were displaced, dispossessed, and thus made refugees at the hands of the new Israeli state, while another 150,000 remained under its rule as internal refugees. During the course of the war, somewhere between 418 to 531 villages were depopulated and destroyed, plus more than twelve urban areas, including the movable and immovable assets of their now absent Palestinian inhabitants, were taken over by new Israeli citizens. While 13,000 Palestinians were killed and several thousand more injured, a number of atrocities were also committed by Zionist paramilitary groups such as the Haganah, Irgun, and Lehi (also known as the Stern Gang). While over thirty massacres occurred, the most famous took place in Dayr Yassin at the hands of the Irgun and Lehi when 245 to 254 Palestinians were killed, women and girls were raped, and the bodies of the dead mutilated. Unprepared for what was to befall them in 1948 and failed by Palestinian and Arab leaders who purported to represent them, but who were more focused on their own objects and inter-nation infighting, the Palestinians suffered while the world remained silent. Not only has Israel not recognized or taken responsibility for the Nakba, but the catastrophe continues today for Palestinians living in refugee camps, under Israeli occupation, and, to a much lesser degree, in diaspora. Responsibility for the failure of the peace process lies squarely with Israel who refuses Palestinians the right of return and independent statehood free of Israeli control and occupation (Abdel Jawad, 2007; Abu Sitta, 2010; Adwan, Bar-on, Naveh, & PRIME, 2012; Khalidi, 2004, 2006; Kimmerling & Migdal, 2003; Masalha, 2012; Morris, 2004, 2008; Pappé, 2007; Sa’di, 2007; Sa’di & Abu-Lughod, 2007).

These conflicting national narratives of 1948, which find their origins in the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba, continue to bind Palestinians and Israelis together in a dangerous cycle of competing memories of victimhood and survival, whereby “[t]he destruction of the collective memory of the Other” is achieved “through the construction of one’s own” (Gur-Ze’ev & Pappé, 2003, p. 93). That is, remembering the Holocaust in Israel has required the forgetting of the Palestinians, pre-1948 Palestine, and the Nakba, while Palestinians’ commemoration and documentation of the

---

8 The Hagana was the primary paramilitary group in Mandate Palestine from 1920 to 1948. Following Israeli independence in 1948, the Hagana became the Israel Defense Force (IDF), while the Irgun and Lehi continued to operate independently until both groups disbanded later the same year. For more information on the activities of these paramilitary groups, particularly with regard to the Nakba, see Morris (2004) and Smith (2010).
Nakba have been accompanied by varied responses to the Holocaust ranging from empathy to denial.

**Remembering the Holocaust, Forgetting the Nakba**

In her speech at the Second Annual Holocaust Remembrance Lecture in 2002, Sarah Roy (2003), Senior Research Scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University, herself a child of Holocaust survivors, astutely addressed the Jewish community's inability to reconcile the horrors of the Holocaust with the suffering of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli state. Her insightfulness denotes the significance of remembering and forgetting within the Jewish community as it relates to the Palestinians:

...in the post-Holocaust world, Jewish memory has faltered – even failed – in one critical respect: it has excluded the reality of Palestinian suffering and Jewish culpability therein. As a people, we have been unable to link the creation of Israel with the displacement of the Palestinians. We have been unwilling to see, let alone remember, that finding our place meant the loss of theirs. Perhaps one reason for the ferocity of the conflict today is that Palestinians are insisting on their voice despite our continued and desperate efforts to subdue it. (p. 176).

As various Israeli and Jewish scholars have demonstrated, this failure of Jewish memory found its historic roots in the early formation of Zionist Israeli collective memory, for in order to memorialize the Holocaust and Jewish redemption through the establishment of the state of Israel the Palestinian people, their ties to the land, and their suffering had to be forgotten.

**The Nazi Enemy Reincarnated**

According to Israeli historian Idith Zertal (2005), the close temporal proximity of the Holocaust with the birth of the Israeli nation, as well as the vital role of the former in securing and ultimately moulding the latter, "yielded [a] kind of catastrophic messianism, and a new, or new-old, myth of destruction and redemption; of powerlessness and empowerment that was removed from both the historical and the political" (p. 167). She argues that the tie between the power and political practices of the new Israeli state with the Jewish community’s history of powerlessness and victimhood stemming from the Holocaust began during the war and was not the result of any formal political decision, but rather political and educational efforts geared toward nation-building. Therefore, the
Israeli discourse of power, as she labels it, was seen not only as a necessity within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also as "a form of atonement, endowing the Holocaust and the history of the Diaspora with retroactive, belated meaning" (p. 167):

The process was dialectic. Memory of the Holocaust invested the local conflict with significance, and extracted it from its political and historical dimensions, while the discourse of the conflict consolidated and reinforced the role of the Holocaust as the constituent myth of the Zionist-Israeli meta-narrative. Both the Holocaust and the ongoing conflict were thus detached from their specific historical contexts, from their complexities and inner contradictions as historical events; borders between them became blurred, turning them into closed, critique-proof mythical realities, bound together and sustaining one another. The Jewish Holocaust, and the Israeli power, had thus become a central factor in consolidating the Israeli identity and in fortifying social cohesion and solidarity in Israel. (pp. 167-168)

Furthermore, Zertal argues that the Holocaust, its victims, and its survivors were turned into “ideological and political arguments in the service of the state” (p. 168). The overlapping of the Holocaust on to the situation in Palestine resulted in the soon to be new Israelis seeing themselves as “the Holocaust licensed heirs” (p. 173) and the Palestinian Arabs, not as an indigenous population who also had a cultural and religious history with strong ties to the land, but rather as a continuation of the Nazi threat that they had just escaped. She cites the diaries and commentaries of Israeli fighters involved in the events of 1948 who were horrified by the cruelty of their fellow Israeli soldiers towards Arab villagers, comparing it to that of Nazi troops during WWII. Zertal stresses that the reversal of roles was finally complete: “The licensed heirs of the Holocaust had transformed themselves into efficient and murderous ‘Germans.’ While the ‘reincarnation’ of the Nazis...simple Arab villagers, became by this deed the total victims of the misdeed of transposing the Holocaust into the local conflict” (p. 173). Such rhetorical positioning of the Israeli state and its leaders as the heirs to the Holocaust’s dead and the Palestinian Arabs as the ever present Nazi threat began with David Ben-Gurion in the pre-1948 period and still rears it head in Israeli political discourse today.

What Zertal implies, but never directly states, is that by transposing the Holocaust on to the conflict in Palestine, claiming to act on behalf of the six million Jews killed, and taking on the mind set of the German soldiers while positioning the Palestinian Arabs as Nazi enemies, even in the earliest formations of Israeli collective memory the Palestinians were forgotten and negated. Put another way, by the ability of
“Israeli Holocaust discourse” (p. 173) to strip away the humanity, lived experiences, and histories of those they understood as their ever present enemy, the Palestinians become devoid of any historical context or meaning. The Palestinian people were not seen, but rather seen through. By necessity they had been forgotten.

**Creating a Land Without People for a People Without a Land**

If early Israeli collective memory necessitated the forgetting of the Palestinian people as a distinct group with a particular culture and history, it also required the physical and psychological removal of the indigenous Palestinian Arab population and their lingering ghosts from the geographical and historical landscape on which the rebirth and redemption of the Jewish people was to take place. While the phrase ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ was the leading Zionist slogan leading up to 1948, the architects of the new Israeli state were not so naïve. As Israeli military leader and politician Moshe Dayan stated in 1969, “[t]here is not a single place built in [Israel] that did not have a former Arab population” (as quoted in Khalidi, 2006, p. xxxi). Therefore, this often referred to ‘land without a people for a people without a land’ did not exist, but rather needed to be created as part of Israeli nation building – a process that called for the Palestinians’ ties to the land to be forgotten.

First, Zionist leaders understood that without the transfer of the indigenous Arab populations outside of Palestine a Jewish state could not and would not be realized (Masalha, 1992, 1997; Palumbo 1987). As Nur Masalha (1997) demonstrates, from 1948 to 1966 the 150,000 Palestinians that remained within Israeli boarders as present absentee were subject to martial law and military governance in the name of Israeli state security. However, in truth such military rule served three purposes: first, to ensure that Palestinian refugees scattered throughout Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip were not able to return to their homes and villages; second, to evacuate semi-abandoned and still populated Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages of their remaining inhabitants who were to be transferred to other parts of the country; and third, to have continued control over Palestinians living in Israel who were isolated from the country’s Jewish population.⁹

---

⁹ If from 1948 to 1966 the Israeli government had to concern themselves only with the small Arab minority within its borders, after the June War of 1967, in which Israel gained control over the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria, it now had
Second, since 1948 multiple "[s]cenes of [e]rasure" (Swedenburg, 2003, p. 38) were created by the Israeli state as a means by which to remove the ghosts of the landscape’s former inhabitants. Israeli scholar Ilan Pappé (2007) terms this process “[t]he [m]emoricide of the Nakba” (p. 225). This form of forgetting was most often enacted through the de-Palestinianization or de-Arabization and then Hebrewization and/or Judaization of the Israeli landscape and history (Benvenisti, 2000; Masalha, 2012; Pappé, 2007). Land formally owned and/or inhabited by Palestinians was confiscated, depopulated and/or destroyed, and then built upon by Israelis – the areas’ former Arab names being replaced by Hebrew ones. Such sites, Ted Swedenbury (2003) contends, “portray Israel as a ‘return’ to a ‘previous state of affairs’…and render nugatory the existence of an Arab community in Palestine in the interim between the departure and the return” (p.54).

Examples of this material contestation between Palestinian and Israeli collective memory abound. Consider for instance, the numerous “green lungs” (Pappé, 2007, p. 229) in the form of Israeli forests funded and established by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) that were developed on the ruins of numerous Palestinian villages destroyed and depopulated in 1948 (Masalha, 2012; Pappé, 2007). These areas not only present their visitors with a sanctified version of Jewish/Israeli history and geography, but are also meant to “prevent all acts of commemoration at these ‘forests,’ let alone visits of return, by Palestinian refugees whose houses lie entombed under these trees and playgrounds” (Pappé, 2007, p. 229). Furthermore, Jewish settlements often literally covered over Palestinian memory. Jewish settlers moved into the few emptied Palestinian villages that were not destroyed in 1948 and took over the land and its buildings, thereby creating to deal with a new and much larger demographic problem, as 1.5 million Arabs were now under their administration. Although the nature of the policy of transfer changed after 1967 the battle for “more land and less Arabs” (Masalha, 1997, p. xvii) did not. Masalha (1997) is correct in arguing that Israel’s victory over Egypt, Jordan and Syria in the June War of 1967 stands as a determining event in the history of Zionism, the Israeli state, and the Palestinians. First, by seizing the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights, Zionists had finally achieved its goal of controlling all of Palestine – an achievement that resulted in yet another Palestinian refugee problem with Jordan absorbing an additional 300,000 people from the West Bank and Syria taking in 80,000 people from the Golan Heights. Second, these land seizures, in combination with Israel’s astonishingly quick six day victory, the resulting explosion of Messianic Zionism, and increased Israeli confidence, created an unavoidable revival of the transfer policy. Third, this revitalization of the concept of transfer assisted the process of ‘redeeming the land’ that had begun during the Holocaust, although now this redemption was sought through the formation of illegal Jewish settlements within the Occupied Territories. The establishment of these settlements from 1967 to the present, as well as the erection of the separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank, has resulted in the illegal confiscation of additional Palestinian land.
their own memories at the expense of the previous inhabitants. Probably the most well researched of these is the Palestinian village of ‘Ayn Hawd, whose original inhabitants became refugees following the village’s fall to the Israeli military in 1948. The village then became the Jewish artist colony of Ein Hod in 1953 founded by Marcel Janco, a Dada artist exiled during the Holocaust. Some of the previous inhabitants of ‘Ayn Hawd subsequently re-established a temporary village only two kilometers away which was seen by the Israeli government as an ineligible settlement and “unrecognized gray village” with no state sponsored services (Slyomovics, 1998, p. xvii).

However, no where is the remembering of the Holocaust and forgetting of the Palestinians, pre-1948 Palestine, and the Nakba more blatantly enacted on Israeli soil than in the construction of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. Seemingly unbeknownst to its visitors, the museum is built on the ruins of ‘Ayn Karim, a former Palestinian village which had a population of approximately 3,200 Christians and Muslims until it was bombed and emptied by Jewish forces between April and July of 1948 (Khalidi, 2006; Mattar, 1983; Swedenburg, 2003). As of 1985 it was believed that an estimated 30,000 former residents of ‘Ayn Karim and their descents were living in refugee camps in Jordan (Swedenburg, 2003). Renamed Ein Karem – its assigned Hebraizated name – the village is now completely inhabited by Israelis. Were the fate of ‘Ayn Karim not shocking enough, visible from Yad Vashem are the ruins of Dayr Yassin, site of the aforementioned and most notorious massacre of the Nakba (Mattar, 1983; Swedenburg, 2003). Today the land is used for numerous Israeli industries and houses a sanatorium (Khalidi, 2006). Yad Vashem does carry traces of the generic but ever threatening Arab through the depiction of the Grand Mufti Hajj Amin Al-Husayni, the leader of the Palestinian national movement from the late 1920s to 1948, as a Nazi collaborator, thereby implicating the whole of the Arab people in the crimes of the Nazis (Swedenburg, 2003). Such managed representations of history fall easily into the theories of Cubitt and the arguments of Zertal, for as Swedenburg (2003) rightly asserts, “Yad Vashem, monument to the memory of human suffering, a warning against the dangers of ignoring persecution, is itself a material act of repression, an active forgetting” (p. 46).10

---

10 Yad Vashem is not the only museum project in Israel that is using the discourse of the Holocaust to actively forget pre-1948 Palestine and the Nakba. In February 2004 the Israeli government and the municipality of Jerusalem approved the construction of the Jerusalem branch
Denying the Nakba

The third means by which the Holocaust is remembered at the expense of the Palestinians, pre-1948 Palestine, and the Nakba within Israeli collective memory is through the denial of the Nakba as a whole. As alluded to earlier by Roy, there has been an unwillingness on the part of Israeli and Jewish memory to connect the creation of the state of Israel with the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians and thus an inability to reconcile Jewish suffering with that of the Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli state. Unfortunately, such selective memory stems from Israel’s refusal to accept legal or moral accountability for their 1948 actions. Ahmad Sa’di (2007) argues that Israelis and their supports utilize three modes of denial to sidestep moral responsibility for the Nakba: “denying or hiding the historically documented violence; neutralizing the moral entailments of the Nakba by shifting the focus to less than relevant issues; and hard-heartedly affirming the facts of the Nakba but denying them any moral import” (p. 287). Such forms of memory management have ensured that the Nakba and Palestinian refugee problem have not been on the table for any peace negotiations between the Palestinians, Israelis, and their peace brokers. It is here that historical collective memory demonstrates its contemporary role as an impasse to peace – for Israelis the conflict only begins in 1967, for the Palestinians it began and has always revolved around 1948 (Pappé, 2007).

Evidence of Israel’s efforts to deny and/or negate the memory of the Nakba began receiving international media attention in 2009. First, in April a tour guide at Yad Vashem was fired after visitors complained that he had “likened” the Holocaust to the Nakba and mentioned the 1948 massacre in Dayr Yassin (BBC, 2009, April 23, n.p.). Yad Vashem justified the firing by stating that it “is an apolitical organization and as such is careful to ensure that the professional work of Holocaust remembrance and commemoration will be separated from any political agenda...Discussions of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are not appropriate during an educational guiding” (Yad of the Museum of Tolerance, a project founded by the Simon Wiesenthal Center (n.d.) which describes itself as “a global human rights organization” that “confronts anti-Semitism, hate and terrorism, promotes human rights and dignity, stands with Israel, defends the safety of Jews worldwide, and teaches the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations.” Shockingly, the site on which the museum is built was once the home of the Ma’man Allah (Mamilla) Cemetery, which had been in use by Palestinians from the time of the Crusades until their uprooting in 1948 (Makdisi, 2010).
Vasheem’s Estee Yaari as quoted in BBC, 2009 April 23). Then in July Israel announced that the word Nakba would be removed from Arabic language textbooks that Israeli-Palestinian students had been using since 2007 (BBC, 2009, July 22), as “no state could be expected to portray its own foundation as a catastrophe” (Education Minister Gideon Saar as quoted in BBC, 2009, July 22). Two years later, on March 22, 2011, Israel passed the Nakba Law. Originally the law proposed making the commemoration of Palestinian Nakba Day on May 15th, the same day as Israeli Independence Day, a crime punishable by three years in prison (Gunneflo, 2011). Ultimately, however, the law was restricted to barring organizations that receive state money from funding activities or events that “deny the existence of Israel as the state of the Jewish people or its democratic character, vandalism or physical contempt for the Israel flag or state symbol, or marking Israeli Independence Day as a day of mourning” (Kadari-Ovadia, 2019).

Pappé (2007) argues that for Israelis acknowledging Palestinians as the victims of Israeli actions is deeply upsetting – not only does it mean facing the injustices inflicted on the Palestinians by the state of Israel, but it also calls into question the very foundations on which the state was founded, thereby raising innumerable moral and ethical questions which are sure to impact the future of Israel and the role of the Holocaust in Israeli collective memory. As Saul Friedlander (1993) argues,[7] if a solution of the decades-long conflict between Zionism/Israel and its neighbors materializes, a central component of the prevailing Jewish attitudes will most likely be altered. The collective anxiety about the persistent existential threat and the ever-present collectively experienced death and mourning syndromes will recede. Jewish existence may attain a semblance of normalcy. Such an evolution will of necessity have an impact on the centrality of the Shoah in the narration of the Jewish past. The converse would be tragic: the possibility that the memory of catastrophes and particularly of the Holocaust will be so deeply engrained in Jewish collective consciousness as to become an impediment to the progress towards peace. (pp. xi-xii)

Yet over the past few decades a courageous minority of Israelis have begun to call their nation’s problematic master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust, as well as its forgetting of the Palestinians, pre-1948 Palestine, and the Nakba, into question. We witness this shift most clearly in the research of Israel’s new historians (many of whom I engage with above) whose work with newly released official

---

11 Shoah is the Hebrew word for the Holocaust.
Israeli military and state documents beginning in the 1980s not only disproved the traditional Zionist master narrative of the War of Independence, but also substantiated Palestinian counter-narratives of it.\footnote{For more on the emergence and significance of Israel’s new historians, see Avi Shlaim’s 2004 piece “La guerre des historiens Israéliens [The war between Israeli historians].”} It is also evident in the work of various non-profit and non-governmental organizations (many of which are referenced throughout this dissertation), most notably Zochrot\footnote{Zochrot is the female of ‘remembering’ in Hebrew.} (2014), which promotes “acknowledgement and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba…and the reconceptualization of the Return as the imperative redress of the Nakba and a chance for a better life for all the country’s inhabitants.” These Israelis have chosen to remember the Palestinians, pre-1948 Palestine and/or the Nakba. That is, they have realized that they can acknowledge the Palestinians’ origins, history of suffering, and need to survive alongside their own.

**Remembering the Nakba**

Around the same time that Israel’s new historians began challenging the master narratives and collective memories of their own nation, predominantly Palestinian scholars were tackling the issue of memory from the perspective of the Palestinians. These authors pinpoint the Nakba as the flashpoint for Palestinian collective memory and the strengthening of earlier forms of national identity (Khalidi, 1997; Sa’di and Abu-Lughod, 2007), and thus “the demarcation line between two qualitatively opposing periods” (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod, 2007, p. 3). As Rosemary Sayigh (2015) demonstrates Palestinian counter-narratives and counter-memories of 1948 have most often been preserved and/or documented through oral histories over the course of three key periods: “beginnings” from 1948 to 1982; “development” from 1982 to 2002; and “democratization” 2002 to the present (p. 194).\footnote{While I use Sayigh’s temporal categories to organize my discussion, my arguments and examples do not explicitly mirror hers, although parallels do exist, particularly with regard to the second and third periods. The greatest deviation comes in our treatment of the first period, as she focuses on the professional recording of oral histories of the Nakba beginning in the early 1970s, while I attend to how newly refugeeed Palestinians used storytelling as a means of agency, resistance, and prosperity in the face of their unexpected displacement and dispossession.}
Beginnings

Whether driven from their homes by fear, military pressure or forced expulsion, during the Nakba Palestinians generally fled with little more than the clothing on their backs – lost were the few mementos documenting their lives prior to their displacement and dispossession. Unable to withstand the military forces destroying their society and simultaneously abandoned by the ineffective leadership of the Palestinian and Arab elite, what means did these refugees have to tell the world of their suffering and the injustices enacted upon them? Interestingly, an elderly Palestinian woman being interviewed about her experiences during the Nakba provides the simplest answer. When asked why she had never publicly told of her experiences she is said to have reacted with bewilderment asking, “How can those without lips whistle?” (as cited in Abu-Lughod & Sa’di, 2007, 10).

Extravagances such as the telephone, radio receiver, and typewriter had appeared in Palestine during the Mandate period, however, these new technologies were inaccessible and of little use to the bulk of the Palestinian population, the majority of whom were peasant farmers and who had a literacy rate of only 27% in 1947 (Ayalon, 2004). Preoccupied with the exigencies of survival and without the educational, financial, political and/or material resources to record and disseminate their counter-narratives and counter-memories of 1948, Palestinians turned to the oral medium of storytelling as a vehicle for personal and collective agency and posterity (Cubitt, 2007; Jackson, 2002; Seikaly, 2009).

Michael Jackson (2002) observes that when forced into the refugee experience – marked as it is “by fleetingness, uncertainty, and flux – by what has slipped through one’s hands rather than what is firmly held” – refugees inhabit a state of consciousness defined by significant oscillation between extremes, i.e.) “here and there, past and present, present and future, living and dead, immediate and imagined” (pp. 88-90). With no resolution to their predicament, such a sense of being out of place and time draws the individual back again and again to past moments of trauma and displacement which cannot be escaped either in the present or future. For refugees then, the act of storytelling becomes not only necessary, but also pedestrian. Stories of unhealed wounds often remain private, rather than public, and are passed between other refugees and subsequently to the generations that follow. It is this sharing and reliving of tragedy,
Jackson contends, that gives stories their power to affirm one’s agency, humanity, and survival in the face of disempowering circumstances.

The storyteller or al-Hakawati has always been a staple of Arab culture and so it is not surprising that storytelling and oral history were used by the post-1948 refugees as an “emergency science” (Masalha, 2012, p. 218). In line with Jackson, Masalha (2012) contends that “[i]ndividual accounts of struggle and revolt...displacement and exodus, survival and heroism served as a buffer against national disappearance” (p. 218). Given the situation in which the Palestinians found themselves after the events of 1948, storytelling based both on personal and collective memories became the only weapon available to those who had been excluded from the grand historical narrative of Jewish redemption and Israeli nationhood (Abu-Lughod & Sa’di, 2007; Zertal, 2005). Therefore, as Ahmad H. Sa’di and Lila Abu-Lughod (2007) explain, “Palestinian memory is, by dint of its preservation and social production under the conditions of its silencing by the thundering story of Zionism, dissident memory, counter-memory. It contributes to a counter-history” (p. 6).

In the absence of official government archives and other material data, the Palestinians were left almost exclusively with their memories and stories as the only records of their displacement, dispossession, and suffering. Yet as Walter J. Ong (1982) explains, “[b]y contrast with literate societies, oral societies can be characterized as homeostatic...[t]hat is to say, oral societies live very much in a present which keeps itself in equilibrium or homeostasis by sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance” (p. 46). Therefore we must remember that – particularly in, but not limited to, oral societies – memory is not static, homogeneous or complete, but rather fluid, heterogeneous, and fragmentary. It is because of these characteristics that memory, the storying of subjective experience, and the recording of oral history have been criticized and/or dismissed by some as too emotional and unreliable (Perry, 2005; Smith, 1999; Stone-Mediatore, 2003). However, in the case of the Palestinians, oral history has served as an invaluable tool to fill the gaping holes in the narrative of 1948 and the historiography of the Palestinian nation. It has also facilitated the understanding of how Palestinians have used memories of the Nakba to make sense of their past and the world in which they live. Unfortunately, as Rashid Khalidi (1997) explains, given the impact of writing and later the introduction of print culture, it has become commonplace for history “to be written about the strong than the weak, and that the views and exploits
of those able to read and write are perhaps naturally more frequently recorded...than those of the illiterate” (p. 89). With their ability to bring mental data into material existence through the creation of physical records, literacy and print culture allowed for the storage, organization, and archiving of information while concurrently enhancing and broadening dissemination capabilities (Cubitt, 2007). As such, after the Nakba the Palestinians found themselves trying to make their voices heard over those of the newly formed Israeli state, which was not only supported by other Western countries and in possession of military power, but also had extensive official archives (Sa’di & Abu-Lughod, 2007), most notably those housed in Yad Vashem.  

**Development**

Although, the Palestinian people have undoubtedly experienced multiple additional traumas since 1948, they have also gained new skills and means by which to document and transmit their stories of displacement and dispossession. Most significantly, the Palestinian literacy rate has gone from 27% in 1947 (Ayalon, 2004) to 97.2% in 2018 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). Needless to say Nakba survivors, their children, and even their grandchildren have now been able to create written archives to capture survivor memories of pre-1948 Palestine and the Nakba for posterity. Such literary and grassroots archival efforts began in the 1980s and 1990s with locally created and published village memorial books. Written and compiled by Nakba survivors, these books seek to reconstruct the authors’ villages of origin destroyed during or after the Nakba through hundreds of pages of cartographic maps, photographs, family trees, poetry, folklore, details of the villages’ daily activities and local customs, eyewitness accounts of the villages’ depopulation and destruction, and other various forms of information (Davis, 2011; Masalha, 2012; Slyomovics, 1998). Survivors’ living memory has been crucial in the documenting, reconstructing, and remapping of several destroyed villages and as of 2011 it was estimated that over 120 of these self-published memorial books documenting more than 400 villages exist (Davis, 2011).

---

15 As the largest Holocaust archive in the world, the Yad Vashem Archive houses astonishingly comprehensive and extensive records, including 125 million pages of documentation, 420,000 photographs, and 100,000 survivor testimonials. This is in addition to the online Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names, which documents the names and biographical details of nearly 4,800,000 of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust. For more extensive details on Yad Vashem’s efforts to document and commemorate the Holocaust, visit their website at [https://www.yadvashem.org](https://www.yadvashem.org).
However, institutional efforts at documenting these destroyed villages also begun in the 1980s, with the most comprehensive project being undertaken by the Center for Research and Documentation of Palestinian Society at Birzeit University in Ramallah, which in 1985 began producing a series of village monographs entitled *al-Qura al-Filastiniyya al Mudammara* (The Destroyed Palestinian Villages) (Davis, 2011; Masalha, 2012; Sylomovics, 1998). The proposed purpose of these monographs, which provide detailed information concerning the 400 plus villages destroyed in 1948, as well as those destroyed in the five years following the Nakba, was stated as follows:

Each study will attempt to the extent possible to describe the life of the people in the village such that the reader is able to picture it as living, inhabited and cultivated as it was in 1948 before it was destroyed. This portrayal will allow Palestinians, especially those who had left these villages at an early age or were born outside of them after 1948 to feel tied and connected to the villages, society and real country as if they had lived in it, rather than it just being a name on a map. (as quoted in Sylomovics, 1998, p. 3)

Further to the efforts undertaken by Birzeit University, Nakba survivor and Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi has arguably created and published the most authoritative and accessible memorial books concerning Palestinian life prior to 1948 and the villages depopulated and destroyed during the Nakba. The first of these publications is *Before their Diasopra: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948* (2004). In compiling the book’s 474 photos and contextualizing them within five key historical periods, Khalidi has created an invaluable visual history of Palestinian life as it was experienced before the Nakba. His second publication, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (2006), was an even greater undertaking. Through extensive field research, Khalidi and his team of researchers were able to provide the following data for each of the 418 villages covered in the book: a map showing the location of the village in Palestine/Israel; statistical information concerning the village and its inhabitants; the circumstance of the village before 1948; the village’s occupation and depopulation; the Israeli settlements created on the village’s land; use of the village in the present; and, when available, pictures of the village and/or its land before 1948 and in the present. The following comment by Khalidi regarding the nature of *All That Remains* clearly echoes the stated purpose of the Birzeit monographs:
In essence...All That Remains is a manual, a dictionary of destroyed villages presented individually, yet in context of their region and the events that swept them away. It is an attempt to breathe life into a name, to give body to a statistic, to render to these vanished villages a sense of their distinctiveness. It is in sum, meant to be a kind of “in memoriam.” (p. xvii)

Whether produced at a community level, housed at a research institution or internationally published, the aforementioned memorial books have allowed for the recording and archiving of crucial data necessary for a true understanding of the personal, cultural, and national lose suffered by the Palestinians during the Nakba. However, storytelling has continued to serve as a primary vehicle for personal and collective agency and posterity. Unfortunately, the number of living Nakba survivors is rapidly decreasing, making the recording of their stories and memories even more imperative. However, the combination of video recording and the Internet has increasingly become the best means by which to capture, preserve, and disseminate Palestinian counter-narratives and counter-memories of events before, during, and after 1948.

**Democratization**

Antoinette Burton (2005) states that “archive enterprises” are increasingly being used by “groups who believe that their histories have not been written because they have not been considered legitimate subjects of history...and hence archivization” (p. 2). Not surprisingly, groups such as the Palestinians have also turned to the Internet as a place to house their projects, thus representing a “tremendous challenge to the basic assumptions of archival fixity and materiality” (p. 2). Two of the most extensive projects seeking to archive Palestinian video testimonials of 1948 are the Nakba Archive and PalestineRemembered.com. Since 2002, the Nakba Archive (n.d. a; n.d. b) has been filming interviews with first generation Palestinian refugees in Lebanon about their lives in Palestine and the circumstances of their expulsion. The archive contains over 650 refugee testimonials representing 150 villages and towns. Since 2010, the Nakba Archive has partnered with the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beruit (AUB), as well as the Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts (ARCPA), to build an online database for Palestinian Oral History facilitated through AUB’s Jafet Library. At the time of writing, the full archive had yet to be digitized, translated, and catalogued. Thus, the most comprehensive online
archive dedicated to the Nakba is PalestineRemembered.com (2004; 2007; 2009), which brings together written, visual, and video documentation in the hopes of “amplify[ing] [refugee] voices in cyberspace.” The website not only contains a number of historical and current photographs, maps, and aerial satellite photographs of different Palestinian villages, districts, and refugee camps, but in the spring of 2003 PalestineRemembered.com launched the al-Nakba’s Oral History Project which, much like the Nakba Archive, seeks to capture and store as many survivor testimonies as possible. The project, which has to date only undertaken work in Jordan and Syria, has conducted over 600 interviews, covering 300 villages and cities, and archived over 3,000 hours of recording, all of which are available for viewing online.

While the Palestinian memorials books, oral history videos, and online archives discussed above are not the only projects that have emerged with the rise of Palestinian literacy and greater technological capacity and media access, they undoubtedly represent some of the most comprehensive and well known. Unfortunately, circulation of and access to the village memorial books is limited, the Nakba Archive has only made short exerts from a handful of their videos available online to the public, and PalestineRemembered.com is struggling to maintain or expand their projects given that it is funded through private donations. Not surprisingly, Nakba archiving projects undertaken by Palestinians and their supporters still do not have the financial and political resources to compete with government backed and ever growing Israeli archives such as Yad Vashem. As such, Palestinians continue to struggle for “[p]ermission to [n]arrate” (Said, 1984, p. 27) their counter-narratives and counter-memories of pre-1948 and the Nakba.

**Palestinian Responses to the Holocaust**

The counter-narratives and counter-memories of 1948 storied, documented, archived, and disseminated by Palestinians over the years generally follow and/or substantiate the counter-narrative of the Nakba detailed above. That said, Palestinians with some knowledge of the Holocaust often state that they empathize with Jewish suffering, but feel that they are being made to pay the price for an atrocity they did not commit. This response is often accompanied by questions of how a people so victimized could then victimize others and/or criticisms of Israel’s use of the Holocaust for political ends, including, but not limited to, justifying their treatment of Palestinians (Said, 1992;
2003a). Such sentiments are often expressed as part of Palestinian counter-narratives and counter-memories of 1948 and/or in the process of trying to reconcile the Holocaust and the Nakba.

This is not to say, however, that problematic Palestinian master narratives and collective memories of the Nakba do not exist. As several scholars have demonstrated (Achcar, 2010; Gur-Ze'ev & Pappé, 2003; Litvak & Webman, 2009), from 1948 to the present Palestinian nationalist and Islamist leaders, their followers, and various academics have sustained master narratives and collective memories of the Nakba that minimize and/or deny Jewish suffering.16 While I agree with Gilbert Achcar (2010) that Meir Litvak and Esther Webman’s attempt to identify a single “Arab Holocaust discourse” (Litvak & Webman, 2009, p. 2) is misguided and essentialist, it is clear that Palestinian and Arab leaders and academics’ responses to the Holocaust – which have generally been filtered through the lens of the Nakba and shadowed by “a symbolic tit for tat” (Achcar, 2010, p. 176) – have fallen along a continuum from empathy to denial. Achcar breaks his analysis of Arab responses to the Holocaust into four stages: 1933 to 1947 when Palestinians were under the questionable leadership of the Mufti; 1948 to 1967 which saw the rise and fall of Gamal Abdel Nasser’s dream of pan-Arabism; 1967 to 1988 the era of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yassir Arafat; and 1988 to 2010 which saw the rise of Islamic resistance movements, most importantly for our purposes, Hamas who since 1994 has been in conflict with the Palestinian National Authority (PA or PNA) currently headed by Mahmoud Abbas. While I cannot address and unpack the myriad of responses to the Holocaust present across these periods and various forms of leadership, it is important to note that Palestinian political and academic attitudes toward the Holocaust have generally fluctuated between minimization and

16 Sayigh (2015) indicates that Fateh and PLO leaders’ focus on the Palestinian national struggle was accompanied by a dismissive attitude toward the life of Palestinians living in refugee camps or exile and thus popular and grassroots efforts to document the Palestinian experience. She explains that after Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which forced the PLO to move to Tunis distancing them from the refugee camps, “one can trace a beginning of divergence between the national leadership and popular levels that is unambiguously marked by [the] appearance of the first village history books in 1985” (p. 197). This divergence appears to account for the historical and contemporary differences between the problematic master narratives and collective memories of the Nakba created and sustained by Palestinians leaders and the counter-narratives and counter-memories of 1948 articulated, documented, and disseminated by Nakba survivors and their descendants, for as Sayigh also notes “Nakba references” made through commemoration and activism “can be said to be an emerging sign of opposition to the National Authority and Israeli occupation not only in the larger diaspora but also in Israel and the Occupied Territories” (p. 201).
outright denial depending on the political circumstance and needs of the time. Although speaking to Arab sentiments more broadly, Achcar (2010) critically summarizes the primary reactions to the Holocaust across these four periods as follow:

...[I]n many cases Israel's frenzied invocation of the Holocaust has prompted a visceral reaction from the most ignorant and/or backward Arabs. They either deny the reality of Jewish genocide, which they write off as a myth put into circulation by a conspiracy, or, worse still, they sanction Hitler's crimes, occasionally adding that he should have finished the job. A much more frequent stance charges Israel with exaggerating the scope of the genocide for purposes of political blackmail and financial extortion...However, the most common attitude, far from passing over the Holocaust and the horrors of Nazism in silence, accuses Israel of imitating or reproducing them and, sometimes, of going one better than the Nazis – an accusation that reflects the propensity for overemphasis and exaggeration that informs a good deal of political statement in the Middle East. (pp. 221-222)

Such extreme and unethical attempts to remember the Nakba by forgetting the Holocaust are undoubtedly of a different order than Palestinians seeking to reconcile their suffering with that of Jews more broadly and Israelis more specifically. Still, the line dividing these responses is thin and easily transgressed.

Speaking to Palestinian approaches toward the Holocaust more specifically, Ilan Gur-Ze’ev and Ilan Pappé (2003) echo Achcar above, but also identify a more recent and significant shift in attitude:

The few scholars who have looked into the question of the Holocaust/Nakbah representation among the Palestinians agree that responses to the Holocaust move from total denial of the event, through indifference towards it, to acknowledging that it happened while minimizing its dimensions and its moral significance, to full acknowledgement not just of the event but also of its universal moral implications as a unique stage in the history of human evil. (p. 94)

According to the authors, the latter approach, which originated in the late 1990s particularly with the work of Palestinian intellectuals Azmi Bishara17 and Edward W. Said (2003a), entailed four new directions or avenues for Palestinian treatment of the Holocaust: assuming a critical approach to past Palestinian and Arab minimization and denial of the Holocaust; identifying and critiquing Israel’s instrumental use of the

17 Unfortunately, Bishara’s work is only available in Hebrew and so I was unable to engage with and/or cite his work directly.
Holocaust without minimizing Holocaust memory; re-evaluating the Mufti’s ties to the Nazis; and exploring the connections between memories of the Holocaust and memories of the Nakba as a possible foundation for co-existence, peace-building, and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. This fourth avenue is briefly acknowledged and advocated for by Achcar, who appropriately critiques Litvak and Webman for dismissing it as comparative and instrumental, i.e.) they believe it compares (rather than connects) the Holocaust and the Nakba, thereby continuing to minimize the former and inspiring more radical forms of Holocaust denial by its opponents.

To my mind, Said’s thinking on and use of this new approach remains the most illustrative and productive and thus, as we will see shortly, forms much of the scaffolding for this dissertation. However, Palestinian and Israeli scholars alike (some directly building upon Said’s work) have sought to bring the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba into counterpoint. From an Israeli perspective, Ronit Lentin (2010) has explored how some Israelis’ melancholy for a Palestine destroyed and subsequent co-memorialization of the Nakba is linked to “unresolved melancholic grief for Zionism’s original sin” (p. 153), while Yair Auron (2017) has advocated for mutual recognition and acknowledgement of suffering caused by the Holocaust and the Nakba as the necessary condition for future reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. However, the two most notable initiatives to bring the Holocaust and the Nakba into dialogue are joint Palestinian and Israeli initiatives. The first is Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-on, Eyal Naveh and the Peace Research Institute in the Middle East’s (PRIME) (2012) Side By Side: Parallel Histories of Israel-Palestine, an innovative and daring textbook aimed at Israeli and Palestinian high school and university students that quite literally places detailed chronological histories of the Israeli and Palestinian nations side by side – the former appearing on the left hand page, the latter on the right – so that readers “become equipped to acknowledge, understand, and respect (without having to accept) the narrative of the other” (p. x). The second is Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg’s (2019) edited volume The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History, which proposes and illustrates “a wholly different syntax and grammar of history and memory, in which the combination of ‘Holocaust and Nakba’ or ‘Nakba and Holocaust’ makes historical, cultural, and political sense” (p. 5).

With that said, efforts to connect the Holocaust with the Nakba have not been limited to academic scholarship, as some Palestinians have garnered media attention for
their efforts to educate their own communities about the Holocaust and its connection to Palestinian suffering. For example, in 2009 Hassan Musa set up a museum exhibition dedicated to the Holocaust and its connection to the Nakba in the West Bank village of Ni’lin (Yousef, 2019). Furthermore, in 2009 Mujahid Sarsur began taking groups of Palestinian youth from his village of Mas’ha in the West Bank to Yad Vashem in an attempt to better understand Israelis, thus marking the first ever Palestinian education groups to visit the museum (Hasson, 2009; Jewish Currents, 2011). Much like their Israeli counterparts noted above, these Palestinians have realized that they can acknowledge the Other’s origins, history of suffering, and need to survive alongside their own.

**Worldliness & The Oppositional Public Intellectual**

Inspired by the scholars cited and engaged with above, I began my PhD committed to further examining how memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba have shaped the historical narratives of the Palestinian and Israeli nations, documenting how Israel’s commemoration of the Holocaust has impacted the commemoration of pre-1948 Palestine and the Nakba, and showcasing a range of critical memory projects used by both Palestinians and Israelis to document, commemorate, and rethink the Nakba. However, shortly after beginning my PhD program, I began to question the focus and objectives of my research. More specifically, I realized that although my planned research had great value as an academic endeavour, it was unlikely to affect change outside the university. As such, I decided to refocus my research on how I might facilitate discussions about the Holocaust and the Nakba between Palestinians and Israelis myself. I found the language and courage to envision beginning something academically innovative yet also applicable outside the university in Said’s writings on worldliness and the oppositional public intellectual.

Said (2001) defined worldliness as the “location of oneself or one’s work…in the world, as opposed to some extra-worldly, private, ethereal context” (pp. 335-336). He explained that it “was meant to be a rather crude and bludgeon-like term to enforce the location of cultural practices back in the mundane, the quotidian, and the secular” (p. 336). Therefore, Said called on scholars to actively and purposefully seek to “connect matters of knowledge and scholarship to the worldly space of politics” (Giroux, 2004, p. 339). Those who heed this call take on the role of the oppositional public intellectual.
Like Said, they refuse the institutional, political, national, and economic pressures to which many professional academics knowingly comply and instead relegate themselves to a necessarily lonely state of exile from which they seek to speak truth to power.

Henry A. Giroux (2004) eloquently and succinctly articulates “the demands of [Said's] worldliness” (p. 342) as such:

[Worldliness implies] giving voice to complex and controversial ideas in the public sphere, recognizing human injury beyond the privileged space of the academy, and using theory as a form of criticism to redress injustice...Worldliness require[s] not being afraid of controversy, making connections that are otherwise hidden, deflating the claims of triumphalism, bridging intellectual work and the operation of politics. Worldliness [means] refusing the now popular sport of academic bashing or embracing a crude call for action at the expense of rigorous intellectual and theoretical work. On the contrary, it [means] combining rigor and clarity on one hand, and civic courage and political commitment, on the other. (p. 343)

Meeting the demands of worldliness means not only striving to avoid these pitfalls, but also being courageous enough to publically challenge those that succumb to them by asking hard and often embarrassing questions, for as Said (1994) asserted “[l]east of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audience feel good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant” (p. 12). This does not mean being unethical or cruel, but rather understanding that “the romance, the interest, the challenge of intellectual life is to be found” in the opposition to the status quo, particularly and especially at times “when the struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them” (p. xvii). 18

However, as Said knew all to well, when publicly speaking in support of those people and issues that are far too often forgotten or silenced, intellectuals knowingly and

---

18 In his 2002 piece “The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals,” Said ties these ideas to the issues of narrative and memory: “The intellectual’s role is first to present alternative narratives and other perspectives on history than those provided by combatants on behalf of official memory and national identity, who tend to work in terms of falsified unities, the manipulation of demonized or distorted representations of undesirable and/or excluded populations, and the propagation of heroic anthems sung in order to sweep all before them...The second is to construct fields of coexistence rather than fields of battle as the outcome of intellectual labour” (pp. 37-38). Said’s understanding of the dangers and possibilities of narrative and memory will be addressed shortly.
purposefully position themselves as outsiders, as exiles – an undoubtedly precarious and lonely ledge on which to stand.¹⁹

These Saidian ideals highlighted two of the greatest challenges I have faced as an intellectual committed to undertaking my scholarly and activist work through an “engaged ethics of worldliness” (Abdirahman A. Hussein as cited in Giroux, 2004, p. 344). On the one hand, I have encountered a fetishization of knowledge within the academy whereby professional academics “fail theory” (Giroux, p. 245) by disconnecting academic learning from the public critique of power and the pursuit of social justice. On the other hand, outside the university, and as a Member of the Board of Directors for the not-for-profit organization Peace It Together,²⁰ I struggled against a fetishization of activism in which efforts to facilitate Palestinian/Israeli dialogue and peacebuilding were often lacking the intellectual understanding and courageous risk-taking necessary to productively and ethically speak truth to power.

While the introduction to this dissertation is not the place to outline and critique these issues at length, suffice it to say these experiences left me struggling (maybe naively) to understand why one would undertake intellectual work within the academy if not to affect positive political change in the world and why some activists and/or organizations believe that political activism outside of the university can be ethically undertaken if not grounded in the historical and theoretical foundations arrived at through at least some form of intellectual rigor. Such thinking and commitments left me not only with one foot in and one foot out of the academy, but also with a reputation for

---

¹⁹ I take this language from “Know the Ledge We’re On: From Accountability to Activist Research,” a one-day workshop hosted by the Centre for Policy Studies on Culture and Communities (CPCC) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in 2015 for which I was a presenter and final report writer. Although not focused on Said, the objective of the workshop was to bring together university-based researchers working collaboratively with various individuals, collectives, and organizations, both within and outside the university, to discuss how they work with and within shifting grounds of knowledge and certainly. My final report on the day’s proceedings, can be accessed at https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/cultureandcommunities/cpcc/CPCC%20Report%20Activism%20and%20Research%20FINAL%20April%202017%20C%202015.pdf.

²⁰ Peace It Together, which was founded in 2004, brought Palestinian and Israeli youth from overseas to Vancouver in the hopes of building and promoting peace through joint dialogue, filmmaking, and community engagement. Sadly, the organization closed its doors in October 2015. To learn more about Peace It Together’s past work, plus watch some of the participants’ films, visit the organization’s website at http://peaceittogether.com.
being a thorn in people's side. Still, as Said reminded me, oppositional pubic intellectuals are not required to be

...humourous complainers [for] witnessing a sorry state of affairs when one is not in power is by no means a monotonous, monochromatic activity....[However], there is no dodging the inescapable reality that such representations by intellectuals will neither make them friends in high places nor win them official honors. It is a lonely condition, yes, but it is always a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the way things are. (1994, p. xviii)

Motivated by Said, I committed to undertaking a research project grounded in both intellectual rigour and ethical activism, which would have value both inside and outside the university. Ultimately, I imagined and executed an original, daring, and highly controversial research project aimed at inspiring and enabling everyday Palestinians and Israelis to accept the difficult yet necessary Saidian challenge of willing the impossible.

A Challenge Accepted: Willing the Impossible

As noted above, Said was one of the first and arguably the most prolific intellectuals to propose and advance the idea of connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba as a mean by which to facilitate coexistence, peacebuilding, and reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis. In fact, in his writings on the question of Palestine Said not only clearly outlined his own political vision, but also left us with a blueprint for the impossible yet necessary task of willing the impossible. This morally, ethically, and politically productive Saidian challenge entails three key components (Said, 2003a): 1) thinking the unequal yet bound tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, that is, thinking them together while respecting their differences; 2) morally and ethically engaging with alterity; and, 3) envisioning a new polity based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights for all. Importantly, Said believed that Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora, who are distanced from the everyday realities of occupation and dialectical hostilities and conflict, are best positioned to accept this challenge and

21 Said appropriated the term contrapuntal from the study and practice of music. Rokus de Groot (2010) identifies the contrapuntal as one of two dimensions of polyphony – “the simultaneity of two or more melodic lines (designated as ‘voices’ or ‘parts’) that, heard simultaneously, differ in their melodic and rhythmic shapes and sometimes in timbre as well” (p. 209) – alongside the harmonic. The contrapuntal, then, “relates to the melodic and rhythmic difference between simultaneous voices...[which] results in a variety of melodic relationships (counter, oblique, and parallel motions, with preference for the former two), as well as in rhythmic disparity” (p. 209).
thus begin bridging the divide that separates them. More specifically, Said (1993; 2003b; 2004) argued that migrants and refugees possess the unique ability to exercise an exilic consciousness whereby they are simultaneously a part of and apart from their own “communal moorings” (Butler, 2012, p. 27). This positionality not only enables them to think the Holocaust and the Nakba together, but also transcend competing claims of victimhood, ethically respond to claims of alterity, and envision a new binational polity. While tremendously challenging, this is precisely the impossible yet necessary task Said left to those acting and courageous Palestinians and Israelis willing to jointly explore their connected histories of suffering, exile, and survival.

Remarkably, the more I engaged with Said’s political vision for Palestine, the more I was drawn to Hannah Arendt’s political vision for Israel. Due to their distinct yet organically linked ethnic and secular backgrounds, and in spite of the uniqueness of the global circumstances in which they each lived, worked, and wrote (Spanos, 2012), a number of fascinating points of intersection quickly became apparent between their thinking. Ultimately, I realized that although Arendt’s writings do not outline as specific a course of action as Said’s, she too left us with an equally difficult yet crucial challenge comprised of three key components (Arendt, 1998, 2007; Feldman, 2007): 1) foregoing forms of Zionism that demand unreality, thoughtlessness, and alienation in exchange for those that foster reality, thoughtfulness, and worldliness; 2) choosing the position of the public conscious pariah over that of the social parvenu; and, 3) adhering to an ethics of cohabitation. However, while Said’s challenge immediately called for action on the part of both Palestinians and Israelis, Arendt’s initially makes demands of Israelis and only then calls for the involvement of Palestinians. That is, if Israelis want to save the Jewish homeland then they must first critique their nation’s obsession with survival and “dignity at any price” (Feldman, 2007, p. 386), as well as its wilful disregard for the Palestinian people, and then take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for the latter. Only then can Israelis and Palestinians jointly commit to cooperation, an ethics of cohabitation, and peaceful coexistence, in the process revealing themselves to be vanguards in and for the world. Like Said, Arendt believed that refugees or stateless persons exhibited the distinctive state of consciousness required to take up this challenge. Thus, paralleling Said’s vision for Palestine, Arendt’s vision for Israel requires a contrapuntal reading of the Holocaust and the Nakba, ethical engagement with alterity, and the envisioning of a new binational polity.
Were these parallels between Said and Arendt not enough, I also discerned additional points of intersection between and imaginative possibilities enabled by their thinking. True, they both left us with the morally, ethically, and politically productive imperative of willing the impossible, however, they also identified the principle media by which their political visions might become a reality. On the one hand, Said’s (1986; 1993; 2000a) writings demonstrate that although narrative and photography have been used to construct and sustain master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba, they have also disrupted, complicated, and unsettled them, thus serving as media of resistance, emancipation, and liberation. On the other hand, Arendt’s (1998) theory of storytelling distinguished between “fictional” stories created and manipulated by invisible authors like governments and their cultural institutions, i.e.) master narratives and collective memories of trauma, and “real” stories that emerge from individuals’ courage to “act and speak…to insert one’s self into the world and begin a story of one’s own” (p. 186), i.e.) counter-narratives and counter-memories. In contrast to Said, however, Arendt never wrote about photography and/or photographs herself. Still, the work of Israeli scholar Ariella Azoulay (2008; 2011; 2012) helps us imagine how Arendt might have conceptualized photography and/or photographs as valuable tools for making her political vision come to fruition. Based on an Arendtian foundation, Azoulay demonstrates that by enacting their “civil imagination” (2012, p. 9) and then entering into a “civil contract of photography” (2008, p. 85) Palestinians and Israelis can achieve joint solidarity and political agency outside of and in resistance to the powers that seek to divide and control them.

Unfortunately, aside from William V. Spanos’ 2012 book Exiles in the City: Hannah Arendt & Edward Said in Counterpoint, the clear parallels between Said and Arendt’s political visions, to say nothing of their life and work, has received surprising little scholarly attention, particularly with regard to the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. Given the imaginative possibilities enabled by their thinking I decided to follow Spanos by bringing Said and Arendt into deep dialogue with one another, but then went a step further by exploring how we might bring their political theories and visions into praxis. More specifically, I began to imagine how I might help Palestinians and Israelis move beyond problematic master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba by sharing counter-memoires and counter-narratives of how these tragedies have affected their lives. I then set out to develop a
unique and innovative method aimed at creating the “occasions” (Fabian, 1990, p. 7) and “conditions of possibility” (Culhane, 2011b, p. 258) necessary for Palestinians and Israelis to begin willing the impossible through storytelling and photography, both inside and outside of the university, in the contemporary moment.

A Series of “What Ifs?” and The Birth of a Method

To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever sought to bring Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s theories into praxis around the urgent imperative of willing the impossible, so I knew that the research method I was setting out to develop would be unprecedented and exploratory. Accordingly, I turned to the field of experimental and performative ethnography, which understands the production of ethnographic knowledge to be collaborative and undertaken within a range of various entanglements; prioritizes the unpredictable and risky process of ethnographic fieldwork over guaranteed academic results and products; and values imaginative, performative, embodied, and affective forms of practice and knowledge (Castañeda, 2006; Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007; Culhane, 2011a, 2011b, 2016; Fabian, 1990). I was particularly inspired and thus guided by Dara Culhane’s (2011b) work in Stories and Plays: Ethnography, Performance and Ethical Engagements in which she undertook “an intentionally utopian ethnographic project” (p. 257) in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside that explored the conditions of possibility necessary for creating ethical engagements between researchers and study participants. Following Culhane, my dissertation grew out of a series of “what ifs,” rather than standard academic research questions:

What if I designed a research method to bring Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s theoretical approaches to willing the impossible into praxis?

What if this method was able to create the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for everyday Palestinians and Israelis to will the impossible through storytelling and photography?

What if this method and project privileged the fieldwork process, particularly in terms of the value it holds for participants, over specific academic products and/or prescriptive outcomes?
What if this method and the fieldwork it entailed proved to be valuable and productive for my participants?

What if this method demonstrated the potential to be a valuable and productive means of addressing other intercultural conflicts?

Working from this series of “what ifs,” I developed a three-stage photograph-based storytelling method designed to enable Palestinians and Israelis to take the first crucial steps toward beginning to will the impossible. First, I conducted in-depth interviews with Palestinians and Israelis living in their respective Canadian diasporas who are of the Holocaust and Nakba postmemory generations (Hirsch, 1997, 2012), i.e.) those who did not directly experience these historical traumas, but who are nonetheless haunted by and struggle to comprehend them. I chose this particular form of counter-memory, based on Marianne Hirsch’s (2012) assertion that the work of postmemory enables the consideration of different historical traumas through connective rather than comparative approaches, as well as the possibility of repair and redress. During these interviews participants narrated their life stories and (post)memories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives using family and/or personal photographs. Second, participants exchanged their stories and associated photographs with fellow participants from both cultures via a password protected project website. Third, I conducted a second round of in-depth interviews in which participants reflected on the experience of narrating their stories, (post)memories, and photographs, engaging with the other participants’ stories, (post)memories, and photographs, and the research process as a whole. While I attend to my own positionality in detail in Chapter 4, here it should be noted that although I am a second generation Palestinian-Canadian and member of the Nakba postmemory generation myself, throughout the planning, researching, and writing up of this dissertation, I envisioned myself simply as “a provider of occasions” (Fabian, 1990, p. 7; Fabian as quoted in Culhane, 2011b, p. 263) for willing the impossible.

As this dissertation demonstrates, storytelling and photography did enable the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for my participants to begin willing the impossible through civil imagination. That is, by narrating and then exchanging their

---

22 Given that all of my participants were born into and grew up amidst the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, I use the term (post)memories (rather than just postmemory) throughout the dissertation to indicate both their postmemories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba and their direct memories of the conflict, both of which are often intertwined and/or inseparable.
stories and (post)memories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba through associated photographs, my participants were able to connect rather than compare their histories of suffering and exile, take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for one another, and imagine new forms of cohabitation and citizenship grounded in justice and equitable rights for all.

**Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is essentially divided into three major parts. First, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 outline the theoretical and methodological foundations of my study. In Chapter 2 I unpack the difficult yet necessary Saidian task of willing the impossible and then complicate Said’s ideas by bringing them into conversation with the political thinking of Arendt. I argue that once Said’s thinking on the question of Palestine is brought into counterpoint with Arendt’s thinking on the question of Israel it becomes clear that she too left us with the difficult, and thus all the more necessary, task of willing the impossible. In Chapter 3 I extend the theoretical foundation laid out in Chapter 2 by teasing out additional points of intersection between and imaginative possibilities enabled by Said and Arendt’s political thinking. In particular, I explore how storytelling and photography create the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for willing the impossible through civil imagination. While storytelling and photography are the principle media through which to bring Said and Arendt’s theories and political visions into praxis, the question remains: how might everyday Palestinians and Israelis use storytelling and photography to will the impossible in the contemporary moment? I answer this question in Chapter 4 by outlining in detail the aforementioned unique photograph-based storytelling method, which provides Palestinians and Israelis an imaginative and practical everyday means for creating the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for taking up Said and Arendt’s challenges. Given the theoretical and methodological importance of bringing the reader into deep engagement with the thinking of Said and Arendt, as well as Azoulay, in these chapters, particularly Chapter 2, I quote these scholars at length before unpacking and analyzing the significance of their work to the task and challenge at hand.

Second, Chapter 5, 6, and 7 focus on my fieldwork. Chapters 5 and 6 present the life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs of my Palestinian and Israeli participants, respectively, while Chapter 7 brings my participants into dialogue with one
another through their reflective interview responses. Once again, I use extensive quotations throughout these chapters; however, I do so here, first, in an effort to prioritize my participants' voices and, second, to provide the reader with the possibility of joining my participants and myself as we endeavour to will the impossible.

Finally, Chapters 8 and 9 present my fieldwork analysis and conclusions. In Chapter 8 I analyze and then reflect on my fieldwork findings through the lenses of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay's political visions to determine how conceivable it is to take up the challenge of willing the impossible through storytelling and photography in the contemporary moment. I then conclude this dissertation by outlining the impact and limitations of my research, possible future uses of my participants' life stories and photographs, and/or my method, plus briefly reflect on how we might envision willing the impossible beyond the contemporary moment.
Chapter 2.

An Impossible Yet Necessary Task: Said & Arendt in Counterpoint

In *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* Judith Butler (2012) highlights the “[i]mpossible, [n]ecessary [t]ask” (p. 28) that sits at the very heart of Edward Said’s political thinking regarding the “question of Palestine” (Said, 1992, p. 3). She argues that,

> “Although Said himself was a defender of secular ideals, he nevertheless understood the kind of convergence of histories and the proximities of exile that might make for a new ethics and politics in the region... For Said, it is an impossible task, but for that reason no less necessary.” (Butler, 2012, p. 16)

This chapter unpacks this difficult yet morally, ethically, and politically productive Saidian challenge of “willing the impossible” (p. 222). I begin by engaging with Said’s political argument that the Holocaust and Nakba must be thought together if his political vision of coexistence and binationalism, grounded in the exilic and diasporic, is to birth a new polity that promises a common and just future for all. I then complicate Said’s ideas by bringing them into conversation with the political theory of Hannah Arendt, thus unpacking what William V. Spanos (2012) has rightly identified as a “hitherto unremarked contrapuntal affiliation” (p. 204) and that Butler alludes to but never explicitly names. As I will demonstrate, once Said’s thinking on the question of Palestine is brought into counterpoint with Arendt’s thinking on the question of Israel it becomes clear that she too left us with the difficult, and thus all the more necessary, task of willing the impossible.

In *Exiles in the City: Hannah Arendt and Edward W. Said in Counterpoint*, Spanos (2012) begins to rectify the scarcity of scholarship exploring the highly productive yet “hitherto surprisingly unremarked affiliation” (p. 4) between the political theory and commentary of Said and Arendt. Of specific concern to Spanos are the variations on the concept of exile which shaped both scholars’ lives and work, as well as
how such an examination might reflect on “what is inaugural, central, and abiding” (p. 4) in their writings, particularly when broadened to include the themes of “Palestine and the postcolonial occasion” (p. 4). By “bringing all the distinctive motifs emanating from and circulating around the supreme theme of exile into playful focus – or, more precisely, loving strife” (p. 3) Spanos teases out the following six points of commonality which “extend and deepen the dislocating implications” (p. 3) of Said’s and Arendt’s personal experiences and political theories of exilic consciousness and conscious pariahdom, respectively: 1) their anti-essentialist, anti-nationalist, non-filliative, and thus affiliative, political consciousness, which positioned Said as a non-Palestinian Palestinian and Arendt as a non-Jewish Jew; 2) their radically secular comportments toward being in the world, that is, their worldliness; 3) their refusal to belong to and/or acquiesce to “the banal biologic of belonging” (p. 186) of the nation-sate and their subsequent emphasis on human agency enacted through new beginnings; 4) their criticism of Zionism and its commitment to ethnic cleansing; 5) their holding up of the refugee or migrant as the key political figure emerging from the particular “global occasion(s)” (p. 173) in which they lived, worked, and wrote; and 6) their envisioning of a new polis, which not only renders the nation-state inoperative, but in doing so also enables a moral, ethical, and political commitment to alterity. Summarizing his analysis, Spanos states that,

...what I have tried to suggest in pointing to the affiliative relationship between Said’s exilic consciousness and Arendt’s conscious pariahdom is that their discourses on the question of Palestine [and the question of Israel], however, distant in time, can be read not simply as a generational discourse as such, but, more resonantly and exactly as an Auseinandersetzung – an open-ended and constantly rejuvenating dialogue in loving strife – one undertaken by a “non-Jewish Jew” and a “non-Palestinian Palestinian” in the dissonant polyphonic mode that Said, in opposition to the deadly marching logic of belonging of the nation-state, envisioned as the singular mode of belonging of the community to come. (p. 192)

Like Spanos I believe that Said’s thinking is confirmed and strengthened when brought into extended engagement with that of Arendt. In fact, the linkages between their political thinking on and visions for Palestine and Israel, and thus the aforementioned six themes, became indisputably discernible and endlessly productive throughout the planning and

23 As I will explicate below, Said understood filiative relations as those ascribed to and/or imposed on one by their origins and affiliative relations as those one chooses, thus allowing for new beginnings.
execution of this study. As such, I bring them together here, specifically with regard to
the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible.

The Question of Palestine: Said’s Political Vision

Nowhere is the task left to us by Said more clearly laid out than in his book of essays The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After (2003a). In the following passages from the essay “Bases for Coexistence”, Said articulates the exigency of connecting the historical traumas of the Holocaust and the Nakba and why such thinking is necessary if Palestinians and Israelis are to choose a life of peaceful coexistence:

[T]here is a link to be made between what happened to Jews in World War II and the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, but it cannot be made only rhetorically, or as an argument to demolish or diminish the true content both of the Holocaust and of 1948. Neither is equal to the other; similarly, neither one nor the other excuses present violence; and finally, neither one nor the other must be minimized. There is suffering and injustice enough for everyone. But unless the connection is made by which the Jewish tragedy is seen to have led directly to the Palestinian catastrophe by, let us call it “necessity” (rather than pure will), we cannot coexist as two communities of detached and uncommunicatingly separate suffering. It has been the failing of Oslo that it planned in terms of separation, a clinical partition of peoples into separate, but unequal, entities, rather than grasping that the only way of rising beyond the endless back-and-forth violence and dehumanization is to admit the universality and integrity of the other’s experience and to begin to plan a common life together. (pp. 207-208)

What is desired…is a notion of coexistence that is true to the differences between Jew and Palestinian, but true also to the common history of different struggles and unequal survival that links them…There can be no higher ethical and moral imperative than discussions and dialogues about that. (p. 208)

The simple fact is that Jewish and Palestinian experiences are historically, indeed organically, connected: to break them asunder is to falsify what is authentic about each. We must think our histories together, however difficult that may be, in order for there to be a common future. And that future must include Arabs and Jews together, free of any exclusionary, denial-based schemes for shutting out one side by the other, either theoretically or politically. That is the real challenge. The rest is much easier. (p. 209)

As expressed above, Said’s political vision is comprised of three key components: 1) thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, that is connecting them while
continuing to honour their differences; 2) morally and ethically engaging with alterity; and
3) envisioning a new polity based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights. Given the
significance of these three propositions to the task at hand, each warrants deep engagement.

Connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba: A Contrapuntal Reading

The first significant step Said takes is acknowledging that the tragedies of the
Holocaust and the Nakba, while certainly not equal, are connected. “Who” he asks
“would want morally to equate mass extermination with mass dispossession? It would be
foolish even to try. But they are connected – a different thing altogether – in the struggle
over Palestine which has been so intransigent, its elements so irreconcilable (Said,
2003a, p. 208). For Said, there can be no doubt that “the Jews of Israel [are] in decisive
measure really the permanent result of the Holocaust” (p. 208) and that the
establishment of the state of Israel and the events of 1948 resulted in the Palestinian
people becoming “the victims of the victims, the refugees of the refugees” (p. 314). And
while he is adamant that Palestinians have a right to “demand consideration and
reparations” from Jews for what was done to them during and after 1948, Said also
stresses that Palestinians must exercise these rights “without in any way minimizing
[Jews’] own history of suffering and genocide” (p. 208). True the Holocaust and the
Nakba are not equal, but they are fundamentally connected and, as such, for Said
neither can be negated or minimized and neither can be used to justify past, present or
future violence.

Explicit in Said’s writings on the question of Palestine is a secular humanist
approach that ethically and morally challenges Palestinians and Israelis to connect their
unequal, yet intertwined, histories of suffering and struggles for survival. As Adel
Iskandar and Hakem Rustom (2010) assert, for Said “humanism was the embodiment of
counterpoint – the harmony of the discordant” (p. 11). As such he encourages us to think
the “tragic symphony” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 495; Said, 2001) of Jewish and Palestinian
suffering contrapuntally. According to Said (1993), taking a contrapuntal approach
means,

be[ing] able to think through and interpret together experiences that are
discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its
own internal formation, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others. (p. 32)

Furthermore, and as Said (1993) demonstrates through his literary analysis in *Culture and Imperialism*, a contrapuntal reading entails attending to both the processes of imperialism and resistance to it, thereby reintroducing to national master narratives “what was once forcibly excluded” (p. 67). Thus, thinking Jewish and Palestinian experiences contrapuntally requires placing the narratives of Jewish suffering and the establishment of, what Said has explicitly labeled, the settler colonial state of Israel in counterpoint with Palestinian narratives of resistance to the settlement of their land and the displacement and dispossession of their people. This simultaneous interplay of divergent histories and perspectives brings to the fore new counter-narratives and voices which allow for ethical engagement and dialogue. In other words, thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally affords Palestinians and Israelis the opportunity to acknowledge and then work through the discrepancies and commonalities that bind them, in the process complicating, disrupting, and countering the unproductive and competing master narratives of trauma and filial identities that continue to sustain the thoughtlessness and violence central to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. As Asha Varadharajan (2010) powerfully asserts in her analysis of Said’s humanism, “dwelling in simultaneity…is a gesture of transcendence; that is, thinking together inevitably entails thinking beyond the ruins of history, the loss of memory, and the limits of identity” (p. 455).

Said’s own contrapuntal thinking of the Holocaust and the Nakba is evident when he writes:

> [T]he sheer enormity of what took place between 1933 and 1945 beggars our powers of description and understanding. The more one studies this period and its excesses, the more one must conclude that for any decent human being the slaughter of so many millions of innocents must, and indeed should, weigh heavily on subsequent generations, Jewish and non-Jewish. However much we may concur…that Israel exploited the Holocaust for political purposes, there can be little doubt that the tragedy’s collective memory and the burden of fear it places on all Jews today is not to be minimized…But there is no reason at all, in my opinion, not to submit oneself to the horror and awe to the special tragedy besetting the Jewish people. As an Arab in particular I find it important to comprehend this collective experience in as much of its terrible concrete detail as one is capable: this act of comprehension guarantees one’s
humanity and resolve that such a catastrophe should never be forgotten and never recur. (Said, 2003a, pp. 206-207)

I do not accept the notion that by taking over our land Zionism redeemed the history of the Jews, and I cannot ever be made to acquiesce in the need to dispossess the whole Palestinian people. But I can admit the notion that the distortions of the Holocaust created distortions in its victims, which are replicated today in the victims of Zionism itself, that is, the Palestinians. Understanding what happened to the Jews in Europe under the Nazis means understanding what is universal about human experience under calamitous conditions. It means compassion, human sympathy, and utter recoil from the notion of killing people for ethnic, religious, or nationalist reasons…I attach no conditions to such comprehension and compassion: one feels them for their own sake, not political advantage. Yet such an advance in consciousness by Arabs ought to be met by an equal willingness for compassion and comprehension on the part of Israelis and Israel’s supporters, who have engaged in all sorts of denial and expressions of defensive non-responsibility when it comes to Israel’s central role in our historical dispossession as a people. This is disgraceful. And it is unacceptable simply to say (as do many Zionist liberals) that we should forget the past and go on to two separate states. This is as insulting to Jewish memories of the Holocaust as it is to Palestinians who continue in their dispossession at Israel’s hand. (p. 209)

It is this manner of critical and yet compassionate approach to thinking the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba together that, while difficult, he contends is ethically, morally, and politically necessary if Palestinians and Israelis desire a just and common future. Yet Said was keenly aware of the vastly different challenges placing these tragedies in counterpoint poses for Israelis and Palestinians respectively. First, he asserts that both Jewish tradition and political Zionism have almost wholly ignored the ethical and moral implications of the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948, thus demonstrating “how far one has to go” (p. 208) for Jews and Israelis to link the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba. With regard to Jewish tradition and thought, he states that in “the broad lines of Jewish philosophy from Buber to Levinas [one can perceive] an almost total absence of reflection on the ethical dimensions of the Palestinian issue” (p. 208) and that the majority of Jewish intellectuals have yet to adequately reflect upon how “the desolate history of anti-Semitism and the uniqueness of Jewish suffering” (p. 207) are consequently linked to the catastrophe experienced by the Palestinian people. Furthermore, and particularly in The Question of Palestine, Said (1992) identifies Zionism as a unique form of settler colonialism that wilfully ignored the Palestinian inhabitants of the very land on which its leaders sought to establish a Jewish
state. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, and as Said argued, this strategic forgetting of the native Other was subsequently institutionalized within all aspects of Israeli national, cultural, and social life. Given the lack of consideration for the Palestinians and their suffering by Jewish intellectuals and early Zionist and later Israeli leaders, it is not surprising that the majority of Israeli citizens struggle to comprehend, or even acknowledge, the linkage between the Holocaust and the Nakba. As early as 1979, the original publication date of *The Question of Palestine*, Said (1992) stated that,

> [t]he fact that no sizable segment of the Israeli population has as yet been able to confront the terrible social and political injustice done to the native Palestinians is an indication of how deeply ingrained are the (by now) anomalous imperialist perspectives basic to Zionism, its view of the world, its sense of an inferior native Other. (p. 69)

In Israeli collective memory Zionism is heralded as the driving force behind the redemption of the Jewish people, which culminated in the creation of the Israeli state (Pappé, 2006; Zertal, 2005; Zerubavel, 1994). Within this master narrative, the Nakba is either strategically denied or acknowledged, but treated as an unavoidable necessity of securing a Jewish state; the Palestinians perceived as a threatening yet “troublesome detail” (Said, 1992, p. 66) that must either be transferred or removed, or contained, controlled, and subdued.

Second, while some Palestinians and their supporters have been crass enough to deny the extermination of millions of Jews during World War II or minimize the enormity of Jewish suffering, many acknowledge the Holocaust and empathize with its victims, survivors, and their decedents, albeit to varying degrees (Achcar, 2010; Litvak & Webman, 2009). Yet even those Palestinians who acknowledge and empathize with the loss and destruction the Holocaust entailed, continue to ask why the Palestinian people have been made to pay for horrors in which they played no part. As Said (1992) explains,

> [t]he fact that…no Palestinian, regardless of his political stripe, has been able to reconcile himself to Zionism suggests the extent to which, for the Palestinian, Zionism has appeared to be an uncompromisingly, exclusionary, discriminatory, colonialist praxis. So powerful, and so unhesitatingly followed, has been the radical Zionist distinction between privileged Jews in Palestine and unprivileged non-Jews there, that nothing else has emerged, no perception of suffering human existence has escaped from the two camps created thereby. (pp. 69-70)
Again, Said wrote these words in 1979, yet the sentiment has not changed. Given that most Palestinians and their supports argue that the Nakba did not end in 1948, but rather endures today under the continuing Israeli occupation, which entails the expropriation of land, the building of illegal settlements, the construction of the separation wall, unequal access to basic necessities such as water, limited movement by way of checkpoints, administrative detention, etc., Said’s (2003a) assertion that “to speak of prior Jewish agonies will seem [to Palestinians] like a kind of impertinence” (pp. 208-209) still rings true.

No matter how challenging or uncomfortable it might be for Palestinians and Israelis to link the Holocaust and Nakba together, this is the very type of dialogue and engagement that Said insisted must be the first step on the road to peaceful coexistence. Only by placing the Holocaust and the Nakba in counterpoint can a collective shift in consciousness be activated that abandons competing claims of victimhood, ridged national and/or religious allegiances, and unwarranted justifications for senseless violence and instead moves toward morally, ethically, and politically grounded attempts at compassion and comprehension. According to Said (2003a), this means Israelis being courageous enough to acknowledge and accept their collective responsibility for the tragedies suffered by the Palestinians at their hands and for Palestinians to assert their “morally unassailable” (p. 197) position as a people dispossessed while also recognizing that their struggle for social justice cannot be divorced from the creation of “a real civil and democratic society, to invest massively in innovative education, and to explore modes of secular community now unavailable in the ‘returns’ either to Judaism, Christianity, or Islam which are characteristic of contemporary religious fundamentalism” (p. 166). If and when achieved, such shifts in consciousness mark a courageous choice to ethically engage with the Other and thus a commitment to new beginnings.

**Exilic Beginnings: Dispersion and Alterity**

Following the failure of the Oslo Accords, Said (2003a) recognized that the daily lives of Palestinians and Israelis had become so intertwined that a clean separation, by way of a two state solution, was simply untenable. Furthermore, he was brutally critical of both Palestinian and Israeli leaders who he felt demonstrated a “lack of vision and moral courage” (p. 204):
The Israelis face a more severe and difficult challenge [than the Palestinians]. They must define Jewish identity in such a way as to permit them to live intelligently and productively in the future by coexisting as equals in an Arab and Muslim Middle East. But unfortunately there is little in the official Israeli past to draw on for such a task. And, alas, the Palestinian and Arab leadership is too powerless and morally bankrupt to offer anything significant for the Israelis to work with. (p. 204)

Abandoned by leaders who could not see past their own political, ethnocentric, and religious ideological investments, Said felt that the Palestinian and Israeli people were left standing together “at the edge of a precipice” (p. 204). At this crucial moment he placed his hope in Palestinian and Israeli intellectuals and visionaries who, having made the aforementioned shift in consciousness, might articulate and then will into being a “new theory of coexistence” (p. 204) based on mutuality, a “new kind of history” (p. 248) characterized by integration and inclusion. This required, he argued, “conscious, secular, and rational means [rather than] waiting for a miracle or great leader or some unforeseen intervention” (p. 246). In other words, Said believed that Palestinians and Israelis needed to exercise their human will so as to begin again.

In contrast to origins, which he viewed as theological, passive, filiative, and linear, Said (1985) understood beginnings to be secular, active, affiliative, and dispersive:

Beginning has influences upon what follow from it: in a paradoxical manner, then, according to which beginnings as events are not necessarily confined to the beginning, we realize that a major shift in perspective and knowledge take place. The state of mind that is concerned with origins is...theological. By contrast, and this is the shift, beginnings are eminently secular, or gentile, continuing activities...a beginning intends meaning, but the continuities and methods developing from it are generally orders of dispersion, of adjacency, and of complementarity. A different way of putting this is to say that whereas origin centrally dominates what derives from it, the beginning (especially the modern beginning), encourages nonlinear development, a logic giving rise to [a] sort of multileveled coherence of dispersion. (pp. 372-373)

If we read Said’s writings on the question of Palestine through his theory of beginnings, it becomes clear that he saw the defining moment that presented itself after the failure of Oslo as a new beginning that offered willing and courageous Palestinians and Israelis the possibility of moving outside of the religious, ethnic, and national ideologies that demand their uncritical and passive filiation, toward endlessly productive relations of affiliation that enable active and ethical engagement with alterity. That is, beginning
again for these two communities of suffering means resisting the filial relations that seek their adherence to limiting and/or unethical relations with the Other and instead choosing to move together into the world with the intention of changing it and thus the course of history. To do so, Said argued, Palestinians must not only acknowledge the Holocaust, the enormity of its destruction, and its lingering impact on Israeli consciousness, but also reject the pressures of the anti-normalization and divestment, boycott, and sanctions movements. For their part, Israelis must not be party to continuing efforts focused on negating the Nakba and shirking responsibility for the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians that it entailed, and instead build upon the lessons of the Holocaust by working to end the social injustices of inequality and oppression that characterize the continuing occupation. Ultimately, Said (2003a) believed that initiating such beginnings required “cross[ing] the line of separation...that maintains the current apartheid between Arab and Jew in historic Palestine” (p. 283). In other words, Palestinians and Israelis must step across the line that separates them, rather than enforce it.

In this sense, Said was asking Palestinians and Israelis to commit to a kind of critical secular humanism similar, although not equal, to what he expected of contemporary humanists and oppositional public intellectuals, and which he hoped for, but never found, in Palestinian and Israeli leadership. In his posthumously published *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said (2004) stated that,

> [i]t is especially appropriate for the contemporary humanist to cultivate that sense of multiple worlds and complex interacting traditions, that inevitable combination I’ve mentioned of belonging and detachment, reception and resistance. The task of the humanist is not just to occupy a position or place, nor simply to belong somewhere, but rather to be both insider and outsider to the circulating ideas and values that are at issue in our society or someone else’s society or the society of the other. (p. 76)

Again, if we read Said through Said, that is, if we read this quote in terms of his call to Palestinians and Israelis to cross into productive affiliative relations with the Other rather than enforce the lines of filiation, we can argue that he is in fact encouraging them to begin from an exilic consciousness that allows them to simultaneously be a part of and apart from their respective communal attachments. Put another way, this “two-in-one condition” (Spanos, 2012, p. 144) of exilic consciousness enables one to be both inside and outside of “the discursive and practical world in which he/she exists” (p. 144). Butler (2012) helps us make this connection. Like Said, she recognizes that “being able to
depart from those communitarian moorings as they have been historically formed is a difficult and necessary struggle,” but also that “this departure from ourselves is the condition of a certain ethical relation, decidedly nonegological: it is a response to the claims of alterity and lays the groundwork for an ethics in dispersion” (p. 27).

That Said, a Christian Palestinian by birth and a secular Palestinian by choice, should serve as a key source in Butler’s examination of Jewish critiques of Zionism, is not surprising given that in a 2000 interview with Ari Shavit, Said (2001) provocatively proclaimed himself “the last Jewish intellectual” and thus “a Jewish-Palestinian” (p. 458). As Gil Z. Hochberg (2006) contends, there are two key aspects of these bold proclamations that should be highlighted – aspects that, I would argue, complement Butler’s assertions above regarding “an ethics in dispersion” and “a response to claims of alterity” (Butler, 2012, p. 27), respectively. First, although Said was highly critical of Zionism he took great care to distinguish it from Judaism, and critiques of Zionism from anti-Semitism. In fact, he demonstrated a clear affinity for and adherence to a “critical Jewish sensibility” (Hochberg, 2006, p. 47), undoubtedly influenced by Theodor Adorno amongst others. Said’s admiration for Jewish thinkers who themselves exhibited an exilic consciousness, is clearly evident in the following quote from Humanism and Democratic Criticism, which continue from his thoughts on contemporary humanism cited above:

[I]t is invigorating to recall...Isaac Deutscher’s insufficiently known book of essays, The Non-Jewish Jew, for an account of how great Jewish thinkers – Spinoza, chief among them, as well as Freud, Heine, and Deutscher himself – were in, and at the same time renounced, their tradition, preserving the original tie by submitting it to the corrosive questioning that took them well beyond it, sometimes banishing them from community in the process. Not many of us can or would want to aspire to such a dialectically fraught, so sensitively located a class of individuals, but it is illuminating to see in such a destiny the tiny crystalized role of the American humanist, the non-humanist humanist as it were. (Said, 2004, pp. 76-77)

It is exactly this role that Spanos (2012) argues Said took on himself with regard to the question of Palestine, becoming, what the former terms, a “‘non-Palestinian’ Palestinian” (p. 145), i.e.) although Said was bound to Palestine by his origins he refused the

24 Said’s propensity for the prophetic within Jewish liberation theology is clearly reflected in his notion of exilic consciousness, which I discuss at length below. For more on the link between Said’s thinking on exile and Jewish liberation theology, see Eliis (2010).
religious, ethnic and/or nationalist associations that such origins often entail, instead remaining steadfastly critical and living “to the side” (Butler, 2012, p. 51) of them. Thus, until his death, Said lingered both inside and outside of Palestinian identity. If we extend Said’s and Spanos’ arguments to the former’s larger political vision for Palestine, it can be asserted that in asking Palestinians and Israelis to move toward coexistence through affiliations grounded in exilic thinking, Said was in fact challenging Palestinians to also become non-Palestinian Palestinians and Israelis non-Jewish Jews or, more specifically in this instance, non-Israeli Israelis.

Second, Hochberg (2006) argues that inherent in Said’s claim that he is a “Jewish-Palestinian” is a “keeping-in-difference inseparability of the Jew and Arab” (pp. 47-48). In other words, this “hyphenated identity…collapses the structure of oppositional difference without, however, erasing difference itself” (p. 47). This argument is reinforced by Said, not only in his discussion of the role of non-humanist humanist above, but also in Freud and the Non-European (2003b) in which he explores Freud’s positioning of Moses as the embodiment par excellence of the limits of communal identity and therefore the inseparability of alterity:

Freud’s symbol of [the limits of communal identity] was that the founder of Jewish identity was himself a non-European Egyptian. In other words, identity cannot be thought or worked through itself alone; it cannot constitute or even imagine itself without that radial originary break or flaw which will not be repressed, because Moses was Egyptian, and therefore always outside the identity inside which so many have stood, and suffered – and later, perhaps even triumphed. The strength of this thought is, I believe, that it can be articulated in and speak to other besieged identities as well – not through dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion but, rather, by attending to it as a troubling, disabling, destabilizing secular wound – the essence of the cosmopolitan, from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself. (p. 54)

Thus, Said understood the exilic consciousness demonstrated by the Jewish thinkers he admired not only as “irremediably diasporic [and] unhoused” (p. 53), but also as ethically binding one to the Other by “proximities [both] willed and unwilled” (Butler, 2012, p. 27). Therefore, if we follow both Said and Butler in thinking dispersion beyond geography and also as “an ethical modality” (Butler, 2012, p. 6), we begin to understand how terribly challenging yet extremely productive non-Palestinian Palestinian and non-Israeli Israeli
identities or positionalities can be in facilitating new “condition[s] of possibility for thinking justice” (p. 5) and thus coexistence.

**Envisioning a New Polity: Non-belonging and Binationalism**

While it is clear from Said’s writings that he understood the exilic to be a particular “comportment toward being” (Spanos, 2012, p. 2) which, in building on Jewish tradition, we might call “diasporic,” one need not be living in exile or diaspora to begin from an exilic consciousness, just as an exilic consciousness is not an absolute given of living in exile or diaspora. For example, Palestinians and Israelis living in Israel or the Occupied Territories may still begin from an exilic consciousness and those living in geographic exile or diaspora may choose to remain only within, rather than also simultaneously outside of, their associated communal attachments. Nevertheless, Said (2000b) argued that exiles and/or dispersions of both geography and consciousness constituted the refugee or migrant as the principal political figure of the modern age. Exploring the decline of Western imperialism and the resultant rise of decolonizing efforts beginning in the twentieth century – a period he termed “the age of the refugee, the displaced person, [and] mass immigration” (p. 174) – Said (1993) asserted that,

[a]s the struggle for independence produces new states and new boundaries, it also produces homeless wanderers, nomads, and vagrants, unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional powers, rejected by established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness. And insofar as these people exist between the old and the new, between the old empire and the new state, their condition articulates the tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions in the overlapping territories shown on the cultural map of imperialism. There is a great difference, however, between the optimistic mobility, the intellectual liveliness, and the “logic of daring” described by the various theorists on whose work I have drawn, and the massive dislocations, waste, misery, and horrors endured in our century’s migrations and mutilated lives. Yet it is no exaggeration to say that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in the resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, has now shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies, energies whose incarnation today is the migrant, and whose consciousness is that of the intellectual and artist in exile, the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages. From this perspective then all things are indeed counter, original, spare, strange. From this perspective also, one can see “the complete consort dancing together” contrapuntally. (pp. 332-333).
Here Said is speaking to two unique yet undeniably bound states of in-betweenness – the physical displacement of the postcolonial migrant, as well as the exilic consciousness that his/her condition enables. And while he is careful to make a distinction between the conditions and experiences of the masses of displaced people and that of intellectuals and/or artists in exile – he viewed the latter “as first distilling and then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity – mass deportation, imprisonment, population transfer, collective dispossession, and forced immigration” (pp. 332-333) – he argued that by being geographically and consciously “unhoused” both have the ability to simultaneously experience the sadness, dislocation, loneliness, and loss of being unhomed while critiquing and working through these very same attachments.

In *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*, Said (2000b) discusses how this condition of being between the “old and the new” enables an “originality [or plurality] of vision” that constitutes one of the “pleasures of exile” (p. 186). Such contrapuntal awareness, he asserted, returns a modicum of dignity to the otherwise dehumanizing condition of modern mass displacement, while also facilitating productive and creative forms of hope and possibility. The dispositions of worldliness that exiles and/or dispersions of geography and consciousness permit are, I believe, strongly bound to the non-Palestinian Palestinian and non-Israeli Israeli comportments toward being noted earlier. This is evidenced in Said’s statement that, as members of “alternative communities that have emerged from the experience of exile” (p. xxxiii), “Jews and Palestinians [living] outside of historical Palestine can play a constructive role that is impossible for those inside, who live under the daily pressure of occupation and dialectical confrontation” (Said, 2003a, p. 208). Given the interplay of their geographic and conscious in-betweeness, Said viewed Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora as uniquely positioned to move beyond the limiting pitfalls of filiative attachments, particularly those of nationalism, toward new beginnings that entail the transcendence of competing claims of victimhood, a contrapuntal understandings of the Holocaust and the Nakba, and ethical engagement with alterity.

But the pleasures and possibilities of exile go beyond exilic beginnings; they also enable the imagining of a new polity. I agree with Spanos’ (2012) estimation that Said imagined the exilic refugee or migrant as enacting two related, yet previously inconceivable, forms of resistance, both of which render the modern nation-state and its
demands for affiliative belonging inoperative. The first, he identifies as resistance to “the systemic economy of belonging intrinsic to the logic of the nation-state, a condition that enables a comportment of ‘not belonging,’ of refusing to be answerable to the call of the nation-state” (p. 166). The second, is “a form of political ‘belonging’ grounded precisely on the ‘not belonging’ – the ‘not counting’ – that authorizes the nation-state” (p. 166).

Much like the precarious existence of the non-humanist humanist discussed earlier, exilic refugees and migrants also represent a “dialectically fraught…sensitively located…class of individuals” (Said, 2004, p.76-77) who in refusing to belong to or be counted by the nation-state assume great – albeit morally, ethically, and politically productive – risk.²⁵

Spanos (2012) goes on to describe the alternative to the nation-state that these forms of resistance, as well as Said’s larger political vision for Palestine, enable:

In rendering the Us and them/Friend and enemy logic of the nation-state inoperative, which is to say, in radically secularizing its sacred exclusive inclusive biologic of belonging, Said is enabled to envisage a polyphonic Palestine: a polis consisting of Palestinians and Jews – two different “voices” – that, however, contrary to the monolithic symphonic Voice of the nation-state, nevertheless belong together in loving – and always inventive, open-ended, and creative – strife. (p. 196)

Not surprisingly then, and even though he moved from advocating for a one state solution to a two state solution earlier in his career, after the failures of Oslo Said (1993) came full circle to again endorse one binational state as the only realistic and just solution to the seemingly intractable Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Ultimately, his political vision could only be actualized if “the complete consort [was] dancing together” contrapuntally” (pp. 332-333).

But if Said understood binationalism as the principle manifestation of coexistence, he also knew that willing it into existence required more than connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba, the achievement of mutual recognition and compassion, and exercising exilic consciousness. Although the latter achievements lay the necessary moral, ethical, and political foundation for his vision, he was explicit that Palestinians and

²⁵ This risk is very real, as exilic refugees and migrants still require an institutional apparatus through which to obtain and secure their rights, hence Said’s call for and imagining of a new polity. For more on this issue, see Arendt’s (1976) argument regarding “a right to have rights” (p. 296), which appears later in this chapter.
Israelis must also make a conscious choice between “either apartheid or justice and citizenship” (Said, 2003a, p. 285). They must reject and rise up against the exclusionary, oppressive, and discriminatory policies and practices of the Israeli state for, as Butler (2012) asserts, in order to achieve a true binational state “the vast violent hegemonic structure of political Zionism,” as well as the settler colonialism that it entails, must be replaced by a new polity “that would imply complex and antagonistic modes of living together, an amelioration of the wretched forms of binationalism that already exist” (p. 4).

The way forward, according to Said (2003a), was for Palestinians and Israelis to jointly advocate for the democratic sharing of land, self-determination for both groups, and the extension of equal citizenship to all. This vision of coexistence and sharing, he argued, “require[s] an innovative, daring, and theoretical willingness to get beyond the arid stalemate of assertion, exclusivism, and rejection,” however, “once the initial acknowledgement of the Other as an equal is made…the way forward becomes not only possible but attractive” (p. 319). Nonetheless, Said recognized that taking that first step toward connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba, engaging ethically with alterity, and advocating for a new polity was tremendously difficult. Yet this is exactly the impossible necessary task left to those acting and courageous non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis who, in recognizing their interconnected histories and experiences of victimhood, displacement, and exile, might take up Said’s challenge of willing the impossible.

The Question of Israel: Arendt’s Political Vision

Unlike Said who came to prominence in the late 1970s and thus only began writing about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict once it was already decades old, the bulk of Arendt’s writing concerning the region were written during the World War II era, just prior to the establishment of the Israeli state, through to its first two and a half decades of nationhood. In fact, Said came to prominence just before Arendt passed away in 1975. Thus, as Spanos (2012) points out, the fascinatingly similar points of intersection between their thinking is premised both on their distinct yet organically linked ethnic and secular backgrounds, as well as the unique global occasions during which they lived, worked, and wrote. The significance of these intriguing biographical differences and their productive intersection cannot be over stressed, for if they led Said to begin with the
question of Palestine, they guided Arendt to begin with the Jewish question and thus, ultimately, the question of Israel.

Arendt’s political thinking on the question of Israel is most clearly laid out in *The Jewish Writings* (2007), in particular the following passages taken from the essay “To Save the Jewish Homeland,” which was originally published in May 1948, just days after the Israeli state was established and in the very early stages of the first Arab-Israeli War. In speculating about what might happen if the then growing Zionist public sentiment of “everything or nothing, victory or death” (p. 391) won out in the *yishuv*, Arendt stated that, beyond the loss of the kibbutzim:

Still another precedent, or at least its possibility, would go down with the *yishuv* – that of close cooperation between two peoples, one embodying the most advance ways of European civilization, the other an erstwhile victim of colonial oppression and backwardness. The idea of Arab-Jewish cooperation, though never realized on any scale and today seemingly farther off than ever, is not an idealistic daydream but a sober statement of the fact that without it the whole Jewish venture in Palestine is doomed. Jews and Arabs could be forced by circumstances to show the world that there are no differences between two peoples that cannot be bridged. Indeed, the working out of such a modus vivendi might in the end serve as a model of how to counteract the dangerous tendencies of formerly oppressed peoples to shut themselves off from the rest of the world and develop nationalist superiority complexes of their own.

Many opportunities for Jewish-Arab friendship have already been lost, but none of these failures can alter the basic fact that the existence of the Jews in Palestine depends on achieving it. Moreover, the Jews have one advantage in the fact that, excluded as they were from official history for centuries, they have no imperialist past to live down. They can still act as a vanguard in international relations on a small but valid scale – as in the kibbutzim they have already acted as a vanguard in social relations despite the relatively insignificant numbers of people involved. (pp. 395-396)

Even if the Jews were to win [an all-out war against the Arabs], its end would find the unique possibilities and the unique achievements of Zionism in Palestine destroyed. The land that would come into being would be something quite other than the dream of the world Jewry, Zionist and non-Zionist. The “victorious” Jews would live surrounded by an entirely hostile Arab population, secluded inside ever-threatened borders absorbed with physical self-defense to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities. The growth of a Jewish culture would cease to be the concern of the whole people; social experiments would have to be discarded as impractical luxuries; political thought would center around military strategy; economic development would be determined exclusively by the needs of war. And all this would be the fate of a nation that – no matter how many immigrants it could still absorb and
how far it extended its boundaries (the whole of Palestine and Transjordan is the insane Revisionist demand) – would still remain a very small people greatly outnumbered by hostile neighbors. (pp. 396-397)

These passages highlight three key aspects of Arendt’s political thinking regarding the question of Israel: 1) her often brutal critique of Herzlian Zionism, particularly its thoughtless drive for a Jewish state at the expense of a Jewish homeland; 2) her disappointment with the missed opportunities for cooperation between Jews and the native Arab population and the formation of a binational state;26 and 3) her prophetic warning about the future of the Israeli state if its leaders and citizens chose to move forward without taking up the challenge of being vanguards in the world. As we will see, Arendt’s thinking on the question of Israel ultimately demonstrates her own contrapuntal reading of the Holocaust and the Nakba, an engagement with alterity, and a vision for a new binational polity.

**Wrestling with Zionism: Thoughtless Escape, Thoughtful Action**

In the introduction to Arendt’s *The Jewish Writings* Ron H. Feldman (2007) stresses that, although linked, the Holocaust and the Jewish state raise two different sets of questions:

> The Holocaust is the end of an era of Jewish existence and therefore raises questions about the past – how and why it happened. The Jewish State is the beginning of a new era and therefore raises questions about what it means to be part of the Jewish people today and in the future. (pp. xlv-xlvi)

In addressing these distinct yet organically connected questions during her own time, Arendt brought to the fore both her reverence and scorn for Zionism. On the one hand, she was deeply concerned with the historical relationship between Jews and gentiles, as well as how Jews’ lack of responsibility for their own fate contributed to the modern Jewish experience of anti-Semitism prior to and during World War II. Her thinking on the matter led her to view the establishment of a Jewish homeland as the best solution to anti-Semitism and the Jewish problem, and, as a result, she was an active Zionist from 1933 to 1943 (as cited in Butler, 2012, p. 36). In fact, she praised Theodore Herzl for his

---

26 Prior to 1948 Arendt supported a multi-ethnic federation open to all nations, not just Jews and Arabs. It was only in 1948, and in response to the possibility of partition and thus war, that she began to support the movement for a binational Arab/Jewish state. For more, see Arendt (2007), Butler (2012), and Rubin (2015).
active determination in finding a solution to the Jewish problem, arguing that Zionism was an asset in rectifying Jewish worldlessness, “the [problematic] modes of Jewish self-understanding and world-understanding that resulted in the Jewish responses of unbelief and passivity in the face of destruction” (Feldman, 2007, p. xlii). On the other hand, Arendt was highly critical of Herzl’s particular brand of Zionism, which she felt envisioned anti-Semitism as static and eternal, isolated Jews from the rest of the world (whether it be from nation-states or other oppressed people), distained revolutionary movements, and focused on “escape or deliverance in a homeland” (Feldman, 2007, p. 339), specifically a Jewish state in Palestine. These issues, she predicted, could only result in yet another form of modern Jewish worldlessness focused solely on survival and “dignity at any price” (p. 386).

This Herzlian form of Zionism differed radically from that of Bernard Lazare, who inspired Arendt’s notion of the conscious pariah. In contrast to Herzl, Lazare did not passively and unconsciously accept the pariah status assigned to the Jewish people, rather he consciously rebelled against it employing it as a motivational tool for political action on behalf of Jews and other oppressed people. Arendt argued that for Lazare, unlike Herzl, “the territorial question” of securing a Jewish state in Palestine was not a priority, but rather “a mere outcome of the primary demand that ‘the Jews should be emancipated as a people and in the form of a nation.’ What he sought was not an escape from anti-Semitism but a mobilization of the people against its foes” (Feldman, 2007, p. 339). Arendt understood this to mean that “[a]s soon as the pariah enters the arena of politics and translates his status into political terms, he becomes perforce a rebel” and that as a Jew one “should come out openly as the representative of the pariah, ‘since it is the duty of every human being to resist oppression’” (Feldman, 2007, p. 284).

Thus, following the Holocaust, the Jewish people found themselves at a crossroads – to one side was Herzlian Zionism, which fostered unreality, thoughtlessness, and worldlessness by focusing exclusively on the survival of the Israeli state and to the other Lazarian Zionism, which enabled reality, thoughtfulness, and worldliness through moral, ethical, and political action on behalf of Jews and non-Jews alike. The road Arendt chose was clear. It was her love for the Jewish homeland and her reverence for and adoption of Lazarian Zionism that accounted for her criticisms of Herzl and the Israeli state, her emphasis on Jewish-Arab cooperation, and support for the
binationalist movement. It was also, I believe, what enabled her to connect the experiences of suffering and exile that bound Palestinians and Israelis to one another after her prophetic warnings regarding the “final tragedy” (Feldman, 2007, p. 394) in Palestine came to fruition. In fact, Arendt’s own contrapuntal understanding of the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba are demonstrated in the following two passages, which were originally published in 1950 and 1951 respectively:

The most realistic way to measure the cost to the peoples of the Near East of the events of the past year is not by casualties, economic losses, war destruction, or military victories, but by the political changes, the most outstanding of which has been the creation of a new category of homeless people, the Arab refugees. These not only form a dangerous potential irredenta dispersed in all Arab countries where they could easily become the visible uniting link; much worse, no matter how their exodus came about (as a consequence of Arab atrocity propaganda or real atrocities or a mixture of both), their flight from Palestine, prepared by Zionist plans of large-scale population transfers during the war and followed by the Israeli refusal to readmit the refugees to their old home, made the old Arab claim against Zionism finally come true: the Jews simply aimed at expelling the Arabs from their homes. What had been the pride of the Jewish homeland, that it had not been based upon exploitation, turned into a curse when the final test came: the flight of the Arabs would not have been possible and not have been welcomed by the Jews if they had lived in a common economy. (Feldman, 2007, p. 444)

The notion that statelessness is primarily a Jewish problem was a pretext used by all governments who tried to settle the problem by ignoring it. None of the statesmen was aware that Hitler’s solution of the Jewish problem…was an eloquent demonstration to the rest of the world how really to “liquidate” all problems concerning minorities and stateless. After the war it turned out that the Jewish question, which was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved – namely, by means of a colonized and then conquered territory – but this solved neither the problem of the minorities nor the stateless. On the contrary, like virtually all other events of our century, the solution of the Jewish question merely produced a new category of refugees, the Arabs, thereby increasing the number of stateless and rightless by another 700,000 to 800,000 people. (Arendt, 1976, pp. 289-290)

Thus, like Said, Arendt was highly critical of Herzlian Zionists’ wilful disregard for the Arab Palestinians, which she clearly believed undermined opportunities for cooperation and peaceful coexistence, acknowledged the colonial nature of the Israeli state, and recognized the organic link between the Holocaust and post-1948 fate of the Palestinians. Interestingly, in one of his rare references to Arendt’s work, Said actually acknowledges her contrapuntal understanding of these tragedies. In the introduction to
The Question of Palestine, Said (1992) states that “[s]omething like an ironic double vision is therefore necessary now in order to see both the very well-known success and the far less known disaster [of Zionism]” (p. xxxix), after which he substantiates his claim by directly quoting the bulk of the second Arendtian passage above.

Nevertheless, if Arendt, like Said, was highly critical of political Zionism and recognized the natural yet tragically ironic connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba, unlike him, her worry regarding the fate of the Arab Palestinians was not a product of her concern for social justice. While I agree with Spanos’ (2012) assertion that Arendt’s insistence on cooperating with the native Arabs was driven by the exigencies of saving the Jewish homeland rather than empathy for their well being or belonging within the new polity, I also believe that it stemmed from her fear of and dedication to eradicating “the insult of oblivion” (Arendt, 1990, p. 69). As Kimberley Curtis (1999) contends,

[i]t is not, of course, that Arendt…championed the cause of social justice. Indeed, she seems somewhat tone-deaf to such concerns. Arendt’s political theorizing was fired by a feeling for a different kind of injustice – the insult of oblivion. This form of injustice is…prior to social injustice in the sense that the degradation of obscurity is a primary precondition of our capacity to inflict and sustain the suffering involved in the many forms social…inequality take[s]…[T]he point is not only the uncertain moral claim that if we could but fully “see” others we could neither commit nor sustain social injustices against them. It is also that the condition of oblivion itself weakens those who suffer it in ethically troublesome ways. Thus, in what has been perceived as Arendt’s insensitivity, even cold humanity, I find the essence of a particularly compelling humanism that owes much to her phenomenology and wells out of her concern with how to intensify our awareness of reality. (p. 68)

In other words, while Arendt’s approach to the Arab Palestinians may well have been chillingly pragmatic, even Eurocentric, as both Spanos (2012) and Butler (2012) argue, it is still highly significant that her strategy for ensuring the success of the Jewish homeland required Jews to face the one true and unalterable reality of their situation in Palestine, the Arab Palestinians, by taking moral, ethical, and political responsibility for them (Arendt, 2007; Butler, 2012; Curtis, 1999). Much like Said then, if we read Arendt through Arendt we quickly see that her approach to the question of Israel was grounded in her dedication to both Jewish tradition and humanism, rather than national, religious, or ethnic filiations. It also becomes obvious that she left us with an impossible necessary task remarkably similar to that of Said’s.
There Is Always a Choice to Be Made: The Social Parvenu or the Conscious Pariah

Much in the same way that the failure of the Oslo Accords served as a fundamental flashpoint in Said’s thinking, the birth of the Israeli state and the subsequent start of the first Arab-Israeli war represented a significant political moment for Arendt. While her writings in this period were primarily concerned with saving the Jewish homeland and the steps Jews must take to ensure its success, her statements encouraging Jewish-Arab cooperation, as well as her warnings of what was to come if such opportunities were not seized, had significant implications for, and ultimately required the action of, both Jews and Arabs. That is, the moment presented all concerned with an opportunity for new beginnings.

Similar to Said, Arendt underscored the failures of both Zionist and Arab leaders, as well as their supporters. For instance, she vehemently criticized both peoples’ desire “to fight it out at any price [as] nothing less than sheer irrationality” (Arendt, 2007, p. 389), warned of the increasingly totalitarian and/or fascist nature of the Zionist and Arab leadership respectively, and appeared horrified by acts of terrorism, particularly those carried out by the Irgun and Haganah. Furthermore, she railed against those individuals who, whether consciously or unconsciously, refused to acknowledge the irrefutable presence and needs of the Other, thus succumbing to the insult of oblivion by failing to take moral, ethical or political responsibility for them. Nevertheless, and again approximating Said, Arendt recognized the unique opportunity such failures presented to those Jews and Arabs who might desire to act together in the world, praising those who chose to engage directly with “the plural diversity of worldly existence” (Curtis, 1999, p. 60) rather than deny reality. Although a minority in the region at the time, she hopefully acknowledged those individuals who, having accepted the reality of their situation, might be able to save the Jewish homeland by means of cooperation:

Fortunately, there are still some Jews left who have shown in these bitter days that they have too much wisdom and too great a sense of responsibility to blindly follow where desperate, fanaticized masses would lead them. There are still, despite appearances, a few Arabs who are unhappy about the increasingly fascist coloration of their national movements. (Feldman, 2007, p. 397)
Thus, paralleling Said, Arendt understood beginnings to be initiated by human will or agency, particularly through speech and action, rather than preordained by origins or tradition (Arendt, 2006; Heller, 2001). She contended that,

[w]ith word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labour, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. To act, in the most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin...to set something into motion...Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action....This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something, but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before. (Arendt, 1998, pp. 176-177)

Building from this, if Said encouraged his audience to begin again by crossing the lines of separation sustained by communal filiation into productive relations of affiliation, in 1948 and later Arendt implored her primarily Jewish audience to begin anew by making an active choice between thoughtless isolation and thoughtful cooperation. On the one hand, she warned that moving forward with the Jewish Israeli state at the expense of Jewish-Arab cooperation would mean the loss of a Jewish homeland, a return to the dangers of thoughtlessness and isolation from the world, and an existence permanently focused on surviving the threats posed by surrounding enemies. On the other hand, she stressed that supporting a binational state in which Jews and Arabs might peacefully coexist presented an opportunity for both peoples to act as vanguards in the world, demonstrate that thoughtfulness and plurality can facilitate the working through of difference, and ensure the survival of both groups. In order to better understand the significance of this Arendtian challenge, as well as the possibility for beginnings that it enables, we must look to her broader theories of the social and public realms, as well as the comportments toward being that they inspire, i.e.) the parvenu and conscious pariah, respectively.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) attributes the rise of the social during the modern age to the movement of private matters from the intimacy of the household into
the public realm. This not only muddied and redefined previous distinctions between the private and public realms, but also greatly impacted the daily lives of individuals. Of greatest concern to Arendt was how the emergence of the social has disallowed for the possibility of political action, instead requiring members of society to conform to a prescribed set of normalizing behaviours. Arendt demonstrates that the rise of the social has resulted in a monolithic society characterized by a conformism that “allows for only one interest and one opinion” (p. 46), thus threatening the demise of our very humanity. For instance, she asserts that modern “[s]ociety is the form in which the fact of mutual dependence for the sake of life and nothing else assumes public significance and where the activities connected with sheer survival are permitted to appear in public” (p. 46). Arendt warns that while the social allows for “the unnatural growth of the natural” (p. 47), the achievement of excellence in activities geared toward life’s necessities such as labouring, it does not allow for the attainment of excellence through speech and action – political activities increasingly relegated to the private realm, but which can only realize excellence, and consequently freedom, if undertaken in the mutuality and plurality of others.

As Hanna Fenichel Pitkin (1998) argues, the challenging and complex nature of Arendt’s theory of the social results from its two incongruent foundations: the first, focused on the economic or biological nature of the social, accounts for its most common reading and is often interpreted through Arendt’s opposition to communism and socialism during the Cold War; and the second, concerned with the conformity demanded within the social realm, a newer reading concerned with “disciplinary normalization, oppressive conformity to mainstream values [and] the obliteration of individuality” (p. 17). Yet aspects of both can be found in Stuart Poyntz’s (2012) discussion of how the drive to fulfill the necessities of life negatively manifests in individuals’ everyday existence, particularly through the creation of novel forms of governmental power. He explains:

[T]he social renders bodies socially accountable and thus subject to new forms of regulation in the name of the public good. This leads to the emergence of a new form of governmentality: one in which the management and care of populations as a whole – often through partnerships between states and social agencies – in the service of a viable and healthy social realm comes to be paramount. What results is a new form of subjection, a new way of relating to the world characterized by thoughtlessness, routine, and an abiding normalization that is
simultaneously misunderstood as individuation. A crippled sphere of action, then, the realm of the social is associated with ideas of behaviour, not action. Such behaviour may meet human needs, but not in a way that nurtures freedom. Rather, the preservation and the maintenance of human life become social preoccupations, and the result is a new logic embedded in organizations and practices that map, control, and manage populations in order to produce stability and Arendt feared, acquiescence...Thus the social refers to the web of relationships that coordinate and manage our ability to act in the world. (p. 23)

Poyntz’s argument highlights the link between Arendt’s criticisms of the social in *The Human Condition* and the concerns she set out earlier in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1976) regarding the social and political crises and experiences that create the conditions for the emergence of dangerous new forms of government grounded in thoughtlessness and isolation. As demonstrated above, the roots of these arguments can be found in her 1948 writings. In fact, Poyntz’s words are hauntingly similar to Arendt’s forewarnings about the ultimate fate of the Israeli state if it was to move forward at the expense of Jewish-Arab cooperation. Accordingly, it would appear that as early as 1948, Arendt viewed Jews who supported the ever-growing Jewish public opinion in favour of the Israeli state and the negation of the Arab Palestinians, to have acquiesced to the conformity of the social, rather than questioning its dangers. These individuals accepted the role of the parvenu – one who, in considering themselves a victim of historical forces, fails to recognize their ability to act in the world as an individual, thus sacrificing reality and their ability to recognize truth (Pitkin, 1998). As Pitkin (1998) maintains, [i]ncapable – of autonomous judgment or action, of perceiving others accurately or relating to them nonmanipulatively, hence of intimacy or love, of mutuality or solidarity, of taking pleasure in the real world – the parvenu is bound to remain isolated, a victim, and unhappy. (p. 27)

However, as Arendt adamantly stressed, there is always a choice to be made. Rather than allowing themselves to fall prey to the powers of the social, which would reduce them to victims incapable of action, these individuals could choose to act within and for the world as conscious pariahs – those who, following Lazare, recognize that they have the power and agency to shape their own destiny and thus rebel against the social and those who support it by acting in solidarity with others (Arendt, 1998; Pitkin, 1998). According to Arendt, it is by acting in the public realm that we can remedy the thoughtlessness and alienation produced by the social. Contrary to the latter, the
achievement of excellence in the public realm demands speech and action within the presence of others. For Arendt, it is the mutuality and plurality resulting from being seen and heard by others that constitutes reality and the common world in which we live, for as she notes “[t]he end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective” (Arendt, 1998, p. 58). Furthermore, unlike those individuals who prefer the seemingly safe isolation and oblivion of the social, those acting in the public realm must be courageous enough to disclose themselves to one another. This is a heroic act, Arendt stresses, because the boundlessness and unpredictability of the public realm does not guarantee one control over what they reveal or the consequences of such disclosure. Yet this is just the point – while the social defines individuals by “what” they are, the public realm reveals “who” they are. It is this form of action or new beginnings, undertaken in the plurality and density of the world, that Jewish-Arab cooperation represented to Arendt and which she believed could combat the ever-increasing social forces of the new Israeli state. In this respect, Arendt and Said share more than a mutual demand for choosing new beginnings over the dangers of acquiescing to filiative or social pressure. The political challenges they left to acting Palestinians and Israelis in fact entailed a blueprint for an ethics in dispersion and a response to claims of alterity (Butler, 2012).

First, much like Said’s exilic consciousness, Arendt’s conscious pariah is a “two in one condition” (Spanos, 2012, p. 144), an “insider-outsider [position]” (Curtis, 1999, p. 131), that necessitates the difficult yet necessary struggle of divorcing oneself from communitarian moorings (Butler, 2012). In her lifetime Arendt lived up to the moral, ethical, and political standards that she challenged others to meet – standards grounded in Lazarian Zionism, but seemingly also in the tradition of those particular Jewish thinkers, Deutscher chief among them, that Said so admired. This is not only evidenced by her harsh critique of Herzlian Zionism, support for a binational state, and championing of Jewish-Arab cooperation in 1948, but also in the schism that formed between her and the Jewish community after the 1963 release of Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (2006). In a now famous exchange of letters between Arendt and Gershom Scholem, in which the latter critiques both her identity as a Jew and apparent lack of love for the Jewish people, Arendt (2007) responded as follows:

You are quite right – I am not moved by any “love” of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life “loved” any people or collective – neither
the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of the sort. I indeed love “only” my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly, this “love of Jews” would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person. To clarify, let me tell you of a conversation I had in Israel with a prominent political personality who was defending the – in my opinion disastrous – nonseparation of religion and state in Israel.27 What he said…ran something like this: “You will understand that, as a Socialist, I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people.” I found this a shocking statement and, being too shocked, I did not reply at the time. But I could have answered: The greatness of this people was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love toward Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come out of that? – Well in this sense I do not “love” the Jews, nor do I “believe” in them; I merely belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument. (pp. 466-467)

Arendt goes on to argue that discussing this issue in political terms demands “a consideration of patriotism [as] there can be no patriotism without permanent opposition and criticism” (p. 467), for she believed that “the hallmark of true patriotism and true devotion to one’s people [is] intense discontent” (as cited in Curtis, 1999, p. 130). Here we see that, while Arendt placed great importance on being Jewish, it was precisely her Jewish identity and dedication to Jewish tradition that drove her to live both inside and outside of her own community and ultimately grounded her humanity. In other words, as a secular Jew of German origins who chose to act in the world as a conscious pariah, Arendt deliberately took up the role of the non-Jewish Jew (Spanos, 2012).

Second, as a non-Jewish Jew Arendt clearly understood that “Jewishness can and must be understood as an anti-identitarian project insofar as…being a Jew implies taking up an ethical relation to the non-Jew” (Butler, 2012, p. 117). While this is corroborated by Arendt’s aforementioned insistence that Jews must accept the reality of the Palestinian Arabs and thus take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for them, I agree with Butler that it is also evidenced in her theory of cohabitation, which emerged from her reporting on the Eichmann trail. Arendt (2006) asserted that Eichmann’s

27 In her biography of Arendt, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (2004) reveals that the ‘prominent political personality’ referred to here was in fact Golda Meir. Apparently, prior to the publication of Scholem’s letter and Arendt’s response to it, the pair agreed, based on the former’s request, to not name Meir directly and to change the gender of the corresponding pronoun.
greatest crime was that he believed he had “a right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world” (p. 279) alongside him. However, to Arendt, “cohabitation is not a choice, but a condition of our political life. We are bound to one another prior to [any social or political] contract and prior to any volitional act” (Butler, 2012, p. 23). Building from this, Butler outlines an Arendtian ethics of cohabitation, which states that, while we have no choice regarding with who we might cohabit the earth, we can choose to both preserve and nourish “the unchosen character of inclusive and plural cohabitation” (p. 151) and take up the obligation to protect the lives of those with who we live – to do otherwise would entail “enter[ing] into a policy of genocide” (p. 24). It is precisely Arendt’s commitment to conscious pariahdom and an ethics of cohabitation that provides the foundation for her holding up of the refugee or stateless person as a model for non-belonging and the envisioning of a new binational polity, respectively.

Envisioning a New Polity: Non-Belonging and Binationalism

Whereas Said’s ruminations on the refugee or migrant where grounded in the global decline of Western imperialism and the beginning of the postcolonial moment following World War II, Arendt’s examination of the conditions of the refugee or stateless person was focused primarily on Europe in the period between the First and Second World Wars, thus preceding Said by a generation (Spanos, 2012). In The Origins of Totalitarianism, which was originally published in 1951, Arendt (1976) documented the process by which increasing masses of refugees or stateless persons, Jews chief among them, were rendered rightless and thus silent – the latter through the loss of “the right to action [and] the right to opinion” (p. 296) and subsequently the common community which these rights sanctioned. She argued that the terrible predicament in which these non-citizens found themselves, particularly prisoners of the internment or concentration camps, not only demonstrated that the supposedly sacred Rights of Man were in fact alienable and unenforceable, but also that, given its inability or unwillingness to guarantee and/or secure the rights of those most vulnerable, the nation-state had been rendered obsolete.

Interestingly, and in astonishingly similar fashion to Said, it was in the midst of her own exilic experience that Arendt “turn[ed] the condition of the countryless refugee...upside down in order to present it as the paradigm of a new historical
consciously” (Agamben, 2000, p. 14). In her 1943 essay “We Refugees” she declared that,

> [h]istory has forced the status of outlaws upon...pariahs and parvenus alike...Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of “indecency,” get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of the gentiles...Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples – if they keep their identity. (Arendt, 2007, p. 274)

Here we see an earlier, yet no less powerful, juxtaposition of the social parvenu and the conscious pariah, i.e.) the former who, in seeking readmission to “the nation-state’s logic of belonging,” acquiesces to the “statist language” (Spanos, 2012, p. 170) of the social versus the latter who, in choosing not to belong within the nation-state or remain silent, subversively steps into the public realm by acting and speaking in and for the mutuality and plurality of the world. Therefore, I agree with Spanos that while Arendt’s analysis of the particular global occasion in which she lived, worked, and wrote was more pessimistic than Said’s, it equally demonstrates “the paradoxical positive possibilities” (p. 170) enabled by the mass displacement, misery, and horror that characterizes the refugee experience. By being dispersed both geographically and consciously, Arendt’s refugee or stateless person, much like Said’s exile or migrant, experiences two distinctive yet interconnected states of in-betweenness, an “enforced double exile” (p. 151) or “two-in-one condition” (p. 144), that enables two forms of productive resistance through non-belonging, i.e.) refusing to be answerable to the demands of the nation-state and finding belonging amongst those who also choose not to be counted within it. If we consider this in tandem with Arendt’s later writings on the question of Israel, I

---

28 As previously noted, even though morally, ethically, and politically productive, these two forms of non-belonging entail great risk, as refugees or stateless persons still require an institutional apparatus through which to obtain and secure their rights. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt (1976) addresses this “right to have rights” as follows: “The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas which were designed to solve problems within given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them...Not the lose of specific rights...but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity which has befallen every-increasing numbers of people. Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity.” (pp. 295-297)
believe it can be argued that, as refugees themselves, those Jews and Arabs who Arendt praised for choosing to act and speak together in favour of a binational state, thus acting as the vanguards of their people, illustrated the perilous albeit highly productive positionalities of the non-Israeli Israeli and non-Palestinian Palestinian. It is this consciously chosen ontological bearing of "non-belonging belonging" (p. 191) that provides the foundation for the envisioning of a new binational polity.

As previously noted, I concur with Spanos and Butler that, contradictory to Said, Arendt’s concern for the Palestinian Arabs was pragmatic even Eurocentric – a significant distinction that should not be downplayed. However, I also believe that Spanos (2012) convincingly demonstrates, “by way of symptomatically pursuing the(decentering ‘logic’ inhering in her understanding of the ‘conscious pariah’ into its implications about Zionism and the Israeli nation-state,” that,

we are directed, indeed, compelled, by [Arendt’s] radically negative critique of the undeviating essentialism of their filial logic of belonging to read her commentary on Jewish-Palestinian cooperation – and her commitment to the idea of a binational community – as remarkably prophetic, if not an explicit vision, of a singular denationalized and non-identitarian, binational community – or more precisely, to bring to centre stage a resonant pair of Saidian terms…a polity that, unlike those founded on “filiation” or “affiliation” is (un)founded on the (il)logic of affiliation. (p. 189)

Nevertheless, Spanos is correct that, contrary to Said, Arendt “offer[ed] no…heuristic directive for determining what she meant in espousing a ‘binational state” (p. 196). To rectify this issue he turns to the Arendtian influenced vision for a binational polity articulated by Giorgio Agamben (2000) in his opening chapter of Means Without End: Notes on Politics, which was written fifty years after Arendt’s publication of The Origins of Totalitarianism. Working from Arendt’s aforementioned assertion that the refugee or stateless person “deserves…to be regarded as the central figure of our political history” (p. 22) and that nation-states “must find the courage to question the very principle of the inscription of nativity as well as the trinity of state-nation-territory that is founded on that principle” (p. 21), Agamben turns his attention to Jerusalem as a case in point:

One of the options taken into consideration for solving the problem of Jerusalem is that it become – simultaneously and without any territorial partition – the capital of two different states. The paradoxical condition of reciprocal extraterritoriality (or, better yet, aterritoriality) that would thus be implied could be generalized as a model of new international relations.
Instead of two national states separated by uncertain and threatening boundaries, it might be possible to imagine two political communities insisting on the same region and in a condition of exodus from each other – communities that would articulate each other via a series of reciprocal extraterritorialities in which the guiding concept would no longer be the *ius* (right) of the citizen but rather the *refugium* (refuge) of the singular. (p. 24)

Agamben envisioned that such an extraterritorial or aterritorial space would not correspond to any homogenous national territory or its “*topographical* sum,” but rather “act on [it] by articulating and perforating [it] *topologically* as in the Klein bottle or in the Möbius strip, where exterior and interior in-determine each other” (p. 25). Applied to Palestine specifically, Agamben argues that, at the time of his writing, “the no-man’s land in which [Palestinians] are refugees has already started…to act back onto the territory of the state of Israel by perforating it and altering it” (p. 26). Within this Arendtian influenced analysis Spanos (2012) finds “the denationalized nationalist logic of the conscious pariah” (p. 199) and the framework for “an unhomed homeland” (p. 201) that he believes bears striking resemblance to Said’s (1993) vision of “‘the complete consort dancing together’ contrapuntally” (p. 333).

While I too find possibility, and thus inspiration and hope, in Agamben’s metaphorical vision for the coming binational polity, a decade later (and interestingly the same year that Spanos published *Exiles in the City*) Butler delineates a thorough and thus, in my opinion, much more compelling and viable binational vision. Most importantly, unlike Agamben or Spanos, she directly attends to the vile forms of binationalism currently being lived out by Palestinians and Israelis on a daily basis. Butler rightfully asserts that the only way to achieve an equitable and hence ethical mode of cohabitation between Palestinians and Israelis is to first bring about an end to Israeli settler colonialism, the occupation and subjugation of the Palestinian people, and thus the state violence both entail. She substantiates this assertion using Arendt:

For Arendt, the call to rethink federal authority or binationalism for the region to politically embody principles of cohabitation envisages a way out of violence rather than a path that would lead to the destruction of any of the populations on that land. The political point is that one cannot defend the Jewish people against destruction without defending the Palestinians people against destruction. If one fails to universalize the interdictions against destruction, then one pursues the destruction of the “Other” with the assumption that only through that destruction can one oneself survive. But the truth remains that the destruction of Palestinian lives and livelihoods can only increase the threat of destruction against those who
have perpetrated it, since it gives ongoing grounds for a resistance movement that has its violent and nonviolent versions. (Butler, 2012, p. 119)

Here again we see the importance of recognizing the boundedness of Palestinian and Jewish suffering, the necessity of acknowledging and then ethically addressing and taking responsibility for the Other, and the possibilities enabled by choosing to forego state violence in favour of productive forms of resistance found outside the nation-state alongside those who also refuse to fall victim to the thoughtlessness and wordliness of the social.

Given my analysis thus far, it is not unexpected that Butler’s (2012) arguments that “there are Jewish resources for the criticism of state violence, the colonial subjugation of populations, expulsion and dispossession” and “that a Jewish critique of Israeli state violence is at least possible, if not ethically obligatory” (p. 1) are deeply grounded in, and therefore owes much to, the political thinking and writing of both Said and Arendt. Grounded in humanism and Jewish tradition, Butler’s thinking brings together and elaborates on both Said’s and Arendt’s political visions (although less directly and with a different purpose than Spanos). True Butler’s overarching analysis finds much of its initial foundation in Said’s multifaceted and difficult vision of willing the impossible outlined above. However, her overarching thesis and resultant Saidian influenced binational vision could not have been supported or so convincingly presented without the assistance of Arendt, particularly her call for thoughtful action in the public realm, insistence on an ethics of cohabitation, and critique of the nation-state and its demands for social belonging. Further to this, given Said’s repeated citation of Arendt’s (as well as Martin Buber’s and Judah Magnes’) support of the binationalist movement in his own writings (2003), I believe the potentiality inherent in Arendt’s thinking on the question of Israel must have influenced Said’s thinking on the question of Palestine to some degree. Butler undoubtedly recognizes this connection even though she never explicitly speaks to it.

With that said, and regardless of how courageous Arendt and other supporters of the binationalist movement might have been in 1948, there can be no denying that their efforts failed and that her warnings regarding the fate of the Israeli state became a reality – a reality which continues to be shaped today by ever-increasingly “wretched forms of binationalism” (Butler, 2012, p. 4). However, taken together her pre- and post-1948
writings, to say nothing of her own political life, provide a blueprint for those non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis who might still choose to begin anew by accepting reality and thus moral, ethical, and political responsibility for one another, acting as conscious pariah and thus vanguards in and for the world, and adhering to an ethics of cohabitation rooted in the joint solidarity of non-belonging. Ultimately, then, like Said, Arendt too leaves us with the difficult, and for that reason all the more necessary, task of willing the impossible.
Chapter 3.

Willing the Impossible through Storytelling & Photography: Said & Arendt in Praxis

By highlighting the points of affiliation between Said and Arendt’s political visions for Palestine and Israel respectively, Chapter 2 provided a thorough understanding of the impossible yet necessary task both scholars left to acting and courageous Palestinians and Israelis. In this chapter, I extend this theoretical foundation to demonstrate how my dissertation research brings Said and Arendt’s political thinking into praxis. This requires teasing out additional points of intersection between and imaginative possibilities enabled by Said and Arendt’s political thinking, which are not considered by Spanos or Butler, but which were particularly salient to my dissertation planning, fieldwork, and findings. More specifically, I explore how storytelling and photography create the “occasions” (Fabian, 1990, p. 7) and “conditions of possibility” (Culhane, 2011b, p. 258) necessary for willing the impossible through “civil imagination” (Azoulay, 2012, p. 5).

The Possibilities of Narrative & Photography: From Representation to Emancipation

If we intend to take up the Saidian challenge of willing the impossible, we must begin by thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally. This means identifying and understanding the master narratives and associated collective memories of these traumas, which have been constructed and sustained by Palestinian and Israeli leaders and their supporters, and then disrupting, complicating, and unsettling them. Accordingly, if we return to Culture and Imperialism, in which Said (1993) lays out his argument for a contrapuntal approach that attends to the divergent yet connected experiences of both the colonizer and colonized, we see that narrative plays a momentous role in his thinking:

Readers of this book will quickly discover that narrative is crucial to my argument here, my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and
the existence of their own history. The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future – these issues were reflected, contested, and even for a time decided in narrative. As one critic has suggested, nations themselves are narrations. The power to narrate, or to block the other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjections; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they fought for new narratives of equality and human community. (pp. xii-xiii)

Thus, Said demonstrates the historical cultural process by which colonial and/or national master narratives were used to represent, subjugate, displace, dispossess, and even exclude the other, as well as how counter-narratives, which complicated and disrupted the aforementioned master narratives, served as a form of resistance, emancipation, and liberation for those living under colonial or imperial rule.

Further to this, Said unpacks how the cultural practice of narration or storytelling is linked to identity formation for both parties. On the one hand, he explores how master narratives construct a ridged dichotomy between “us” and “them” substantiated by the “returns’ of culture and tradition [which] accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity” (p. xiii). By way of evidence, Said repeatedly points to education as a cultural battleground or theatre in which students are not only expected to learn their own national stories before, and often even to the exclusion of, others, but also “to appreciate and belong loyalty, often uncritically, to their nations and traditions while denigrating or fighting against others” (p. xiii). The danger, he argues, is not just in “venerating one’s own culture, but also thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world” (p. xiii). On the other hand, Said stresses the need to reintroduce the stories or counter-narratives of those excluded, as they ultimately serve as “narratives of emancipation and enlightenment” (p. xxvi). Rather than seeking separation from the dominant group and their narratives, he reminds us that those excluded sought integration within them. In other words, if national master narratives “were not flexible or generous enough to admit new groups these ideas needed changing; a far better thing to do than reject the emerging group” (p. xxvi).
If in *Cultural and Imperialism* Said highlights the cultural significance of master and counter-narratives for the colonizer and the colonized respectively, as well as the need to attend to both forms of storytelling and their associated identities through contrapuntal analysis, it is in “Invention, Memory, and Place” (2000a) that he applies these arguments directly to a consideration of memory. Here Said explicates how collective memories, which function as part of the aforementioned larger colonial master narratives, are also linked to nationalism, education, identity, power, and authority. Echoing many of the scholars engaged with in Chapter 1, Said recognizes the fluidity, malleability, and usefulness of the “modern art of memory” (p. 180), particularly as part of “a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider’s understanding of one’s country, tradition, and faith” (p. 176). Building from the insights laid out in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s edited volume *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), Said (2000a) proceeds to outline how Zionist and Israeli social and political authorities fashioned, manipulated, and exploited “false, that is, invented memor[ies] of the past as a way of creating a new sense of identity” (p. 178) founded on recovered and/or reconstructed ancient and modern Zionist histories of geography, as well as the memorialization of the Holocaust, much to the determent of the Palestinian people. He asserts that this process of active memorialization and conscious forgetting resulted both in the negation of the Palestinian people in Israel, including their culture, narratives, and civil rights, as well as their reductive representation as homogenized menacing “Arab” terrorists, particularly in mainstream American media.

However, far from being passive victims, Said stresses that “the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality” (p. 184). In other words, the Palestinian people have fought for “[p]ermission to [n]arrate” (Said, 1984, p. 27) their own stories and memories, which counter, disrupt, complicate, and unsettle Zionist and Israeli master narratives and collective memories. Yet Said (2000a) also acknowledges that “the fate of Palestinian history has been a sad one, since not only was independence not gained, but there was little collective

---

29 For more on Said’s concept of “imaginative geographies” see both *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

30 For an extended analysis of the American media’s problematic representation of Islam, Arabs, and the Middle East, see Said’s *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1997).
understanding of the importance of constructing a collective history as part of trying to gain independence” (p. 184). Unaware of the catastrophes that would befall them in 1948 and then 1967, the Palestinian people only truly began a concerted effort to document their history as a people after the June War of 1967 and the resulting Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza – circumstances that “sharpened the need…for organized resistance and counterassertion” (p. 188). As noted above, by this time the Palestinian people faced the daunting challenge of trying to reinsert themselves into an already established and well-organized Zionist Israeli narrative that negated and/or misrepresented them. Still they persevered, the result being numerous cultural and academic projects, “based upon a sense of recovered history, formerly blotted out but now reclaimed” (p. 189), which together chronicled

a line of dynastic descent, between the events of 1948 and before and after the catastrophe, [which] gave substance to the national memory of a Palestinian collective life that persisted, despite the ravages of physical dispossession, military occupation, and Israeli official denials. (p. 189)

While Said encouraged and dedicated his time to numerous projects of this kind, as noted in Chapters 1 and 2, he readily acknowledged and warned against problematic Palestinian master narratives and collective memories of the Nakba that, to varying degrees, minimize and/or negate the severity of the Holocaust and its lingering affect on Israeli consciousness. As such, in the conclusion to “Invention, Memory, and Place” he reminds us of the unique yet bounded responsibilities that Israelis and Palestinians must accept and then meet if the Holocaust and the Nakba are to be brought into counterpoint:

[T]here can be no possible reconciliation, no possible solution unless these two communities confront each’s experience in light of the other. It seems to me essential that there can be no hope of peace unless the stronger community, the Israeli Jews, acknowledges the most powerful memory for Palestinians, namely, the dispossession of an entire people. As the weaker party Palestinians must also face the fact that Israeli Jews see themselves as survivors of the Holocaust, even though that tragedy cannot be allowed to justify Palestinian dispossession. Perhaps in today’s inflamed atmosphere of military occupation and injustice it is perhaps too much to expect these acknowledgements and recognitions to take place. But, as I have argued elsewhere, at some point they must. (p. 192)

While Said identified narrative as crucial to the task of willing the impossible, he also recognized the unique possibilities facilitated by photography. As discussed in
Chapter 1, photographs have been used by Palestinians not only as evidence of their presence in Palestine prior to the formation of the Israeli state, but also the conditions of their existence before, during, and after the Nakba. Interestingly, and paralleling his arguments about narrative, Said understood photography as a “double-edged sword” (Iskandar and Hakem, 2010, p. 13). On the one hand, he recognized photography as violent and exclusionary in its ability to construct and sustain hegemonic and often reductive representations of its subjects. Although Said’s fear of photography began as a young boy caught in his father’s “unforgiving optical grid” (Said, 1999, p. 76), which favoured staged European style family photographs (as well as home movies), his later critiques focused primarily on American mainstream media’s visual representation of Palestinians as nothing more than “fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariah” (Said, 1986, p. 4). Such representations, he stressed, dehumanized Palestinians by diminishing and/or rendering invisible their lived realities of suffering and exile. On the other hand, he was keenly aware that representation is fundamental to the political and social existence of a people. More specifically, he recognized that photography “provided the only explicit documentation of memory, particularly in the case of the Palestinian experience” (Iskandar and Hakem, 2010, pp. 12-13). Thus, as Iskandar and Rustom (2010) rightly assert, for Said “[t]he tragedy of Palestine is the victorious rendering of the invisible present, whereby resistance is born out of the mere appearance of the Palestinian” (p. 13).

Nowhere is Said’s understanding of the significance of photography to the emancipatory Palestinian project of documenting their collective history and reasserting their counter-narratives and counter-memories more clearly demonstrated than in After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives, a photo essay that brings together Said’s written narrative and Jean Mohr’s photographs. As Said (1986) explains, the goal of this collaborative effort was “to deny the habitually simple, even harmful presentations of Palestinians, and replace them with something more capable of capturing the complex reality of their experience” (p. 6). Doing so, he argued, required

an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media, in works of social science, in popular fiction. [After the Last Sky] is a personal rendering of the Palestinians as a dispersed national community – acting, acted upon, proud, tender, miserable, funny, indomitable, ironic, paranoid, defensive, assertive, attractive, compelling. (p. 6)
Furthermore, Said acknowledges the two forms of “double vision” (p. 6) at play in the project – first, the state of “inbetweeness” that the Palestinian subjects of Mohr’s photographs experience as a result of being “at once inside and outside” (p. 6) of their own world; and second, Said’s own exilic consciousness as a non-Palestinian Palestinian, expressed through his personal narration of Mohr’s photographs. Accordingly, he argues that a “multifaceted vision is essential to any representation of us. Stateless, dispossessed, de-centred, we are frequently unable either to speak the ‘truth’ of our experience or to make it heard” (p. 6). To right this injustice, Said skilfully uses *After the Last Sky* to beautifully demonstrate that, while visual representations and/or negations of the Palestinian people have undoubtedly contributed to the creation and preservation of Zionist and Israeli master narratives and collective memories, photographs also offer imaginative and hopeful possibilities for Palestinians to story their own counter-narratives and counter-memories, thus documenting their existence and suffering while also asserting their agency and identity.

Having considered the difficult yet necessary task left to us by Said in light of his theories of narrative, memory, and photography, I ultimately believe that he recognized and advocated for the storytelling and exchanging of counter-narratives and counter-memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba as a practical everyday means by which acting and courageous Palestinians and Israelis might take up his challenge of willing the impossible. Furthermore, and while I realize that Said’s arguments regarding the emancipatory potential of photographs focused on the Palestinian experience specifically, I trust that he would acknowledge and support my assertion that critical engagement with photographs holds immense potential for both Palestinians and Israelis in the aforementioned process. In other words, I argue that by choosing to narrate and then share their own stories and memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba, particularly through associated photographs, non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis can confront, as well as move beyond, problematic representations and invented traditions that support and sustain origins and filiative relations, toward emancipatory forms of self representation and ethical engagement that establish and nourish affiliative

---

31 I believe that Said’s acknowledgement of the difference between these two forms of “double-vision” correspond to the distinction he made in *Cultural and Imperialism* (and which I outlined in Chapter 2) between the experiences of the masses of people displaced in the twentieth century and those intellectuals and/or artists in exile who, he believed, were capable of “distilling and then articulating the predicaments that disfigure modernity” (Said, 1993, pp. 332-333).
relations. Such a new beginning, which finds its roots in exilic consciousness and non-belonging belonging, can facilitate ethical engagement with alterity, while also laying the foundation necessary for the envisioning of a new polity based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights. Hence, unlike Spanos and Butler, I argue that Said did more than confer onto us the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible; he also demonstrated that storytelling and photography are the principal media through which to make this morally, ethically, and politically productive imperative a reality.

The Possibilities of Storytelling: “Fictional” Versus “Real” Stories

Although Arendt’s political vision began with the question of Israel rather than Palestine, she also left us with the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. From an Arendtian standpoint, this endeavour begins by critiquing and challenging Herzalian forms of Zionism, which create and sustain thoughtlessness, unreality, and the insult of oblivion, and whose adherents favour the role of the social parvenu. Interestingly, the primary medium Arendt credits with both producing and remedying the worldlessness and alienation of the social is storytelling. In The Human Condition Arendt (1998) makes a distinction between “fictional” and “real” stories – the former created and manipulated by invisible authors, while the latter emerge from individuals’ courage to “act and speak…to insert one’s self into the world and begin a story of one’s own” (p. 186). She elaborates on this distinction as follows:

The invisible actor behind the scenes is an invention arising from a mental perplexity but corresponding to no real experience. Through it, the story resulting from action is misconstrued as a fictional story, where indeed an author pulls the strings and directs the play. The fictional story reveals a maker just as every work of art clearly indicates that it was made by somebody; this does not belong to the character of the story itself but only to the mode in which it came into existence. The distinction

32 A review of Arendt’s writings demonstrates that her ever-evolving political theory contained another equally significant, yet differing, approach to storytelling. In this instance she was concerned with the theorist as storyteller who, like herself, returns to past events to make meaning in the present. Not having direct experience of the phenomena under examination, the theorist seeks to identify “those currents of thought, political events and outlooks, instances and institutions, that once ‘the imagination of history’…gathered them in the present, reveal an altogether different meaning than what they stood for in the original context” (Benhabib, 2003, p. 64; Evers, 2005; Stone-Mediatore, 2003). This form of storytelling is best demonstrated by the methodology Arendt developed in The Origins of Totalitarianism (1976) where she herself takes on the role of theorist as storyteller.
between a real and a fictional story is precisely that the latter was “made up” and the former not made at all. The real story in which we are engaged as long as we live has no visible or invisible maker because it is not made. The only “somebody” it reveals is its hero, and it is the only medium in which the originally intangible manifestation of a uniquely distinct “who” can become tangible *ex post facto* through action and speech. *Who* somebody is or was we can know only by knowing the story of which he is himself the hero – his biography, in other words; everything else we know of him, including the work he may have produced or left behind tells us only *what* he is or was. (pp. 185-186)

As Arendt’s full account of “enacted stories” (p. 181) demonstrates, “fictional” stories, which are “made” by hidden authors within the isolation of the social realm, determine “what” we are, while experience based “real” stories or “life stories” (p. 184), which “begin” in the mutuality of the public realm, reveal “who” we are.³³

However, she cautions that the courage and willingness to share stories of experience with other acting beings within the public realm must be accompanied by an acceptance that none of us is the author of our own story:

> [c]ompared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life…lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. (p. 50)

In other words, it is not simply the act of telling a story that creates political meaning to emerge, but rather the intersubjective act of sharing and negotiating these stories within the “web’ of human relationships” (p. 183). Unlike the “fictional” stories “made” by official authors working within the confines of the social, new political meaning emerges when “real” stories are publicly shared and negotiated between acting beings, thus disclosing the richness and multifarious nature of the human world through action, speech, and,

³³ In contrast to Arendt's notion of the distanced theorist as storyteller, in *The Human Condition* Arendt places great value on the direct experience of the storyteller. Building on Arendt’s distinction between “fictional” and “real” stories, Shari Stone-Mediatore (2003) argues for the subversive force of stories of experience, particularly marginalized narratives, which have the ability to problematize and counter the institutions and ideologies that influence our lives. In these instances stories of experience shared in the mutuality of the public realm afford narrators a medium through which to exercise agency within the world regardless of status or circumstance. Furthermore, she asserts that “marginal experience narratives contribute to political thinking and political life precisely in their functions as ‘stories,’ that is, as experience-rooted but creatively reproduced narrative texts whose meaning is realized in their interpretation by specific communities” (p. 5).
consequently, agonism. In this context, storytelling is not a means by which to defend deeply held “truths,” as this closes off all possibilities for debate, but rather an opportunity for both the storyteller and their audience to enlarge their understanding of one another and the world (Calhoun and McGowan, 1997). This process, in which difference and agonism lead to plurality and mutual understanding through sustained debate, demands hospitality\(^{34}\) and thus a sense of responsibility between strangers that can only be achieved through judgment, which “seeks distance through imaginative displacement” (Jackson, 2006, p. 255) by reconsidering the world from the perspective of the other (Arendt, 1978; Calhoun and McGowan, 1997; Stone-Mediatore, 2003). To be clear, judgment does not require that the audience assume the beliefs of the storyteller, but rather that they work to understand their position even when it may be troubling and especially when it calls their own stories into question. Furthermore, Arendt recognized that an individual’s desire and willingness to risk disclosure of who they are, engage with others, and release private stories into the public realm can only be seen as courageous. While it is true that such political action is boundless and unpredictable, the plurality it creates through agonism allows the storyteller and their audience to empower themselves, for as Arendt (1998) states,

> [p]ower is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities. (p. 200)

Here we can see the immense moral, ethical, and political potential made possible by storytelling within the public realm. In her analysis of the relationship between aesthetic experience and Arendtian politics, Kimberley Curtis (1999) contends that “[o]ur paramount ethical challenge is how to save human particularity, how to create a world in which it can appear and flourish, how to cultivate our passion for it” (p. 7).

\(^{34}\) Poyntz (2012) argues that in Arendtian terms “it is not only recognition of the stranger (or the other) that is central to public life, but also a willingness to show hospitality toward the stranger to support the kind of plurality central to democratic communities” (p. 21). As he notes, in this context hospitality finds its roots in Kant’s notion of a right to visitation: “The right to visit, to associate, belongs to all men by virtue of their common ownership of the earth’s surface; for since the earth is a globe, they cannot scatter themselves infinitely, but must, finally, tolerate living in close proximity, because originally no one had a greater right to any region of the earth than anyone else” (as cited in Poyntz, 2012, p. 21). Thus, Poyntz contends “to show responsibility or obligation to others is to show the kind of hospitality necessary to ensure that a diverse and plural world will come into view” (p. 22). Here we can see a clear link to Arendt’s theory of cohabitation, which was addressed in Chapter 2.
Thus, while some individuals will choose to remain separated from one another by the forces of the social, others will choose to meet within “the space of appearance” (Arendt, 1998, p. 199) where they have the opportunity to experience togetherness, and thus reality, through speech and action. Rather than remain complacent and isolated, these individuals may feel a “mutual aesthetic provocation” (Curtis, 1999, p. 36) – a desire to appear and disclose themselves to one another by sharing stories of experience. As such, a real world application of political action and storytelling within an Arendtian public sphere holds great possibility for moving individuals “away from oblivion toward the presence of others” (p. 15), thus “forc[ing] open all limitations and cut[ting] across all boundaries” (Arendt, 1998, p. 190).

If Arendt’s theory of “fictional” and “real” stories is considered in light of her work on totalitarianism and critiques of Herzalian Zionism, we can think of “fictional” stories as the master narratives “made” and manipulated by the nation-state and its associated institutions, as well as acquiesced to by its supporters, and “real” stories as counter-narratives that “begin” when courageous individuals act in and for the world. Nowhere is Arendt’s distinction between these two forms of storytelling, as well as their link to memory, more clearly revealed than in her report on the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann.

Whereas Said’s thoughts on the limits and potentiality of narrative and memory as they pertain to the question of Palestine span several of his journalistic and academic publications, Arendt’s most concentrated and infamous exploration of storytelling and memory as they concern the question of Israel is found in Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. Within the context of this study, four of Arendt’s critiques of the trial’s planning and proceedings are most pressing. First, she took issue with “the show trial” (Arendt, 1997, p. 4) David Ben-Gurion, then Prime Minister of Israel, “had in mind when he decided to have Eichmann kidnaped in Argentina and brought to the District Court of Jerusalem to stand trial for his role in the ‘final solution of the Jewish question’” (pp. 4-5). Employing the same language used to describe the “maker” of “fictional” stories within the social realm, Arendt labels Ben-Gurion the “invisible stage manager” (p. 5) of the trial proceedings.35 Building off her earlier critiques of Herzalian

35 Arendt (1997) justifies this critique of Ben-Gurion as follows: “Not once does he attend a session; in the courtroom he speaks with the voice of Gideon Hausner, the Attorney General, who, representing the government, does his best, his very best, to obey his master. And if, fortunately, his best often turns out to be good enough, the reason is that the trial is presided over
Zionism, of which Ben-Gurion was an adherent, Arendt levels harsh criticism against “the 'lessons' he thought should be taught to Jews and Gentiles, to Israelis and Arabs, in short, the whole world” (p. 9), through the trial: the non-Jewish world was to learn about, but also feel shame for, the immense destruction and suffering enacted on millions simply because they were Jewish; Jews in diaspora were to be reminded that “only the establishment of a Jewish state had enabled Jews to hit back” (p. 10) against their enemies since the 1948 War of Independence, thus demonstrating the disparity between “Israeli heroism and Jewish submissive meekness” (p. 10); a link was to be forged in the minds of Israeli youth between their ties to the Jewish people and the darkest period of their history; and, finally, it was hoped that the trial would unearth “other Nazis” (Ben-Gurion, as cited in Arendt, 1997, p. 10), particularly in the form of Arab leaders. While a detailed account of Arendt’s skilful discrediting of each of these lessons as either “superfluous…or positively misleading” (p. 10) cannot be provided here, if we read Ben-Gurion’s objectives for the trial against Arendt’s political vision for Israel it becomes clear she believed the former used the Eichmann trial to create a master narrative and collective memory of the Holocaust that positioned anti-Semitism as eternal and static, heralded Israel as the only source of Jewish redemption, sought acquiescence to these narratives from both diasporic and Israeli Jews, and ultimately fostered worldlessness, unreality, and oblivion.36

Second, because Eichmann’s victims were Jewish, Arendt believed that “it was right and proper that a Jewish court should sit in judgement” (p. 269), however, she also asserted that “insofar as the crime was a crime against humanity, it needed an international tribunal to do justice to it” (p. 269). That is, while the “fictional” story and collective memory crafted by Ben-Gurion framed Eichmann’s actions as a crime against the Jewish people specifically, Arendt believed the accused’s offences were actually “crimes against mankind committed on the body of the Jewish people” (p. 7). In this

by someone who serves Justice as faithfully as Mr. Hausner serves the State of Israel” (p. 5). Therefore, although many of her judgments of the trial refer to Hausner directly, it is clear that she views the latter as nothing more than Ben-Gurion’s puppet, a parvenu, as it were.

36 Though Arendt does not address the Palestinians or the events of 1948 directly in her report of the Eichmann trial she does discredit Ben-Gurion’s assumption that Nazis in the form of Arab leadership needed to be “ferret[ed] out” (Arendt, 1997, p. 10), i.e.) they were in plain sight all along, notes that before and during the trial “[t]here was no mention of decent Arabs” (p. 13), and references the Jewish peoples’ “seizure of its old territory” and “the unprecedented nature of the origins of the Israel [sic] state” (p. 263). I believe these brief references are muted echoes of her earlier criticisms of Arab leadership and acknowledgement of and choice to take responsibility for the native Arab Palestinians.
sense, Ben-Gurion and the court’s political goals for the trial, as well as the master
narrative and collective memory it produced, encompassed the full history of the Jewish
people, whereas Arendt’s justice oriented counter-narrative and the counter-memory it
inspired started in the nineteenth century and with a concern for humanity at large
(Arendt, 1997; Bilsky, 2001). Recognizing the unprecedented nature of Eichmann’s
cries and rightfully concerned with the possibility of similar offenses being perpetrated
in the future, Arendt sought justice and the establishment of an international precedent
for prosecuting and punishing those who commit crimes against humanity – a much
different objective than Ben Gurion’s aspiration to construct a master narrative and
collective memory of the Holocaust that was bound to and thus justified Israeli
nationhood (Zertal, 2005).

Third, Arendt condemned Ben-Gurion and the court’s “staged silence” (Bilsky,
2001, p. 234) regarding the Jewish leadership’s cooperation with the Nazis during the
Holocaust. Israel’s conscious negation of references and/or stories of Jewish
cooperation from the trial’s official transcripts was particularly salient given that during
the 1950s the state accused and prosecuted Holocaust survivors for contributing to
Jewish suffering and victimization. As Arendt (1997) explained, she chose to include the
issue of Jewish cooperation in her analysis of Eichmann’s trial “because it offer[ed] the
most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in
respectable European society – not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only
among the persecutors but also among the victims” (pp. 125-126). Including this dark
chapter of Jewish history not only highlighted the privileged positions conferred onto
these “voluntary ‘bearers of secrets’” (p. 118) by the Nazis and which the former
accepted as Jewish parvenu (Zertal, 2005), but it also exposed a counter-narrative and
counter-memory of events that Ben-Gurion and the state had sought to bury. As Leora
Bilsky (2001) affirms, “Arendt’s understanding of the collective aspects of memory [and
collective self-deception] made her fear that the omissions in Eichmann’s trial [would]
produce in the Israeli collective memory… ‘holes of oblivion’” (p. 243).

Finally, due to her belief that to truly serve justice Eichmann needed to be at the
centre of the trial, rather than the suffering of the Jewish people, Arendt took issue with
the prosecution’s decision to have survivors testify at the trial as witnesses. While I agree with Bilsky and Shoshona Felman (2000) that Arendt rather callously failed to appreciate the significance of the survivors’ private stories of suffering being shared publically for the first time – again this is particularly significant given the silence around the Holocaust and ill treatment of survivors in Israel prior to 1961 – I believe Arendt’s initial aversion to survivor testimonies was grounded in her concerns about the objectives and proceedings of the trial itself. Put differently, she was frustrated that the witnesses’ testimonies were being used in the formation of a master narrative and collective memory of Ben-Gurion’s design. In her mind the courtroom was not the appropriate place for the telling of such stories, survivor testimonies were not necessary to try Eichmann for his crimes as there was more than enough documentation to achieve this goal, those who testified – most of whom were prominent Israelis – had been hand picked by the state from hundreds who had applied, and the survivors’ individual stories became unbearable as they culminated into waves of horror that washed over the audience of survivors who, as she stated, “knew by heart all there was to know, and who were in no mood to learn any lessons and certainly did not need this trial to draw their own conclusions” (Arendt, 1997, p. 8).

And yet across the duration of her report a handful of testimonies changed her mind. The first was the testimony of Zindel Grynszpan, an older and more traditional

37 Following from my earlier footnotes concerning the theorist as storyteller, Kai Evers (2005) suggests that because Arendt “came to perceive [survivor stories] as insufficient efforts at communicating experience, she developed her notion of the holes of oblivion. [That is,] Arendt judged survivors incapable of storytelling. Indeed she cautioned in the strongest terms possible against the expectation of gaining any significant insight into totalitarian domination from them” (p. 115). The result was that she assigned a privileged position to the theorist as storyteller. Glimpses of this attitude can be still be seen in sections of Eichmann in Jerusalem, however, as I elaborate above, I believe her real concern regarding survivors testifying at the trial was that their stories ultimately served Ben-Gurion’s objectives. As we will see shortly, her attitude regarding the value of survivor testimonies, as well as her views on the holes of oblivion, changed over the course of her report on the trial, thus reflecting her belief in the political potential of storying experience in the public realm.

38 Here we are concerned with the survivors who testified at the trial, however, it is important to acknowledge that Arendt also took issue with who should speak for the absent victims. In response to Hausner’s opening proclamation that the six million Jews who lost their lives during the Holocaust stood beside him in court as prosecutors, she asserts that “[w]ith such rhetoric the prosecution gave substance to the chief argument against the trial, that it was established not in order to satisfy the demands of justice but to still the victims’ desire for and, perhaps, right to vengeance” (Arendt, 1997, pp. 280-261).
man who “did not look as though he had volunteered” (p. 227) and whose brief yet honest story of how the totality of his life had been ruined in a mere day made Arendt realize that “[e]veryone, everyone should have his day in court” (p. 229). The second was the story of Anton Schmidt, which was told during the testimony of poet and author Abba Kovner. Schmidt, a sergeant in the German Army stationed in Poland, had helped members of the Jewish underground, Kovner among them, by providing them with forged documentation and military vehicles over the course of several months until his arrest and execution in 1942. In response to Schmidt’s story Arendt proclaimed, “how utterly different everything would be today in this courtroom, in Israel, in Germany, in all of Europe, and perhaps in all countries of the world, if only more such stories had been told” (p. 231). Leading from this, she declares that “[t]he holes of oblivion do not exist. Nothing human is that perfect, and there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. One man will always be left to tell the story” (pp. 232-233). For Arendt, Grynszpan’s story was a pure example of “shining honesty” (p. 230) amongst a multitude of otherwise privileged testimonies and Schmidt’s actions were proof “that under conditions of terror most people will comply but some people will not” (p. 233). In contrast to the vast majority of privileged testimonies that played into Israel’s “fictional” story of the trial and represented their storytellers as passive victims, the “real” stories of Grynszpan and Schmidt revealed these men as heroic agents who courageously chose to act and speak in and for the world, thus ultimately enlarging Arendt’s own mentality. That is, it was her interpretation and response to these men’s testimonies that truly demonstrated the power of their stories. Thus, I agree with Bilsky (2001) that “Arendt suddenly realized the significance of a trial as public forum where human action receives its name and story [and was thus] reminded of her own ethics of storytelling” (p. 251).

---

39 Arendt (1997) makes this statement in response to her earlier assertion that it would have been “much wiser” for the prosecution “to seek out those who had not volunteered!” (p. 223).

40 Although Arendt believed witness testimonies given at the trial concerning the uprisings in the Warsaw ghetto “had no connection whatever with the crimes of the accused,” plus failed to include “the activities of the Jewish Councils, which had played such a great and disastrous role in their own heroic efforts” (Arendt, 1997, p.121), she did concede that “[l]egal consideration aside, the appearance in the witness box of the former Jewish resistance fighters was welcome enough. It dissipated the haunting specter of universal cooperation, the stifling, poisoned atmosphere which had surrounded the Final Solution” (p. 123). Nevertheless, it is Grynszpan and Schmidt’s stories that cause her to reconsider her attitude toward survivor testimonies and the holes of oblivion.
In the end, Arendt’s bold deconstruction of “the redemptive mythical discourse of the [Eichmann] trial” (Zertal, 2005, p. 128) not only demonstrated why and how Ben-Gurion set out to construct a “fictional” master narrative and collective memory of Jewish suffering and Israeli nationhood, but also publicly voiced her own counter-narrative and counter-memory of both the Holocaust and the trial itself (Bilsky, 2001; Felman, 2000; Zertal, 2005). In the words of Bilsky (2001),

> [i]f ever there was a “competition of storytellers,” it was strongly evident [in the Eichmann trial]. Arendt rewrote the attorney general’s accusations, challenged his choice of witnesses, objected to the direction in which he lead the trial, reinterpreted the crimes, and, finally, could not resist the temptation to produce her own judgment. (p. 232)

In courageously choosing to act and speak as a conscious pariah committed to Lazarian Zionism, humanism, and Jewish tradition, Arendt very bravely and publically told the “real” story of the trial from the perspective of a non-Jewish Jew – a decision that earned her the scorn of both the Jewish and Israeli communities. In addition, and although she begins her treatise with scepticism toward the value of such stories, in the end she was reminded of the moral, ethical, and political potentiality of “real” stories told and shared by acting and courageous individuals within the mutuality of the public realm.

As we can see, although she begins with the question of Israel, rather than Palestine, and works from a different positionality, time period, and political context than Said, Arendt’s theoretical approach to storytelling and memory arrives at similar conclusions regarding the dangerous limits of master narratives and collective memories and the hopeful potentiality of counter-narratives and counter-memories. If we consider Arendt’s political vision for Israel in tandem with her theory of storytelling, it becomes evident that she would also recognize and advocate for the telling and sharing of “real” stories between acting and courageous Palestinians and Israelis as a practical everyday means by which to take up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. True she never discussed storytelling specifically in terms of her broader political vision for Israel, however, I would argue that the telling and sharing of “real” stories of the Holocaust and the Nakba constitutes a vital first step toward the Arab/Jewish cooperation that she advocated for so fiercely. In the end, I believe that Arendt’s ethics of storytelling is of tremendous value to Palestinians and Israelis who, in seeking new

---

41 Although Bilsky positions Arendt in direct competition with Hausner, she too acknowledges that he was working under the direction of Ben-Gurion.
beginnings as conscious pariah, might choose to challenge Herzalian forms of Zionism, work in thoughtful cooperation as vanguards in the world, and take responsibility for one another by honouring an ethics of cohabitation. Therefore, and again moving beyond Spanos and Butler, I argue that Arendt not only left us with the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible, but also demonstrated that storytelling in the public realm is the primary medium through which we can make this goal a reality.

Although I have identified strong points of affiliation between Said and Arendt with regard to narrative or storytelling and memory, unlike Said, Arendt never wrote about photography or photographs. Interestingly, however, the work of Israeli scholar Ariella Azoulay, herself a non-Israeli Israeli and intellectual in exile, helps us bridge this theoretical divide. Built upon a strong Arendtian foundation, Azoulay’s theories of “civil imagination” (Azoulay, 2012, p. 9) and “the civil contract of photograph” (Azoulay, 2008, p. 85) help us understand how Arendt might have theorized photography and photographs. Azoulay also helps outline the final step necessary for bringing Said and Arendt’s theories into praxis. Accordingly, it is to a consideration of Azoulay’s work that I now turn.

Willing the Impossible through Civil Imagination & the Civil Contract of Photography

In Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography, Azoulay (2012) critically analyzes the moral, ethical, and political possibilities enabled by the political imagination and the civil imagination respectively, particularly “under conditions of regime-made disaster...[in which]...citizenship is restricted to a series of privileges that only a portion of the governed population enjoys and, even then, to an unequal degree” (p. 1). She defines the political imagination as “the ability to imagine a political state of being that deviates significantly from the prevailing state of affairs” (p. 3). Using the French

42 Although she was a Lecturer and Senior Lecturer in Hermeneutics and Cultural Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, Israel from 2002 to 2011, as well as an internationally recognized scholar, Azoulay was denied tenure by the university in 2010. In 2011 her colleagues publically supported her by asking the Israeli Council For Higher Education to investigate, arguing that Bar-Ilan’s decision was politically motivated by Azoulay’s “leftist leanings” and “radical political views,” i.e.) her critique of the Israeli state and support of Palestinians’ rights, thus raising “heavy suspicions of political persecution” (Gordon, 2010; Kashti, 2010, 2011). Azoulay did appeal the decision; however, her appeal was denied. She is now a Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Culture and Media at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island.
Revolution as an example, she demonstrates how the political imagination allowed individuals in the eighteenth century to collectively imagine themselves as citizens no longer ruled by the monarchy. Yet Azoulay also warns that the political imagination “does not always provide us with the wings we need to soar [as it] runs the risk of remaining cramped, limited and circumscribed [by] often re-inscrib[ing] existing forms” (p. 3). Moving from the time of the French Revolution to the modern era, she demonstrates how citizenship within the prevailing nation-state has suffered a “civil malfunction” (p. 2) when the rights and privileges associated with it became applicable and accessible only to certain portions of the governed population:

The combination of...[the will of the people on the one hand, and...sovereignty on the other]...created the nation-state as a kind of war-machine, which has once again subjugated citizens by rendering them subjects compelled to put the priorities of defense ahead of their own civil needs and concerns. Thus, instead of citizenship limiting the power of the state, preventing its sovereign power from untrammeled frenzy and circumscribing the will of the people so that the latter does not supplant the place of citizenry of citizens, citizenship has become emaciated and devoid of imagination. It is possible to view citizenship as itself subject to the repressive and dictatorial derivations of the imagination whose language is the only language it is capable of speaking. Once the civil horizon of the citizen is limited by the nation-state, by democratic sovereignty or by the will of the people, the citizen...cannot help but conceive of himself as citizen. This citizen finds it difficult to imagine what it is not to be a citizen or what it is to be a second-class citizen ruled together with him under the category of citizenship. This failure of the imagination is neither coincidental nor does it reflect the shortcomings of one or another specific individual. It is a structural failure that expresses the inversion of the relations between the citizen and power that is a feature of democratic sovereignty – instead of power being subject to the citizens, citizens are now subject to power. In their inability to imagine other sections of the governed as citizens, or alternatively, in acquiescing with the fact that other segments of the governed are defined as non-citizens, citizens are ventriloquized by the regime and by its interests, which seem to speak from their throats. Political imagination is insufficient to enable us to imagine the non-citizen or second-class citizen as citizen: civil imagination is also needed. (p. 9)

Azoulay asserts, “the civil must be separated from the political and defined in its own right as the interest that citizens display in themselves, and others, in their shared forms of coexistence, as well as the world that they create and nurture” (p. 5). To accommodate the civil, the political imagination must be redefined in ontological terms, that is, as “a form of imagination that transcends the single individual alone and exists between individuals and is shared by them” (p. 5).
Because the aforementioned form of political imagination demanded by the modern nation-state assists in creating and sustaining master narratives and collective memories of trauma and disaster, which stunt the imagination’s moral, ethical, and political potentiality (Azoulay, 2011), Azoulay (2012) calls for the creation of a civil discourse that suspends the point of view of governmental power and the nationalist characteristics that enable it to divide the governed from one another and to set its factions against one another. When disaster is consistently imposed on a part of the whole population of the governed, civil discourse insists on delineating the full field of vision in which the disaster unfolds so as to lay bare the blueprint of the regime. Civil discourse is not a fiction. It strives to make way for a domain of relations between citizens on the one hand, and subjects denied citizenship by a given regime on the other on the basis of their partnership in a world that they share as women and men who are ruled. It seeks to isolate potential factors in the real world that might facilitate the coming into being of such relations of partnership, instead of the power of the sovereign that threatens to destroy them. (pp. 2-3)

In this manner, civil discourse, enacted through the civil imagination, enables citizens and non-citizens to not only identify and critique national master narratives and associated collective memories of trauma and disaster, but to also jointly produce counter-narratives and counter-memories of such events outside of and in opposition to those who seek to rule and divide them (Azoulay, 2011). Thus, driven by “civil intention” (Azoulay, 2012, p. 106), these individuals choose to take responsibility for one another and the common world they share.

According to Azoulay, photography is the medium through which the moral, ethical, and political potential of the civil imagination is best realized. In *The Civil Contract of Photography* she outlines “a new ontological-political understanding of photography” (Azoulay, 2008, p. 23), which demonstrates how the medium “has created a space of political relations that are not mediated exclusively by the ruling power of the state and are not completely subject to the national logic that overshadows the political arena” (p. 12). “This civil political space,” Azoulay contends, “is one that the people using photography imagine every day” (p. 12). Yet just like stories shared in the public realm, no one owns a photograph or can determine and/or limit the stories that it tells. Rather the photographic encounter between photographer, spectator, and photographed subject, particularly within the context of or in connection to regime-made disasters,
becomes a space of political relations between citizens and second-class or non-citizens, which exists outside of the demands of the nation-state. By “watching” (p. 14) rather than looking at a photograph the photographic event can be recreated regardless of the photographer’s intention, thus facilitating new and alternative readings. Having enacted the “civic skill” (p. 14) of watching a photograph, the civil spectator has a duty to not only negotiate how both they and the photograph’s subject are ruled, but also to demand that they not be ruled in that manner. By anchoring spectatorship in civic duty towards photographed subjects who call on the spectator to “recognize and restore their citizenship through…viewing” (p. 17), this form of “civil negotiation” (p. 16) demands, as well as allows for, the rethinking of citizenship or, to be more specific, the reimagining of photographed subjects as “participant citizens” (p. 17). But as Azoulay asserts, “[w]ithin this space, the point of departure for our mutual relations cannot be empathy or mercy” (p. 17) toward those subjects who suffer injustice and/or injury, rather “[i]t must be a covenant for the rehabilitation of their citizenship in the political sphere within which [both are] ruled” (p. 17). By “deterritorializ[ing] citizenship” (p. 25) in this way, a new “political space is created in which a plurality of speech and action (in Arendt’s sense) is actualized permanently” (p. 25), thus suspending the power of the sovereign.

As demonstrated above, Azoulay conceptualizes the medium of photography and the civil skill of watching photographs in terms of Arendt’s theory of action. Just like storytelling, photography enables new beginnings through speech and action as individuals appear and are made visible to others within the unpredictability and mutuality of the public realm. Therefore, the “civil gaze” of the spectator does not “seek to control the visible, but neither can it bear another’s control over [it]”, rather it “recognizes instantly that what is inscribed…and discernible in [the photograph] are products of plurality – the plural participants in the act of photography” (p. 97). Again, this recognition is accompanied by an ethical duty toward the photographed subject to deterritorialize and rehabilitate their citizenship. In doing so, the spectator not only acts in solidarity with the photograph’s subject, but they also “break away from [their] status as citizen and [instead] exercise citizenship – that is, [they] turn citizenship into the arena of a constant becoming, together with other (non)citizens” (p. 118). In this manner, both the spectator and photographed subject are empowered to jointly voice “civilian grievances” (p. 118) outside of and in resistance to the nation-state that seeks to control
and divide them, but which can no longer guarantee nor provide for their right to have rights.

While the Palestinian/Israeli conflict serves as Azoulay’s primary site of critique and analysis in the works cited and engaged with above, it is in *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950* that she best demonstrates how her theoretical framework can be put into praxis to attend to the contending collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba. By watching historical photographs found in Israeli state and Zionist archives, Azoulay (2011) sets out to create “a civil archive which makes it possible to view the catastrophe they recorded” (p. 7), but which the Israeli state has worked hard to disavow and negate. Her analysis counters both the official Israeli master narrative of the War of Independence, which sought to manage both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis through “military governmentality” (p. 21), and Palestinian collective memory, “which situates the [N]akba as the constitutive event of Palestinian existence and identity” (p. 9). Rather than reading these photographs through competing historical and/or nationalist lenses, she employs her civil gaze to recreate each photographic event, thus producing counter-narratives and counter-memories that reimagine the past and present, as well as possibilities for the future. In this way “the disaster imposed on the Palestinians as a *catastrophe* (from a civil perspective) [is presented] not as the outcome of war that preceded the creation of the Israeli regime, but as a component and as a product of that regime” (p. 9). Thus, the “civil malfunction” (p. 14) at the heart of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, which positions Israeli citizens against Palestinian second-class or non-citizens, is not only made present, but also addressable by way of a civil demand for “a different kind of participation and cooperation across space and time” (p. 16).

Taken together, Azoulay’s body of work – that of a non-Israeli Israeli – reveals how entering into the civil contract of photography, whether through historical or contemporary photographs, allows Palestinians and Israelis to jointly create a civil discourse that petitions for Palestinians’ right to be citizens and Israelis’ “right not to be…perpetrator(s)” (Azoulay, 2012, p. 243), thereby reinstating the presence of the Palestinian people, deterritorializing citizenship, and resisting the powers that seek to rule them both. Furthermore, I believe a strong, albeit unspoken, parallel exists between Azoulay’s theorizing of discourse, memory, and photography, and Said’s arguments concerning both the violent dangers and hopeful possibilities enabled by narrative,
memory, and photography. Finally, and as Azoulay herself demonstrates, her critique of the nation-state and theories of the civil imagination and civil contract of photography are directly grounded in the Arendtian language of the social and public spheres and the “fictional” and “real” stories that each produces. Together the work of these three scholars makes a compelling and powerful argument for storytelling and photography as the best media for everyday Palestinians and Israelis to take on the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. True the contemporary moment differs greatly from that of Said and Arendt, however, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict not only continues, but has worsened. It is for just this reason that non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis must continue to strive toward bringing Said and Arendt’s political visions for Palestine and Israel into being.
Chapter 4.

Creating the Occasions & Conditions of Possibility Necessary for Willing the Impossible

While this dissertation takes great inspiration and guidance from the life and work of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay, it also recognizes that their ability to publically act in and for the world as a non-Palestinian Palestinian, non-Jewish Jew, and non-Israeli Israeli respectively cannot be divorced from their privileged position as intellectuals in exile. Each went beyond theoretically outlining how to will the impossible by courageously taking up this difficult yet necessary task at great personal and professional risk to themselves, yet it cannot be denied that their position as intellectuals in exile offered them the voice, status, security, and resources necessary to do so. Thus, while storytelling and photography are the media through which to bring Said, Arendt, and Azoulay's theoretical approaches to willing the impossible into praxis, the question remains: how might everyday Palestinians and Israelis use storytelling and photography to will the impossible in the contemporary moment? To assist in this endeavour, I created a unique photograph-based storytelling method that provides an imaginative and practical everyday means for creating the “occasions” (Fabian, 1990, p. 7) and “conditions of possibility” (Culhane, 2011b, p. 258) necessary for beginning to undertake the difficult yet necessary task that sits at the heart of this dissertation.

Imagining an Everyday Means for Willing the Impossible: Photograph-Based Storytelling as Methodology

As outlined in Chapter 2, Said’s (2003a) original vision of willing the impossible entailed three components: thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, morally and ethically engaging with alterity, and envisioning a new polity based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights. In order to facilitate the transition of this task from the realm of the public intellectual to the realm of the public citizen, I needed to bring everyday Palestinians and Israelis into dialogue specifically about the Holocaust and the Nakba, provide them a space that would facilitate and encourage ethical engagement and
dialogue, and allow them the opportunity to address and respond to one another. I achieved these goals through a three-stage research process:

1) conducting in-depth life story interviews with my Palestinian and Israeli participants, during which they storied their own counter-narratives and counter-memories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba using associated photographs;\(^{43}\)

2) assisting my participants in exchanging their life stories and associated photographs with their fellow participants;

3) conducting a second round of in-depth interviews in which each participant reflected on the experience of narrating their own stories and associated photographs, engaging with the other participants’ stories and associated photographs, and the research process as a whole.

\(^{43}\) Unlike Said and Azoulay who narrated public photographs of unknown others in solitary intellectual contemplation and then disseminate these images and their readings of them primarily to academic audiences, the everyday Palestinians and Israelis who chose to participate in this study personally narrated their own life stories, memories, and photographs to one another. Thus, while their stories and photographs are being documented and disseminated to academic audiences through this dissertation, this is secondary to the process of the participants narrating and then exchanging their stories, memories, and photographs with one another.
While a detailed account of how I applied and adapted this method throughout the duration of my fieldwork is provided below, here it should be noted that while designed to operationalize the theoretical thinking of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay, this method was also informed by the imaginative and ethical potentiality of several related fields of study.

First, as an unprecedented and thus exploratory effort to bring the theories of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay into praxis, this method was inspired by new forms of experimental and performative ethnography, which recognize that the production of ethnographic knowledge is a collaborative effort undertaken within “diverse zones of entanglement” (Culhane, 2016, p. 3); prioritize the unpredictable and thus risky process of ethnographic fieldwork over guaranteed academic outcomes or products; and value imaginative, performative, embodied, and affective forms of practice and knowledge (Castañeda, 2006; Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007; Culhane, 2011a, 2011b, 2016; Fabian, 1990). While my positionality (introduced in Chapter 1 and discussed below) invariably affects my research, it is important to stress that my method purposefully positions me first and foremost as “a provider of occasions, a catalyst in the weakest sense, and a producer (in analogy to a theatrical producer) in the strongest” (Fabian, 1990, p.7; Fabian as cited in Culhane, 2011b, p. 263). Although I am entangled with and thus a co-producer of knowledge with my participants, this method prioritizes the knowledge produced from my participants' direct, albeit mediated, engagement with one another. True, this method entails undertaking seemingly conventional interviews focused on a predetermined subject, however, it privileges the process and experience of fieldwork for the participants themselves, rather than the mining of their narratives and memories for data that can then be analyzed and disseminated as definitive research findings and prescriptive outcomes. The key objective of this method then is to provide participants with the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for willing the impossible through storytelling and photography, with no expectation or guarantee that such a difficult yet necessary task would or could be accomplished. Building from Dian Million’s (2013) concept of “felt knowledge [or] felt theory” (p. 30), this method acknowledges that the storying of counter-narratives and counter-memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba is an inherently imaginative and performative political act resulting not only in the creation of discursive knowledge, but tremendously productive forms of embodied and affective knowledge. Her argument that such forms of “poetic knowledge…[incite] for life…[They] transport us to another place, compel us to look at horrors and, more
importantly, enable us to image a new society…to see the future in the present” (Robin D.G. Kelley as cited in Million, 2013, p. 30) complements the imaginative and performative aspects of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s political thinking.

Second, this method builds on oral history, testimonial studies, trauma studies and memory studies by focusing on giving voice to those often excluded or silenced from official and/or national master narratives; highlighting the political, social, and cultural significance of subjective and personal meanings of lived experience; and making explicit the rewards and risks of testifying to and bearing witness to traumatic memories (Cubitt, 2007; Felman & Laub, 1992; Langer, 1991; Perks & Thomson, 2006; Ritchie, 2011; Shuman, 2005). When considering how best to facilitate contrapuntal understandings of the Holocaust and the Nakba through storytelling, Marianne Hirsch’s (1997; 2012) theory of postmemory was particularly valuable. Hirsch (1997) defines postmemory as “the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own related stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated” (p. 22). As a structure through which psychic knowledge and affective experience of trauma are transmitted between and across generations, Hirsch (2012) argues that the work of postmemory provides the opportunity to consider different historical traumas through connective rather than comparative approaches, thus “constitut[ing] a platform of activist and interventionist cultural and political engagement, a form of repair and redress” (p. 6). As I have suggested, it is just such an approach – one focused on connection rather than competition – that is necessary for Palestinians and Israelis to work through their competing claims of victimhood toward responsibility for one another and the common world they share. As such, I chose to work specifically with Palestinians and Israelis who are part of the Holocaust and Nakba postmemory generations. Working with these people, rather than the survivor generations, allowed me to extend Hirsch’s theory of postmemory beyond her initial case study of the Holocaust, plus avoid the unproductive and unethical competition over suffering to

In Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory, Hirsch (1997) developed her theory of postmemory specifically in relation to the Holocaust. However, in The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust (2012), she argues that in light of the multiple traumatic events of the early twenty-first century the Holocaust “can no longer serve simply as a conceptual limit case in the discussion of historical trauma, memory, and forgetting” (p. 18). As such, she argues that “[t]he challenge may be how to account for contiguous or intersecting histories without allowing them to occlude or erase each other, how to turn
which comparative approaches often fall prey. As we increasingly lose members of the survivor generations, their descendants are left to carry the double burden of being haunted by indirect memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba and direct memories of the resulting Palestinian/Israeli conflict in which they were born and raised. As a result, the manner in which members of the most immediate postmemory generations reconcile, or fail to reconcile, these multiple traumatic histories – both at a private personal level and at a public intercultural level – will have significant ramifications not only for the future of the region, but also for the generations that follow.

Third, my method follows visual studies and visual ethnography by attending to the role of photography and photographs in the process of knowledge production, particularly how subjective engagement with photographs can assist individuals in challenging and even overcoming the institutional forces that seek to define and control them by creating other ways of seeing and understanding the world (Azoulay, 2008, 2011, 2012; Crary, 1990, 1999; Edwards, 2001; Guerin & Hallas, 2007; Hirsch, 1997, 2012; Kuhn, 1995; MacDougall, 2006; McAllister, 2006, 2010; Mitchell, 1994, 2005; Mirzoeff, 2011; Pink, 2001; Pinney, 2011; Pinney & Peterson, 2003). While Azoulay’s work has been invaluable to my research, Hirsch’s claim that family photographs serve as a powerful medium of postmemory helped me recognize that family photographs associated with the Holocaust and/or the Nakba would be crucial aids in assisting members of the postmemory generations to share their life stories. Being part of a common social practice (Bourdieu, 1990; Hirsch, 1997) in which family stories are passed between generations, family photographs can serve as strong emotional points of identification between storytellers and their audiences. However, photographs are capable of doing much more than this. As Elizabeth Edwards (2001) argues, photographs are “not merely passive and inert entities to which things happen and thing are done” (p. 13), rather they “remain socially and historically active [as they shift between various contexts and, as such,] are...open to...multiple performances and the making of multiple meanings” (p. 14).
Accordingly, my research traces the “social biographies” (Edwards, 2001, p. 13) of family photographs as my participants critically engage with these images both as storytellers and audiences. For instance, consider the following quote in which Hirsch (2012) describes the complex relationship members of the postmemory generation have with family photographs associated with historical traumatic events. She states that they look not only for information or confirmation [about the past], but for an intimate material and affective connection that [transmits] the affective quality of the events. [They] look to be shocked…touched, wounded, and pricked…torn apart. Photographs thus become screens – spaces of projection and approximation, and of protection. Small, two-dimensional, delimited by their frame, photographs minimize the disaster that they depict, and screen their viewers from it. But in seeming to open a window to the past, and materializing the viewer’s relationship to it, they also give a glimpse of its enormity and its power. They can tell us as much about our own needs and desires…as they can about the past world that they presumably depict. (p. 38)

Given that these forms of authentication and projection often conflict with one another, authoritative institutional tropes can problematically muddy their distinction. It is for this reason that in order to critically engage with their own family photographs by identifying, deconstructing, and confronting the national and familial myths they perpetuate, spectators must move beyond the limited parameters of their intimate familial world toward the political potential of the public realm (Azoulay, 2008, 2011, 2012; Hirsch, 1997, 2012; Kuhn, 1995; Langford, 2001; McAllister, 2006, 2010; Musleh-Motut, 2012, 2015). In my research family photographs serve as extremely powerful tools assisting in the storying of traumatic life stories rather than just as benign memory prompts facilitating uncritical oral histories. Likewise, spectators viewing other individuals’ family photographs undoubtedly also encounter the problematic blurring of authentication and projection, however, by subjectively engaging with these images they are also able to bear witness to the narrator’s trauma and suffering. As Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (2007) rightfully contend, an

image’s role in the process of bearing witness can be seen to rely not upon a faith in the image’s technological ability to furnish empirical evidence of the event, but upon a faith in the image’s phenomenological capacity to bring the event into iconic presence and to mediate the intersubjective relations that ground the act of bearing witness. (p. 12)

45 In this instance, authentication refers to the need of the viewer to find evidence or confirmation of the historical events supposedly depicted by the photograph.
By entering into subjective and ethical engagement with other’s family photographs, spectators are not only able to challenge long held preconceived notions of the other, but acknowledge and bear witness to postmemories outside of their own. It is my belief that attending to these multiple levels of phenomenological engagement with family photographs moves academic analysis of photographs related to the Holocaust and the Nakba beyond their supposed evidentiary ability to document life before, during, and after tragedy (Azoulay, 2011; Guerin & Hallas, 2007; Khalidi, 2004, 2006; Sturk, 2004). Rather they enable Palestinians and Israelis to take up Azoulay’s challenge to enact their civil imagination by entering into a civil contract of photography by which they can achieve joint solidarity and political agency outside of and in resistance to the powers that seek to divide and govern them.

Finally, very little has been written within diaspora studies regarding how the global Palestinian and Israeli diasporas have either inflamed or worked to resolve the conflict “back home,” with almost no attention given to the contributions made by their respective Canadian contingents (Bamyeh, 2007; Gold, 2002; Hammer, 2005; Schulz, 2003; Sheffer, 2007; Smith & Stares, 2007). The few studies that do exist examine these global diasporas’ impact on the conflict in isolation from one another, rather than in terms of joint efforts. Thus, I return to the political thinking of Said and Arendt, to make a case for conducting my fieldwork with Palestinians and Israelis living in their respective Canadian diasporas. As both scholars argue, the migrant or refugee signifies the preeminent political figure of the modern era, as the state of in-betweenness that characterizes their lives enables multiple productive forms of resistance through non-belonging, which are necessary for envisioning a new binational polity, i.e.) the comportments of the non-Palestinian Palestinian and non-Israeli Israeli. My decision to work specifically with Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora was guided by Said’s (2003a) assertion that these individuals “can play a constructive role [with regard to willing the impossible] that is impossible for those inside [the region], who live under the daily pressure of occupation and dialectical confrontation” (p. 208). Second, as Arendt (1998) asserted, one’s biological needs must be met before they are able to speak and act in and for the world. This issue is particularly urgent for Palestinians who, as stateless and rightless non-citizens living under Israeli occupation, find themselves on the losing end of a power imbalance that often leaves them struggling to meet their most basic needs. While working with Palestinians and Israelis living in Canada did not
resolve this power imbalance, it did enable me to work with Palestinians who had secure access to water, food, shelter, physical safety, freedom of movement, and financial income of some kind.

Leading from this, the choice to work with Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora was also a conscious decision not to further contribute to the problematic research economies that have developed in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Palestinian refugee camps over the past few decades. For instance, in their work on the over-researching of the Shatila Palestinian Refugee Camp in Lebanon, Mayssoun Sukarieh and Stuart Tannock (2012) documented residents’ concerns regarding discrepancies between the volume of research being conducted in the camp and the studies’ lack of return on promises for social change, the exclusion of research subjects from research planning and practices which created suspicion about researchers’ identities and objectives, and the negative impact of research on social relationships and identity within the camp itself. Furthermore, Dara Culhane (2011b) reminds us that

> [f]or subaltern persons, access to public support and private philanthropy increasingly demand…a ‘bare life entitlement narrative,’ an available cause-and-effect narrative consisting in a life story featuring traumatic individualized experiences as causal of some recognized biomedical or social problem label. For university-based researchers, access to public support and private philanthropy demands documenting, representing and reproducing bare life narratives supplemented by policy recommendations. These narratives are, in every important way, true; the pain they disclose is real. That their telling may be co-opted into commodified entitlement narratives when exchanged for food, housing, health care, attention, affection, compassion and belonging; or grants, publications, tenure and promotion is the result of political decisions not made by the tellers, or by researchers…People tell stories, but not in conditions of their own making. (p. 261)

Cognisant of the aforementioned issues, as well as the fact that academics undertaking fieldwork in the Occupied Territories and Palestinian refugee camps have access to “lines of social mobility” (p. 260) from which their research participants or collaborators have more often than not been excluded, I chose to design a practical storytelling method that could support and/or compliment the immensely important past and present work undertaken in the region by local Palestinians and Israelis, particularly, but not

---

46 Culhane defines subaltern using the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: “By subalternity I mean those removed from lines of social mobility” (as cited in Culhane, 2011b, p. 260).
limited to, the Peace Research Institute of the Middle East (PRIME) and Zochrat (both
discussed in Chapter 1).  

**Putting a Photograph-based Storytelling Method to Work: Fieldwork Overview**

**Preparing for Fieldwork**

*Parameters of Inclusion*

As outlined above, I chose to conduct my fieldwork specifically with Palestinians
and Israelis who are of the Holocaust and Nakba postmemory generations, were born
into and grew up amidst the Palestinians/Israeli conflict, and now live in their respective
Canadian diasporas, as they are especially well positioned to jointly embark on the new
and imaginative beginning that is willing the impossible. As per my Recruitment Notice
(Appendix C), to be included in the study participants had to meet the following criteria:
1) be a Palestinian or Israeli immigrant to Canada; 2) been born after the Holocaust
and/or the Nakba, e.g. Israelis must have been born after 1945 and Palestinians after
1948, and be 19 years of age or older; and 3) must be interested and willing to
participate in each of the three research stages laid out above and in the corresponding
Initial Consent Form (Appendix D).

Beyond these parameters of inclusion, I set out to recruit a diverse demographic
of participants with regard to gender, religion, place of origin, and age. In the spirit of
Said, Arendt, and Azoulay, the greatest factor shaping my recruitment efforts was the
participants’ willingness and courage to commit to each phase of my research project.  
Not only did each participant have to show interest and be willing to tell their stories and
share their associated photographs publically and then exchange them with at least one
individual from the other culture, but they also had to accept the possibility that members
from their own community and/or the other culture might question and/or challenge their
stories. Thus, I was more concerned with recruiting participants who were engaged and

---

47 For more on decolonizing research on Palestinians specifically and Indigenous Peoples more
generally, see Al-Hardan (2014) and Smith (2012) respectively.

48 To be clear, each participants was made fully aware of every step of the research process, as
well as what each would entail, before being asked to make a decision about whether or not to
participate. See the Ethics section below for a discussion of how informed consent was
negotiated with participants throughout the research process.
dedicated to the full process that this project entailed, rather than their demographic diversity. I was also cognisant that Palestinians and Israelis willing to participate in my research were likely to be fairly liberal and, as such, less diverse in terms of their political views and affiliations. For example, individuals unwilling to connect the Holocaust and the Nakba and/or who are critical of joint peace and dialogue initiatives would not be interested in and/or well suited to the project, while individuals willing to explore the connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba, plus engage with members of the other culture, would want to participate and thus be well suited to the project. I speculated that individuals falling into the latter group might be predisposed to or already enacting the comportments of the non-Palestinian Palestinian and non-Israeli Israeli, which are required to will the impossible, and thus would self-select themselves for this research.

Finally, I set out to recruit 6-8 participants (3-4 Palestinians and 3-4 Israelis) living in the province of British Columbia, as the memory work this project entailed required prolonged relationship-building and thoughtful engagement between participants and myself. Close proximity with and ease of access to participants was crucial to the success of my proposed method, as well as the goals of the dissertation as a whole. While I constructed my method to position me simply as a provider of occasions for willing the impossible, I recognized that my status as a second generation Canadian of Palestinian heritage and member of the Nakba postmemory generation positions me as an “insider/outsider” within both the local Palestinian and Israeli communities. Prior to beginning my fieldwork I speculated that, although some Palestinians were likely to perceive me as an “insider” due to the fact that both of my parents and my extended family are Palestinian, as well as the fact that my father and several older relatives are survivors of the Nakba, others might see me as an “outsider” because I was born and raised in Canada. Similarly, I assumed that because of my Palestinian heritage and the fact that I have never lived in Palestine/Israel, some Israelis might view me as an “outsider,” however, some might think of me as an “insider” because my life has also been impacted by the Holocaust, the Nakba, and the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. As we will see below, my assumption was correct. To some participants I was simply an “objective” or “neutral” researcher who happened to be of Palestinian heritage, while others definitively categorized me as either Palestinian or not Palestinian, thus binding
me to or distancing me from the Holocaust, the Nakba, and/or the conflict, as well as their respective communities, in various ways.

Recruitment Process

Given my status as second generation Palestinian-Canadian, as well as my previous role as a member of the Board of Directors for Peace It Together (PIT), I have multiple connections within the Canadian Palestinian and Israeli diasporas, primarily in British Columbia. Because SFU’s University Ethics Research Board (REB) does not allow researchers to directly approach potential research participants, I began my recruitment process by asking my contacts within the local Palestinian and Israeli communities, as well as PIT, to refer me to individuals who they thought might be interested in participating in this project (Appendix B). From there I utilized snowball sampling to recruit additional participants whereby participants and/or other members of these communities referred me to other possible participants. I chose to proceed in this manner as snowball sampling is well suited to exploratory research, particularly work that deals with difficult topics and/or requires access to underrepresented populations (Tenzek, 2017), thus enabling me to recruit unique members of the Canadian Palestinian and Israeli diasporas – those interested in exploring the connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba, and engaging with members of the other culture – whose lives and stories warrant further research attention.

Recruitment progressed quickly, with several interested and qualifying Palestinians and Israelis contacting me within days and weeks – some even within minutes – of receiving the recruitment information. I met with these individuals as soon as possible, taking the time to fully explain the research process, review the Initial Consent Form (Appendix D), and address their questions and concerns. After each individual agreed to participate, we discussed the nature of the first interview, how to select photographs, and then scheduled our first interview. Knowing that recruitment would be ongoing, plus the quick response time of interested and qualifying individuals, I began conducting the life story interviews before recruitment was complete. However, as soon as my fieldwork began two things became immediately apparent. First, the life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs that my participants were choosing to share were immensely rich and, second, each individual was clearly willing to commit more time and energy to engaging with their fellow participants than I had initially
anticipated. While the details of how the latter issue ultimately shaped my fieldwork process will be addressed below, here I note that the former led me, in consultation with my committee, to limit my number of research participants to six. The feeling was that taking on more participants would run the risk of overburdening the constraints of the dissertation resulting in my current participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs, as well as their engagement with their fellow participants, not receiving the time, care or deep engagement they deserved. Once again this hypothesis bore itself out, as consolidating and editing Chapters 5 and 6 was tremendously challenging. Unable to include all of the information provided in the these lengthy and complex interviews despite their richness and value, I had to make pragmatic choices about how to best represent these individuals’ life stories, (post)memories, and photographs to the reader while still capturing their gravity and nuance.

Interestingly, only one Palestinian and one Israeli who met the inclusion criteria explicitly declined to participate. Their reasons for doing so, however, were significantly different, thus reflecting the power imbalance inherent to the conflict itself, as well as the different levels of risk to which this research endeavour exposes qualifying individuals. On the one hand, a PIT board member informed me that an Israeli they had contacted was angry at the very idea of thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba together and was thus offended that the information had even been forwarded to him. On the other hand, a Palestinian who contacted me directly stated that, while they and their spouse were very interested in participating in the project, after a great deal of contemplation, they were choosing not to participate as they feared their involvement would attract the attention of Israeli authorities and subsequently put their and their family’s security and livelihood at risk. Therefore, while anyone choosing to engage in this research opens themselves up to risk by stepping outside of their communal moorings toward affiliative relations of non-belonging, as well as disclosing themselves to others in the public sphere, for some individuals, particularly Palestinians, the risk is not only higher than for other potential participants, but far too great. It is true that Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora are uniquely positioned to contribute to the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible, yet similarities and differences in individuals’ social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances, both across and between the two communities, as well as their sense of safety, undoubtedly impacts individuals’ willingness and/or ability to participate.
Finally, several individuals who were eager to participate did not fit the aforementioned inclusion criteria. Some were from Palestinian or Israeli families, however, they were not born in Palestine or Israel, had never lived in the region and/or had no direct experience of the conflict. It should also be noted that a handful of individuals scrutinized the REB’s restriction on researchers directly approaching potential participants. For instance, two of my subsequent Israeli participants, who I had known previously through either community or professional connections, stated that they were confused when I did not personally approach them to participate, thus causing some awkwardness. As per REB’s policy, however, once they directly expressed their desire to participate to me I was able to include them in the project. Furthermore, after I had already limited my research to six participants, one Israeli, who I had also previously known through my professional circle, expressed his disappointment and frustration that I had not contacted him directly to participate. Interestingly, I had immediately thought of him, but was unable to reach out myself and a mutual contact who had apparently forwarded my recruitment information to him never received a response.

**The Participants**

Individuals who agreed to participate in this study were self-selected, suggesting that they were predisposed to and/or already enacting the comportments of the non-Palestinian Palestinian or non-Israeli Israeli. While some might suggest that a self-selection bias is present in my study, Robinson (2014) asserts that

> [t]he self-selection bias is not possible to circumvent in interview-based research, as voluntary participation is central to ethical good practice, therefore all a researcher can do is be aware of the possibility for bias and consider its possible impact on findings and generalizability. (p. 36)

Given that this study’s recruitment process was not geared toward generating a broad representative sampling of Palestinians and Israelis, but rather engaging members of both communities who were courageous enough to try and will the impossible, I believe recruiting through self-selection was germane not only to my method, but also to the aims of the dissertation as a whole. By self-selecting themselves for this research process, participants demonstrated their courage and openness to take up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. Consequently, they identified themselves as members of exceptional minorities – vanguards if you will – within the broader
Palestinian and Israeli global communities, plus evidenced Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s theoretical arguments.

Although the study was limited to six individuals, my participants are demographically diverse. While all three Palestinian participants – Nick, Haifa Staiti, and Amanda Qumsieh – were born and raised in the West Bank (two in Beit Sahour, one in Jenin), they are mixed in terms of gender (one male, two female), age (56, 32, 22), religion (two Christian, one Muslim), and diasporic citizenship (two are Canadian citizens, one is not). Similarly, while all three Israeli participants – Ran Vered, Itai Erdal, and Ofira Roll – were born and raised in Israel (Afula, Jerusalem, Nahariya), they are mixed in terms of gender (two male, one female), age (61, 40, 39), and ethnic origin (two European, one North African).

Ethics

Since my dissertation research entailed working with human subjects, prior to commencing my fieldwork I submitted an ethics application to the REB, which was subsequently approved under minimal risk review. In compliance with the requirements of the Tri Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) and SFU Policy R20.01, both of which the REB is charged with enforcing, I was required to inform my participants about, as well as work to reduce, any possible risks or psychological harm that their participation in my study might entail. I sought to achieve the latter by limiting the number of participants to six; choosing to work specifically with individuals living in British Columbia who are of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba postmemory generations; undertaking one-on-one interviews with my participants (with the possibility of meeting face-to-face left up to the participants only after the completion of the study); providing a safe space\(^{49}\) for participants to speak freely, albeit somewhat indirectly, to one another in their own words; and allowing participants to remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms and digital editing. Doing so ensured that my participants would not be put at any greater risk than they might experience if

\(^{49}\) I followed Dan Bar-on’s (2006) definition and understanding of safe space, which he outlines with regard to his own work with Jews and Germans, and Palestinians and Israelis as follows: “it is the responsibility of the interviewer to create a relatively safe space for the interviewee to be able to talk openly about difficult issues (especially when traumatic experiences hover in the background of the interview). The construction of safe space includes technical aspects – such as securing a quiet place, providing adequate time, and arranging high quality audio-taping – as well as emotional aspects – acting curious, being emotionally attentive but also spontaneous, giving interviewees the feeling that their narrative is unique and important” (p. 29).
they initiated dialogue with one another on their own and/or through dialogue programs focused on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, e.g.) emotional challenges related to the telling of and/or listening to stories associated with the Holocaust, the Nakba and/or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict; disagreements that might arise when engaging with members of the other culture about these historical traumas and/or the conflict; and criticism from members of their own community for engaging with members of the other culture. Not only did I inform my participants about these potential risks and/or harms in the Initial Consent Form (Appendix D) and our early meetings, but by self-selecting themselves for the study my participants demonstrated that, for them, the potential benefits of participating outweighed the known risks. As addressed earlier, those who deemed the risks of the study too high chose not to participate. Thus, while REB’s requirements are seemingly paradoxical to the Saidian and Arendtian challenge of willing the impossible, it was my hope that the aforementioned efforts would allow my participants the time and support necessary to safely and comfortably participate in this research project, while still leaving them unencumbered to jointly work toward willing the impossible.

The aforementioned paradox is consistent with Culhane’s (2011b) assertion that the principles of university ethics review requirements “are antithetical to the premises of performative ethnography and performance as research” (261), as ethnographic fieldwork “necessarily dwells in uncertain, risky space” (Castañeda, 2006, p. 98). Castañeda (2006) emphasizes that

fieldwork is necessarily improvisational, mobile, fluid, flexible, and transformative; and these performative qualities mean that there is a gap between the doing and the design of fieldwork such that there is always a hidden, or unknown and unknowable, element that breaks from the [definition of the situation] as defined by either or both of the fieldworking subject [the ethnographer] and the subjects of fieldwork [the participants]. (p. 82)

Recognizing that shifting from interdisciplinary theory and methodology to ethnographic practice is unpredictable and consequently improvisatory (Cerwonka & Malkki, 2007), as well as the fact that efforts to will the impossible are equally unpredictable and challenging, a multi-tiered consent process became crucial. Culhane (2011b) justly argues that, “ethical engagement demands constant renegotiation over time” (p. 261), hence, I renegotiated informed consent with my participants following each of the research stages noted above and detailed below. For example, consent was negotiated
before the first interview (Appendix D: Initial Consent Form); before participants’ stories and photographs were posted to a password-protected website for exchange (Appendix G: Supplemental Consent Form); after the reflective interview when these videos needed to be posted to YouTube as an additional form of data backup (Appendix I: Second Supplemental Consent Form); and after I finished writing, but before I submitted my dissertation (Appendix J: Third Supplemental Consent Form). Consent will also have to be renegotiated if and/or when my participants decide to make their stories, photographs, and/or reflective interviews public outside of my dissertation (see “Future Use of Participant Data” in Appendix D). Again, such an approach to informed consent prioritizes process over product. While my participants’ stories and photographs will undoubtedly be of great interest and value to the greater public, particularly to Palestinian and Israeli communities worldwide, priority was given to the process of participants telling and sharing their stories and photographs with one another, regardless of the project’s outcome and whether or not participants choose to eventually share their materials publically outside of this dissertation.
Undertaking Fieldwork

Stage 1 – Conducting In-depth Photograph-based Life Story Interviews

I began my fieldwork by conducting in-depth photograph-based life story interviews with three Palestinian and three Israeli immigrants to Canada who, as members of the most immediate postmemory generations, were willing to explore and share their counter-narratives and/or counter-memories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives. The choice of photographs used in this process was left up to the participants. I asked them to gather family photographs that they felt best represented their postmemories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba or work from one or more photo albums that contained such images. Fascinatingly, clear themes in the choice of photographs emerged within each community, e.g.) the bulk of the Palestinians’ images are immediate family photographs produced before the participants’ birth or during their childhood or adult life, while the majority of the Israelis’ images are personal photographs taken during or associated with the participants’ service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). As the following chapters will demonstrate, although the participants’ chosen photographs appear to be everyday vernacular images devoid of explicit atrocity, the memories and postmemories lingering outside their frames are seeped in historic and contemporary traumas (Batchen, Gidley, Miller, & Prosser, 2012; Cadava, 2011; Hirsch, 1997, 2012; Metz, 1985).

Once the choice of photographs was made, I sat down with each participant in a space of their choosing (all but one interview took place in the participants’ homes) and allowed them the time necessary to story their postmemories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba using their photographs. Although I used the same semi-structured interview schedule for each interview (Appendices E and F), I let the participants lead our discussion, only asking additional questions where appropriate and/or necessary. Inspired by Henry Greenspan and Sidney Bolkosky’s (2006) definition of what constitutes a “real” or “genuine interview” (p. 439), I approached each interview (including those in Stage 3) as a collaboration of mutual labour between each participant and myself. This entailed a dedication to helping “(bring) forth” (p. 439) each participant’s “whole story” (p. 440) in a professional, yet gentle, relaxed, and caring atmosphere, as well as “facilitate(ing) the fullest possible articulation of each individual memory, whenever and however it (arose), while returning to the broader context and chronology
when the time (was) ripe” (p. 442). With the participants’ consent, their interviews were videotaped and their photographs digitally scanned, if and when necessary (Appendix D).

Rather than simply audiotaping or transcribing my participants’ interviews, I chose to videotape them, as the resulting videos brought the storyteller into mediated presence before their fellow participants (Guerin & Hallas, 2007). Such visual storytelling also enabled the documentation of nonverbal forms of communication, such as the storyteller’s facial expressions and physical gestures or movements, including physical contact with material objects such as photographs, which would have been difficult, if not impossible, to properly convey through aural recordings or the written word (Lichtblau, 2011; Williams, 2011). The use of video thus enabled me to capture a sense of the storyteller’s personality and emotions by documenting their affective, haptic, embodied and/or disembodied ways of communicating remembrance, thereby facilitating “the collection of whole new worlds of information” and the opening up of “[w]hole new areas of exploration” (Williams, 2011, p. 268; Lichtblau, 2011; Sipe, 2006).

Participants were given the opportunity to review and then request any changes to and/or note any concerns regarding their videos and photographs before these materials were shared with their fellow participants (Appendix G). While all of the interviews undertaken for this dissertation where videotaped, I also gave my participants the option of remaining anonymous through the use of a pseudonym, sharing a transcript of their life stories in lieu of their actual video, and distorting their faces, voices and/or images in their videos and/or faces in their photographs (Appendices D and G). Only Nick chose to share a transcript of his interview, rather than the video itself, plus his and his wife’s faces were blurred in his photographs. Ofira also chose to blur the faces of friends and family appearing in her chosen photographs, both in her video and the scans of the images themselves. Given that Nick and Ofira’s choices were rooted in unique elements of their life stories, the reasoning behind their decisions has been left to Chapter 5 and 6, respectively. These were the only changes or edits made to the participants’ videos and/or photographs. Here again the process and experience of the participants telling their stories and sharing their chosen photographs with one another was prioritized over the aesthetic or filmic quality and/or production of the videos. My presumption that videotaped interviews would allow for the deepest engagement between participants was corroborated by the participants themselves. On the one hand,
several participants were disappointed that they were not able to watch and listen to Nick as he shared his stories and photographs. They also noted that they found it hard to fully understand and/or remember some of the specifics of his story, including his reason for remaining anonymous, because they were simply reading a transcript. On the other hand, many of the same participants stated that they found Haifa and Ofira’s interviews the most engaging and moving specifically because of the emotion evident in their videos.

Although I initially set out to have one Palestinian and one Israeli exchange stories and photographs, as indicated above, very shortly after my fieldwork began five of my six participants indicated that they wanted to engage with the stories and photographs of all the other participants. Ultimately, all six participants committed to listening to the other five participants’ stories and viewing all of their photographs, regardless of cultural background. This signalled a level of commitment to the project and the other participants that I could never have anticipated, forcing me to revise my research method and timeline. Though the decision to proceed in this manner undoubtedly slowed down and complicated my fieldwork (to say nothing of the interpretation and writing processes), it resulted in much more nuanced and hopeful findings. I believe that my participants’ courage and willingness to commit to this level of engagement speaks both to their desire and openness to jointly working toward willing the impossible, as well as the hopeful potentiality they recognized in this photograph-based storytelling method. This development bares out Cerwonka and Malikki, Culhane, and Castañeda’s arguments that ethnographic fieldwork is unpredictable and subsequently improvisatory, as well as the latter’s understanding of fieldwork participants as a self-selected “emergent audience” (Castañeda, 2006, p. 83):

Audiences emerge...with the active agency and participation of spectators50 who choose to observe, listen, interact, dialogue, engage, and disengage with the activity in the very moment of its enactment and temporality of performance...The idea of emergent audience as a principle of ethnographic fieldwork entails self-selection of subjects to participate in research and the fact that fieldwork is intrinsically a collaborative (interactive, dialogical, collusive) endeavor. Fieldworkers do not in any simple sense impose themselves and their projects on the people; rather, members of the subject community exercise their agency and control over the extent to which they engage the fieldworker and participate as subjects, distant/disengaged observers, active or

50 “Spectactor” is Augusto Boal’s term for an individual who is both spectator and actor.
occasional participants, collaborators, interpreters, critics, publically or privately nay-sayers, assistants in or enemies to the research process. These subjects have agendas, interests, and motives that bring them into definitive relationships with the fieldworker. There is no theoretical or classificatory way to account for these as they are given by the pragmatics of situations and may be beyond the knowledge and ability to know of the ethnographer. It is the pragmatics of these persons that create a pervasive micro-level of collaboration, collusion and complicity that is inherently obvious and apparent to all fieldworkers. (pp. 83-84)

In Castañeda’s metaphorical language of “the invisible theatre of ethnography”\(^{51}\) (p. 88), while I might have “staged” or created the occasions and conditions of possibility for willing the impossible, my participants emerged as an audience of “spect-actors” by actively, yet unpredictably, determining their individual level and manner of performativity within the “theatre” of my study. As we will see in the coming fieldwork chapters, my participants’ decision to engage with each and every one of their fellow participants’ stories and photographs, was only the first, albeit the most significant, example of how they unexpectedly enacted their agency throughout the research process.

**Stage 2 – Facilitating the Exchange of Life Stories, (Post)memories & Associated Photographs**

Once the participants’ life story interviews were completed and their photographs scanned, I posted these materials on a private password-protected website (http://nawal-muslehmotut.squarespace.com) to facilitate the exchanging of stories, memories, and photographs between all six participants (Appendix G). I chose to proceed in this manner so my participants had the opportunity to engage with each other’s stories and view their photographs at their leisure, affording them the time and safety to engage with, reflect on, and document their responses to these materials in private and in advance of sharing their thoughts with me.

Beyond bringing the storyteller into mediate presence before their audience, the documenting and exchanging of participants’ life stories through videos, rather than aural recordings or written transcripts, facilitated the intersubjective engagement

\(^{51}\) In his article “The Invisible Theatre of Ethnography: Performative Principles of Fieldwork” Castañeda (2006) makes a comparison between ethnographic fieldwork and Augusto Boal’s invisible theatre in which, as part of the latter’s Theatre of the Oppressed, a group of actors secretly improvise a script on an important social issues in a public place with the objective of “creating a provocative and engaging set of interactions with a public in which different emotions, positions, and ambivalences of the social issue are presented, provoked, and debated” (p. 77).
necessary for both testimony and witnessing to take place (Guerin & Hallas, 2007; Lichtblau, 2011; Sipe, 2006; Williams, 2011). Not only did these videos give the participants viewing them a better sense of their fellow participants’ personalities, emotions, and nonverbal forms of communication through affective, haptic, and embodied and/or disembodied forms of remembering, but they also afforded them distance and time to wrestle with the stories they were hearing and the photographs they were viewing or, in Azoulay’s terms, watching. Having my participants story and exchange their counter-narratives and postmemories of the Holocaust and the Nakba face-to-face and in real time, would have opened up the possibility of disruption, conflict, and competition potentially leaving the storyteller struggling to narrate their life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs in their entirety. It also might have caused storytellers to self-censor themselves. By mediating these exchanges through the project website, participants were not only able to narrate their stories, memories, and photographs comfortably, freely, and without interruption, but they were subsequently obligated to engage with their fellow participants’ stories, memories, and photographs without being able to effect what they were seeing and hearing on screen. I believe that proceeding in this manner actually better facilitated the joint task of willing the impossible. For instance, several participants stated that they were frustrated with Ran because he chose not to share any photographs, often used language that they interpreted as falling in line with Israeli master narratives and collective memories, and expressed a lack of interest in his fellow Israelis’ stories and photographs. Had these individuals been in the same room with Ran as he tried to share his stories, they may not have allowed him to finish, thus risking efforts to will the impossible. In doing so, they would have missed out on the revelations that, upon reflection, his narrative inspired.

Stage 3 – Conducting In-depth Reflective Interviews

Finally, after participants had an opportunity to watch and contemplate the other participants’ stories, memories, and photographs, I conducted another series of in-depth one-on-one interviews in which each participant was asked to reflect on the experience of sharing their own life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs, engaging with the other participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs, and the research process as a whole (Appendix H). Again, working one-on-one provided participants the time and support necessary to deeply engage with and speak honestly about their experience of each research phase. With the participants’ consent, these
interviews were also videotaped and stored on YouTube for backup (Appendix I). At the time of writing, no plans had been made to share these reflective interviews with the other participants, however, and once again enacting their agency, each participant expressed a strong desire to not only watch these second interviews, if and when they are made available, but also to meet their fellow participants in person.

Reflections on Fieldwork Positionality

In “‘Do I Like Them Too Much?’: Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa,” Valerie Yow (2006) states,

> When I refer to interview effects on the interviewer and to the ways the interviewer interacts with narrator and with content, I include motives for doing the project, feelings about the narrator, interviewer’s reaction to the narrator’s testimony, and intrusion of the interviewer’s assumptions and of the interviewer’s self-schema into the interviewing and interpretive processes. (p. 55)

In Chapter 1 I acknowledged that I did not conceive of or execute this project as an objective researcher, but rather as a Palestinian-Canadian oppositional public intellectual and member of the Nakba postmemory generation committed to willing the impossible. However, here I would like to briefly address the other interview effects identified by Yow above and their influence on my fieldwork as a whole. Again, I believe such reflexivity assists in highlighting the advantages, rather than the disadvantages, of acknowledging and engaging with my own subjectivity during the research planning, fieldwork, and interpretative and writing processes (Armbuster, 2010; Yow, 2006).

First, I have felt immense gratitude towards, responsibility for, and connection with my participants from the moment of recruitment – feelings that have continued to deepen even after the conclusion of my fieldwork. I believe the strength of these feelings is a product of having recruited through my own personal and professional networks, our shared commitment to working toward peaceful coexistence and equitable rights for all Palestinians and Israelis, and my recognition of the great personal risk they have exposed themselves to by participating in this project. Although various levels of familiarity existed between my participants and myself before their recruitment,\(^{52}\) I

---

\(^{52}\) I had actually met four of my six participants (Nick, Haifa, Ran, and Ofira) before recruitment began, plus had longstanding familial, personal, and/or professional relationships with the
quickly developed trusting and warm relationships with each. Even from our first contact regarding the project, I sensed my participants held a level of trust in both the research process and myself that I never could have anticipated. This only increased my desire to care for them throughout the research process, represent their life stories, (post)memories, and photographs as truthfully and respectfully as possible, and ensure they found the fieldwork experience meaningful and productive. The only time the close relationships between my participants and myself became challenging was during the early stages of negotiating rolling consent. While this process proceeded quite smoothly, initially some participants wanted to give me blanket consent to ask and share whatever I wanted, however I wanted, and whenever I wanted. For their protection I had to insist on continually renegotiating consent, as they could not anticipate their future feelings about what they shared and/or how what they shared might be received or interpreted by various audiences (Culhane, 2011b). Overall, the level of trust and intimacy that developed during my fieldwork and beyond forced me to question whether my participants and I actually did like each other “too much.” On reflection, I believe the nature of the relationships we developed encouraged and enabled the sharing of the tremendously nuanced stories, (post)memories, photographs, and reflective responses presented in this dissertation, and thus positively contributed to our admittedly modest attempt to will the impossible.

Second, although I primarily viewed myself as a provider of occasions who co-laboured with participants during the interviewing process, I could not help but be deeply moved and inspired by their life stories, (post)memories, associated photographs, and reflective responses. With that said, not only was it difficult to keep my emotions in check individuals who put us in contact. With that said, the only participant with whom I had a prior friendship was Haifa. We first met in approximately 2005, when her and her now husband were students in undergraduate tutorials I was teaching. We stayed in touch after their graduation and I eventually attended their wedding. Years later I encouraged Haifa to become a PIT Board Member. Although I also met Ran while serving on the PIT board (he, Haifa, and I were all Board Members at the same time) Ran and Haifa never met in person or outside online organizational meetings. In addition, although my parents put me in contact with Nick and Amanda (all three of our families are friends) only Nick and I had previously met and even then only briefly two or three times. Ofira and I had a chance encounter in 2011 at a locally held international conference where, after seeing me present on the work of comics journalist Joe Sacco, she approached me about my interest in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. This introduction quickly turned into hours of deep and inspiring conversation, yet we would not see or speak with each other again until she contacted me about participating in this project. Finally, while I had not previously met Itai, I had seen him perform his play This is Not a Conversation a few years prior. It would be Itai’s co-performer, and a mutual Palestinian friend, who put us in contact.
during the interviews, but the affective labour entailed in repeatedly witnessing their testimonies throughout the listening/viewing, transcription, analysis, and writing up of their stories, (post)memories, photographs and/or reflective responses impacted me mentally, emotionally, and physically. Upon reflection, I realize that these responses were the result of a dynamic and fluid mix of admiration, guilt, and jealousy. First and foremost, I was truly inspired, motivated, and made hopeful by Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s willingness to still be open and engaged with Israelis even after everything they and their families have endured, plus Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s unwavering and courageous commitment to speaking their truth in the face of harsh disapproval and accusations from their own community, families, and/or nation. Nonetheless, as I watched and listened to Nick, Haifa, and Amanda narrate their life stories, (post)memories, and photographs I periodically felt pangs of guilt for having escaped the suffering, oppression, and discrimination they experienced, plus flashes of jealousy over all that I have lost being born and raised in diaspora. Much to my surprise, a related form of jealousy extended to Ran, Itai, and Ofira who have also been afforded knowledge of and access to my family’s culture, language, and homeland, albeit in a much different way than my Palestinian participants. While these moments of guilt and jealousy were few and far between, I am grateful for the opportunity to have experienced and worked through them, as they have allowed me to better understand how my own (post)memories of the Nakba and my differing relationship to the diaspora have impacted my life and work.

Finally, and leading from the discussion above, my postmemories and positionality did come into play during both the fieldwork and interpretative processes. While these were not particularly intrusive or disruptive, I was continually cognisant of how my professional and personal expectations and self-understanding might positively and negatively affect my research. As evidenced earlier in this chapter, some of the assumptions I had as a researcher about how my fieldwork might proceed bore out, however, two did not. First, prior to beginning my fieldwork, I felt confident that I would quickly form bonds with my Palestinian participants, but worried that I might feel uneasy working with my Israeli participants, e.g.) Would the latter see me as biased? Would they be biased toward me? Would my past negative interactions with Israelis, both locally and “back home,” affect how I engaged with them throughout my fieldwork? While my first assumption was correct, almost immediately I realized that the latter was not, as Ran,
Itai, and Ofira were tremendously warm and welcoming throughout the process, which in turn put me at ease. In fact, I never felt bias from or obligated to take sides with either community during the research process, as it felt that we were all committed to the same goals albeit for different reasons (Armbruster, 2010). Second, I assumed that by signing on to the project each participant was fully committed to all aspects of my three-stage research process and would remain so throughout, yet I found myself shocked, even defensive, when during our first interview Ran enacted his agency by choosing not to share any photographs and expressing his lack of interest in his fellow Israelis’ life stories, (post)memories, and images. While I was correct in assuming that other participants might react similarly to Ran’s choices, I have since felt regret for allowing my preconceived notions about how I thought my participants should share their life stories, (post)memories, and photographs, and what their engagement should look like or entail temporarily distract me from the value of his testimony and participation.

Also at play during my fieldwork was my own self-schema, particularly the desire to have my categorically different Palestinian-ness, postmemories of the Nakba, and experience of life in diaspora recognized by participants, even if only in the most general sense. Truthfully this desire for recognition caught me unawares when, after simply lingering as traces in the background of my mind, it suddenly came to the fore when Nick stated that I was not Palestinian because I do not speak Arabic, do not have children, married a Canadian of European origin, never visited Palestine, and speak with Israelis with an impartiality uncommon to Palestinians. Nonetheless, all of my participants – Nick included – acknowledged that I too am bound to this conflict through my heritage and family, and am thus deeply committed to the tremendous, yet necessary task of willing the impossible. Interestingly, I believe that by primarily recognizing myself simply as a facilitator of this process, rather than an equal participant within it, I was able to create the “safe” and “objective” space for willing the impossible that my participants

\[53\] When asked how they viewed me within the context of the study, the remaining five participants answered as follows: Haifa stated that I remained “neutral” and “objective” even though we initially bonded over being Palestinian; Amanda believed the process was “easy” for her because even though I do not speak Arabic and have never lived “back home” I understood her, the conflict, and Palestinian culture as though I had, thus making me Palestinian in her eyes; Ran thought of me as “Just Nawal!” even though he was aware of my background, but noted that he might have felt differently if we had not known each other prior to recruitment; Itai stressed that my name alone identified me as Palestinian and thus made him want to help me with this project, but also that he was impressed by my “objectivity”; finally, Ofira praised me for how “professional” I was during the process, as she forgot about my background and saw me as “just a researcher” – this is markedly different from our first meeting when she viewed me as Palestinian.
acknowledged and thanked me for providing. In the end, this was all the recognition I needed.

By Way of Conclusion: A Brief Introduction to My Fieldwork Chapters

Having outlined both the theoretical and methodological grounding for the unique three-stage photograph-based storytelling method that I developed specifically for this dissertation, I now move to my primary fieldwork. Chapters 5 and 6 detail the life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs of my three Palestinian and three Israeli participants, respectively. Chapter 7 then brings my participants into dialogue with one another through their reflective interview responses. And, finally, in Chapter 8 I reflect on how conceivable it is to take up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible through storytelling and photography in the contemporary moment.

Before proceeding, however, a few comments regarding Chapters 5 and 6 are in order. In an effort to historicize my participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs, as well as the points of commonality and/or disparity that appeared within and across communities, my participants’ stories are presented in each chapter ordered by age (oldest to youngest). Also, in order to approximate the videos and/or transcripts that were shared with their fellow participants, detailed analysis of my participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs in terms of their relationship to the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible has been left to Chapter 8. It is my hope that proceeding in this manner might also enable readers of this dissertation to enact their own civil imagination by entering into a civil contract of photography with my participants, thus joining them in their efforts to will the impossible. Furthermore, and as noted earlier, I had to make painful yet pragmatic decisions about how best to represent my participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and photographs to the reader within the confines of this dissertation while still capturing their significance and complexity. This required editing out extraneous words, phrases and/or stories, plus relegating relevant fieldwork observations and necessary contextualizing information to footnotes.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not provide a brief overview of the life stories, (post)memories, and photographs that comprise Chapters 5 and 6. In terms of Chapter 5, generational differences are clear across Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s life stories,
particularly in terms of their personal experiences of being born and raised amidst the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. As Haifa astutely highlighted in her reflective interview, Nick is of the pre-Intifada generation (her father’s generation), Haifa herself is of the First Intifada generation, and Amanda is of the Al-Aqsa or Second Intifada generation. And yet the themes that run through their postmemories of the Nakba are consistent. Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa’di (2007) explain that

the special character of Palestinian memory lies in the key experiences of their radical and abrupt displacement from life in situ, the continuing violence and lack of resolution they must endure, and the political nature of the deliberate erasure of their story, which gives birth to the stubborn dissidence of their memory work. (pp. 4-5)

This “special character of Palestinian memory” undoubtedly characterizes Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s own (post)memories. The counter-narratives and counter-memories brought forth through their immediate family photographs speak of tattered memories of displacement and dispossession passed down through generations; lingering nostalgia for a pre-1948 Palestine now lost; recognition of the ironic yet organic link between the Holocaust and the Nakba; and a belief that the latter continues unremittingly today under an occupation characterized by the normality of violence, oppression, and discrimination. Particularly in the case of Nick and Haifa, these (post)memories are accompanied by the ghostly hauntings of fathers both dead and living, lost either to death, imprisonment or ostensibly failed dreams of justice and freedom (Cho, 2008; Gordon, 2008). Such spectres haunt all three participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and photographs, which demand true witnesses to their families’ continued suffering and call for justice and political action – both sounded through a hopeful yet melancholic resilience focused on a new and just polity yet to come (Bresheeth, 2007; Segal, 2016).

Generational differences are equally apparent in Chapter 6, as Ran, Itai, and Ofira share their experiences of being born and raised in Israel during the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Here, however, we see a generational divide that places Ran on one side and Itai and Ofira on the other. While Ran grew up in the early years of the new Israeli state surrounded by the then silent survivors of the Holocaust, Itai and Ofira came of age within a post-1967 Israel that had not only institutionalized the Holocaust, but also begun to use it for political ends. Yet here again we see a consistency to the (post)memories shared by all three participants, each of whom make a direct connection between the Holocaust and their service in the IDF, albeit with distinctions characterized
by the generational divide noted above. Thus, the counter-narratives and counter-memories brought forth in their life stories and through their personal and often military related photographs, are punctuated with paradoxes of choice; critiques of the militarization of Israeli society; and personal efforts to re-educated themselves after realizing that the Israeli education and military systems fed them a problematically sanitized and heroic version of the War of Independence. While this personal re-education has lead all three participants to acknowledge and even co-memorialize the Nakba to varying degrees, it also appears to have produced within Itai and Ofira a melancholia not only for “a lost Israeli innocence” (Lentin, 2010, p. 156), but also the destruction of Palestine, and the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people – a melancholia that has become entangled with weighty moral obligation and/or guilt (Lentin, 2010). Nonetheless, it is the act of wrestling with the ghostly spectres that shadow their own postmemories of the Holocaust that motivates their pessimistic yet unwavering determination to will the impossible (Cho, 2008; Gordon, 2008; Lentin, 2010).
Chapter 5.

Nostalgia, Continuous Hauntings & Melancholic Resilience: Palestinian Life Stories, (Post)memories & Associated Photographs

Nick

Nick was born in 1958 in Beit Sahour, Palestine, which is located one and a half kilometers east of Bethlehem City, in the Bethlehem Governorate. On March 23, 2015, the date of our first interview, he was fifty-six years old. Nick, his wife, and their four sons lived in Beit Sahour until 2001 when they moved to Detroit, Michigan. Although the family lived in Detroit for nine years, they were denied citizenship by the American government. On July 1, 2010, Nick, his wife, and three of their four sons travelled to Windsor, Ontario where they filed refugee claims with the Canadian government. Approximately three weeks later, the family arrived in the Greater Vancouver Area, where they continue to live today. Although his wife and children’s refugee claims were approved in 2014, as will be discussed below, Nick is still fighting to remain in Canada. He is the only one of this study’s six participants who faces the threat of deportation back to the region.

Our first interview takes place in the kitchen of Nick’s family home. The eleven photographs he chose for this project are stacked in front of him on the dining room table. Before introducing and/or discussing any of them, he briefly speaks about his family’s history from the Nakba onward. In 1948 his father was living and teaching in the north eastern town of Baysan, Palestine. Once the First Arab-Israeli War began, he fled with his wife and oldest daughter (Nick’s mother and oldest sister respectively), leaving

54 Due to ongoing issues with Nick’s outstanding Canadian refugee claim, which will be discussed in greater detail below, he chose to remain anonymous. As such, he used a pseudonym, plus a full transcript of his first interview (rather than the original video) and edited photographs (in which his and his wife’s faces are blurred) were provided to the other participants and used in this dissertation.
behind their home and all of their belongings.\textsuperscript{55} Displaced and dispossessed, they fled to Beit Sahour to live with his father’s parents (Nick’s paternal grandparents) where they had to start a new life from nothing. Hearing the stories of his family’s struggles as he grew up had a great impact on Nick, particularly after they lost everything again during the June War of 1967. Here Nick makes a direct connection between his family fleeing from Baysan to Beit Sahour in 1948 and the second trauma they suffered in 1967. He shares his memories of the 1967 War, which he experienced at approximately nine years old:

I remember it, as I see you now, how it is coming when we start to run away, we start to find the places underground or to have a care somewhere there so protect us. Every family to find [safety]\textsuperscript{56} under...basement...because we wasn’t ready for war, we haven’t any place to hide and especially there is many bomb coming to our city and...many people...killed by bomb...[O]ne of them is our cousin, so we scare a lot. I remember how everyone scaring...hiding...

Living through the 1967 War at such a young age undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on Nick; however, it was the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank that would shape his life to the present:

It is affect our life when I go to work when I was like eleven years (laughs)\textsuperscript{57} old...because we are poor, we need to work to make money. So I remember...I work in Israel too, I work in Jerusalem, I was like twelve years, I was working in Israel in building construction. And...because we want to make money, we can’t stay [at home]...[E]very one of my brothers was working, all of us working

---

\textsuperscript{55} In The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited, Benny Morris (2004) explains that during 1948 “the Arab town of Beisan...was viewed by [the Haganah General Staff] as a probable point of entry for Jordanian forces invading Palestine” (p. 226). Thus, on April 22 it was recommended “that the town be conquered and its population harassed into flight” (p. 226). By April 28 the Haganah had placed the town “under intermittent siege” and “most of the women and children were evacuated to Nablus, Tubas and Jordan. Adult males were not allowed to leave” (p. 227). After bombing the town on the night of May 11/12 the Haganah agreed to a ceasefire and the Arab inhabitants were told that they were welcome to stay if they wished or would be given “safe passage” (p. 227) if they chose to leave. Although, initially 1000-1200 Arabs stayed, the Haganah feared they might revolt and so “sought and gained authority...to expel the remaining inhabitants” (p. 227). Morris states that “[m]ost [of the remaining inhabitants] were apparently expelled around 15 May across the Jordan” (p. 227), leaving only approximately 300 Arabs in the town by May 18. Yet by May 28 these remaining inhabitants were given the choice to transfer to Jordan or Nazareth, which they did. At this point the town’s Arab name, Baysan, reverted to the Hebrew, Beit Shean, which it maintains today.

\textsuperscript{56} [Text appearing in square brackets] indicates edits and/or information added for clarity.

\textsuperscript{57} ([Italicized text appearing in round brackets]) indicates non-verbal forms of communication and/or my notations.
because we need money, we can’t live without money. So...almost we start...from the beginning. So...that’s how our life.

So, that’s make me think about to be political, to think...if that not happen to me, maybe my life it will be different...[S]ince I be born, since I start to feel how I am hungry, I need to work...makes me think why is that happen. Of course it's coming to occupation.

By “be political” Nick is referring to his decision to become politically active against the Israeli occupation once he was in university:

...[W]hen it’s coming to occupation...I need to move it...I do not keep it there. So I start to think how is the best way to...do something against occupation. So that’s coming to my mind to be...political...to say my opinion about that...make a strike, do something like that. Also...we used to do in the university like a book fair...[A]nd...every time we do anything the soldiers come surrounding the university and they close it and...[throw]...smoke bomb...and [tear gas], all of that. So we start to return back to them...to throw rocks to them, to do everything because they coming to our university...[S]o that’s why we start to...hate more...what’s they doing.58

Before delving deeper into his political activism and the consequences it ultimately had on his and his family’s lives, Nick speaks to the difference between the relationships he had with Israeli civilians when he worked in Israel as a child and his interactions with Israeli soldiers when he was politically active as a young adult:

...I think there is two kind of people in Israel. Some people we can be friend together and some people we can’t do that with them...[T]he original...Jewish, as I know from my father, long time ago before, they was...good families, they were living together at Baysan, all of that area...but after’s coming the Zionist, that is something...different. When the soldiers coming to take our land, to kick us from our home, do not let us live our lives, so that’s make us...hate them, do not what to stay with them...

58 It is significant that Nick’s political activities took place in Beit Sahour, as the town is credited with one of the most famous and successful local, non-violent, social organization campaigns against the Israeli occupation that characterized the First Intifada (1987 to approximately 1993). For more on Beit Sahour’s role in the First Intifada, see Robinson (1997). For more on Beit Sahour’s role in both the First and Second or al-Aqsa Intifada (2000 to approximately 2005), as well as the town’s continuing resistance to the Israeli occupation through direct non-violent action, visit the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement Between Peoples’ website at http://www.rapprochement.org.
Nick makes a clear and significant distinction between the original Palestinian Jews with whom Palestinian Arabs lived peacefully for decades and the Zionist Jews who began arriving in the region from Europe in the late nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{59}

Although he returns to the aforementioned distinction shortly, Nick proceeds to clarify that he was politically active from approximately late 1980 to 1985, just prior to the start of the First Intifada in 1987. These activities resulted in Nick being imprisoned by the Israeli state multiple times over the course of several years by way of multiple administrative detentions.\textsuperscript{60} Memories from his time in prison are the impetus for Nick to begin introducing his chosen photographs:

\ldots[I)n Palestine at that time...the [First] Intifada [had begun]...they start to get anyone...[if] he was political...put him in prison. They don't want any man talk...against Israel, against occupation...[But]...this time they can't stop anybody [from fighting back against the] occupation. So because of this they took me to the prison...without any court, without any judgment, just to put [me] in...prison, administration prison, for 6 month without let me see my family or...they see me or talk with [me], expect some letters they send it to me from outside and sometimes they do not know if you’re still alive or not alive. Not just me, a lot of people something like that.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{59} For histories of the relatively stable relations that existed between Christian and/or Muslim Arabs and Jews in Palestine during the time of the Ottoman Empire, see Michelle U. Campos’ Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine (2010) and Charles D. Smith’s Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History With Documents (2010).

\textsuperscript{60} In Administrative Detention in the Occupied Palestinians Territory: A Legal Analysis Report, the Addameer Prison Support and Human Rights Association (2016) defines administrative detention as “a procedure under which detainees are held [by the Israeli military] without charge or trial. No charges are filed, and there is no intention of bringing the detainee to trial. In accordance with the detention order, a detainee is given a specific term of detention. On or before the expiry of the term, the detention order is frequently renewed. This process can be continued indefinitely” (p. 7). As the report argues, although this practice is permitted with strict conditions under international law, Israel’s practice of administrative detention does not meet the international standards set out by said international law.

\textsuperscript{61} In their 2003 report Torture of Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israeli Prisons (Qatamish 2003), Addameer states that Palestinian prisoners are often deprived of family visits over the course of several months or even years.
And the problem...these pictures (he holds up photographs #1 and #2)...[my family] send it to me...[O]ne day, in one of the [hunger] strike...we asking [them] to give us...good food to eat, because they never put us a good food, just little bit food, so we lose a lot weight inside...[T]here is many people sick...they cannot...fix all...give them good medicine, they just [say]...“Drink water, drink water,” that’s their good medicine...“Drink water you’ll be good, drink water you’ll be good.” So...one day [the soldiers] come...inside our tent, inside our camp, and start to tear everything, damage everything...and one of
...[I]f you can see...(he flips photographs #1 and #2 over and shows the Arabic handwriting on their backs) these our numbers. That's the name of the prison...and my number...[I]n the prison, I have a number, I do not have a name there, they know me by number. So my number is (in English, he reads out the number written on back of photograph). So when they call...(in English, he reads out the number again) that's meaning...me. So, that's...something. (He shakes his head.) I think the same way they learn from...Holocaust. They treat us how German...treat the Jewish.

I ask if he thinks that consciously and/or unconsciously the Israeli soldiers treated him and his fellow prisoners this way because of the trauma they and/or their families suffered as a direct or indirect result of the Holocaust:

...[T]hat's what we think...yeah. They think we did for them that. No, we did not. We was peace with the...Jewish in that time. We never be fighting with the Jews in that time. That's what we know and that's the history said. They come here and instead to take their revenge from German or from Hitler...they come to take from us...[T]hey took our land...start to punish our people, treat us like how the...German treat them in the Holocaust all of that time. So that's...not fair.

Nick clarifies that he sees the continuing cycle of violence and oppression suffered by the Palestinians from 1948 to the present as linked to the trauma of the Holocaust in this way: “It is coming because they punish us instead...they punish the wrong people, the wrong time, the wrong place.” Furthermore, he states that, while he has always been aware of this connection, it was especially apparent while he was being tortured in prison – violent acts that he feels are reminiscent of the treatment Jews suffered at the hands of the Nazis:

...[Y]ou can feel it...when you...face the soldiers, you can feel the same thing. What about if they...turn of the cigarette in your body? How they cut...my hands (runs his fingers from his right hand across the top of his left hand multiple times), put that here (holds out his wrists and motions as though his hands are being tied or cuffed together), so how they put...in front of our eyes (motions as though putting a blindfold

---

62 Based on the common Israeli torture practices documented by Addameer (Qatamish 2003), tearing up Nick’s photographs of his wife and children was likely meant to serve as a form of psychological torture.
across his eyes), how they put...*(motions as though putting a bag over his head)* dirty bags on our...heads.\textsuperscript{63} All of that it is coming from how they live before that...Yes, that’s what happened...that’s what we know...if you read the history you can see the same thing, how they treat them...they...treat us.

After a brief break,\textsuperscript{64} Nick and I return to his photographs, most of which he had in prison with him at one time or another, although not all were torn by the Israeli prison staff. He holds up photographs #1 and #2 again, along with photographs #3, #4, #5, and #6. As he shows each to the camera Nick describes how tremendously important they were to him while he was in prison, as they provided periodic updates on his children’s development and wellbeing, helped him maintain a connection (albeit limited) with them and his wife during their separation, and lifted his spirits even under the most dire conditions.

\textsuperscript{63} Again, Addameer’s (Qatamish 2003) *Torture of Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israeli Prisons* report explains that, “[s]ince the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territories in 1967, the systemic torture of Palestinian prisoners by the Israeli military and security forces has been official policy. Torture is not only limited to acts practiced during interrogation, or within prisons and detention centers. It is a far more comprehensive concept on the level of the variety of acts and the groups and individuals it targets. The forms of torture used are dependent on the nature of the occupation. In the case of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the occupation is based on denying the existence of the other through a series of practical procedures within an ideological and political framework, legally codified through the regulations of military occupation” (p. 7). This report documents popular forms of psychological and physical torture used by the Israeli military against Palestinian prisoners including, but not limited to, the aforementioned depriving of family visits, forcibly entering homes and destroying personal property during arrests, tightly binding prisoners’ hands with either iron or plastic handcuffs resulting in reduced circulation and injury to hands and wrists, covering the eyes with blindfolds and/or filthy sacks causing difficulty breathing, panic, terror, weakness, and a sense of isolation from the world – all forms of torture that Nick describes over the course of his interview.

\textsuperscript{64} Much to my dismay and horror, less than ten minutes into our interview my video camera shut off and I lost all the footage that had been recorded up until this point. I believe that someone in the house may have accidently tripped over the extension cord that plugged the camera into the wall. Thankfully, Nick was good humored about the error and was gracious enough to start our interview over again. As such: 1) all of the information from our interview that appears in this chapter is from the final recorded interview, and 2) I chose to take two breaks during Nick’s interview, both of which are noted in this chapter, to ensure that the camera was recording.
Given the immense value of these photographs, it is not surprising that having some of them torn up by Israeli soldiers was terribly upsetting. Yet Nick not only taped them back together, but he has kept them all these years:

...[T]hat's the most important things in my life, so I keep that with [me]. Where I move, they move with me because that’s make me all the time thinking in the past. How I was, where I was, who I am, who treat me...So that’s keep me reminding...that I was in prison, how it affect my life...[A]nd you will know in a minute how it is affect my life to be in the prison every time...how they follow me, I cannot find a job...I finish my degree in university, I can’t find a job, keep running...So...it is affect my life, so that’s why I keep them...I keep remember them. Just if my grandson also ask me I will tell them what’s happened.

Nick expresses the importance of these photographs for his children and grandchildren, as the events he and his family experienced before their birth will undoubtedly have generational impact. For instance, he states that these photographs help explain why he and his family are not living in Palestine:

So that’s why we are not there...we are out of our land. Why we are here? You think here’s...something is different than there? No. It’s...the important things we are there not safe. We have no safety there. We scared. They come to put me in jail. Anything, any active...in the...West Bank or in Palestine they come to beat me out, put me in the jail without any reason. So that affect my kids too. How they grew without their father. They boys and at that time they are thirteen years, twelve years, that’s the most important [time] to be with your kids. So this affect them. Make them always doubt about everything. So that’s why I left there to be together, to be a family...

Even when Nick was not imprisoned he continually faced the threat of re-arrest. To avoid this he repeatedly evaded the Israeli soldiers by hiding in other people’s homes, which kept him separated from his family once again. Although being separated from his wife and children while in hiding was tremendously hard, Nick stresses that being on the run was still better than being imprisoned – at least this way he could still see his family periodically:

So I want to keep follow them, how they are...[I]f I am in my city and some[one] from my family is sleeping I can see them, I can talk with them. So that’s keep me at least in touch with them. I stay like that three and a half years. Stay running (inaudible) here, there...until is coming the peace agreement...After Oslo [my life] start to be quiet little bit, but coming back again because they not put...Oslo in the ground. They give us a fake things, not really a peace, so that’s why
start the Intifada again and again, and will not stop until the Palestinian take their right.

Although Nick previously worked as a science and math teacher, earned a two-year diploma from the teaching centre in Ramallah, as well as a degree in sociology and psychology, he was unable to find work to support his family and so had to resort to
whatever means possible to ensure they were fed. As he holds up photograph #7 he describes selling fruit from the back of his car in Beit Sahour:

...[S]o I start to work like [this]. That’s...my son and my small car and fruit to sell...so I can make living some way...I have a degree and I sell these. So this is the point. How...it affect my life the prison...[T]he prison coming from ’67, coming from ’48, all of our life is affect together. So they punish us...instead of to punish who make them...that. So that’s our life how it is (puts down photograph #7 and holds up photograph #8) and how is my family...To keep them with me so [I can] see them...so I can feel I am a father.

Photograph #9

Discussing these hardships leads Nick back to his time in hiding and the memories evoked by photograph #9:

...[T]his [is] where I was living (holds up photograph #9). So one day the Jews coming to arrest me, I run away from this house. There is here (he points to the open space in the photograph between the child crawling on the left-hand side and the other children on the right-hand side) I...put a ladder...I jump from house to house, from...roof to roof until we run away from the soldiers. One day they came when I was with my youngest son, I left my youngest son by himself...[I]t is remind me, this house, how when they coming, the Jewish, the

---

65 Nick later clarified that the Israeli government would not allow him to teach at the government run schools because of his past imprisonments and that, although he was allowed to teach at the public Christian schools, he could not maintain a job because he would either be re-arrested and/or on the run, thus making it impossible for him to teach the whole school year.
soldiers, to my house to take me to prison again and I run away...I call neighbors to go to my house. I left it open, so they can go to pick up my son or take care about my son...[H]e is like one or...I think it was like two years in that time...When I saw them I closed the door, I ran away from other side, from the other roofs, because Beit Sahour is building like you can run from house to house...at least one mile...So if you run from the house they can't catch you. So we run away and they never catch me for the three years.

...[J]ust imagine this life, a father with three kids, in that time, run away from here to there. How's my wife that time? [H]ow she (inaudible) the three kids almost in the same age?...It is almost the hard[est] job my wife have ever [had] and she was a teacher...[F]or what? Because I am Palestinian or...(trails off)? Why?...I make the Holocaust for Israel...? We did take their land? Everyone know...they took our land...[N]ow we agree to give them state...I always say, I do not mind to give the Israel state...just give us our state.

When I ask Nick if he supports a one-state, two-state or binational-state solution to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, he is adamant that a two state solution is the only viable option:

No...they have their state, we have a state. We have international...order about that things. We follow that, but they do not...[W]e want to go back to our home...to live [with] our family. My family [is] there...they suffering now. If they open...the boarder for them they will leave cause they can't stay like this.66

While his family overseas remains unsafe, yet prohibited from leaving the West Bank, Nick is himself unsafe here in Canada, yet yearns to return to his homeland. His status remains uncertain in Canada. As noted earlier, he has filed a refugee claim with the Canadian government; however, due to his past imprisonment, the Canadian government has denied his request for asylum:

Now I'm work[ing]...[and have a] refugee claim. [B]ecause I was in prison they...call me a terrorist...Now they stop...my court...and the government appeal against me. They give my wife and my kids approve as a refugee, but they hold my case because they think I am terrorist...I have [two judgments from two different judges saying] that I am not a terrorist, but the government keep appeal against me without any reason...[W]hat I think, they have no proof that I [did] anything. I am in...United State[s]...and...Canada like fifteen years so far. If am a terrorist, why do you not catch me to do the...(inaudible)?...If I want I would do everything in that time...if I am...I waiting another court, with another judgment...[T]he government want [to deport me], but they have nothing against me. I have nothing to hide.

66 Unfortunately, Nick's mother passed away shortly after this interview.
I told them I am political man. I not hide that. That’s why the Jewish is put me in the prison. So give us our state. I will go there, I will not stay here. So that’s the point.

I ask Nick what would happen to him and his family if his refugee claim is denied, he is unable to make another appeal, and he is sent back to Palestine:

I do not know. For me *(short exhale of breath)* they would just...take me out, but I have no choice where to go. I have nothing cause there is no safety in our land. We have a problem there. They will [take] me away from my family again, I will not let that happen. I will keep fighting here in the court...because I believe...[in]...Canadian justice, but the government [thinks] something is wrong...I am not that. [My wife and kids] will stay...because they...know if they go back they will not live a good life there. Check points...they can’t go anywhere...danger of them, anytime maybe Intifada’s coming...the soldiers will shoot, so maybe one of them is be killed. They have many...activities so they will remember me again, so that’s the...problem.

Photograph #10

At this point we shift gears and I ask Nick if there are any other photographs he would like to discuss or comments about his photographs that he would like to share. He shows me photograph #10, which was taken when his third of four sons was born. To him this photograph represents a time when he, his wife, and their children were a family – a state of existence that was impossible when he was imprisoned or on the run. To
demonstrate the devastating impact that his imprisonment has had on his family, Nick
shares the following story:

...[W]hen...I came out [of prison] I go...[into a]...room with my wife and [my son] go to my brother and tell him, "Uncle, Uncle! There is a stranger...with my...mother! Go, go! Take him out! Let him go out!" [My son] want to kick me out of the house because he think I am stranger! He not recognize me because he was young, I stay a little bit [in prison]...[J]ust...how is that feeling? My son he said..."He's a stranger! Who is this man?" So this...was...hard...[T]hat’s let me think what the occupation did for us...[E]veryone impacted...

This story begs the question: how have these experiences shaped Nick’s relationship with his children? He explains that since they left Palestine he, his wife, and their children have been able to live together as a family and, as such, he and his sons have become much closer. Still, Nick worries about what will happen if they are separated again and who will take responsibility for the family in his place.

Nick’s stories undoubtedly speak to the continuous and unrelenting cycle of trauma, violence, and oppression suffered by Palestinians living under occupation, as well as its enduring generational effects. Nick recognizes this as well:

...[I]t...impact[s] [each generation]. It will be affecting until...they give us our state...Yeah, it will effect every day because...[M]y first cousin, just a few years ago, they killed him...for nothing, in Bethlehem, my city. They killed him. He is a businessman and they shot him [for]...no reason...just someone is crazy. One time they threw a stone from a building like seven floor...flat...on [one of our neighbour's] head and...killed him...he’s seventeen years [old]. So what will happen? His brothers, his mother? What will happen after that?...So it will keep from generation to generation. Nobody can stop that. Just if they...make it two state, to give us our right and our state, that’s it. They live their life, we live our lives. Leave us alone, stay alone, by yourself.

Given his earlier statements regarding working in Israel when he was young and his positive experiences with Israeli civilians, I ask Nick if he thinks such positive Palestinian/Israeli relationships would be possible, even flourish, if the two-state solution became a reality:

Yeah...it could be, but it need a time...It’s need a time to...start again...to feel [safe], they are not danger [to] you. So yeah, it will be, because a lot of our people work in Israel and...we have many Israel[is] come to our land. We hide them! Yeah...I’m serious! There is many Jewish coming to our land and we hide them [from other
Palestinians]...who...want to kill Israel. You know, there is some people like...they do not...make different between Jewish and the Zionist...We take them home, stay in our home, to stay with us a few days because we are friend with them.

After another brief break, Nick expands on his knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, particularly while he was growing up in Palestine:

...[T]he Palestinian...people know everything, they read everything. Because [of] what happened to us, let us read everything. We know...most of the things going on in the world. If you ask any small or any young or any old people they know something about any thing happen outside Palestine...[W]e are cultured people, so we read about Holocaust. We not agree with that. We do not want that to happen to any people. So that's why...we say we against Hitler or...any...kind of...colonialism...[W]e fight against any colonialism.

So we not agree to do that for the Jewish, because they are people and in that time the Arab people...they protect the Jewish. The history know that. When...many of them run away, come to our land, they live with us. They live...in Palestine and...all Arab countries and still there many Jewish live in Arab country. So they’re live in peace. They live, they have the right...like anybody. You can...go to...like Jordan, you can find Jewish. If you go to Syria, you can find Jewish. Egypt, you can find Jewish, because they live with us a long time ago. They’re no different. Who made the different? The...Zionist [a]fter the Holocaust because they was looking for...a state. So they choose Palestine...to make their state. Force then us by promise [made by those] who do not own that land.67 So that’s why...it’s affect us, the Holocaust...So it’s keep running...at reason of Holocaust, they took our land.

Again, it is clear that Nick makes a very clear distinction between Jewish/Arab relations in Palestine prior to 1948 when Palestinian Arabs and Jews lived together peacefully and Palestinian/Zionist relations just prior to and following the creation of the Israeli state and the Nakba.

---

67 Here Nick is referring to the Balfour Declaration. In a letter dated November 2, 1917, British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild, a prominent British Zionist, to inform him that, “His Majesty’s Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country” (Smith, 2010, pp. 71-76). For a detailed discussion of how the Balfour Declaration was subsequently interpreted by Zionist leaders, as well as how this promise conflicted with and/or contradicted both the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence (July 1915-January 1916) and the Sykes-Picot Agreement (May 1916), see Smith (2010).
Moving forward I ask Nick how he feels telling his story, particularly given that he knows the Israeli participants will be reading his transcript and viewing his photographs. What does he want them to learn or understand about him and his family?:

...[I] just want them to understand we are family. We have a right to live as a family. We have right to live as a human being. We not make any against the Jewish. They come to our town. We not go to their home, they come to our home. Just leave us alone and everything will be coming in the future. It’s need a time to fix everything so we can live in peace together. Without our right, there will [be] no peace. They will keep running the Holocaust effect, the Nakba effect, the ’67 effect, the ’73 effect, the ’88, ’93 all of that time, 2000, [it] will keep running like that. Every two years there will be something. Every one year there will be something. Without solve the main problem, to give the Palestinian people right, there will [be] no peace.

From Nick's point of view the only thing that will interrupt this unrelenting cycle of violence is an end to the occupation and the formation of a Palestinian state. Only after these goals are achieved can the healing between Palestinians and Israelis begin. To that end, Nick wants the Israeli participants to know that:

...[M]y life is not different than the Palestinian life. I am one of the Palestinian people. So what affect me affect them, what affect them affect me...I have family there, not just me. I have...brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, everyone. So, as I said, we want to stay in our land. We want to live there. We want to live...in peace. So...give us that. Everything will be heal after that. Without this, it cannot be healed.

Given his response, I am curious how Nick feels about his forthcoming opportunity to watch the Israeli participants' videos and view their associated photographs? What does he think that experience will be like?:

...I think...they know that’s they have no right their government what’s they doing because, as we said, this is Palestine and international control they said it is two state and I think they believe in that. So whatever they want to say...I say to them, just talk with your government, send messages to your government, make against your government, that they give us our right to live in peace in our state.

Although Nick is open to relationships with individual Israelis, dreams of Palestinians and Israelis living together peacefully, and demonstrates empathy for the traumatic events suffered by the latter and their families and/or ancestors, I ask him how watching their videos and viewing their photographs might impact his opinions or attitudes. Does he think that there is anything they could say that would impact his
understanding of Palestinians’ and Israelis’ connected histories of suffering or the current conflict?

Everyone have his opinion so…I not force anyone to say what’s he wants…[W]hatever…they think is ok. For me, as I said, it is good for all of us to find a way to have the peace in Palestine…[W]e can’t have the peace without everyone take his right. So…I am ask[ing] anyone, Jewish or Palestinian, to…give the other their right. We don’t want more, we don’t want less. We have…at least what we agree together to give us what they [took in] 1967…[J]ust let us take [that] and everything after that will be healed, everything will be okay.

While Nick assures me that he is interested and excited to hear the Israelis’ stories and view their photographs, he continues to stress that the Palestinians are the undeserving and indirect victims of the Holocaust:

...[I]...is okay for me to see them, but...we not make that problem for them. You see? It’s okay to see them, to feel with them...what happened to them, but I not agree to let them punish me as Palestinian...It is not I make their problem. We not did, but they did our problem.

Given the power imbalance that Nick identifies between participants, I ask him why he wanted to participate in this project and what he hopes will come of it?:

...I...believe we need someone to listen [to] the...good voice...Palestinian or Israeli, because I believe many people from Jewish also believe how I believe. So we want [to] encourage these people to say something to their government. To write about [these] things...I met many Jewish people here. I used to talk with them...am friendly...me and them. We agree that what they do there is there, that’s why we are here. We...don’t want to effect [here] like there. We are here, (inaudible) Canadian or people here...what is there, is there. I have nothing against you, you have nothing against me...[M]any of them they said, “We against what's going on there.” So...we want these people, the same thing to talk with their government, to say something, to put in the newspaper...to let Canadian government also believe what we believe, we need two state...But you suppose to know, there’s...many people [in Israel/Palestine] still...meeting together, Jewish and Palestinian, [to] talk about peace because there is many Jewish fighting with us to make the peace...but these voices is weak...they not make too much things...changing. So we have everyone, every voice, believe...for two state, to say something...

Thus, Nick makes a clear distinction between Jewish and Palestinian relations in the Canadian diaspora versus Israeli and Palestinian relations ‘back home,’ as well as the avenues for actions open to both. Yet he believes both are crucial to achieving peace.
Before wrapping up our interview, Nick indicates that he is interested and willing to engage with all of the Palestinian and Israeli participants’ interviews and photographs: “Yeah, I can watch every one so I can know…if all of them agree with me or some of them, so we can make it…easy for everyone to understand where we are.” Nick also confirms that he would be interested in watching each of the other participants’ reflective interviews. However, his most emphatic response comes when I ask if he would be interested in meeting his fellow participants in person: “Oh yes! I believe to talk with anybody.”

Photograph #11

Haifa Staiti

Haifa was born in 1983 in Jenin, Palestine, which is located in the northern region of the West Bank, in the Jenin Governorate. On December 30, 2014, the date of our first interview she was thirty-one years old. Haifa lived in Jenin with her family until 2000 when she decided to move to Norway to study. Two years later she moved from Norway to Vancouver where she lived until 2014 when she, her husband, and their two

68 This is one of the photographs that Nick selected for the project, however, he never showed or discussed it during our interview. He did hold it behind photograph #1 as he showed the latter to the camera and discussed it. Based on the video, it appears that he chose not to show photograph #2 because of its similarity to photograph #1. Nevertheless, the photograph was provided to Nick’s fellow participants and therefore is included here.
young sons moved to Toronto. Although Haifa was living in the Greater Vancouver Area when she first agreed to participate in this project, she ended up moving to Toronto before we could complete our first interview. As such, this interview took place in the offices of Peace It Together when Haifa returned to Vancouver to visit her husband’s family for the Christmas holidays. Haifa is the only participant of the six who was living outside of the Greater Vancouver Area for the duration of the study.

The five photographs Haifa chose for this project are still in Jenin with her family. As such, she had one of her younger sisters take pictures of each photograph with her cell phone and forward them to Haifa who then displayed the digital images on her iPad Mini during our interview. Haifa starts by systematically working through each of the five photographs, first describing each one and then returning to share the stories and (post)memories she associates with each one. It is only after she narrates these photographs and their associated memories and/or postmemories that I begin to ask more specific and detailed questions. Before working through each image, Haifa notes that she chose these particular photographs because they most closely represented how the Nakba has impacted her family’s life generally and her life specifically.

Photograph #1

69 Although PIT dissolved in October 2015, at the time of this interview, both Haifa and I were active members of the organization’s Board of Directors.
Haifa begins with photograph #1, which shows her father seated on a horse. Although she is not certain where or when the picture was taken, she believes it was likely in the 1970s just outside of the Jenin refugee camp where her father’s family lived. For Haifa, this photograph signifies her paternal grandfather’s death during the Nakba and how it set her family’s life on a trajectory that has significantly impacted multiple generations from 1948 to the present day:

I really like this picture because it’s...close to the narrative that I heard from my own grandmother about the events of 1948...[W]hen you look at the landscape it looks...very similar to the village where my...grandmother’s family lived [voice begins to crack with emotion] before 1948. [T]he village is called al-Mansi, it’s just outside of Haifa...on the interior side...it was very similar terrain...[T]hey had...a small house in the village, they had olive groves, and fields that they grew wheat in. So it looks like it could be just taken there, but it’s not, it’s taken outside the refugee camp in Jenin.

The horse is...also interesting and that my dad is riding it because...the story that my grandmother...tells about 1948 is...the village was attacked one day and they were able to fight back, but they thought that...the Jewish militia might come back and so they decided to flee the next day...[S]o they packed most of their stuff...on their horses and they left the village.70 And at that time my dad was about a month old, so he was an infant, and he had two little sisters with him and my grandmother...and my grandfather and the rest of the family...[T]he story that my grandmother tells says that at some point on the journey...there is two different narratives, but one of them is that they left most of the wheat that they had harvested at home and they were worried that they’re not going to have enough wheat to feed the family...when they finally find a place to settle and so my grandfather decided to go back to get some more wheat. The other story was that they left some gold or jewelry. So whatever it is, they left something and my grandfather decided to go back and retrieve whatever they left in their home...I guess the next day my grandfather’s horse came back and my grandfather was dead on the back of the horse...[T]hey

70 Available documentation appears to corroborate Haifa’s grandmother’s story. Morris (2004) states that during the Nakba al Mansi was attacked by the Hagana’s Palmah units during the night of April 12/13, evacuated by its Arab inhabitants on April 15, and then razed in the days that followed. He also notes that the displaced villagers made their way to the Jenin area where they took shelter in makeshift tents. In All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated By Israel in 1948, Walid Khalidi (2006) provides similar information, but also notes that the “Palestinian newspaper Filastin reported that Zionist forces had infiltrated al-Mansi a few days before, on 9 April, and had exchanged fire with its defenders” (p. 176). He also explains that the Arab Liberation Army (ALA), who were battling Zionist forces over a nearby settlement, “reported that [their] forces withdrew to [al-Mansi] on the afternoon of 11 April after a “violent” Jewish counterattack. When the ALA proposed a ceasefire in the battle, the Haganah commanders rejected the offer and decided to counterattack extensively, occupying and destroying the surrounding villages” (p. 176), including al-Mansi.
believed he had been shot by a Jewish militia that may have met him on his way or something.

...[S]o...I always have that image (begins crying) in my head of the horse...[S]o my father...never actually met his own dad...For us that’s really...the biggest profound...way...the Nakba impacted our family’s life...(pauses as she continues crying)...because not only did my father and his family become refugees, but...we also lost our grandfather...I have...never met him. My father has never really met him because at one month old you not...remember much. So for us this is really what 1948 means for us, for my family. And that story, that narrative, it was told to all of us...[I]t set our family on a completely different course in our lives, so it has impacted everything...every aspect in our life from then on.

Photograph #2

Photograph #2 shows Haifa’s parents in the early 1980s when they were students at the university in Nablus, just shortly before they were married. As Haifa moves from photograph #1 to photograph #2, her tears become interspersed with laughter. On the one hand, this photograph speaks to how the events of 1948 inspired her father to become politically active against the Israeli occupation as a young adult and his subsequent imprisonment. On the other hand, it reminds Haifa that for a time her parents lived a happy and normal life:

...I like [this picture] because...I like seeing (laughs) pictures of my parents as young people. But I [also] like it because...they look very happy and it was at a time in their life where they were trying to build a normal...life for themselves and their family. My dad...as a result of
his childhood...not surprisingly, became very politically active at a young age. And so right out of high school he became a teacher, but he also became a member of the political party, Fatah\textsuperscript{71}...[it] was really the only political party at the time...He was very politically active in the party and so they end up getting in trouble with the Israeli government. He was arrested several times...and then eventually he...was released from jail...in his late twenties and was actually banned from becoming a teacher ever again. So the Israeli government [who] did civil administration of the region at the time decided that he was not allowed to teach...[H]e was a high school graduate, so he decided to go back to university and that’s where he met my mom who’s eleven years younger than him...[T]hey got married and started our family.

[My mom’s]...father is not a refugee...[He] comes from Tulkarem. They’re very well off, well-established family in Tulkarem. They have roots in that city and lots of land and they were...a rich family. Her mom...is a refugee. She came originally from Jaffa, her [mom’s family], but not her dad’s...[S]o...when [my parents] wanted to get married that was a big problem...[M]y father was poor, he was refugee, and he wasn’t, in my (laughs) mother’s family’s standard, very good looking (laughing) so...her family were not very happy about the marriage and they fought against it for a long time. But they persisted and eventually they agreed to let her marry a poor refugee...Well, she made them agree to it...and that’s how our family got created.

Which again...it’s all set...by the events of 1948 because...my father grew up as a refugee and...they killed his father, which...has really impacted...every decision that he’s done in his life has been colored by the fact...and every feeling he has about...[the] current situation, past situation, future...possibilities is colored by that...thought that...he lost his father because of it...\textit{(trails off)}

\textsuperscript{71} Although founded as the Palestinian National Liberation Movement in 1958 by Yasir Arafat, in 1967 Fatah became one of the largest political parties under the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) umbrella. While Fatah originally focused on Palestinian nationalism and the liberation of the Palestinian homeland, particularly through armed resistance, under Arafat’s leadership it eventual recognized Israel’s right to exist and signed Oslo I in 1993. The party began to loose power with Arafat’s death in 2004 and then lost parliamentary elections to their rivals, Hamas, in 2006. The party is currently led by Mahmoud Abbas.
Photograph #3

Photograph #3, which was taken in Haifa’s childhood home, shows one of her two younger brothers, Mustafa, seated in the living room, which also doubled as her and her siblings’ bedroom. Above her brother hangs a framed photograph of their father. Haifa explains that the latter image “was on that wall, in that room our entire childhood and it’s [a] really important picture for us…”72 – the deep significance of the photograph becoming readily apparent as her words trail off into tears and she is unable to speak for some time. When she is able to return to photograph #3, she continues to elaborate on how her father’s political activism impacted her parents’ efforts at building a normal life, but also goes further by extending her narrative to include the impact his decisions had on her and her younger siblings:

So this is my brother Mustafa. And like I was saying...(flips back to photograph #2)...my dad was very politically active, so they tried to start a normal life here...(laughs). They graduated both of them from accounting at the university, and they opened an office...I was told [that]...business was really good. I was born...they were happy, but it (laughs) it didn't last because again my dad...just...kept getting into trouble...[S]o...just a couple of years after, [I] think I was just three or four...the Israeli civil administration...came arrested my dad and shut the office and took their license away...[T]hey had no work and...from then on [my dad] pretty much was in jail most of the time...[H]e would get arrested and there would be...the...administrative detention for

72 Haifa notes that although they no longer live in their childhood home, she believes that the framed photograph of her father now hangs in the guestroom of their new house.
three months, but then it gets renewed for another three months, then another three months. Eventually he’d get released, he’d be with us for a couple of months, and then get arrested again. So between the time I was [four or five] years old and 1995, [when I] was twelve...I don’t really remember having my father with us...I remember my father in jail and very, very brief moments of memories of him with us, but...for me it feels like he wasn’t there because those moments were so short and he spent more time behind bars than outside.

But we always had his picture in this living room (begins crying)...and...(becomes very emotional) we used to talk to him. (Continuing to cry:) The thing about pictures too...and we were all young so we didn’t really understand, but...whoever was looking at the picture, it looked like my father was looking at him and so (begins crying again) we always fought about...who he was looking at (still crying) but of course he was looking at whoever, at all of us...[S]o I remember having lots of arguments with my siblings about who my dad was talking to (laughs while crying) at any particular moment.

...[T]his picture was taken...earlier on so you can see he looks still a little bit young. His hair is mostly black...you’ll see the difference in the next picture...My brother, Mustafa, who’s now...all grown up...handsome young man, he posted this [picture] on Facebook the other day with the caption “I miss my dad”...(begins crying again)...which is interesting because my dad has been at home with us for many years...[B]ut many years in jail has done...many...not very kind things to my dad so...even though he’s been with us for many years sometimes you feel like...we don’t really know him and so...I think we still miss the memory of him...(begins crying again)...[W]e miss the stories that my Mom told us of him as we were growing up...[S]o...that picture speaks a lot about our experience as children.

![Photograph #4](image-url)
Continuing to discuss the impact her father’s imprisonment had on her and her siblings’ childhoods, Haifa starts to introduce photograph #4, but is again overcome with emotion and needs some time before she can proceed. When she is ready, Haifa explains that the photograph shows her, her mother, and four of her siblings just outside of their childhood home on their way to visit her father at the Israeli prison in Jenin. The photograph was taken on the first day of Eid, the celebration following the end of Ramadan. As she begins narrating this photograph it becomes evident that her memories are a tangle of a young daughter’s excitement and pain:

…[M]y childhood is full of...memories of us visiting my dad in jail (crying) which for us were very exciting times...We didn’t get to see him very often so it was really nice when we finally got to...[T]he last time that he was arrested...he was in jail for...just over four years and it was the longest time...[H]e was actually taken to a prison in the Negev and so...it was much harder to go visit him, so we couldn’t actually get to see him. But this particular time he was in Jenin, which was a prison...in the city, but we would walk by it [on the way] to school and so [it was] much easier to go visit him, but at the same time it was kind of weird because we knew he’s there, but we couldn’t actually be with him. And you can tell we’re all really excited! ...And he...used to have candy that he would buy from the prison cantina and (becomes emotional) then squeeze it through the bars for us.

---

73 Haifa is third from the right, wearing the pink jacket.
Photograph #5, which marks the conclusion of a photographic timeline that spans from the 1970s to the late 1990s, was taken outside Haifa’s childhood home in early 1995 just days after her father’s final release from prison. Once again, her narrative is punctuated by both tears and laughter brought forth by intersecting childhood memories of joy and heartache:

(Crying.) And [in] this one, he finally was released...I mean look at him, he looks...really old...We moved from this house soon after...[T]hey had a piece of land that [my mom] bought...years ago, on a little mountain in Jenin...[S]he saved while he was in jail and built a little house for us. So this was [a] rental apartment and we finally were able to move. (Crying.) But even though the house was complete she refused to let us move until he came out and so we’re all very excited by that. [S]o that was kind of an end of an era for us...because he finally was released and was actually with us since 1995.

Haifa explains that her father’s release was a complete surprise to her family, particularly given that he was very strongly against the Oslo Accords: “...to be released you had to sign a document saying that you’re going to promise to never do anything that would harm the security of the state of Israel and a bunch of other...conditions, which he refused to sign (laughs)...” Hearing that friends and neighbours were beginning to welcome home loved ones released from jail, Haifa and her siblings kept questioning their mother. Not knowing that her husband had changed his mind, Haifa’s mother could only tell her children not to hold out hope:

I think he eventually got...talked into [it]...[W]e...girls were starting to grow up and I think he felt that he needed to be at home with his family, so he signed it, but he didn’t tell us (crying)...[O]ne evening we were all just sitting at home watching TV and this taxi pulled over by our house and it was him. So it was...(crying)...I still remember that evening. It was very exciting...No one knew [he’d been released].

...[M]y grandmother...his mom...always lived with us, but that evening she was at my aunt’s house and she didn’t come until the morning and she saw...these shoes by the door, which were obviously a man’s shoes, and she got very confused. She came in asking all kinds of questions like, “Who’s been in the house overnight?” And she didn’t believe...it was the last thing on her mind that maybe her son had (laughing) come home. So that was very exciting for all of us and it...really shaped the rest of our time with my Dad...that evening.

74 Haifa is first on the left in the back row.
75 Unfortunately, Haifa’s paternal grandmother passed away in 2015.
Haifa's choice of photographs and their associated (post)memoires clearly speak to the immense impact the Nakba had on her father's life and how the choices he made affected her and her siblings' lives. In order to carry the narrative beyond her father's release in 1995, I ask Haifa what life was like living with him from that time on:

[It] was interesting because...my mom tried to...make sure that we know a lot about my dad because he was in [jail]...much of the time...she told a lot of stories about how kind he is and all that. So we had this idea...vision of what my dad is. Obviously, years in jail...can turn you into a very grumpy person, which is what he is right now. He was tortured a lot and he told us a lot of stories about the experience in detention and interrogation. So...he's not very happy person, which I can understand. He's not very pleasant to be around because he doesn't...like to be happy...[L]ike he’s...an angry, sad person, which is understandable when you go through that kind of experience. He’s very disappointed in where things are politically at the moment because...he lost...his father, he lost his home where he grew up and where he was born...his father's home and land...[H]e lost pretty much everything...[S]o...he wanted to...dedicate his life to fighting for his freedom and to be able to go back to that home...He's now reached a point where it doesn’t look like that dream’s ever going to be...achieved...so...in his view...he’s wasted his life on a cause that’s now lost.

To make matters worse, Haifa's father has suffered from various health issues since 1995, including retina pigmentosa, which is slowly causing him to go blind. Not only has this made his day-to-day life very difficult, but it also forced him to retire from teaching, which he returned for a short period after his release:

[S]o...now he’s at home...[he’s] older, doesn't have a job, his cause that he fought for all his life is pretty much just gotten squandered...(laughs)...[S]o there’s nothing to fight for. He doesn’t believe in the fight that anyone else is fighting because...to him it’s like no one’s actually...carrying that torch that he had...dedicated his life for and people are just...they’ve lost Palestine, you know, and so he’s kind of sitting under his fig tree...[with] not much to do.

Haifa's memories not only speak to the abuse her father suffered while in Israeli custody, but also the impact his imprisonment has had and continues to have on his, his wife’s, and their children’s lives. This becomes even more evident when I ask Haifa if she and her father have become close since his release:

---

76 For a discussion of the different impetuses and forms of resistance that characterized the First and Second Intifada, as well as the tensions between the First and Second Intifada generations, see Laetitia Bucaille’s (2004) *Growing Up Palestinian: Israeli Occupation and the Intifada Generation*, particularly Chapter 5.
I think of all my siblings I had the potential to be the closest because...I’m the oldest, so he had a few years...when they lived that normal life...I actually have a couple of memories of my childhood with him, buying me a doll and taking me out to the market and stuff. My other siblings don’t. Asef here (scans back to photograph #4 and points to brother second from the right)...my Mom was pregnant [with him] when [my dad] was arrested the last time. So [Asef] was born when my dad was in jail and my dad didn’t actually see him until he was released in 1995. [S]o he was...four or five when my dad finally met him. So he had no memories of my dad at that time.

Thawra (points to her sister who is fourth from the right) was pretty much the same experience. One of the times that he was released from jail, Thawra was just a couple of years old and was wandering around the living room. [P]eople came to say hello to him and welcome home, which people did every time that he was released from jail...[J]ust...[a}s...they were about to leave, [my dad] pointed to Thawra and said, “Oh you forgot your daughter!” And...people [said]...(laughs while crying), “Well actually this is...your daughter!” So the two of them don’t really have a lot...(trails off)

Even though Haifa is the only one of her siblings to have positive memories of her father before his imprisonment, she admits that in the years after his release she struggled to adapt to suddenly having a father who was “a little bit controlling.” Deciding she wanted out, in 2000 Haifa left to study in Norway:

...[F]or me that was an escape from everything that was happening, but a lot of it was also...just wanted to get away from the family dynamics...[W]hen we finally experienced living with my dad he was totally different from the stories that my mom told. He didn’t...like music...which...[is] understandable because...in prison they played the same Fayrouz song every morning and...it drove him [crazy]...for years! ...[H]e couldn’t [stand] the sight of a radio...so he’d come and kick our radio and...get really angry. And...so we remember...a couple of years later thinking that it was much better (laughs while crying) when he was in jail. Which is not really what you want to feel, right?

[S]o a lot of us have a kind of...turbulent relationship with my dad. We love him dearly, but...it’s been hard...for him...[B]ut...after he was released, a few months later, our youngest sister was conceived. So she was born 1996 and she’s the closest to him, cause she’s the only one of all our family where he’s actually been there her entire life and her childhood...[F]or us that was also difficult because all of a sudden

---

77 In their 2003 report Torture of Palestinian Political Prisoners in Israeli Prisons (Qatamish 2003), Addameer lists loud music as a form of Israeli torture used on Palestinians prisoners: “Loud music is played while the prisoner is bound, making it impossible to hear or concentrate. This may last several days, causing severe headaches. Although ‘banned’ in the Israeli High Court ruling of 1999, the use of this interrogation method has been documented since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000” (p. 62).
he had this favorite child, but *(crying)*...it’s not really favorite, it’s just that he was actually there for her. So she’s the closest to him.

Haifa’s response provides a window into a child’s experience of having their father imprisoned, as well as how that experience affects each child within the same family differently. For instance, Haifa confirms that her and her siblings recognize that they have very different relationships with their father and understandings of their family depending on when they were born in relation to her father’s imprisonment and release.\(^78\) However, she also confirms that her and her siblings all recognize that the Nakba directly impacted their relationships with their father and his ability to raise them:

[F]or us...the profound connection [to the Nakba] is that we became a family...with no fathers...[I]n fact, my siblings, and even my mom...we talk about that a lot, about how...not only did we lose our father because of jail, but we also lost him because even when he was with us he’s never experienced having a father so he didn’t know how to parent himself. He didn’t know what a father does, right? So we lost him from that sense. And even before that his grandfather was lost. He went to World War Two and never came back. And so we always talked about [how]...our father's side of the family...really was a generation after generation...raised by the women...without having that father figure.

And...it was very important for my dad to have...more than one son...I was born and then my sister was born and then my brother was born and he wanted to have another son because he grew up without a father and without brothers and so he was the only male in the family with two sisters and his mom...[H]e felt very lonely because of that and [he] never really had that...male figure...so they kept trying till we had another brother. But, yeah, it’s definitely that common thread in our family and it really...shaped the way that our family...lived its life...[M]y siblings would definitely make that connection...

I inquire if, aside from the nature and quality of their individual relationships with their father, Haifa and her siblings experience the aforementioned connection or understanding differently from one another:

Yeah, I remember talking about this with the oldest two...and I think we all agree that...we have very similar relationship with my dad. Thawra and Asef, the ones who were born at the height of his political

\(^78\) Interestingly, while tracing and analyzing the social biographies of my own family's photographs produced in Palestine, it became clear that my siblings and I have very different relationships with our parents, understandings of our family, and connections to Palestine depending on when we were born in relation to our parents' immigration to Canada in 1969. For more, see my 2015 piece “From Palestine to the Canadian Diaspora: The Multiple Social Biographies of the Musleh Family's Photographic Archive.”
activism and being out of jail have...a more difficult relationship with him. So Asef...when he was becoming...a teenager and entering university, they had very difficult relationship to the point where they weren’t speaking...[for]...a couple of years...It’s much better now. I think...the older we get, the more sympathy and empathy and understanding we have for his experience and then appreciation for...or understanding [that] he is the man he is because of the life he lived and it was a very difficult life and it’s very hard to be a kind...[H]e’s kind, but it’s very hard to express kindness, very hard to express happiness or...pleasant emotions and live your life pleasantly if you’ve had this kind of life...[S]o we understand that better and...we’re more forgiving towards him than when we were [younger]...

For me, there’s also that feeling that...he lost his home and his father and then he made the choice to become politically active and put the cause – he refers to it as the cause – first and foremost before his family and as a result we grew up without our father. [F]or...years that made me really angry at him...1948 destroyed his life and then eventually it destroyed our life because of his choices that he made because of 1948. I have a much more...sympathetic (laughs) understanding now of that experience...I’m not angry at him as much as I used to be.

Given what Haifa has shared about her father so far, I cannot help but wonder if he knows she’s participating in this project and what his reaction was or would be if he knew:

He doesn’t, but...it’s good point to ask him about what he’d say...[H]e’s very stubborn man and he’s got...one thought in his head and that’s it, right?...I don’t know how he would [react]...[F]or him it’s a continuous story from 1948 onwards. Everything that happened in his life afterwards is been shaped by 1948...so for him that’s...a natural conversation to have, right?...[I]f you’re talking about parallels between...postmemories stories from 1948 and the Holocaust, I don’t know how [he’d react]...[H]e’s a very reasonable man...but everything in his life has been shaped by the fact that he lost his home because the state of Israel was created and so...it’s very hard for him to explore possibilities, future possibilities, that doesn’t recognize that fact...[I]t’s not like he’s anti-peace or...dialogue...I was involved in dialogue programs when I was growing up and he didn’t mind at all. We had Israeli friends and that was fine...[W]hat angers him the most is people who are denying his story, denying his suffering, denying the fact that because a state was created in 1948 he lost his home and his father. So if you start from that point then it’s a...much easier conversation to have.

To this point, Haifa’s responses have focused almost primarily around her father and for good reason, however, when I inquire about her life growing up in Palestine more generally, she begins to share details of her mother’s political activities:
My life was really very much colored by the fact that my father was in jail a lot and was very politically active. My mom was active as well, but in a...different way...I can’t remember if I was...four [or] five...just after the [First] Intifada started...my mom had basically no work because the office was shut down and my grandmother was helping...sustain the family by doing little jobs that she kind of knew how to do from the village days...[T]hen my mom met a women who came from Haifa, a Jewish women...[S]he came to Jenin and was working on a project to help the children of the refugee camp because...[during]...the early years of the Intifada the schools were shut down a lot and the kids had no place to go...[S]o this women came with books and games and Play Dough and...organized these circles for kids to come and do something useful with their life...[M]y mom got engaged with her [and] really involved in that project. Eventually they...had an actual physical centre for the kids.

...[M]y childhood was really...spent in those centres...I’d go to school then...come home to children’s centre where my mom and Arna worked...I would go to the library and play with the games...[T]hey did that for years...until 1996. So that was my childhood...really characterized...by the fact that my dad wasn’t there...and Mom was involved in these children’s centre with this...Israeli Jewish women who came and wanted to do something useful for the children of the camp.

...I grew up just outside the camp, but I used to go [there] a lot cause my aunt and the rest of my dad’s family were there...[T]hat organization with Arna and the centres attracted a lot of volunteers from Europe and North America, a lot of journalists, so I got exposed to people from outside of Palestine, people who spoke English...I think that gave me...a different kind of lens on...the world outside of Palestine...I think that’s why...eventually I ended up moving.

Childhood moments spent at the centre exposed Haifa to the world outside of Palestine, as well as demonstrated to her that positive engagement between Palestinians and Israelis was not only possible, but potentially productive. Interestingly, even after everything her father had been through he was still willing and able to build friendships with individual Israelis:

I remember at one point [Arna] decide[d] to go and visit my Dad in jail...[T]hey were very good friends...dear friends. And when he came out of jail she was the first one to be there...[S]he died of cancer soon after he came, but her last night she was in our home and spent it just talking to my dad...You know, an Israeli who was actually part of the Haganah as a young women and a Palestinian who’s spent...most of his life in Israeli jail and they [were] very good friends.

At this point, I inquire about how the Nakba impacted her mother’s family and any postmemories she might have associated with her maternal family and their experiences:
It’s interesting…I was thinking about that when I was preparing for this interview and I realized that I don’t know very much about my grandmother’s story. Unfortunately she passed away a few years ago and now I regret that I never sat down with her to learn her story. But…I do know that she came from Jaffa and I think they were also a very well to do family because she spoke English a little bit, which is unusual for a woman of her age. So she was obviously educated…so she went to school, which usually was something that [only] well to do families were able to do…[M]y dad named me Haifa after the village just outside of Haifa and then he named my sister, who is born after me, Jaffa and that was a homage to [the] little village outside Jaffa were my grandmother on my mom’s side came from. So we always carry those with us…those memories. But yeah, I don’t know very much about that.

I think the fact that [my grandmother] was educated and came from a comfortable family had a role to play in how my mom eventually was able to marry my dad…[S]he was a very big supporter of girls education and independence and that’s why my mom ended up at university…I think the fact that my mom was wanting to marry a refugee and the fact that my grandmother herself had that experience helped with eventually getting the family to wrap their head around [my parent’s marriage]…[F]or my dad…that was a blow in the face because in Haifa his father had acres and acres of land, they had olive mountains that my grandmother still tells stories about, but he lost that and then he became a refugee (crying) and then this other family goes, “Oh you can’t marry our daughter because you don’t have land”…[T]hat was angering for him…but I think my grandmother’s experience as a refugee helped in trying to make that marriage happen and eventually…our family was created.

Having addressed both her paternal and maternal families’ experiences of the Nakba, I ask Haifa if she ever heard counter-narratives of 1948:

What I know about that narrative is what I heard from my own family…these are their accounts and their narratives. What I’d like to do is find documented historical narratives…I’m pretty sure it’s very close, but it would be interesting to read a documented account of what actually happened versus just the stories that my grandmother told to my father and my mother.  

Counter-narrative I did not hear growing up in Palestine. I heard [them] when I finally…was able to interact with Israelis who were my age or later in years. So after I left Palestine or even in 1997 I went to a peace camp, Seeds of Peace, and I met Israelis there…[T]hat was

---

79 Since completing our interviews, I have provided Haifa with the aforementioned information about al-Mansi, which I found in Morris (2004) and Khalidi (2006).

80 Seeds of Peace is a New York based, non-profit organization that teaches teenagers from various conflict-ridden areas of the world peace-building and leadership skills. This training
the first time that I actually heard that counter-narrative where it was like, “No, this didn’t happen”...[F]or me that was a shock because...first of all I didn’t realize that there were people out there who didn’t think that this [laughs] happened. I was like, “[But this is] what I’ve been told all my life.” [I was] like “Oh!”

So that’s interesting and also gave me an understanding of why it was so difficult...or is going to be so difficult to resolve the conflict...[W]e both come from totally opposite direction...[Israelis] are told a narrative where...[it was] “(a) land without people, for people without land...[T]here was never a Palestine. There was never these towns...[P]eople actually decided to get up and leave these towns because they didn’t want to live next to Jews...or they sold their land or their houses”...[Y]ou know, that whole narrative about being forced to flee or [being] ethnically cleansed or kicked out of your home at gunpoint [which] was completely unrecognized from the other side.

I am curious how Haifa responded to these counter-narratives and/or reconciled them with the narratives passed on to her by her family, particularly at such a young age:

...I mean I was fourteen...[or]...fifteen years old. I was pissed off when someone told me that and I was shocked that anyone would actually believe that...[T]hen I was really angry...[N]ow I think about it and...ok...if that’s the story that’s being told officially or through the education system, if you grow up being told that story, which is [a] very sanitized story, then it’s very hard for you to see your own responsibility or role in what's going on...[A]nd then of course it's very easy to get angry at these crazy weirdoes out there that refuse to have peace with you, like, “What is wrong with them?”...So I think I understand people’s reactions a little bit better now...I also recognized the importance of telling these stories. Because I’ve also met people who when you finally tell them your story they go like, “Oh!” (laughs)...[T]hen they go and look...more into it and then they realize there’s this whole entire narrative that they weren't aware of and...then they start understanding a little bit better why this is so complicated, why the right of return is so important for Palestinians...and...what it might take to eventually be able to reach a resolution. So...it’s very important for us to tell these stories.

Haifa’s belief in the power and importance of sharing stories about the Nakba is evidenced by the fact that over the years she has increasingly met more people, including Israelis and/or Jews, who acknowledge it and its consequences – an awareness she also credits in part to the rise of the Internet:

[W]hen I grew up there was no Internet, right? And...the media internationally was very well controlled and there was usually just one story getting out of the Middle East and I think now there’s more
stories, right? [Now] [t]here’s more authentic stories and just people telling their stories that are getting out to the world and so people are slowly getting more exposed to different narratives...I meet way more people now who understand...or have a small...understanding of the story of the Palestinians than when I first left Palestine in 2000...

When it comes to the Holocaust, however, Haifa admits that she knew very little about it before she left Palestine:

I didn’t learn much about it growing up...[and] don’t remember hearing anything about it in school or by anyone really...[W]hat we heard about even Jews in general was what we saw crossing checkpoints...for us it was one and same. The idea of soldier is Jewish and so that’s what we knew about Jews and Judaism. [We heard] [a] little bit more [from] people who went to Israel and worked for Jewish families or...establishments. Then you hear bit different accounts, more humanistic accounts about Jewish people...[H]ow nice they can be and how...well organized...[P]eople being impressed by working or interacting for Jewish families and liking the organization...and comparing that to another experience growing up in refugee camp, for example, but not very much about Holocaust...[H]istorical accounts were more told about the Balfour Declaration and...Zionism. That story we got from the Palestinian perspective, but not anything else.

When I went to Seeds of Peace...[they took]...us to the Holocaust Museum. That was the first time that I actually got to learn about that experience...[and] the concentration camps...[S]ince then...[I] read more about it, so I know a little bit more about it. But...I don't think it’s...something that's discussed a lot in Palestine by Palestinians or something that we learn about very much.

Here again, I cannot help but wonder how Haifa reacted to learning about the Holocaust at such a young age. Her empathy for the horrors suffered by the Jewish people is juxtaposed and yet inseparable from the displacement, dispossession, and occupation of her own people:

...[I]t was very sad...[T]he images were shocking...I remember feeling, “How could someone who’s gone through that, do this?” You know, like I couldn’t wrap my head around the fact that you could go through this kind of oppression and victimization and then turn around and be an oppressor to another group of people. I think now I can...[I]f...you’re not seeing yourself as an oppressor, so that’s one thing, I mean...because you’re told [a] different narrative so...you don’t really know. You don’t go to the refugee camp and see how people live. You don’t go to the West Bank and see how people live. So...you have no understanding of that...[T]hat link is broken...for Israelis. Whereas for us we look at it and we go, “How can you do that?” You know? “You’ve actually gone through that experience. You know how it feels to be...forced out of your home and oppressed for your religion or ethnicity. So why would you do that to another group of people?”
I think [Palestinians] see it as a sequence of events. There was the Holocaust and the Jewish people suffered and...a solution for the problem was to create a nation-state for the Jews and that ended up being Palestine, which created 1948 and the plight of the Palestinians afterwards. So, yeah...I see it as one thing caused another...to where we (inaudible) right now.

Although critical of Israel’s negation of the Nakba and Israelis’ inability to connect the two traumas, Haifa agrees that learning about the Holocaust allowed her to have more empathy for the other:

I think that’s what the key is...[I]t gives you that empathy...[W]hen you’re told that one narrative about...these group of people being the enemy and the oppressor and there’s no space, no room, for feeling empathy. Right? Because that then weakens your own narrative and story and your cause. Right? You can’t, absolutely can’t, sympathize with the other because we’re only fighting for our cause. But when you hear the narrative of the other then it gives you that space and room to feel a bit of empathy and that’s...when things really start changing...

Before I move on to anticipatory questions regarding the next stages of the project, I ask Haifa how she thinks her postmemories of the Nakba and/or understand of the Holocaust might impact her children:

...[O]bviously it’s a different experience if you’re still living in Palestine under the occupation...[be]cause then it just continues...[I]t’s 1948 every week! (Laughs.) Versus for us...people who immigrated and live...somewhere else...I think about that now that the 1948 generation is...passing away...slowly...[W]e’re left with...just the stories of those events and the memories that our parents tell...[H]ow much do we want to tell to the future generation and how [do] we want them to carry that forward?

...[M]y kids where born here...and their father is Anglo-Canadian so, he has no...concept other than hearing...my own experience...[M]y kids will never, hopefully, thank God, be able to live that again. (Becomes emotional.) Do I want to tell them anything about it...really? And if I do, how much and why, right? I mean I think it’s important for [me]...(still emotional but laughing) personally, just because...well they need to understand why their mom is crazy! (Laughs as she’s crying.)...I need to understand why my Dad was the way he is, right? And I think these stories make us who we are...[S]o...for that reason alone [I might tell them]...But I also...think for the Palestinians, because we haven’t resolved the problem yet, we need to keep the memories alive...[O]therwise, if the people who lived the events pass on and no one’s telling the stories and the memories...we’re going to lose interest and then it’s going to (becomes emotional again)...die off...[W]ho wants that, right?...(Crying.)
Further to this, Haifa speaks to the significance of her chosen photographs and how they will allow her to share the stories of her life with the boys:

I would like to go back... and... find some of those... photographs and keep them myself... [Choosing photographs for this project] was interesting because it made me realize how important these pictures are... I have... the [digital] images... but I would like to have the actual photographs of some of them, if not all... [M]y siblings would like to keep some of them as well... So I'd like to have those and I would like to show them to my children... I'd like to explain to them what these pictures mean to me... [I]t's not like I could just walk them down the street and say, "Oh this is where your mom grew up”... [I]t's complete different experience... they can't really identify with it, so they are going to reply on me telling them... [those]... stories about how I grew up and where I grew up and what that means to me... I hope that they will find that interesting... I hope that they would... find the stories and the pictures important and that they would remember the stories and be able to tell them... to their own children... [O]ur history is important to us... and we need to kind of make sure it's preserved... I’d like to write some of these stories down so that they have them recorded and they can read them later on... 81

Having explored her photographs and associated (post)memories, I ask Haifa what she wants her fellow participants to understand about her and her family:

... I want them to know our story and understand... how 1948... impacted our lives... and... the Palestinians in general... I think what we really all want – every Palestinian – is a recognition of... the impact of the creation of Israel on the Palestinian people... I think for us... the biggest problem has been... that there hasn’t been that recognition... it's been constant denial of the fact that we even existed... I still met people who say that there were no Palestinians in Palestine in 1948 and they all came... from Jordan and Egypt... when Israel was created to fight for and keep the Jews out... And I'm like, "But my grandmother lived there.” You know? "She had her sheep and her goats and her keys and her land. So you can’t [deny that]”... [T]hat’s what I want. I want that understanding and that recognition of the fact that, yes, we were there, we had lives, we had homes, and all those lives and homes were destroyed so another family can have a home and a life... [I]f we can recognize that then we can talk about it. What do we do about this? Right? How do we move forward?

Here Haifa speaks to the Palestinian people’s need for recognition of their suffering, yet she says nothing about what she wants her fellow participants to know or understand

81 Haifa notes that both her sons have met their grandfather – the oldest, Zaid, in person when they visited Palestine, the youngest, Owen, only over Skype. When I ask if he showed warmth toward his grandsons she states that: “Yes! Yeah, yeah! It was amazing to see actually. And I have pictures of him feeding Zaid grapes... [H]e loves Zaid... it was very heartwarming to see...”
about her personally. I ask her if she has any desires of her own or if having the participants truly witness her family’s stories is enough. Ultimately, the recognition she seeks is for her father in the hope that it might bring him some peace: “I think it’s the witnessing…for my father…because…it will be…almost…a conclusion to his…decades of fighting to finally get that recognition because really that’s what he’s been after all these years…”

Haifa returns to the themes of understanding, recognition, and empathy as she shares her hopes about what her fellow participants might walk away with after hearing her stories and viewing her photographs:

You know that understanding of realization that…it’s not because we as Palestinian people have anything against...Jewish people or Israeli people...[I]t’s not about them, it’s about us. It’s about our experience, our loss, our suffering...[T]hat’s why we’re so stubborn. That’s why we persist. That’s why we continue to...fight years after years...[I]t’s not crazy deranged people...[I]t’s...[that]...we have a very just...cause...and a real...loss...[W]e’re just hoping to recover some of that...years and years after. So I’m hoping for some empathy really, at the end of the day...I’m hoping someone...[will]...say “I feel your pain.”

When questioned about whether or not she anticipates negative responses, Haifa states that:

Yeah, I mean, they might...listen to this...and...think that these are just stories that people told and they’re not necessarily true. I mean, I wasn’t there...[They might] completely disregard this as...just...heresy...and that [it] didn’t happen and continue on with their life...[S]o...that’s a possibility...[P]eople could react in this way...[They might] continue with denying...of those narratives, right? And then sticking to their own narratives.

Hesitations aside, Haifa says she welcomes the opportunity to hear the other participants’ stories and view their photographs: “Yeah. I think it [will] be interesting. I’m looking forward to it...I appreciate that they’re probably expecting the same reaction and understanding from me and...I’m absolutely...open to that.”

Haifa acknowledges that engaging with the other participants’ stories and photographs will be emotionally challenging, yet she anticipates that it will increase the empathy she already has for Israelis, thus opening up equitable and productive possibilities for joint Palestinian/Israeli peacebuilding:
I would expect it to be emotional, like difficult, kind of like these were tough stories so...yeah, I think it will be emotional. I already...have empathy and I expect that...to increase more...I think it will also hopefully allow me to...think differently about how we can...move forward from that point and what a future for the Palestinians and the Israelis may look like based on understanding of...both of our histories...I’m expecting it to be positive...you know, difficult emotionally during, but hopefully lead to something positive.

For Haifa the key to bridging the divide between Palestinians and Israelis lies in the recognition of the others’ suffering and the cultivation of and increase in empathy for the other – a goal she feels is well served by the exchanging of life stories, (post)memories, and photographs through this project:

I think it’s important that we all tell these stories so that we can allow each other to have that degree of empathy...I think that’s what we need in order to move forward with a just and fair resolution for the conflict...[A]s much as it’s becoming more and more, I still don’t think that...the story of the Palestinians from 1948 has been told enough times, that enough people know about that, that we’re getting...the recognition and understanding of why this is really important. I mean one of the biggest challenges to reach a resolution has been the right of return and that's something that's very important to Palestinians...and why is it important and why we actually need...to move...forward on that, why do we need to resolve that contentious point, so that we can move forward...I hope that people would understand that and that has always been my hope.

You know, I get out and I talk about my experience [be]cause I want people to get the understanding and I’m hoping that this...project will contribute to that. I think it will, which is why I thought it was important to participate...I hope more people are able to have that opportunity...to tell these stories. Again it’s becoming important now...because the people who lived during those events are passing on and so...we need to keep those stories alive beyond that generation.

Yet recognition and empathy alone are not enough. As Haifa explains, the injustices of the Nakba must not only be acknowledged and understood by Israelis, but also rectified through concrete political action:

[A]gain we need to recognize the unjust that was done to the Palestinians in order to create the state of Israel and then have that honest and frank conversation about...how do we correct that...to a certain degree. I mean obviously...we can’t reverse events, but what can we do to give a just solution to these people...to refugees? And it’s interesting that children of Palestinian refugees are still refugees because the fact is...if 1948 doesn’t happen I may...have a house (laughs) in Haifa right now, right?...[L]ike my father was never able to drive us around town and say
this is where I went to school, this is where I was born...this is where my father was born. So we have lost that...history of our family and I think...something needs to be done about this...We can't...just solve cosmetic issues...[Y]ou actually need to come back to the heart of the matter and deal with the events of 1948 and what happened after that...[I]t start[s] with that recognition that, “Yes, we understand...something wrong was done and people suffered as a result of that and we’d like to talk to you about what can we do to fix it.”...I think when we finally reach that point, where we can actually sit down and talk with that empathy and that understanding, that’s when we’re actually going to really resolve the issue. Talking about negotiations and Area A and Area C...we’re never getting there because it’s not about dealing with what actually happened.

I ask Haifa if she would return to live in Palestine if a just and equitable resolution was reached. Her response indicates that the possibility of a binational state is alive in her imagination:

...I've never actually been to Haifa...I've heard it’s a beautiful city...[I]n my ideal world, it’s an area where we all live together...under some kind of arrangement, but everyone is free and happy and have equal rights and they can live wherever they want...[Y]eah it would be great (laughs) to live on the coast of Haifa one day! [T]o start with I’d like to visit that village where my father was born. One day I’d like to go back there and see it (inaudible).

I conclude our interview by asking Haifa if there is anything she would like to say to her fellow participants. Her response is simple: “Just thank you for being open-minded enough to want to listen to this.”

**Amanda Qumsieh**

Amanda was born in 1992 in Beit Sahour, Palestine (the same town as Nick), which is located one and a half kilometers east of Bethlehem City, in the Bethlehem Governorate. On March 25, 2015, the date of our first interview, Amanda was twenty-two years old and the youngest of the study’s six participants. She lived in Beit Sahour from the time of her birth until she immigrated to Canada with her family in 2007. As Amanda explains, “…we immigrated here as a family…because…the situation there is very unstable economically, politically, and my dad just wanted a better life for us, better education, better opportunities…” Upon their arrival to Canada the Qumsieh family settled in the Greater Vancouver Area where they lived until December 2016 when
Amanda, her older sister, and their parents moved back to Beit Sahour. Her two brothers remained in Canada.

Our first interview takes place at the kitchen table in the Qumsieh family home. Amanda has seven of her twelve photographs laid out in front of her in material form (photographs #1-7), while the other five (photographs #8-12) are pulled up on her
computer as digital images. Although she begins her interview by immediately speaking to two of the twelve pictures, for the rest of her interview Amanda’s (post)memories guide which photographs she introduces and when. She begins by introducing photographs #182 and #2, both of which speak to the dispersion of her paternal uncles outside of Palestine and thus the separation of her extended family:

...[T]hese two pictures were taken in 1996...at my little brother’s baptism...[and are] significant...because this was the first time in a really, really long time that my family...came together...[O]ne of my uncles, this one (points to the man who is second from the left in photograph #283), was in exile for 22 years in Jordan...and my other uncle had moved to Canada and...another one lived in Scotland. [S]o the family was just all over the place and I guess...my brother’s baptism was the reason that everyone...came back together and that’s why we took these pictures to keep the memories.

Amanda explains that while her two uncles moved to Scotland and Canada by choice, her other uncle was forced into exile because he had become “politically involved...in...’67 or something...[so] he wasn’t allowed to live in Palestine anymore.” For the sake of her uncle’s privacy, I do not push Amanda for information about the nature of his political activity and/or the specific reason for his exile. I do, however, ask her how she links the dispersion of her uncles to the Nakba:

...[T]he Nakba for me is something I haven’t experienced, but...some of my family members have and...it’s...continuous...it happened in ’48 but we still feel the Nakba everyday because it shaped our lives. A lot of the events that have happened after that...the reason of it is the Nakba. So...if the Nakba didn’t happen my family would not be all over the world. Like right now especially...we barely have any family left in Palestine. We have family all over the world...[T]hat’s very typical of Palestinians. It’s very sad.

As the youngest study participant, Amanda has the furthest distance from the Nakba, so I ask her what she was told and/or taught about 1948 growing up:

...[T]he Nakba is something...we were taught [about] in school, from my family, friends. [T]hat’s something you hear all the time...[at] simple...family gatherings...“Nakba,” “Nakba,” “This happened”...I think, 750,000 Palestinians were expelled, which was the majority of the Palestinian population. There would be a lot of talk about the refugees...[S]o yeah, we grew up with it and the Nakba...is

82 Amanda is in the front row, third from the left, wearing the white and red dress.
83 In the video of Amanda’s interview, she is holding photograph #2 out of the camera’s frame, so it would not have been clear to the other participants who she was pointing to.
still...commemorated...every year. Last year I saw on Facebook some people posted pictures...because they try to keep it alive and...remembered. So even though I haven’t personally experienced it, I can see the effects of it.

Amanda notes that unlike many of their family friends, neither her father nor her mother’s families were expelled from their land and homes in 1948. If Amanda’s family was not displaced and dispossessed during the Nakba, their lives were shaped by the creation of Israel and the occupation that followed. As a result Amanda learned about the events of 1948 as part of the greater history of the Palestinian people, rather than through familial stories of displacement and dispossession:

[I learned about the Nakba] [m]ore generally...Like my dad would say that some people...majority of them had thought that it was just a two week thing and then they’re going to come back to their homes...[H]e said they would...have their keys in their hands...[T]hey used to have really big keys...[T]here are actually a lot of pictures online...you can look at them...[H]e said...they thought it was just a temporary thing...but that...they could never come back.

[Photograph #3]

Amanda’s family was not displaced and dispossessed in 1948, but she did spend the first fifteen years of her life living in Beit Sahour. As a result, the bulk of her chosen photographs relate directly to the Israeli occupation, which she believes is a direct continuation of the Nakba. The manner in which this cycle of discrimination, violence,
and oppression has spilled over into Amanda’s childhood, yet also become entangled with happy memories, emerges as she begins to narrate photographs #3-7:

(Holds up photograph #3.84)...[T]his was in...1998...[T]his is a resort in Jericho and it was one of the only places that as Palestinians you’re allowed to go to. It wasn’t easy to get to that part of the resort, so when we did get access to it (laughing) we were very excited! My whole family went, like my immediate [and extended] family...[S]o again...the thing with the...Nakba is after that with the occupation the main thing is your freedom of movement is very restricted. So for me...any chance that we could get out of Bethlehem and go to other cities that are really close to you, but you can’t [normally] get [to]...was a privilege...[T]hat’s the reason why I chose this picture...because it’s something rare, it doesn’t happen often...it was good times.

Amanda admits that she only remembers the “joy of being [at the resort]” for three days rather than the arduous process of trying to get there from Beit Sahour – a process she is certain entailed her family having to get the proper permits from Israeli authorities. Thus, while the photograph signifies happy childhood memories for Amanda, it also signifies the restrictions placed on her and her family’s freedom of movement by Israeli authorities.85

84 Amanda is furthest to the left being splashed by the water.
Photograph #4 also brings back wonderful memories for Amanda, particularly of a time when her family was happy and prosperous. So these were actually good economic years...which...are not very common in Palestine. This was in 1998...and it was my dad’s birthday...[T]his is in his office [in Beit Sahour where he worked as a civil engineer] actually...I remember going to his office and...giving him his birthday cake. It was really happy times, good economic times, for us...[I] think the family was very happy. So...I chose (laughs) this picture cause...I like to look at some of the good times that we’ve had, especially...before the [Second] Intifada, which is coming soon.

Although photographs #3 and #4 were both taken in 1998, Amanda explains that these happy and economically good times began with her birth in 1992 and ended with the start of the Second Intifada in 2000: “...[M]y Dad keeps saying...(laughs) ‘When you were born you’re like my lucky charm,’ ‘When you were born I had...a good job and things were going wonderful for me, until the Second Intifada.’” Here she reiterates that although their movement was restricted and/or made difficult by Israeli authorities during this period, the family was still able to visit places in Israel that they could never dream of visiting now. She also notes that during that time tensions between Palestinians and Israelis were much less palpable than after the start of the Second Intifada.

If Amanda was able to travel into Israel during this period, she still never interacted with Israeli citizens who she clearly distinguishes from Israeli soldiers: “...I remember...the soldiers obviously...but normal Israelis...the regular every...day to day citizens you don’t really interact with...it’s usually authority.” In fact, occupying authorities controlled even her most mundane childhood activities:

...[W]e would go to...the waterslides and...[the guards]...talk to you normally. [T]hey'll be like “Yeah, wait for your turn,” stuff like that, but you don’t really...you can’t make friends. I mean you go there for a day and you have to come back at a certain time too, so it’s not like you have time to make friends even if you wanted to.

86 Amanda is standing closest to her parents, immediately behind the cake. Her three siblings are pictured to the left.

87 When I asked Amanda what she would want to travel into Israel for, she states that: “I would love to go to Jerusalem just to see...the churches and go to the Old City...go shopping, see the malls...[I]t’s a different world (laughs). It’s very close to Palestine, but it’s completely different...”
Consequently, even though Amanda’s father and one uncle worked in Israel and speak some Hebrew, her own interactions with Israelis during these years were limited to childhood encounters with military authority.

Photograph #5

Next Amanda introduces photograph #5, the last image taken before the start of the Second Intifada, which also speaks to her family’s restricted yet somewhat easier travel prior to 2000:88

...[M]y mom’s a chemistry teacher...[and her] school trip was going to Tiberias, which is in Israel...[A]gain...being able to go there...we had a lot of fun...(laughing)...[B]eing able to go on the ship and just going to through the sea was...really...an experience for us, something we don’t get to...experience everyday....[T]his was...two years prior to the Intifada....[T]hat’s really the only time that I...have been able to go to Israel...I have no other pictures of me being there older than that...[We just went on] those trips and that’s...something I really...hold on to.

We did go to Turkey...I’m not sure how old I was, but that was definitely before the Second Intifada...[I]f I’m not mistaken, we might have actually used the Tel Aviv airport, which you’re not allowed to use now. So yeah, I think things really went downhill after the Second Intifada in every aspect.

88 Amanda is second from the right sitting beside her mother and surrounded by her three siblings.
Photographs #6 and #7 continue to speak to how living under occupation impacted Amanda’s childhood, yet they also demonstrate how her and her family’s lives changed with the start of the Second Intifada. Although she introduces the two photographs to the camera at the same time, she narrates photograph #7 first. It shows Amanda and four of her childhood friends playing in an inflatable pool set up in her
family’s backyard. While this image captures playful childhood memories, it also speaks to the water crisis that continues to persist for Palestinians:

As you know water is a huge problem...During the Second Intifada we...did not have a lot of access for water, so (laughs)...yeah five kids packed in one [pool]...And if...you look closely the water is not even that high...it’s not a lot...Like we would get yelled at if we used more than that because there was no water, right?

She then turns back to photograph #6, which shows eight children playing in a lacklustre playground. However, for Amanda it signifies how seemingly happy childhood memories are in fact embedded in daily experiences of oppression and violence that she could not comprehend as a child:

This picture, again same...neighborhood friends...reminds me of the time where we had a month curfew...Here was no school, nothing...and...as kids we thought it was awesome. We thought “Oh, no school, this is good!” until we started seeing the soldiers’ invasion of Beit Sahour and you see the tanks...When they walk down the streets your houses are literally shaking, like the windows are shaking cause they are so heavy...and then you hear about all these tragedies, people being killed...Actually during the Second Intifada...my house was searched. Every single house in Beit Sahour was searched. I don’t know...what they were looking for, but...it was really a...tense time...But as a kid...you don’t really realize it as much.

Given that Amanda would have been approximately eight years old when the Second Intifada started, I ask her what she remembers about those experiences and if she felt fearful during moments like those described above:

Yes...fear is a huge thing cause you would hear these bombs going off even at night too and sometimes it would be fake bombs...They call them sound bombs...and they would use them just as...scare tactics...I remember one thing...I'm really heavy sleeper...(laughs)...[and] one night...there was heavy, heavy bombing...and I did not wake up...Then I woke up [not because] of the sounds [but because] I needed to go use the washroom...(laughs)...You know when you get up...you're not aware, you don’t know what's happening. So I just get up...to go to the washroom and then my mom, like from behind...tackles (laughs) me down cause she didn’t want me to go...past the window...I'm like, “What's happening?”...Then I hear the sounds and I look at my family. My dad is carrying like all these things with him. My mom has like forks and knives with her...[They're]...thinking that any minute our apartment is going to get bombed and we need to have stuff with us.

---

89 Amanda is second from the left, in the green swimsuit.
90 Amanda is first on the left, in the pink shirt and shorts.
That was for me like, “Wow! I can’t believe this is happening!” And then the next day...the...people of my town went to the location that they thought...was being bombed and there was absolutely nothing. So we realized that it was only sounds bombs.

Recalling this frightening memory brings forth other stories, which cast a brighter light on the violence and danger that surrounded Amanda on a daily basis. Much as she has done to this point, she acknowledges her limited understanding of these events as a child, while also reflecting on the deeper meaning they hold for her as an adult in the present moment:

Another thing that...I’ll never forget from the Second Intifada is...there was this...girl from my sister’s school...[S]he was younger than me...[and]...she was shot at because...the car...she was in with her family was the exact same car...[that other] Palestinians were riding [in] and those Palestinians were wanted...[S]o they mistaken their car with the girl’s car and she got shot at and...killed...I will never forget that. Her funeral was...just...so tragic.

Telling this story brings to mind the September 2000 death of Muhammad al-Durrah, the twelve year old Palestinian boy who was shot and killed as he hid behind his father. As Amanda rightly notes, al-Durrah “became the symbol of the Second Intifada” after video of his killing was broadcast by France 2 and subsequently gained international attention. However, she does not say much about his death, but rather simply concludes her discussion of these two incidents by stating that: “…so yeah, you see all these things and [it]...really, really affects you.”

Given these stories, I ask Amanda to speak more generally about her daily life during the Second Intifada, yet doing so brings forth another unexpected memory:

...[B]asically...everything...you do is controlled, even something as simple as going to school. During the Second Intifada...I just remembered...[S]orry, like all these things keep coming back to me...all these memories...I went to a Catholic school and...we were going to school thinking it’s a normal day, like school is open, everything is good...until we start hearing those shots...[T]he principal comes out of his bedroom, he’s not dressed yet...he has this shirt on and...I don’t know why I remember this, but it was ripped...[H]e was yelling like, “Everyone go home! I am not responsible for one soul!” Like he was scared that if...students...die, if they get killed, then he’s...

91 Although the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) initially took responsibility for al-Durrah’s death, in May 2013 the Israeli government released an inquiry report that not only claimed the incident had been staged, but that al-Durrah had not been injured or killed. For more on this controversy, see Sherwood (2013).
going to be blamed for opening the school. So...it was chaos. People were running all over the place...[W]e just went back to the car and went home. And...as kids...again, like no school, “Yay! Good times!” But I remember...my mom...would...sit us down and be like, “Today you were suppose to have learned this chapter. I’m going to teach it to you.” So she would teach us math, science, English, everything. And...the days that we do go to school, [the teachers] would tell us like, “You guys don’t understand this, but education is so important to you” and “Don’t think that this is a joke” or “This is good for your future,” like “You need to learn these things...”[N]ow looking back at it I’m like they’re so right! (Laughs.)

Due to the contrasts between Amanda’s stories from before and after the start of the Second Intifada, I inquire about the nature of her interactions with Israelis post-2000. She responds quickly and simply: “Settlers and soldiers. That’s pretty much it.” I encourage her to elaborate:

...[Y]our experience with the soldiers is again just very authoritative...[Y]ou’re told what to do. You get to the checkpoint and you show your IDs, whatever. They take their time...decide if they want to...let you go through or whatever...[T]hey just seem bored...they are at work...like...I don’t think it’s something they enjoy. And sometimes they would just...have small talk with you...just ask questions like, “Which school do you go to?,” “What do you do?,” like stuff like that. So...it didn’t feel like they were...confrontational necessarily...[more] like this...is their job.

I ask if this was the impression she had when she was young or if it is something that has occurred to her in hindsight. Her response, more than any up to this point, demonstrates the normality of growing of under occupation:

When I was young...even seeing the soldiers never really scared me. I guess it’s just normal...to me...[I]n this picture (holds up photograph #6) you see this wall here (points to the wall in the background to the left)? At one point in the Second Intifada all of us...were standing at this wall cause we were looking at a soldier that was kind of afar, but we could see him...[W]e started yelling at him, like trying to get his attention... (laughing)...I don’t know why! And then he turns around...and he points [his gun] at us and (laughing) we start yelling and screaming and jump[ing]...[W]e lived in apartment building, right? So...my dad came out, other neighbors came out, and they’re like, “Well like what’s happening?” They thought someone died or something. And we told them like (laughing) “We got scared cause he turned around!” (Laughing.) And my dad starts yelling at him...(laughing)...[The solider] didn’t do anything...but...my...dad started yelling at him...I think he just wanted to show us that like “Don’t be scared” like “He’s not going to...” [My dad yelled at the solider] “Ya kalb!” like “[You] Dog!” (Laughing.)...I think...my dad is very protective and because he saw how scared we were...he just
wanted to show us that...“I’ve got your back” like “Don’t worry”...[T]he reason why we got scared is cause...he pointed it at us, right? [W]e didn’t expect that cause we were like “Oh...he might actually shot us!”

Here Amanda distinguished between the regularity of seeing and interacting with armed soldiers versus the unusualness of having one point his gun directly at her and her friends. This observation leads her to share the following memories of Israeli soldiers both before and after 2000:

I told you they had...searched our house and the whole apartment...I remember clearly...one of the soldiers was holding his gun very high and just walking around like this (pretends she is holding a large gun and moving it from side to side) and the kids that were younger than me, like the really little ones, were scared so [one of my neighbors, an older girl] just looks at him and she says...“Do you mind putting it down?” like “There are kids here [and] you’re scaring them”...[T]o my surprise he just put it down...[A]nd when they...searched our house...they put napkins on the chairs that they...stood on...to look at like pretty high stuff...I think that changed, like it’s not the case anymore...I think Israeli soldiers weren’t as aggressive before...the [Second] Intifada...[E]ven during it wasn’t that bad. It was only after that you see...just a complete disregard for Palestinian life or Palestinian anything.

Interestingly, Amanda explains that even though she never had any direct interaction with them she found Israeli settlers\(^{92}\) to be much more frightening and threatening than the soldiers she encountered on a daily basis:

[O]ne thing I remember...I’m not sure if this was in the Second Intifada or after, but there was a settlement called Ush Ghurab in Beit Sahour. It’s no longer there...[E]very time you drive past it it’s like...“Oh these settlers...[T]his is not their land”...[I]t’s just such a foreign and...weird entity...[Y]ou just know not to...talk to them, not to...get close...[T]heir reputation is that they’re very violent people...[T]hey’re not scared to hurt you because they have the Israeli soldiers protecting them...

The matter of fact manner in which Amanda speaks about her experiences up to this point, prompts me to ask if during her childhood she understood why her and her family were living this way and/or why it was normal for them versus other people:

Just because we’re Palestinians...[T]hat’s something you hear all the time...[Y]ou’ll hear like, “Falastinia ihna msakhamin”...which means

\(^{92}\) For a critical historical analysis of Israeli settlements, the settlers themselves, and the latter’s relationship with the Israeli government, see Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar’s (2007) *Lord of the Land: The War Over Israel’s Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007.*
[laughs]...“Things are horrible for us.” “We...don’t have good luck.” “This is the way life is for us.” “We’ve always been [deprived] our very basic rights...” You’ll hear this growing up all the time...And it will go back to...the Nakba...and then the different wars...[and] the Intifada...I feel like you can’t have...a Palestinian family or friends gathering, without politics. People will always be talking about politics cause it’s our everyday life.

Photograph #8

At the time of writing, Amanda had lived in Canada for eight years, during which she came into adulthood. In the lead up to photograph #8, she describes how having some distance from her life under occupation has not only allowed her to critically reflect on those earlier experiences, but also demonstrated the true importance of receiving her Canadian citizenship:

...[L]iving in Canada and seeing the way people live here, the rights that they have...really makes you think about your life back home. Just being able to decide tomorrow I’m going to go to Vancouver...[J]ust total freedom...[Y]ou can’t do that in Palestine. If you want to go from...even like Bethlehem to Ramallah, which is really, really close...still in Palestinian land, you have to go through check points...[and] road blocks...[I]t makes you not even want to go...[T]here’s a chance that I might be told that I can’t enter so...is it worth trying?

93 Amanda is furthest on the right. Her mother and two brothers are also pictured.
Plus meeting...Canadians that don’t even know Palestine. Like they’ll ask me, “Where are you from?” and I’ll say “Palestine.” They won’t know what Palestine is...[S]ome of them will say “Oh, Israel?” and I’m like “No!” (Laughing.)...[I]t makes you really realize that as Palestinians...you have no identity, you don’t have a state...there’s nothing to protect you...[T]hat’s why when we got our [Canadian] citizenship...I actually have a picture of it...*(holds up her computer and shows photograph #8)*...I remember my dad saying like, “Finally now we have a state behind us...We can go anywhere and you’re protected. You’re Canadian. So people can’t infringe on your rights even if you’re in a foreign country.” Travelling as a Palestinian is not as easy and you get discriminated against just because you’re Palestinian.  

94 At this point, Amanda’s older sister arrives home and comes into the kitchen to say hello. As such, Amanda and I stop our interview and take a brief break.
After a brief break, Amanda continues to reflect on her earlier life in Palestine using photographs #9-12, which were taken when she returned to Palestine in 2012. During these trips she witnessed the intensification of the conflict:

...[T]he first time going back to Palestine [in 2011] I had been here for four years and I feel like you really forget about life back home, so it's like a whole new experience and...you come back with a different mentality, a different set of mind. [We] came back and...we were going to Ramallah...(show photograph #9 on her computer)...you can see these nice houses on top of the hill...these are...settlements. [T]his is Ma'ale Adumim...it’s by al-Eizariya...which is really close to my hometown...[H]ere in Canada I actually...studied political science...and I focus a lot about Palestine...[S]ettlements, as you know, is a huge issue...cause they’re illegal under international law, so seeing them in person just brings the experience...makes it more real...[T]hese are...on Palestinian land and you’re travelling between Palestinian cities and you see...[them]...always on top of a hill...[T]hey have the most water resource...really nice buildings. You can distinguish them easily from other Palestinian houses.

And then I took pictures of the...I don't know what these are called like guard [towers]...? (Shows photograph #10 on her computer.) [Y]ou see these all over the place...[T]hey’ll typically have...a soldier or two...in them just...watching Palestinians and...making sure that anything happens...then...they’ll...shoot or whatever.

---

95 Although Amanda first returned to Palestine in 2011, photographs #9-12 were all taken during her second trip in 2012.
Even though Amanda saw settlements and guard towers when she was young, she states that she simply could not comprehend their significance at the time:

I’ve seen them when I was young, but...I didn’t understand what they were...or...didn’t really understand it as I do now. Now I know that...this is signs of occupation everywhere, which...again goes back to
the Nakba...goes back to the ’67 War. [E]specially (shows photograph #11 on her computer) the separation wall is a huge thing. It’s meant to control...[T]he Israeli government likes to say that it separates Israelis from Palestinians, but it really separates Palestinians from Palestinians...I don’t know if the camera saw like the different graffities (sic) (shows photograph #12 on her computer and then zooms in on the images of Yasir Arafat and Marwan al-Barghouti96)...[T]he wall only started...after the Second Intifada...[S]eeing the wall and how close it is to Palestinians’ homes and farms and how it really...divides...people from their work...it’s...very sad reality and I...don’t believe in the justification given to their wall...[that] it’s a security wall...97

Now that Amanda has shared memories of her life under occupation, plus reflected on how she understands them to be linked to the Nakba, I ask her what, if anything, she was told and/or taught about the Holocaust:

I have heard about the Holocaust and...to be honest I don’t remember if we were taught about it in school specifically or not but I had little knowledge of it...I just knew...six million Jews...were...killed. I didn’t know details. I didn’t really understand it. I knew that Jews had been discriminated against for centuries, always have...but I really only understood the Holocaust more when I moved to Canada. The education system in Canada really emphasizes...the Holocaust a lot. We watched videos...different documentaries...yeah.

Not having a solid understanding of what actually transpired during the Holocaust, Amanda could not make a connection between it and the Nakba and/or Israel:

I didn’t understand it. I had no clue that the Holocaust even related to Israel or was somehow the push or...one of the reasons that...people felt empathy...for Jews to have a homeland. I had no [idea]...I didn’t understand it whatsoever...[L]ike you will hear people say that it’s the most horrific thing that happened...in humanity...but I...had no idea or didn’t make the connection.

It was only after Amanda moved to Canada and began to learn more about the Holocaust that the connection became clear:

The more I learned about it, the more I understood the history...the more I realized that...because the Jews have suffered for so long and

96 Marwan al-Barghouti is a Palestinian political figure and Fatah member, who is generally viewed as the leader of the First and Second Intifadas. He was arrested and imprisoned by the IDF in 2002 and subsequently found guilty of murder by the Israeli courts. He is currently serving five life sentences.

97 Unfortunately, we are interrupted again, this time by my dad calling on my cell phone (I had forgotten to turn my ringer off). Given that my dad is Palestinian, Amanda jokes that the timing of his call signifies his agreement with her last statement.
they’ve...wanted a homeland...the world really felt empathy for them and helped them basically...build Israel...[T]hen I started making connections between the Holocaust and the Nakba, both really tragic...events that have happened, that continue to this day...to be used in different ways, some good, some bad. But...I’m glad that...[laughs]...you really grow up and learn and you have an open mind and you understand things. I tried to see like the other peoples’ perspective and point of view.

I cannot help but wonder how this new found empathy for the Jewish people might have changed the way Amanda understood her childhood experiences:

[I]t’s weird because...it’s like...those people have suffered...and they’ve gained a homeland, but they’ve gained it through making other people suffer. So you understand and you sympathize, but at the same time you know that it’s wrong...[J]ust because you went through this you shouldn’t put other people through it.

Now that Amanda has connected the Holocaust and the Nakba in her own life, I ask her what she wants her fellow participants to know about her and/or her family:

...I don’t want them to buy in[to]...some of the propaganda that Palestinians hate Jews, they hate all Israelis...[T]hat is absolutely not true. I think...most Israelis and most Palestinians want peace and I think we could live together. And just [saying], "Hey, I'm just another human being. I'm just like you"...share my stories...[of]...how the Israeli government actions have affected my life, it's like reaching out to the other side that I don’t get to see. I only see the extremist side, I see soldiers, which...do not represent everyday [Israelis]...[T]hey’re humans too, but when they go to their job they become a different person...[S]ettlers absolutely do not represent all Israelis. I want to meet the normal Israelis that are just like me, that want peace...I want them, through sharing...my stories, to...[see that] maybe we can build friendship...I want to know how the Holocaust affected their life. I studied the Holocaust, but I didn’t meet someone that...was directly affected by it or their family and I’d love to hear their stories...

When I inquire about how she thinks or hopes the Israeli participants will respond to her stories and photographs, Amanda states that: “I think...some of them will...feel sad about...the occupation...[I]f my government was doing that I would not be very happy or very proud...” [B]ut I also think that they know what their government is doing..." When I remind Amanda that each of the Israeli participants will have served in the army, she exclaims “Yeah, there you go!” Yet she feels that hearing about what their

---

98 Here we are interrupted again when Amanda’s home phone starts ringing and no one is able to pick it up. Once the phone stops ringing, she does complete her thought, but the interruption appears to stop her from elaborating any further.
government and military is doing to Palestinians from a Palestinian will be productive for them: “...like this is a Palestinian like telling you their perspective, their view of what they’ve experienced, so it’s a little bit different. I think it will be a positive response.”

Amanda also expresses a clear enthusiasm about her forthcoming opportunity to listen to the Israeli participants’ stories and view their photographs:

I think it’s a great opportunity...because like I said you don’t...get to see that a lot...[T]he only time that you meet other Israelis is actually when you live in a different country, like in Canada or in the States. So being able to hear their stories, how life is for them, how the Holocaust impacted their lives, and their postmemory of the Holocaust will be really good and I’m very excited to hear it.

This positive response, while not completely unexpected, says much about Amanda’s willingness to be open to Israelis living in diaspora, particularly given the poor interactions she has had with the few she has encountered in Canada:

[T]he Israelis that I’ve met...haven’t been...well we met...last summer...[when]...the Gaza assault was happening and it was [a] very sad time...[T]he Israelis...that I met...didn’t think that their government was doing anything wrong. They thought that, “Oh they’re killing the terrorists.” But I’m like, “Well there are children. Most of the people that are killed are civilians.”...[T]hey’ll...say “Oh Hamas is putting their children in danger”...[I]t wasn’t very nice.

Working in the local mall, she also met Israelis selling products from the Dead Sea at one of the kiosks. After stopping her to try their products, they would often ask where she was from. Their reactions to her response were mixed:

...[O]ne] girl was really nice, but it’s only because we didn’t talk politics...I feel like they have [the] wrong...impression of us. Some guy didn’t believe I was Palestinian. He’s like, “No, I don’t think you’re Palestinian.” [H]e said, “Oh Palestinians don’t dress that way”...[I]t was just very offensive...[H]e kept asking about...my religion and...not very nice things.

Regardless of these less than positive and/or productive meetings, Amanda hopes this project might signal a positive change in her interactions with Israelis living in Canada:

[B]asically I want to meet Israelis that are open-minded, that want peace, that are willing to look at other Palestinians as humans, as people they can work with, and we can achieve peace. If the governments don’t want to work for it, then the people can work for it...[Y]ou can start...from the bottom and work your way up...[S]o...I think it’s going to be good...I don’t think it will be negative in any way.
Following from this, I ask Amanda what she hopes her participation in this project will achieve and why she agreed to participate:

...I think it’s a good way...to understand that both people have gone through tough times...the Holocaust and the Nakba...I think we have a lot of things in common, more than we think, our language, the way we look, our culture. I think...we can live together...and [be] prosperous...[T]wo-state or one state whatever (laughs), anything that works...[T]his...project really shows that...you go through life and you go through tough times and...maybe...someday we will get to a point where we can understand each other, appreciate each other, and...live together. I...really think we can. I mean, we have. We’ve lived with the Jews for...so long...[I]t’s always been normal. It only happened after the Zionist movement and all these things...divided the people.

Given Amanda’s enthusiasm thus far, it is not surprising that she wants to watch all of the other participants’ first round interviews, as well as their reflective interviews. When asked if she would be interested in meeting her fellow participants face-to-face, she reminds me of one of her pre-interview suggestions: “I told you let’s throw a party (laughing)!” Her final message to her fellow participants is equally open and welcoming: “I can’t want to meet you! (Laughing.)”
Chapter 6.

Re-education, Co-memory & Melancholia: Israeli Life Stories, (Post)memories & Associated Photographs

Ran Vered

Ran was born in 1954 in Afula, Israel, which is located in the Northern District of the country. On June 23, 2015, the date of our first interview, he was sixty-one years old, making him the oldest of the study’s six participants. Although Ran initially left Israel when he was thirty, it was not until he was thirty-five and after “a few stints(s) back and forth” that he left permanently. After serving approximately eight years in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), he travelled for a couple of years and attended university for three. During this time he met and travelled with his current wife, a Canadian who had been living in Israel for five years. After living in Toronto for one year and Chicago for three, Ran and his wife moved back to Israel for three years before permanently moving to Canada in 1994 with their two children. Ran’s eldest daughter, who is from a previous marriage, still lives in Israel, as does the rest of his family, including his parents, brother, and sister.

Our first interview takes place in the living room of Ran’s home. Prior to that day, he had requested that we delay our interview until he returned from a previously scheduled two-month visit with his parents in Tel Aviv, as some of the photographs he was considering sharing were stored at his parents’ home. In particular, he noted photographs of himself in school prior to his military service and of his mother’s eleven uncles who had perished in the Holocaust. Although Ran contacted me after his return to Vancouver to let me know he was ready to do the interview, when I arrived at his home he explains that he was actually unable to find the photographs he was thinking of sharing. Instead he shows me a photo album that his wife suggested he pull out that morning – an album he admits he had not looked at in over twenty years. He invites me to look through the album as he finishes sending an email and putting together some snacks for us. The album contains a fascinating mix of black and white, and colour photographs that appear to span from Ran’s childhood through to his military service.
When he returns to the living room, he sits on the couch with me and draws my attention to a photograph of himself and his best friend, Naftaly, which was taken during their service in the IDF. Sadly, Ran tells me that his friend passed away in an accident when he was only about twenty-one years old. Given that Ran made a point of showing and discussing this photograph with me, I assume he plans to share it, and possibly other images from the album, during our interview. However, as we begin setting up for the interview, Ran leaves the photo album on the couch across the room. Just before the camera starts to role I hand him the album, which he somewhat reluctantly places on the side table to his left. Ultimately, Ran is the only one of the six participants who did not share photographs during his interview.

Ran begins by explaining that he left Israel for a combination of reasons. On the one hand, he had married a non-Israeli who “was not really connected to Israel” the way he was, plus he had been offered a job in Chicago. On the other, he was not happy with what was happening in the country at the time:

[T]here was Lebanon, there was Sabra and Shatila...I cannot tell you that I left Israel because I did not approve the Israeli government approach to the conflict, but I was definitely...on the left side...I had some experiences in (inaudible) and I also was a soldier for a long time so...I had my issues with that.

Although Ran and his wife ultimately chose to settle in Vancouver, he still returns to Israel once or twice a year to spend time with his aging parents. Between these trips and his daily engagement with Israeli newspapers online, he feels he has more than a solid understanding of the political climate in Israel: “I probably know more about Israel from where I am now than people that live in Israel, or people that I know that live in Israel, mainly because...lots of Israelis are kind of overwhelmed, tired, you know, and they don’t see...the light at the end of the tunnel.”

99 [Text appearing in square brackets] indicates edits and/or information added for clarity.
100 Ran is referring to the three-day massacre of Palestinian men, women, and children living in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut, which was committed by the Lebanese militia with the assistance of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). For a detailed account of the Sabra and Shatila massacres, as well as survivor testimonies, see Bayan Nuwayhed Al-Hout’s Sabra and Shatila – September 1982 (2015).
101 (Italicized text appearing in round brackets) indicates non-verbal forms of communication and/or my notations.
I ask Ran which photographs he chose for our interview and why. Although he never actually addresses any photographs and/or the aforementioned album in his response, he does speak about how his childhood connection to the Holocaust differed from his peers:

I grew up in a house that is not a typical. I want to say typical when I grew up most my friends...the neighborhood where I grew up...the parents were Holocaust survivors...[T]his...was normal. I mean...pretty much two houses yes, one house no...So my family was actually...the exception...My father was born in Israel and his grandfather came to Israel in...beginning of the nineteenth century from Europe. My grandmother from my father’s side came from Russia in...British army...in ‘20s. From my mother’s side, they left...Europe and moved to Egypt, just her and her dad – my grandfather – her mother, and sister...[T]hey moved to Egypt in the late ‘20s...I think at that time [my grandfather] was part of the Zionist attaché...in Alexandria actually. But...my dad and my grandfather and my...grandmother on my mother’s side had a big family in Europe. So my mother arrived to Israel from Egypt when she was about fifteen...before the Israeli independence.

...[S]o when we grew up...the Holocaust was not part of our upbringing as far as the immediate family. We always knew that my mom had about eleven uncles and aunts that never made it through the war...mainly Poland...through different concentration camps and there’s about three uncles, an aunt, that left just before. I think one in Brazil...none of them in Israel, and one in the States and one in France, I think...[W]e always knew, but...they were not part of our life, mainly because they were not part of my mom’s...life because she was born in Egypt already without them...[I]t wasn’t people that she was connected with. So it was always there, but it wasn’t really something that as a kid was on my mind.

While Ran’s familial connection to the Holocaust might have been more indirect than that of his friends, it still permeated the fabric of his everyday life from childhood to adulthood, particularly by means of Israel’s education and military systems:

Growing up in Israel in...the 50s...you talking ten years removed from the Holocaust so...it was part of life. I mean...from kindergarten...all the way through the education system, all the way through...Holocaust Day in Israel, all the way to memorial, all the way to the fact that you going to people to play with and some of the parents are still there, some of the parents hide food...in boxes. So you grow up with it.

So for us as kids it was part of why we are there...because after the Holocaust...I grew up...in Israel...as the underdog. It was the beginning...[T]he existing state of Israel was...‘48 so I was born in ‘54...[I]t was right there. I mean, the first war was ‘56, which is the Sinai War...and then...‘67...[S]o...when I grew up Israel was always...
underdog, the survivors that arrived from Second World War, and tried to find a place that they can live...in peace...[A]nd there was always like..."If we’re not going to take care of yourself, nobody’s going take care of us." So...it’s an underdog feeling and it’s...fed you...since you are young, that this is who we are and if we are not for us, there’s nobody else for us.

...[T]hat’s...the way I grew up. And I guess the whole thing was because of the Holocaust, because the fact that...in the ‘40s there was an event that...there was six million Jews that basically lived as equal citizens in different countries in Europe and in one day they become people that basically being put into concentration camp and because of the fact they’re Jews. So you grow up with this notion that this will never happen again and this is why we are there and this is why...if we have to suffer a bit, and if we have to go to the army, and if we have to pay more tax, and if we have to do this and...so it’s always there. I mean you don’t complain because this is better world than your parents’ generation. This is how the Holocaust...affected my generation of growing up...[I]t’s affect every aspect of your life.

Given the silence surrounding the Holocaust in Israel immediately after the end of the Second World War – a silence that gradually began to break with the 1961 trial of Adolph Eichmann and then the June War of 1967 – I ask Ran if he thinks the time in which he grew up contributed to the lack of discussion about the Holocaust in both his and his friends’ households. He reiterates that for his generation the Holocaust was simply part of daily life – “the people that you meet on the street, the people that work in the grocery store are Holocaust survivors. They are there...[Y]ou don’t have to push it...” – whereas by 1967 the next generation was farther removed and their children only learned about the Holocaust more “formally” through history books. These latter generations’ understanding of the Holocaust is markedly different than Ran’s, as he grew up with survivors who were unable and/or unwilling to speak to him about their experiences because they were simply too recent. While Ran suggests that some of these survivors have become more open, some even eager, to tell their stories, I suggest that such silences make it even more difficult for members of the postmemory generations to understand and wrestle with the traumas that have impacted their families. Here Ran returns to the photographs I inquired about earlier:

Yeah. I agree. As far as the pictures...because...on my dad’s side...he was...a single child...and his [dad’s]...family was removed and my grandmother doesn’t know even who...her family was. So it’s all on my mom’s side and because she left...in the ‘30s to...Egypt from Europe...I could not...I was actually looking when I was now in Israel...for picture of this generation...[W]e found a lot of pictures of uncles...but none of them my mom could say...“This is the uncle that whatever”...[So] she
didn’t grow up with them, she doesn’t have any…pictures of them. She believed that maybe her sister had, but her sister passed now…[S]o for me the only pictures that kind of connected to [the Holocaust]…is probably…picture that related me and [my] army service…

This last statement, in which Ran suggests that the only photographs that really connect to the Holocaust for him are those taken during his military service, is highly significant and yet he makes no mention or gesture toward the photo album to his left, rather he simply proceeds to explain the connection:

...[Y]ou grow up in Israel [with] the...notion that...Israel need to have a strong army [because] of what happened in...the Second World War...I grew up as a Zionist. I grew up as someone that believed that by the age of eighteen...you have to go and serve because look what happened...before...[A]dd to that the fact that we didn’t move to Luxemburg, we moved to a...place in the Middle East that...neighbors did not really accept the state of Israel...[S]o it was...a double thing. First you had to maintain regardless. On the top of it there’s always people that want to kill you on the daily basis surrounding you. [When the]...’67 War [happened]...I was thirteen...[T]he feeling was that...it can end up differently...it didn’t sound good.

So I grew up with the notion that there was no other option...[Y]ou have to go to the army...[I]t is survival...it’s a survival mode...I think everybody that grew up with me...that’s why they went to the army. I...believe that things change now and there are other option and there’s other thoughts, but...seriously...I do not recall when I grew up people my age...that were questioning...[G]oing to the army’s something that we have to do. It is something that needed. It is something that’s right to do...[W]hy there’s questions now? ¹⁰²

I am struck by the paradox of Ran insisting that he felt he had no choice but to serve in the army and the fact that, having served for approximately eight years, his military service spanned well beyond the three years mandatory for Israeli males. I ask him what area of the military he served in and why he served for so long. Immediately it becomes clear that Ran is not comfortable discussing the details of his service, resulting in an evasive response: “Well we’re not going to go to the details...I served eight years because what I did in the army required lots of training and I could not...do it otherwise.” Still, he explains that he finished his service at the age of twenty-seven or twenty-eight,

¹⁰² Ran is referring to Israeli refuseniks who refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories and conscientious objectors who refuse service all together. For more on refuseniks, see Ronit Chacham’s (2003) Breaking Ranks: Refusing to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and Peretz Kidron’s (2004) Refusenik!: Israel’s Soldiers of Conscience. For more on conscientious objectors, see Erica Weiss’s (2014) Conscientious Objectors in Israel: Citizenship, Sacrifice, Trials of Fealty.
even though he had the option of a career in the IDF: “...at the time I didn’t feel that this was something...I really want to do...[N]ot that I had...bad experience, but...it’s not something that fits my...needs...”

Realizing that he is reluctant to provide any more details about the specifics of his military service, I return to the topic of the photographs and the aforementioned connection he made to the Holocaust. Again, I ask Ran if he has any photographs to share. He sits up in his chair and reaches for the photo album that is sitting on the side table to his left. As he begins flipping through the album some of the images are visible to the camera, but are upside down. These images include the photograph of his late best friend, which he had shown to me before the interview:

You have to also understand that Holocaust survivors parents are very tough parents...because they give you the guilt all the time...[about]...what they did in order to bring you here and...you have food, which they didn’t...[S]o it’s...a constant...[Y]ou could always recognize [kids of Holocaust survivors] by the way they been cared for...[T]hey couldn’t do stuff that other kids could do. So...again, it’s not something that as a kid you are conscious about it, but it’s part of it. I mean, “He cannot do this because his mother don’t let him,” which other kids can do because they didn’t have this experience. “It’s too dangerous” or whatever. So it was there at all time.

...[A]s far as...my experience and the reason that...I went to the service is...a result of this memory and...the reason that I felt that I have to be there. And...when I was eighteen, I was pro-Zionist as far as, you know, “We have to be there. We have to be strong. We have to what we do, because we have no choice”...[T]he bottom line there was no choice. I mean, it’s either this or we are not here.

But I did have...interesting encounter...with Naftaly’s parents this visit that I was in Israel. I went to [a] memorial [for him]...and this like forty years now [since his death], which is huge...but...[his parents] moved to a new place. [His father] showed me the house and then...we passed a room and he said, “You know who is this picture?” And I said, “No, I don’t know, who’s picture”...[A]nd he said, “This is the Polish women that I was in her yard under the ground for about eighteen month in the Second World War.” I mean he was standing there and this is like three minutes after I went to the house...[T] came from nowhere...[H]e told me the story about...how he ended up there...[T]here were...him and his brother, I guess. [A]t that time they were...in the...ghetto, in one of the kind of restricted area in...Poland...[A]pparently there were people that going in and out from the ghetto through some fence...and they met the guy that they didn’t see for a long time, a friend of them, and they ask him where they been...[H]e told him that he’s hiding at this women in the village...and that’s where they staying, he’s just going into the ghetto to bring food
to other people...[A]nd he said that...about a month later...everybody knew that this is it...they're about take everybody from the ghetto and they're gonna move them to concentration camp and they start going to the houses...[H]e took his brother and actually they ran out through the fence and they went and they didn't know where to go so they went to this house that their friend told them. So he came to this place, he knocked on the door on this woman, and he said..."I am the son of this...remember?"...And she said, "I don't have enough food to feed you and your brother and the other girl (inaudible) the brother, but they are not here, I didn't see them for a week. So if you want to be there until they show up you can be here, but as...of now I don't have even food to give my kids." So it was...kind of his friend's story because they stayed there for about eighteen months. The other kid apparently perished because never came back. And they stayed there, in this village, for eighteen month. She gave them food...until the end of the war.

[1]Interestingly enough [a few years] after they came to Israel...they contact...this Polish woman and they still in contact with her...[S]he's very old now and they actually been sending her money because she cannot support herself...It is a nice story. (Slams the photo album shut.)...[S]o...this is stories that kind of going through my childhood (begins to put the photo album back on the side table to his left).

While Ran still has not shown or directly addressed the photo album, it appears that the photograph of him and his best friend during their army service reminded Ran of this amazing story. When I ask if he associates any of the photographs in the album with this story, Ran fixes me with a somewhat frustrated sideways glance and smile. A bit taken aback by his reaction and confused by his reluctance to share the photograph that he had previously and openly shared with me, I begin to explain my reasoning, but Ran abruptly cuts me off:

(He grabs the photo album and begins flipping through it again)...[I]t's because...there was a picture of...me in the service and...the guy that I met...and the visit that I had now [with his parents] and...so it's...all comes together...I think my closest friend, people that I grew up with and I had picture of (closes the photo album again), we never, as kids...talked to them...I think it was a combination between they don’t want to talk about it and we are not really want to hear about it. So...we knew that that's where they come from...[W]hen we grow up in families even today (places the photo album back on the side table to his left)...you have a father and a...mother and uncles and aunts and...from both sides and...even a small family...[Back then] most of the families did not have it. It's basically father, mother (clears throat) and that's about it because they all came relatively young with no family. So...the whole feeling was that this generation that I grew up is the generation that will start the tree again...I'm talking about the Holocaust so bad that...most of the kids that I grew up did not have uncles...I mean, maybe they have one or two, but...definitely (sits back
...the people came from Europe were not big families, there was no such a thing.

It is clear to me that Ran is more comfortable discussing the past through stories, rather than photographs, so I simply move on. Instead I ask him if he learned more about the Holocaust or if his understanding of it changed as Israeli society began discussing it more openly. As he explains, the Israeli education system ensures that young Israelis have a specific understanding of the Holocaust and its relationship to the founding of the Israeli state by the time they finish high school:

...[O]bviously...I read more books in my adult life about the Holocaust...[and watched] movies...but you have to understand that...in the education system in Israel...part of the history which you study...[is] the history of everybody, but there was a section that is...the Second World War and the Holocaust...[I]n a essence it’s a small part of the history, but obviously you learn much more about it because its effect. So you know the name of all the concentration camps (clears throat). You know the history of...how many Jews from each country. You know which country are more friendly and less friendly. So you hear the stories through the education system...[E]ven if your parents came from (clears throat) Tunisia – and there really...the whole Second World War (moves hand over the top of his head)...really above them because there was no communication didn’t really experience it – their kids go through the system and their kids learn the same thing that Holocaust survivors learned so, it’s (clears throat twice)...part. So (clears throat again) you cannot grow up in Israel without learning this section of the history. So I don’t think that I know now much more than I know as a kid...[T]here’s obviously always (inaudible) stories here and there, but...by the time you finish high school...you have the picture. You should have the picture.103

Having spoken at length about his understanding of the Holocaust and how it has impacted his life, I ask Ran if he had any knowledge or understanding of the Nakba while growing up. Here he reiterates that the Israeli education system separated the study of pre-modern and modern Israel from the rest of world history and then proceeds to provide an overview of the history that he was taught. This includes a discussion about the “old Jews” who lived in the region prior to 1948, the arrival of “the first modern

---

103 Up to this point, Ran has made a very clear and significant connection between the Holocaust and his military service, plus provided some sense of how the photograph he shared off camera relates to both. Had he actually shown any of his photographs I would have asked him to speak to the significance these images might have for his children and the generations to come. Instead I ask him how, if at all, his being Israeli and/or his previous life in Israel has impacted this children. For the sake of brevity, plus the fact that the information provided in his response is somewhat secondary to the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen to remove this section of Ran’s life story as it is presented here.
Jews” or “new Jews,” the various waves of Jewish immigration from Europe, the “relatively good” relationship between Jews and the “native” Palestinians prior to Ottoman and British intervention, disputes over the land which he describes as a “no man land,” and the Zionist desire for a Jewish state. Only then does Ran address the issue of the Nakba:

Now…the Nakba or the ’48 years war…as far as the Israeli education system, it’s a war. It’s not describe as a Nakba. I mean the word Nakba…I was expose to it only much later in my life when I started to meet Palestinians and start to talk and...understand. But as a kid when you grow up and you learn...there’s a ’48 wars...There’s always the story that...we were small and they were big...I know that, obviously, there is lots of questions about who was small and who was big at the time, but regardless...it was a ’48 war. There was...declaration of United Nation (clears throat)...and Israel agreed to...division of the land of Israel and obviously the Arabs did not...and...Arabs decided they gonna just take over and make end of it. The Brits, they left...[T]hey say, “It’s all yours! Kill yourself! Kill each other!”

...[S]o there was a ’48...war and obviously...you grew up [with]...the hero stories...how we won...I guess it establish ‘67...lines...[N]ow there’s...all these stories about if the Arabs fleed...Jaffa and Haifa and...all the villages...the versions are many...[T]he ongoing story when I grew up was that there was a promise...from [the Arab] armies that you can leave your houses and as soon as we finish the war...and we free the country...you can come back...We’re not going to go through how much of this story...and I’m sure there is stories to here and to there, but this is the old ongoing story. Obviously there was (clears throat)...other stories about some of them did not leave because they want to. I talk with Palestinians from both sides. I talk with Palestinians that said, “Yes, my...mother left the house in Jaffa and left the key under the carpet and went to...visit her friend in West Bank and said...‘I don’t want to be in the middle of this fighting and I’ll be back when it’s finished,’ never came back.” And obviously there is stories of villages that...forced to be leaving. So obviously there was different kind of stories, but we grew up on this story that there was a war...for the Israelis it was the war that made Israel.

I ask Ran if learning about the Nakba later in life caused him to critically reflect on the Israeli narrative of the War of Independence, which he was taught in school:

---

104 The term “new Jews” refers to the sabras or tzbars (both meaning “prickly pear cactus”) who were the first generation of Zionist Jews to be educated and socialized in the Jewish community in Palestine prior to 1948. Considered pioneers of the Israeli state, they are revered by Israelis for bringing the dream of a Jewish state into fruition and are often juxtaposed with the “old Jews” of the diaspora. The terms sabras and tzbars have subsequently come to refer to any native-born Israeli. For more, see Oz Almog’s (2000) *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*. 

184
I don’t know [what or] how they teach it [in Israeli schools] now. I’m sure that the books...are much more (clears throat) careful describing the war...[T]he narrative...at the time...(clears throat) was pretty straightforward, I mean, (clear throats) “Bad people, good people. We won, it’s ours”...

...[L]ater on, when you grow up, you realize that there’s been ‘48...you might won and had some (inaudible) there, but...there’s other people that lost and...for them it’s a trauma event that cover them for the next sixty, seventy years. So (clears throat) you grow up and you understand that there are two sides, always...two different stories...[Y]ou realize that what for you was one experience, for...somebody else was probably a different experience...which you don’t learn when you’re a kid.

Ran’s response segues directly into his personal understanding of how, if at all, the Holocaust and the Nakba are related:

I...think...both events defined the people that live today...at least...our parents. So in the case of the European Jews they find their...existing in Israel and in the case of...the Palestinians that had to leave...their home and had to leave their villages and have to leave everything they own, I mean, suddenly end up in tents...I don’t know if you can compare it, but I think the trauma is a trauma. I mean...somebody would say...I had...eleven uncles and they all perish in Buchenwald compared to somebody that moved to a tent. I don’t know...but it doesn’t matter. The fact is that both of them see it as a tragedy, both of them see it as...something that affect their life and affect their...thought and affect their...kids and affect their grandkids...and it’s...something...that’s part of their life. It sits in their life.

...[N]ow the question is...as an Israeli you...always think, “Ok there was trauma, there was a history event...[H]ow do you deal with it, as far as the other side?...[W]hat is the solutions to this event...?” I mean, let’s say that the loss of the ‘48 is one event and then don’t have enough time to think there’s ‘67 (laughing) event, right?

...I have to admit that...most of my conscious life are ‘67 and up. I was thirteen by then, so for me the...struggle was more like ‘67 and up, than ‘48 and up. I was never questioning the right of Israel to exist in the ‘48 (making air quotes) “war” era...right or wrong. But that’s how I grew up...Definitely questioned the (laughs) ‘67 war...[T]wenty years ago I thought there would be some kind of movement to this. I’m sure that...each side think that the other side is the culprit on this dead end.

Today I...consider Israel is definitely the culprit in this, but this my opinion. But...(clears throat)...you have to understand that even today the majority of the Israelis believe that they have zero tolerance to experiment with the enemy. So...if you get to the point that – and this was evident in the last election – they said ok there is a chance that this experiment, let’s say peace agreement, would in 1%, in some kind of capacity, would jeopardize the existence of the state of Israel then
the Israelis just go blank. “I don’t want to do this experiment…” And I think, still as of today, the Holocaust is part of it…I don’t know how easy is it Palestinian to move from Japan to Jordan, from Jordan to Saudi Arabia and…I don’t know to where, in a Muslim country, but...for the Israeli, the average Israeli, there’s no other option. Ok? There is...six million Israelis that live in a piece of land that is smaller than Vancouver Island and this is the only option...[I]f they miss that it’s...might not be there...[I]t’s very, very hard to change this set of mind because it’s enough that you have somebody that said...“[T]hat’s what you want to happen,” and then the average person would think, “Am I willing to take this chance?” And, as evidence as of today, they choose not to.

This response speaks to the impact the Holocaust still has on Israelis today, particularly how the fear of annihilation and a focus on survival impacts their willingness to engage and/or negotiate with Palestinians. Ran goes on to describe how this fear manifests in the everyday life of Israelis:

I...don’t know about the young generation. I think that [they] grew up more like, “The Arabs are the one that want to annihilate you and finish with you,” and I think the older generation have this experience and know that it can happen...I mean, it’s very hard to live somewhere in the south of Israeli today, near the border with Gaza, even if you live in a kibbutz and you are progressive and lefty in your opinions...and...you’re hailing the idea of...evacuating Gaza and give it back to the Gazans, and...have your kids going to the shelter...twice a day and still think about how...do we make peace. Right?...I think...it’s a very difficult situation.

Nonetheless, Ran acknowledges the power imbalance that exists between Israelis and Palestinians:

[O]bviously the Palestinians have the short end of the stick, there’s not doubt that...I don’t know, I mean, I think the only way that things might change is have somehow, in some part in the history, leaders that can (clears throat) unite both sides of the people and...bring them together because right now...I don’t see it happening with the existing Palestinian leaders or the existing Israeli leaders. I just don’t see it happening. And it’s become worse and worse...[I]t’s horrendous.

Here I am struck by yet another paradox. On the one hand, throughout the interview Ran has repeatedly returned to Israeli master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the founding of the Israeli state. On the other hand, he has stated that “Israel is definitely the culprit” and acknowledges that “obviously the Palestinians have the short end of the stick.” Considered alongside his earlier admission that he did not hear Nakba stories until he was older, I cannot help but wonder if having lived in
diaspora for so long has allowed him to undertake a more critical assessment of the Israeli government and/or empathize more with the Palestinian people:

No...I was like this when I lived in Israel...[F]or me...the first question that...you want to ask yourself – and it’s...a dilemma, right? – ...if you want to stand with Israel, if you want to stand with Jews, if you want to think that this history is important...the dynasty of the Jewish people...everything that threaten this dynasty or whatever you call it, you have the right to do everything you can in order to preserve it. And when I say everything you can, lots of bad things. It doesn’t work for me. So if I had to choose, if I have to do these bad things...to maintain the dynasty, I might choose give up the dynasty. But that’s me. I don’t know if I’m right or wrong, but I see myself first as a human being and then all the rest. I think...history, everything that you grew up is important. I think...the history of the families, history of the religious (inaudible), everything...that brought you up is part of you and I think that’s important, but then you have to ask yourself what is more important...

Thus, Ran’s critical stance toward Israel began to develop while he was still living there, rather than in diaspora. Based on this response, as well as his earlier statements regarding why he chose to leave Israel, it can be assumed that Israel’s involvement in events like the Sabra and Shatila massacres were hard for Ran to reconcile with his own humanism. Nevertheless, I ask him to clarify what he feels is more important than “stand[ing] with Israel” and preserving “the dynasty of the Jewish people.” What is it that he feels he chose instead? Once again he does not directly answer my question, yet his response is significant, as it directly addresses the role of religion in the conflict:

[I]t’s a tough question. I wish things would be different...I wish...people would be nice to each other, but it doesn’t look like it’s going to happen...and...it’s a problem. On top of it you throw on the religious. And then...on top of it this issue that supposedly had just land dispute. And you put another layer of God give this land and...Muslim infidels. And you put this together and it's become huge mess...it's terrible...[O]bviously the people that now pushing to...put more people in the West Bank and maintain a hold in the West Bank...in terms of settlement...are people that coming from the relatively religious side, same way that, I guess...you could say that...suicide bomber might think that they...go to heaven on the Muslim side. So...if you put on the top of it...people talk directly to God then...you have a problem on your hand...and...it’s a bad mix.

At this point, we return to our discussion of the Israeli education and military systems and how they link to and/or shape Israeli understandings of the Holocaust. While Ran has already spoken to this earlier, he proceeds to elaborate further:
I think when you grew up, at least when I grew up...the only information that you have is the education system. I'm not saying that we didn't have unique kids the age of sixteen that questioned the political this, but it was rare then just because everyone fed from the same book and ate the same garbage that the education system provide you and...the narrative is one and that's about it.

I think kids today exposed to much more...I don't know if they're more developed (laughs) than when we were kid, but critical thinking is much more...[T]here will always be people that look at it...as...this is the only place we have...[and] there's three hundred million Muslim that try to annihilate us and make sure that we are not there because we're just pain in the butt of everyone there and if you're not going to be strong, and sometime we have to do things that are not nice, but that's the only way we survive and there are other people that might think that there's a different ways so...

Having acknowledged the increased access to information that young Israelis now have, I suggest that the rise of the Internet may have contributed to increased critical thinking among Israeli youth, possibly also allowing for the growth of the current Israeli minority who are educating other Israelis about the Nakba, undertaking joint initiatives with Palestinians and/or petitioning their government to end the occupation. Ran responds with a partial breakdown of leftist Israeli politics. For instance, he notes that 15 of the 126 seats in the Israeli Knesset¹⁰⁵ are held by Arabs who, although Israeli citizens themselves, are committed to the Palestinians people, plus another five to seven are held by the Israeli left. Yet, his focus is on the Israeli centre:

...I call them practical lefty, means that...you have to solve the problem because if you don’t solve it none of us will survive – neither them or you...[Y]ou cannot think...you can control another five million people...[U]ntil when? I mean...it's not gonna to work...there's no solution there...[T]hey do think that there is a strong reason to come to an agreement with the Palestinian. If it's because they think they're right or wrong or because...they think it’s a right thing to do or because it’s humanitarian thing to do or [be]cause Palestinian have the right to...it doesn’t really matter...I think that majority of Israel, as of today, somebody said, “Ok, we have a...guarantee no question ask two states” (inaudible) I think there would be more than fifty [percent of the] people in Israel for it. I’m sure. But the question is how? How do you convince these people that this two-state solution is not going to become two states that two months later fighting again?

¹⁰⁵ The Knesset is Israel’s unicameral legislature, which is made up of 120 elected representatives. Because Knesset seats are allocated to parties rather than specific party candidates, plus the fact that a party must secure 3.25% of the overall vote to gain a seat, coalition governments are the norm, i.e.) no single party has ever held a majority. In the 2015 Israeli election, the Arab Joint List – an alliance of four predominantly Arab parties – won 13 seats in the Knesset.
I note that a two-state solution would also be difficult to manage given that Gaza and the West Bank would remain separated from one another by Israel. How would this new arrangement affect Israelis living between the two Palestinian territories, as well as Palestinians who would still have to travel through Israel to reach the West Bank or Gaza? Ran agrees: “...you can find solutions, but for Israelis the question is what happen the day after? And...I'm saying it's worth a try and lots of people think it's not.”

While it is evident that Ran is open to working with Palestinians to find a solution to this decades-old conflict, I wonder what he hopes his fellow participants will learn and/or understand about him and his family after watching his video? His answer is simultaneously dismissive of the other Israeli participants and yet anchored in self-proclaimed humanism:

[W]ell as far as the Israelis...I don’t really care (laughs)! As far as the Palestinian [laughs], I mean, I...don't know where they come from...what’s their opinions, but I think if they live here and...talk with you I’m sure that they are thinking same as me and everybody else. But I think that the idea is that...when you talk with each other you realize that we are all basically the same, we all want the same, we all try to achieve the same, we all try to...live peacefully have...wife and kids and...means to provide and...have...healthy relationship and...develop yourself and that your kid develop, and move...on with your life. I think that’s what, eventually, everybody want and I think...I hope, that that’s what I would see...in other videos. And I hope that people see this video and that’s what they see.

As to whether or not he is worried that the other participants might not see this in his interview, Ran proclaims: “[I’m] [n]ot...worried. No...listen I mean...the pure humanitarian might think that...a few things that I say...I kind of overstated and...I should be more cautious about it, but I’m not worried about it. I’m 61 years old! (Laughing.)” When I asked how he feels about having the opportunity to watch the other participants’ videos, Ran appears to be eager to hear both the Palestinians and Israelis’ stories:

I don’t know how old they are, but I’m sure they have experience...I...very interested to hear their story regardless. I’m more interested to hear their stories because they are involved in this type of experiment or type of...research that you’re doing...[I]f somebody would tell me...“Do you think that the Nakba is like the Holocaust?” I would say, “No, of course, because it's two different experience.” I’m not saying this one is worse than the other one...both of them are traumatic experience for two different people...[B]ut...I'll be very interested to hear...both...Israelis how they grew up, how they
experienced the Holocaust, I don’t know if they are different age so...And, of course, I’d be much more interested to hear...I...understand it’s second generation Nakba...So yeah, I mean...it’ll be very interesting...first for the story of...where they come from, the parents, and how they arrived to wherever they arrived, and why they are here and yeah, I mean, I’m extremely interested.

This seemingly enthusiastic response to watching all the other participants’ videos contradicts his earlier statement that he does not really care about the other Israelis’ interviews and thus marks a third paradox in Ran’s interview. Nonetheless, I ask if there is anything in particular he hopes to walk away with from the other participants’ videos:

I would love to hear...the Palestinian story, even though I did talk to Palestinian through the years. I mean...usually when you meet Palestinian you do not dive into...(laughs) what did my parents did to your parents kind of stories, right? So, it’s mostly pleasantly you talk...I was involved in some forms that talked a little bit more, so I’m aware of some of the stories...

When it becomes evident that Ran has been involved with other dialogue initiatives focusing on Palestinians and Israelis, I encourage him to share some of those experiences. He explains that prior to becoming a member of the Board of Directors for Peace It Together (PIT), alongside Haifa and myself, he was also part of a small mixed group that met to talk at local coffee shops, had friendly albeit general conversations with his Arab Israeli neighbour, and took part in the Vancouver based International Soccer Tournament during which he played with and hosted the mixed Palestinian/Israeli team that was brought over for the event (although he sadly notes that some of the Palestinian players were unable to come to Vancouver because they were not able to secure the proper paperwork). While Ran is disappointed that PIT ended, particularly given what a great experience he had with the organization, he stresses that he still “think[s] it’s great to...be with people from different aspects of the conflict...”

Ran’s openness toward and past involvement with other dialogue programs reminds me of some information I wanted to clarify earlier. He had noted that his father was born in the region prior to 1948, thus I am curious if he ever spoke to Ran about what it was like living with Arab Palestinians during that time:

---

106 Having only met over Skype during a small handful of board meetings, Ran and Haifa have never actually met or had any conversation outside of board matters. Thus, Ran was not aware that Haifa was also participating in this project. When he learns later in our interview that he will have the opportunity to hear her stories, Ran’s enthusiasm for the project (and presumably our interview) grows.
I talked with my father actually a lot about…growing up in Israel before '48...(long pause)...[H]e grew up in Tel Aviv kind of a single kid. His father left early, so he was a bit street boy, but I never felt that he have an issue...[D]on’t get me wrong, my father have a lots of issues with lots of people, but to his credit...when I grew up, and even now when I talk with him...I never felt that he have...I mean you would talk with Israelis that...Arab is like...“He’s an Arab,” you know? It's like...I guess some Arab would say, “He’s a Jew,” right?...[N]ever felt it from my dad’s side. And I...talk with some of his friends his age, like 85 and up, he’s 88 now...you can hear some, you know (rolls his eyes) but...these people speak their [mind]...I don’t think my dad try to cover this. But...he grew up and...he had...worked with Arab...it was part of his life...So...I didn’t grow up...[feeling]...that he had any issue with Arab people as an Arab people.

And what about Ran himself? Did he have much interaction with Palestinians while he was growing up?

No. Zero. Which is terrible. I mean...I grew up in Israel, there is...20% of the people in Israel are Arabs and I grew up (inaudible) until the age of eighteen. There was no...any attempt from any...I mean...my family...they go to work, they come back, I mean, but there was no whatsoever. I mean, you don’t study Arabic in school...

I confirm that the interactions and/or relationships he has had with Palestinians and/or Arabs occurred and/or developed only in adulthood:

Yeah...I think...this is atrocious...I mean I think it’s better now...If I was in Israel...there are schools now that are mixed...very few and struggle a lot, but...I have no doubt that’s where my kids would go to. [But]...it’s not easy...because they are far away and...there’s many issues there. But...no...you grow up until you’re eighteen and then you go to the army, right? So how do you see...Arab the next time? You don’t want to know...[Y]ou basically can...become a mature person without really have any (contact)...I mean you go to Jaffa and you eat hummus...this is not really a relationship, right?

But I guess...I can blame myself. I could if I want, but...there was no...any attempts...in the system there...[T]here’s no way that you don’t go and visit people...you think...are your enemy and to go and spend the weekend in an Arab village, why not vice versa, right?

While Ran has been willing to engage in such initiatives, he states, “the majority of people don’t want to on both sides. That’s what’s sad.” While I am impressed by and

---

grateful for Ran’s openness to dialogue with Palestinians, I cannot help but wonder why he has agreed to participate in yet another joint initiative? In other words, why did he decide to participate in this specific project, particularly given his apparent lack of enthusiasm for hearing his fellow Israelis’ stories?:

*(Clears throat)*…[F]irst of all…as I said…I was aware of the Nakba as the way that…it’s been described to me the last…ten years or so of my life…as something that is an issue…I always thought that it was a bad war for the Palestinian, it was a bad event, but…when you grow up in Israel you don’t really grasp, I think, the…magnitude of…what happened there. I don’t know if it’s because you’re not sensitive, but…it’s not something that…you think about…

I met a Palestinian once, an older guy, that said…”I don’t…ask you to…give me anything because of what happened. All I ask you is to just [a]knowledge that this happened!” And…I said…I could…yeah. I don’t know what to say…I know that there’s people that want more than acknowledgement, but…it just makes sense. It just makes sense to talk about it. It just makes sense to explore…[J]ust makes sense…if you talk about things and you understand what the other side believe and you understand what the other side feel…you have a much easier time later on to deal with them. And if you don’t do it, it’s impossible.

I note that everyone involved in this project has hope that the more Palestinians and Israelis speak with one another, the more their consciousness might shift, and solidarity might flourish, resulting in a better future for everyone. Ran agrees, but is somewhat pessimistic due to the tumultuous political climate in the Middle East at the time and its negative impact on Israelis’ sense of security:

Unfortunately, I thought that it will happen by now, but…the Arab world is in shamble as it is. I mean, between Syria…I mean this doesn’t help the cause…there’s no support there, and Egypt…I thought that maybe it will be a nation that become something else and maybe will lead the Arab world to something that can be an example and…shine light on other ways that Muslim countries can conduct business…I[t] doesn’t look like this happened.

So…I guess *(inaudible)*…why would I want to go into this, look what happened in Syria?…[D]o I really want to?…I mean, all this surround Israel doesn’t really help the cause. You know what I mean? It’s much harder to feel secure. It’s not just focusing on what’s happening with the Palestinians or the threat from that, but everything that’s happening around them...

As we begin to wrap up, I ask Ran whether or not he would be willing to watch all of the other participants’ videos. In light of his previously expressed ambivalence toward
his fellow Israelis’ stories, I’m not surprised that, while interested, he is not wholly committed:

I don’t know if I can watch five hours of people like me talk, but…I’ll definitely…take a look at it. I might…be fascinated…I don’t know. I mean it’s like somebody told me, “Do you want to see…five hours serious on…the Irish war against the Brits?” I don’t know…[I]f it’s interesting I’ll watch it. If it’s less interesting I’ll might skip forward…I definitely would like to watch it.

While not willing to go so far as committing to watching all their videos, Ran states that he “[a]bsolutely” wants to meet his fellow participants face to face should the opportunity arise.

When I ask Ran if he has any final thoughts or comments he would like to share, he asks me what the focus of my study is and what I am trying to achieve – issues that we had discussed at length over the last few month, but which he does not remember. While I am confused that he would ask such questions at the conclusion of our first interview, I simply reiterate the purpose and objects of my dissertation research and thank him for his time and participation.108

Itai Erdal

Itai was born in 1975 in Jerusalem, a city claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians. On January 13, 2015, the date of our first interview, he was forty years old. Although he served his mandatory three years in the IDF, he left Israel for Canada at age twenty-five largely because he wanted to avoid serving as a reservist. Like Ran, Itai is the only member of his immediate family who lives outside of Israel and so returns every year to visit his family.

108 Shockingly, as soon as I stop the camera recording, Ran gets up from his chair, walks over to the outlet that my camera is plugged into, and abruptly unplugs it. My first response is sheer panic, as my video camera shuts off and I cannot do my regular check to ensure the interview recorded in full. Although he continues to be very warm toward me, Ran begins to rush me out of his house. As I quickly pack up my things and make for his front door, he hugs me and tells me how great it was to see me, yet he then reiterates that he will not commit to watching all of the other participants’ interviews, as he is only concerned with those of the Palestinians, not the Israelis. I leave his house confused and frustrated by the interview overall and fearing that I might have angered or triggered him.
Our first interview takes place in the living room of Itai’s apartment. He begins by explaining why he decided to share a personal photo album rather than a series of individual family photographs. The album, which contains photographs from Itai’s high school and military days, was compiled by his friends in celebration of his nineteenth or twentieth birthday:

...I wanted to share this album because I feel like the Holocaust is kind of the only reason I went to the army in the first place...[S]o when you asked about how the Holocaust has impacted my life I’ve obviously, like most Israelis, lost family members in the Holocaust as well, but...nobody that I knew...is close to me...I’ve lost...many, many great aunts, and great uncles, and cousins, and great grandparents, but...that was many years before I was born...I feel like the...album from the military is much more related to the Holocaust for me.

Immediately it becomes clear that although Itai has a familial connection to the Holocaust, he feels there is a stronger connection between the Holocaust and his military service. Nevertheless, before moving into a detailed discussion of his chosen photographs and the Holocaust postmemories they signify, Itai takes a few moments to reflect on how the Holocaust has impacted his and his family’s lives:

Growing up in Israel you cannot not hear about the Holocaust...[I]t is ever present, all the time, in schools, in media...everything is compared to [it]. Every time there’s a bad person he’s a Nazi, every time. So you cannot grow up in Israel and not be affected by the Holocaust. I have had several friends...who are direct children...or grandchildren of survivors, but that was not the case with me.

The closest that I got personally to be affected by the Holocaust is...my father’s wife...[who] I grew up with and [am] close to. Her mother survived the Holocaust as a child, but...became...mentally ill because of [it]...[W]hen she was a little girl, after her father died, her mother...just lost it and...sort of thought they’re still in the war and the Nazis are coming...[S]he locked her two daughters in the basement and fed them potato shells for months until the authorities got wind of it and put the mother in an institute and took the...twin daughters into...a home...[A]s a result...when we were growing up her fridge was packed – still is – to the point where...you open it and stuff falls out...[S]he always packs ridiculous amounts of food and when her children eat she...hovers above them and serves them more and more and more food all the time.

...[S]o I can see the direct connection of the Holocaust (laughs). Because her mother survived the Holocaust, I can see how she raised her children. But those are my brother and sisters, it’s not...me. So

109 Sadly, Itai’s stepmother has since passed away.
that’s sort of my…semi-direct relationship (laughs) to the Holocaust. The first thing that I can think of…is my father’s wife, Yona.

Having spoken to the impact the Holocaust has had on his own life, Itai turns his attention to the photo album and the images it contains:

(Clears throat and picks up photo album from coffee table in front of him and begins flipping through it as he speaks.)...Now they don’t look like…war photos or anything. They just young kids…nineteen year old friends…goofing around and having fun, but as you will see we have guns and we’re wearing uniforms...[A] lot of these pictures took place...while I was stationed...in Palestine, near Tulkarem...[Y]ou can even see Tulkarem in the background [of] some of them, or you can see military tents and guns and stuff...

(Showing the camera photo album page #110)...[A]s you can see these are just friends goofing around...[Y]ou see that we’re all soldiers and, like I said, in the background here (points to the background of the photograph in the top right-hand corner of album page #1) behind me you see Arab villages...[S]o this was while I was stationed in Palestine...even though some of these I am in civilian clothes and some of them I am not. (Showing the camera album page #2111) This is from my basic training. These photos were actually...posing and making...sort of warrior, soldier faces...for the camera. (Pointing to the photograph of himself in the lower left-hand image of album page #2.) This is me as a very impressionable eighteen-year-old soldier.

As noted, Itai only served the three years mandatory for Israeli males, however, during this time he was an infantry or combatant soldier – a role only a small percentage of IDF soldiers experience.

110 Itai only appears in the top left photograph. He is furthest on the right, wearing civilian clothing.

111 Itai appears in each of the photographs on this page. Given his two individual photographs, he is easy to identify in the other four images. Also, because Itai scanned these album pages himself, I did not edit them prior to sharing them with the other participants or including them in this chapter, hence the uncropped edges.
Having already introduced the photographs he wanted to discuss, plus provided context regarding his military service, Itai shares the postmemories these images signify:
...[W]hen I look at them I wonder why would an eighteen year old [serve]...I was pretty politically aware...[B]oth my parents are what we call leftists, they sort of recognized the Palestinians’ right to be people and...[are] humanists and...care about...injustice all around the world. And yet...the only reason that somebody like me would choose to go to the army in the first place and go and serve in the Occupied Territories...I feel like I was brainwashed in a way and lied to by the government, by the school system, by the media growing up in Israel...I feel like Israelis are all being brainwashed and lied to and Israelis use the Holocaust as an excuse to do that.

I encourage Itai to clarify how and why he feels Israelis are “brainwashed” and what “lies” he is referring to. Like Ran, he first reiterates the master narrative of the War of Independence taught in Israel’s education system, however, he then proceeds to problematize it:

...[T]he main lie was that the Palestinians all ran away in 1948. That’s what we were always told. We were told that, (clears throat)...after the Holocaust there were millions of Jewish refugees who had nowhere to go and then all the nations of the world voted in the United Nations and decided to divide the country into two and the Jews accepted and the Palestinian didn’t...[T]hen all the Palestinians attacked the Israelis with five different armies, which did happen, and we won! And when we won they all ran away! And that’s why we took their homes! And that’s the narrative that we’ve always been told.

...[N]owadays people know that there were actually fifty-two different massacres that happened where Palestinians didn’t run away and were slaughtered...[N]ow we know that...three years after the Holocaust that Jews were determined to never be victims again and would do anything in order not to be...I’m sure the Holocaust was forefront in their thoughts and their minds...[I]n 1948 the Holocaust was so fresh in everybody’s mind that everything’s justified and everything was ok. But sixty something years later it’s not ok.

Closely paralleling the second paradox in Ran’s interview, Itai stresses that he felt he had no choice but to serve in the IDF, yet later acknowledges that he ultimately had to make a choice about whether or not to go to the army. And while both men speak to their own humanism throughout the course of their interviews, Itai’s reasoning for serving in the IDF and his reflections on that decision in the present moment diverge drastically from Ran’s:

I feel like that’s...sort of the direct connection that lead me to become a solider because I grew up in a country where you couldn’t be – or that’s how I felt – a pacifist because if you were you would die...you would get killed by somebody...[S]o I felt like as...somebody who’s growing up in that country part of my duty – in order not to be
parasite, in order to be a good citizen, in order to do the right thing – was to go and serve my country...in the army...[I]f it wasn't for all the lies that we were told that really directly connected to the Holocaust...I maybe would have seen this conflict like I see it now, with two people who have equal rights to the land, one side that has everything and one side that has nothing.

I went to the army because...if humanist, forward thinking people like myself don’t go then I’m gonna leave the army to the fanatics and the bigots and the crazy people and then worse things will happen...[S]o me and all my friends and everybody I know...we were all leftists, we were all supporting the Palestinians, even before the First Intifada, even when it was not popular. We all said Palestinians should get a country and we were even saying the radical thing that Jerusalem should be divided and that was considered completely fanatic.

...[S]o I joined the army thinking those things already and I joined the army in order to do good things. But now I realize that any time you put a uniform on you oppress Palestinians and there is no way of being an Israeli soldier and doing the right thing...[T]he right thing would have been to refuse to join the army. But growing up in Israel, in the environment...what I feel was...basically getting brainwashed (laughs) or indoctrinated...led me to believe that the right thing to do would be to join the army.

Although this suggests to me that Itai may have been worried about what might happen to him if he did not serve, he corrects me:

I was worried that...if leftist people don’t go to the army then everybody in the army is gonna be rightwing...[W]hen I was in the army I did several time do various things in order to try to improve lives of the Palestinians that I was coming contact with...I would stop rightwing soldiers from abusing people and I would report people who did atrocities...I was trying to be somewhat of a compass or a...you know what I mean...(exhales) whatever.

At the time, Itai believed that he could change the IDF from the inside – an enormous challenge that he now realizes was impossible:

I was trying to be a good (laughs) soldier...treat people with respect and...decently and show Palestinians that not all Jews are monsters and not all Jews try to kill them...I was trying to...change things from the inside, but now I don’t think that is possible...I wouldn’t want my children...if I had any, to ever be soldiers...for any reason.

I cannot help but wonder how his fellow IDF soldiers and superiors, as well as the Palestinians that he sought to help, responded to his efforts:

For the Palestinians...they couldn’t...I mean, they didn’t know. I was just another soldier. Maybe they saw that I was less of an asshole than
other people, but…I don’t think it mattered to them. I think people were scared of me just like they would be of anybody who has a gun. So to the Palestinians I really doubt that it mattered much, except for those couple of cases where I managed to intervene, where I actually helped somebody. And to my fellow soldiers, I got into trouble. I had to defend myself…[I]t got…pretty scary at times.

Again Itai stresses that he felt he had no choice but to serve in the IDF. I ask him to reflect on what, if any, other options might have been available to him. Here he makes a distinction between Israelis who try to get out of mandatory army service for a variety of personal reasons and refuseniks whose decision not to serve is ideologically driven:

...[I]f I would have took a stand it wouldn’t have been as a refusenik. I…would have probably just…pretended to be crazy to get out of the army like some people do, right? If I would have made it into an ideological thing, I would have spend three years in military jail.

A lot of people choose not to serve [but] not for ideological reasons. They wanna have a career, they want to go to the university, they just hate guns…they’re not masculine…there could be many, many reasons why one wouldn’t wanna go (laughs) to the army. So most people who don’t want to go to the army…will never say it’s for ideological reasons cause that’s how you get into trouble…[Y]ou have fewer chances…of escaping the army if you say it’s for ideological reasons.

[Your]…chances of getting out of the army are much higher if you just pretend to be crazy. So that’s the way to do it. You just go and you say, “I pee the bed at night”…[T]here’s various things you can say. You can say, “I’m suicidal and if you give me a gun I’ma gonna shoot myself,” and that’s a big red flag for them. Now they also have good psychologists who are trained to see who’s lying because many, many people are lying about being suicidal…[M]y father is remarried, so I have a brother who is fifteen years younger than me, and I trained him how to get out of the army and he didn’t serve…[B]oth me and my father…sat with him and told him what to say in order to get out of the army because I didn’t want my young brother to go to the army.

But refuseniks is very different. Refuseniks started in the Lebanon War…and…they were…treated pretty severely in the beginning because…it’s an act of mutiny and so they wanted to scare people off…[I]t…was…family men in their fifties and…forties who were colonels and…officers and…they wrote a letter saying we will not go...[S]o that was a big, big ripple effect because it wasn’t just like kids, it was serious people who decided to do this...[S]o...yeah, refuseniks is...quite different and…I applaud them, but I…was never that. The refuseniks are a tiny minority…even of the people who don’t serve...

Itai goes on to explain that Israelis who find a way to avoid service for non-ideological reasons are still stigmatized in Israeli society:
I mean the biggest penalty...is...the stigma that comes with it, right? And that's what my mother told me when I was considering not to go to the army. My mother said, "Every time you go to a job interview in this country people are gonna ask you what you did in the army...[I]f you are...pretending to be crazy then they might take your drivers’ license away because you say you can't drive or they might not give you other privileges." So if you are going that route there's a stigma that comes with that. That's what people are afraid of in Israel, the stigma of being a slacker or being a parasite.

Given the aforementioned paradox and the resulting personal conflict it caused for Itai, I am curious how he feels looking at these photographs in the present moment. Are they reminders of his past personal struggles and subsequent regret and/or are they souvenirs of the camaraderie that existed between himself and his fellow soldiers?:

...[Y]eah, a lot of people in those images are still good friends of mine. But I look at [the photographs] like it was somebody else. It's hard to image that that was me. It’s twenty years ago in a different country and the whole thing is completely surreal. Being a soldier is surreal.

I was in Gaza for a bit and I did not wanna be in Gaza. Gaza was horrible, horrible...so I went to Lebanon quite a bit because Lebanon was...in my mind, much better. I had no moral conflicts about being in Lebanon...even though that seems crazy now too. But at the time you knew that if you go to Lebanon you gonna fight Hezbollah who are trained soldiers like you, who have guns...whereas in the Occupied Territories it was women and children...[A]s a soldiers you wanna fight soldiers, you don’t wanna fight civilians. So I went to Lebanon and I was in combat. I was shot at and bombed. Then I shot a friend in the foot by mistake when I was in basic training.

So the military was quite traumatized for me...I have no doubt that I have some posttraumatic stress. Always felt like...I was so lucky in the army because I was between the two Intifadas and...I was in the western front in Lebanon where all the action was in the east...I always felt like I was so lucky and then maybe ten years ago, I remember I was working in London and it was very stressful situation, it was a big show, I designed lights, and I started having these nightmares...[E]very night people would shoot at me and try to bomb me...stuff that I’ve even never seen in real life, I saw in my dreams, people burning alive and horrible, horrible things...[T]hen you realize you cannot go through three years of the army and not be scarred by it and not be affected by it...[S]o for me I think it's deep somewhere in my subconsciousness, I don’t think about it very often. But I’ve seen some horrible things in the army. Yeah. And...I’ve felt...things that no eighteen-year-old boy should feel. (Laughs.)

I am curious how Itai addressed and/or reconciled such experiences both during and after his service:
...[L]ike I said, I was already leftist when I joined the army and everything I’ve seen just made me more and more see that this is a horrible injustice...[S]o my first reaction was not wanting to be in Gaza. Then when we were in Tulkarem I refused to go out on tours and...they let me just do kitchen duties all the time, which is cook and do the dishes and guard duties in the base, because I did not wanna go out and be among civilians. So even when I was in the army I tried to...not do the horrible things.

But...Israelis have to go to the reserves until they’re forty-five years old...Combatant soldiers till they’re forty-five, other soldiers till they’re fifty-five...up to forty-five days a year. So usually they call you for a month of service and then two weeks of training...[W]hen my military service was done I decided I’m never going back...I don’t wanna put uniform again...I will not be a reserve...[F]or a few years I’ve escaped the military in order not to go back and do my reserve duty. So that’s one conclusion that I came up with after the army is that...never again (laughs).

But it’s also...everybody I knew was in the same place, right? It’s the whole society. I was not unique in that sense. Like here people who go to Afghanistan and Iraq and have posttraumatic stress are one in thousands. In Israel it’s every other man almost (laughs)...that you see...it’s an entire society (laughs).

As previously noted, it was his commitment to never serving in the IDF again that brought Itai to Vancouver in 2000: “I was tired of running away from the army all the time...If I’m not in the country, I can’t serve the country...But if I was to go back, after six month I get a letter from the army.”

Given the significant impact that Itai’s time in the IDF had on him, as well as his earlier statements that he was brainwashed by the Israeli government and military, I encourage him to further reflect on the Holocaust. For instance, how, if at all, did his understanding of the Holocaust change either after completing his service and/or during the years that have passed since? Here Itai makes a significant distinction between the Holocaust as a traumatic historical event and the Israeli state’s continued use of the Holocaust to justify and meet their own ends:

The Holocaust...may be the most horrific thing that ever happened (laughs) in history. I feel very Jewish. Every time I see anything about the Holocaust it touches me in a profound way. I was in Eastern Europe in places where...I got to see from close some of the things that happened...[S]o...the Holocaust is a separate event that I feel affected my family and me in a profound way. That has nothing to do with how we use the Holocaust now to justify what we do to Palestinians...[T]he fact that now Israelis do horrible things to Palestinians doesn’t take anything away from what Germans did to
Jews. Those are completely separate events...[It’s] just unfortunate that the two people who are in this messy conflict now one of them is completely screwed up by the Holocaust (%laughs%). You know?

I feel...that when the country of Israel started it was three years after the Holocaust, it was very fresh in everybody’s mind and Jews were seeing themselves as weak, as being weak for centuries and they were determined to never be weak again...[T]hat’s how they started the Sabra...[T]he whole thing was to build strong Jew who is no longer stepped on...which Jews were for hundreds and hundreds of year. Anti-Semitism is very, very real. So there was definitely a problem...[T]here were two...people that both had a real problem at the time. The...problem of Jewish refugees around the world...was very, very real and I believe Jews deserve to have a country and it’s just unfortunate the country they chose already had people in it (%laughs%).

Itai’s discussion of Israel’s use of the Holocaust begs the question: what, if anything, was he taught about the Nakba growing up?:

...[N]othing, it’s never mentioned! It’s the War of Independence, that’s it. What we learned is that as soon as the UN voted for us we were attacked by Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and...then we somehow managed to win...[T]hat’s what I was told.

In fact, it was not until Itai chose to educate himself about the conflict that he learned about the Nakba:

[I realized that was not the full narrative] when I became politically aware...politically active. I started searching for stuff...Israel has many leftist organizations...[T]here’s B’Tselem, there’s Zochrot. Zochrot is maybe the most amazing organization for that.

...[I]n Jerusalem there’s...many...houses that are some of the prettiest, most beautiful, gorgeous...I love architecture and I’ve always loved my city...I’m very local patriot...[S]ome of my favorite buildings, that are absolutely gorgeous, I never thought who lived [in] them before...how come we have them now, and where are the people that were here...

...[N]o Israeli thinks about that because...Israelis have always said...“Well we had homes in Poland and Germany and they were taken away from us too. And this is war! And this is what happens in war!”...[S]o it was all justified. But the people who were living in those houses are now less than an hour away! They’re in Gaza! And they still have the key! And they still have the deed for the house! And they’re

---

112 B’Tselem (“in the image of” in Hebrew), otherwise known as The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, is an Israeli independent, non-partisan, not for profit organization that not only documents and publicizes human rights violations, but also seeks to end the occupation. For more on B’Tselem, visit their website at http://www.btselem.org.
alive and they’re saying, “We are here!” So this very different than the people who took your homes in Germany and Poland [laughs].

Here I seek some clarification: did Itai’s political awakening happen before, during, or after his military service?:

...[T]here’s two separate things to being politically aware. First...when I went to the army and when I say I was a leftist what I mean is that I've already realized that Palestinians are people who deserve the same rights as me, which is a revolutionary thing to say in Israel because most people don’t see Palestinians as people at all...[A]nd even if they will not admit [it]...they never saw Palestinians as equal...[S]o I had that from childhood because I had parents who taught me to look at everybody as equal...[W]e had Palestinian friends and I used to go to Palestinian villages before the Hol... – before the Holocaust! (laughs) – before the Intifada...[E]very Friday we would go to Bethlehem to buy ham because there’s no ham in Jerusalem when I was a kid because it’s religious...Bethlehem is full of Christians and so we would go there to buy bacon and ham and I...saw Palestinians as regular people, which most Israelis grow up their entire life and they never see a Palestinian once! They only know them as the people who try to stab us in the back. They never see them, whereas I grew up going to Palestinian weddings and seeing who Palestinians are...[S]o that was...[the]...advantage of my education over many Israelis. [Nevertheless] I still thought that they all fled in 1948. I still never wondered who lived in those houses before. I still felt that Jews had no choice to do what they did in 1948. All that happened to me years later...

Thus, it was only years after he completed his military service that Itai learned about the Nakba – a significant moment of political awakening, which he still remembers:

It was shocking. I do remember seeing an interview...Zochrot did with a Palmach warrior...[T]here’s two separate things to being politically aware. First...when I went to the army and when I say I was a leftist what I mean is that I've already realized that Palestinians are people who deserve the same rights as me, which is a revolutionary thing to say in Israel because most people don’t see Palestinians as people at all...[A]nd even if they will not admit [it]...they never saw Palestinians as equal...[S]o I had that from childhood because I had parents who taught me to look at everybody as equal...[W]e had Palestinian friends and I used to go to Palestinian villages before the Hol... – before the Holocaust! (laughs) – before the Intifada...[E]very Friday we would go to Bethlehem to buy ham because there’s no ham in Jerusalem when I was a kid because it’s religious...Bethlehem is full of Christians and so we would go there to buy bacon and ham and I...saw Palestinians as regular people, which most Israelis grow up their entire life and they never see a Palestinian once! They only know them as the people who try to stab us in the back. They never see them, whereas I grew up going to Palestinian weddings and seeing who Palestinians are...[S]o that was...[the]...advantage of my education over many Israelis. [Nevertheless] I still thought that they all fled in 1948. I still never wondered who lived in those houses before. I still felt that Jews had no choice to do what they did in 1948. All that happened to me years later...

Thus, it was only years after he completed his military service that Itai learned about the Nakba – a significant moment of political awakening, which he still remembers:

It was shocking. I do remember seeing an interview...Zochrot did with a Palmach warrior113...and he describes how they went to those villages and usually the men would run away when they saw them coming and they’d leave only women and children in the village...[T]hen they would surround the village and start shooting in the air...and get closer and closer shooting in the air until the women and children will flee as well...[T]hen they burnt down all the huts and they burnt the entire village...[I]n the few cases where people did not run away they shot them and killed them...[H]e describes how those people were the absolute poorest of the poor. They didn't have walls. They were living in mud huts. They certainly didn't have any communication, any way of uniting against the Jews. They were not a national movement. They were just scattered villages...[W]e was never told that.

113 Itai is referring to the testimony of Amnon Neumann. Video of Neumann’s testimony, as well as accompanying English and Hebrew transcripts, can be accessed at http://zochrot.org/en/video/53135. Zochrot’s full archive of testimonies from both Jewish fighters and Nakba survivors is available at http://zochrot.org/en/testimony/all.
...[T]he other thing that I didn’t know – and that’s just from reading, I just went back and reread history books more carefully – is that there were six month...or more between...[I] think it was from September 1947 until May 1948 really...between the Jews started killing all the Palestinians *(laughs)* or...conquering the land, *until* all those Arab nations attacked. So by the time all those Arabs countries attacked us, most of the damage was already done. They were way too late coming to defend their Palestinian friends, which is another *whole* problem. The Palestinians have *always* been screwed by everyboby around them...Jordanians *don’t care* about Palestinians...Egyptians *don’t care* about Palestinians, as you can see now with what they’re doing to the tunnels in Gaza, right? Egypt could have *easily* given food to Gaza and helped Gazans and they *don’t*...

I bring our discussion back to the photo album and the images it contains. Although Itai does not have children, I am still curious how he thinks these photographs might move through his family. Does he think they will be important to later generations? What, if anything, would he tell his children about these photographs and his experiences?:

...[T]hese photographs are my childhood and my childhood had to do with the army too. Those are inseparable...I don’t try to ignore that, it’s part of my past. It’s not...something that I’m proud of, it’s not something that I would do again if I had a chance, but it formed me as a man. It made me who I am right now. *(Clears throat)* It made me believe all those things I’m telling you now about the conflict. It made me feel so strongly about the conflict that I’m trying to write a play about it and do anything that I can do in order to change things. So I’m not gonna hide them or anything...they are my life.

Given the significant meaning that these photographs have for Itai, I ask if he might use these images and the experiences he associates with them to teach his future children or younger siblings about the lessons he has learned through his own political awakening:

I don’t know. I mean...I’m trying...I have little nieces and nephews [who still live in Israel] that I educate at times...I think any time anybody talks to me about this I say the truth. I say what I think happened and how I acted and how long it took me to realize what is really happening...I think that’s what happened to many, many Israelis who...for many years felt that they were victims and then realized that they are the bullies and they’re no longer the victim. So...I’m not sure what significance these photos will have to be honest. I think it’s formative of my childhood...my youth.

Rather than push Itai to speculate further, I ask him if he ever hear different narratives of either the Holocaust or the Nakba: “The Nakba was *never* mentioned in any
way. And the Holocaust...is there more than one more narrative?...[As] I said...I feel like Jews use the Holocaust, sometime subconsciously, in order to justify what they are doing right now.” Thus, regardless of the growing movement of Israelis who have experienced the same political awakening as him, Itai is not optimistic that the discourse around the Holocaust in Israel will ever change:

I wish I could tell you yes, but no, I really don't. I was part of that movement. I support them every time I go to Israel...I go to demonstrations...[Y]ou know, [I] was just there a month ago and I was in a big demonstration. I go and do tours in the Occupied Territories...I do anything I can to support the leftist movement, but there is no left left. There is a tiny, tiny minority of people who are considered fanatics...by the mainstream. So, no, I don’t see change coming from the inside of Israel, no, I don't. I’m very pessimistic.

The only thing Itai feels might eventually break the stalemate of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is if the global community does more to hold Israel accountable for its actions, yet he also acknowledges that such efforts simply put Israel on the defensive. His predictions for the region are tremendously bleak:

Like I said, I’m very pessimistic. I think...more and more people around the world see Israel like South Africa used to be viewed.114 I think if there were sanctions like the ones that there were on South Africa, if Israeli military men would start getting arrested and trialed by international courts, maybe if there was such a movement – which I don’t see ever happening because there are so many powerful Jews around (laughs) the world who would prevent that from happening – but if that was ever to happen then maybe Israelis would go, “Hey, why do people think that we’re like South Africa?”

But I really feel like everything the world is doing only puts Israelis more into their corner. They only feel more like it's us against the world. They only feel more like victims. And if you ask me what is going to happen, I think there will be horrible bloodshed and the two people will just kill each other. I think that's where we're heading...[S]oon there will be more Palestinians than Jews and in fifty years...they will outnumber the Jews by significant number and then you will be a minority of people who are controlling the majority with force, which is not the case now. Now it's about 50/50. When I was a kid we were the majority who were oppressing a minority, soon it will be a minority that's oppressing a majority and that will not last.

I talked to a...Middle Eastern studies professor and asked him...“How’s this gonna end?”...[H]e said, “Well what do you mean? We're gonna to

lose.” I said, “What do you mean we’re gonna to lose?” He said, “Oh Jews cannot sustain this land. The Jews cannot hold this land.”...I said, “But what we have all the power in the world. We have nuclear weapons. We can destroy the world if we want to (laughing). What do you mean? How could we not? How will we lose?” And he said, “You know the Crusaders were in Jerusalem for three hundred years. If you were born a hundred [or two hundred] years into the Crusaders you thought that Jerusalem was always Christian and it will always be Christian...Now most people don’t even know that it ever happened. It’s a blip on history. The Crusaders couldn’t hold it. Why do you think white people can come into the Middle East and control a region...Europeans to control local people. Nobody can hold this land. The Jews will lose.” So if you think of it like that, you can see why Bibi Netanyahu wants to bomb Iran because it’s like, “I’m gonna take as many of them with me as I can before they kill me.”...I’m afraid that that’s where we’re heading.

Thinking ahead to the federal Israeli election scheduled to take place just a few weeks after our interview, Itai is certain governmental changes will not be forthcoming:

It’s all constantly goes right, all the time...[W]hen I was a kid...there was always 50/50, no side could ever form a government. It seemed like half of the country was for peace and the other country was against peace...Now the right is huge majority. The left is tiny, tiny, tiny. And most people who say they are left, are not left at all, they’re rightwing or center...I know a lot of people who would say that they are leftists who would tell you that Palestinians should have a country, but that’s just because they hate them so much they wanna be separated from them. There’s very few people...who actually see Palestinians as equal, very, very few.

I struggle to reconcile Itai’s highly pessimistic outlook with his professional artist practice, which includes writing and performing plays that directly address the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Seeking some kind of clarity I ask him why he bothers doing this work if he is so pessimistic: “Because what is there to do (laughing)? What, do you give up? Because I have a moral obligation. Because I served in the army for three years and I participated in oppressing Palestinians.” To provide the other participants some context, I encourage Itai to discuss This is Not a Conversation, a play he wrote and continues to perform with our mutual Palestinian friend Dima Alansari:

...Jews, in particular, feel that they can never criticize...Israel, that dirty laundry should be laundered inside. And I think that’s horribly wrong (laughs) and that if you love Israel that’s why you should criticize it

---

115 In this election, which was held on March 17, 2015, Netanyahu’s Likud party retained their power by winning 30 seats in the Knesset.

116 This play can be viewed online in its entirety at https://vimeo.com/209683020.
more...[E]ven as a Jew I feel (laughs) like – given the Holocaust, given all the history that happened to Jews – Jews should know more than anybody how to treat other people (laughs)...[S]o I want to make a play that shows people that it’s okay to criticize Israel. If I’m Israeli and...Jewish and everybody I love is there, nobody can blame me for being anti-Semite. I am Jewish more than anybody...[I]f I can criticize Israel, then so can you...I feel that the more we tell people about the atrocities that happened in Palestine then it’s good, then...more people know, then maybe we can shift something in the public opinion in the world...I feel like I have a moral obligation of telling people what I saw, what is happening in Palestine, what Israelis are doing. But on the other hand I feel like...I wanna make a play that makes it okay for Jews to criticize Israel...because...that’s the only thing I can do.

Photograph #1117

117 This is the photograph of Itai and his mother, which he discussed, but was unable to locate, during our first interview. Interestingly, when Itai emailed this image to me it was labeled
Aware that Itai has also written and performed a play about his late mother, I am reminded that during our first conversation about this project he had immediately mentioned a photograph of him and her (see Photograph #1), which he wanted to share with the other participants, yet he has yet to show or address it. When I inquire about this photograph, he begins searching his apartment for it, but is unable to locate it before the end of our interview. Nonetheless, he briefly speaks to the photograph’s significance:

Yeah, that’s the first one that came to mind because I...found it when I was doing this play about my mother and [she] was...sort of the most dominant women in my life. I was very close to my mother. And then when I found that photo I...saw that I have a gun and...she’s hugging me and she’s so proud of me...I considered not going to the army before and my mother sort of talked me into going because she felt that if I’m a citizen of Israel then I should not be a parasite...for the same reason I mentioned. She said, “If you go then you can make sure that...there’s no atrocities happening...you can be the...good man there.”

Having addressed all of Itai’s chosen photographs and the postmemories that they signify, I turn to anticipatory questions. What does Itai want the other participants to learn or understand about him and/or his family?:

I think it’s all obvious and I think they probably know it already, but that...there’s a lot of good people who were put in impossible circumstances...[I]t sounds like a bad excuse, and maybe it is, but...it’s just so complicated, it’s not black and white at all...

...I support the Palestinians and I sort of feel...there’s...one side that has everything and one side that has nothing. But there are still many people on the other side who want to kill Jews...with all the horrible things that we’ve done to Gaza over the years...with all the siege and the horrible bombings and the war and stuff. I still don’t understand

“Poisoned1.” While writing this chapter I offered Itai the opportunity to address the file’s name: “It’s ironic that the photo name was poisoned. That’s the temporary title of a play I’m working on, about the army. I guess I used that photo when working on that show once. Poisoned is army slang for people who are really into it, gung ho about the army.” Note that the name of the file and Itai’s explanation where not provided to the other participants.

Itai admits that once he decided to share his photo album he stopped searching for the photograph of himself and his mother. Furthermore, while he is searching for the image in question he comes across a box containing more photographs from his service. As he looks through them he shows the camera three photographs — one of his officer who accidentally shot his soldier in the back and was subsequently kicked out of the army, one of the door to door combat location where Itai accidentally shot his friend in the foot during training, and one of a friend of his during his army service. Given that Itai did not choose these particular images for the project, plus the fact that they did not elicit any additional postmemories of the Holocaust, I did not have Itai scan them to be shared with his fellow participants. With that said, the images are clearly visible in the video.
why [Palestinians] have to spend all the money that they have on buying more missiles instead of buying medicines or food. I still feel like it’s so tragic that [they] never managed to unite. That is, in a way, always been the tragedy of the left...[T]he right is always so good at getting united and the left, it never is. And so if Palestinians could only unite and not listen to the extremists and not be religious (laughs) and not...then...(trails off and slaps his knee)

This is sounding horrible because I am the oppressing side. I am from the side who does all the horrible things and so it’s not my job to tell them what they should do different...which a lot of Israelis do all the time. I worry about the Israeli side. I’ll let the Palestinians worry about the Palestinian side.

So I just want them to know that... – and I’m sure they know this (laughs) – not all Israelis are racist...just like not all Palestinians are. And it’s just...a conflict between two sides that both have a...claim on the land and that both...in 1947 had nothing. And yeah, no everything I say, like I said...I don’t feel like it’s my place.

Finding his response somewhat confusing, I try to clarify – is his message to the Palestinian participants that Israelis have to make hard choices when put in difficult situations?:

...[W]hich is obvious, but also...when I say that I feel like I was brainwashed and lied to I don’t think that that’s...some evil people who decide to brainwash the people. I think that’s how Jews see it because they felt like victims because they were victim for so many hundreds and hundreds of years...[M]y family fled to South America because of pogroms in Russia...[T]hen when my mother went to school, when she was a kid...she sent home because they told her that her grandparents [or ancestors] killed Jesus Christ...and that Jews put the blood of Christian children in the matza.119 This is [what] my mother was told...as a kid, you know? So anti-Semitism is real. And it’s unfortunate that the hatred toward Jews...has now created this impossible situation (laughs) for Palestinians, but that situation is also real.

So it’s just...really complicated and...most people in Israel are not evil. There are definitely bad people. The settlers are bad. There are rightwing fanatics, Jews who thinks the Messiah is gonna come tomorrow, who are willing to do anything and they are evil, but they’re a tiny minority. Majority of Israelis are good people who just wanna live their lives just like Palestinians do and they have been exhausted by this conflict, completely exhausted.

And, you know, just before I came here in the ‘90s there were many, many, many buses blowing up in Jerusalem and I personally know people who lost family members in terror attacks and almost every

---

119 Here Itai is referring to the anti-Semitic legend of blood libel. For more on this legend, see Alan Dundes’ (1991) edited volume The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore.
Israeli does...[S]o this very violent conflict...has exhausted the left in Israel. And again it...all sounds like excuses, but...the reality is really quite complicated. (*Laughs.*)

Similar to Ran, Itai notes the way religion complicates the conflict and addresses the ever-present fear of annihilation and its impact on Israelis’ willingness to engage and/or negotiate with Palestinians. When I clarify his desire for the Palestinians participants to walk away with an understanding of the complexity of the conflict for Israelis, particularly given their experience with historical and contemporary anti-Semitism, he restates his pessimism:

I wish I could give them some hope...but that doesn’t seem likely cause I’m not very hopeful myself. But, I mean, the nice thing that I could have come up with is that there are...Jews who see things their way and there are people who (*laughs*) know that what is happening is wrong, you know? But I’m very pessimistic.

After reassuring Itai that his recognition will mean something to many Palestinians, I inquire about how he is feeling about the opportunity to hear the other participants’ stories and view their associated photographs. Although he is looking forward to the opportunity, he is not certain that he will be surprised by what he hears and sees, as he has spoken with Palestinians throughout his life. While Itai has discussed his reasons for continuing his own artistic practice despite his pessimism, I ask him why he chose to participate in this project specifically. He reiterates that he feels he has a moral obligation to Palestinians – an obligation he feels extends to me:

*[W]ell, I don’t have many hopes...[but] like I said, I feel like I have a moral obligation to do whatever I can and this is my small part of trying...Even if...you as a Palestinian get something out of this then it’s my duty to try to help you. And that’s all. (*Laughs.*)

At this point, our interview comes to a rapid close, as Itai is very quick to express his interest in watching all of the other participants’ videos and viewing their associated photographs, watching his fellow participants’ reflective interviews, and meeting each of them face to face.
This page is from the same photo album as album pages #1 and #2. Although Itai did not specifically discuss these photographs during our interview, he did pass along a scan of this album page to share with his fellow participants, hence its inclusion in this chapter. Itai appears in three of the five images wearing a red and blue plaid shirt. Again because Itai scanned these album pages himself, I did not edit them prior to sharing them with the other participants or including them in this chapter, hence the uncropped edges.
Ofira Roll

Ofira was born in 1975 in Nahariya, which is located in northern Israel on the border with Lebanon. On January 28, 2015, the date of our first interview, she was thirty-nine years old. She is the only Israeli participant who is of North African, rather than European, decent. In August 2003, six months after getting married, Ofira and her husband, Ido, left Israel and moved to Pittsburgh so the latter could pursue his PhD. Six years later the couple, along with their then two-year-old daughter, moved to Canada. Like Ran and Itai, during fieldwork and the early writing stages Ofira was the only member of her family who lived outside of Israel, but would often return to visit. However, Ofira, her husband, and their children moved back to Israel in August 2019. Thus, she is only one of two participants who has left the diaspora and returned to the region. At the time of our interview her youngest son, Yuval, was only four months old and still breastfeeding. As such, he is present and within the camera’s view throughout the entirety of our interview.

Our first interview takes place in Ofira’s living room. She is seated on the couch with Yuval cradled in her arms and her chosen photographs sitting in a loose stack to her right. Within moments of the camera rolling, Ofira begins sharing multiple detailed stories in response to even the simplest of questions. For instance, when I ask her where she was born she notes that Nahariya is located in the Galilee, a region populated by a mix of Arabs and Jews. Unlike Ran and Itai who only periodically had contact with Palestinians during their youth, Ofira explains how living in the Galilee had a profound affect on her understanding of the similarities and differences between Arabs and Jews:

...[T]he Galilee is kind of a place that it’s really mixed, Arabs and Jews, so growing up I thought Arabs are cool, like us, because my mother used to be a nurse in Arab villages...[B]ut slowly, slowly growing up I got all the hints why they are different and we are different and we should be separated because there were no Arabs in my class. I had one friend that her father was Arab and mother Jew, I think, and she was in our school. It was “Whoo, whoo!”...[I]t was big deal...

...[T]he big encounter that I remember...was that when I was in third grade or so I had a friend, Olla, and [she] was from a village in the north where my mother was nurse, and we were good friends...[O]ne day Olla invited me to her house and my mother said, “Yes, of course you can go. I know this family.” And I went in the village and I went to their house and they host me like a queen. Was beautiful, beautiful, beautiful...[T]hen I returned to the clinic of my mother and I said,
“Wow! Her family are so beautiful! They really look like my cousin.” And my mom looked at me and said, *(sternly in a lowered voice)* “Don’t say it again.” And I said, “Why? They are so beautiful.” And she said, *(again sternly in a lowered voice)* “Don’t compare between Jews and Arabs. And don’t say to your cousin.” Because my cousin grew up in a much more Orthodox Jew family and she thought that her brother would take it really hard that I compare her, his daughter, to Arabs. But I remember that moment was like…impact on your skin *(hits the top of her left hand with her right fist)*, you know? Like I just felt like “Doo, doo, doom!” I should remember this moment. I really remember that then it was like, “This makes sense to me that it’s them and us. There is separation between humans.” And from then, I must say, that it just continued with me.

Interesting enough, now when I think about it, talking *(laughing)* about memory…the cousin I compared her to was killed in terror attack later on. Really interesting connection…I just realized…[S]he was like twelve…almost thirteen years old, when she was killed. So it’s really interesting that the one that I compared to [Arabs]…end up was killed…[L]ike interesting…I’m…surprised.

The connection Ofira makes between her childhood experience and the death of her cousin is remarkable. I make a note to return to this issue later in our interview and continue with my introductory questions. For example, why did she and Ido decide not to return to Israel? Ofira notes that the reason they moved to Canada from Pittsburgh was a combination of her not wanting to raise her daughter in Israel, as well as her desire to pursue her own PhD. However, it was not until she became pregnant with her first son that the decision not to return to Israel was truly solidified:

It was from the belly. It wasn’t from the head…I remember when my son, my second child, was in my tummy…here in Vancouver. When we went to the first ultrasound…they find out if it’s a boy or a girl…[W]hen [the technician]…said “It’s a boy” I start crying, but real cry. And she said, *(in an empathetic voice)* “Oh! I’m sorry did you want a girl?” And I said, “No, actually I really don’t care…I’m sad because it means that we are not going back to Israel.” She just didn’t understand what I’m talking about. Because I knew that my daughter could avoid military service, but my son it’s much harder in the Israeli society…[T]hat moment she said, “It’s a boy,” *(snaps fingers)* the clicks *(snaps fingers)* in my head is like *(snaps fingers)* “He’s going to be a soldier *(snaps fingers)*. He’s going to…die and I’m not *(snaps fingers)* going to let it be.” *(Snaps fingers)* And just done. “Goodbye Israel.” It was like “Cha, cha, cha, cha,” like moments, seconds.

I just realized that I don’t want to raise my kids there…[W]hen people like to say ”Is it final decision?…Like did you decide to immigrate for good?”…I say, “You know what I’m a nomadic. I don’t know.” I’m just…moving with what we really feel at the moment and right now I don’t feel like raising my kids there. And it breaks my heart because I
come from a really beautiful family, beautiful big tribe and lots of love...My mother's family is from Morocco, so it's kind of like Arabs' hospitalities and like food and celebrations and everything. And my father's family is from Tunisia. So I really grew up with big family, supportive, loving, everything and just leaving them behind for this conflict is really...hard. (Very quietly) It's really hard.

Given that Ran and Itai's discussions of their experience in the IDF did not address gender, and the fact that Ofira is the study’s only female Israeli participant, I ask her why she felt that her daughter would be better able to avoid mandatory army service versus her son. Her response not only speaks to the gendered nature of the IDF, but her use of language, as well as her political views, are strikingly similar to Itai's:

In my generation it was harder to know that it's a possibility, but nowadays many, many females just said like that they are Orthodox, for example, so you are free to go without any problems...[Y]ou can say that...[you] don't feel like. You can make many, many reasons, really like...not real ones and they get accepted if you're a women. But for males it's really problematic because they want all males to go through the army. It's kind of the...system that keeps everyone involved in the mission of keeping Israel safe and all this, but it's brainwashed like for the society...[E]veryone needs to go through it and if you don’t go through it, you’re not part of the society.

121 For more on the gendered nature of the IDF and women’s role within it, see Tami Amanda Jacoby's (2005) Women in Zones of Conflict: Gender Structures and Women’s Resistance in Israel.
[I]t takes me to...a picture of my ex-boyfriend (holds up photograph #1)...[I]t’s...a holiday, [Purim],\textsuperscript{122} that you dress up for, and I was (making air quotes) “an angel” and he was...like soldier. But look at that (pointing to her ex-boyfriend’s clothing) he’s a soldier half way and citizen half way...with the jeans...[T]his guy didn’t serve the army...I remember when I was his girlfriend I was kind of embarrassed to have this picture in my album because it was saying, “My boyfriend is not part of the society.” You get it? So it’s really interesting that for years I kind of didn’t like this picture to be there.

But I must say that that day when he...decided to dress up like that I said, “Ooo, maybe I should question all this military idea,” [be]cause it never occurred to me. I just thought it’s part of life, and you have to do it. As you crawl, you walk, you talk...you go to the military...[W]hen you grow up in Israeli Jewish schools most of the conversation is not like, “When you finish high school what do you do?” it’s like “When you finish army what do you do?” Army is part of the routine. It’s like elementary, secondary, high school, military then...[many] of the people go travel...I think to heal themselves from the experience and then come back to college.

\textbf{Photograph #2}

\textsuperscript{122} The Jewish holiday of Purim commemorates Mordecia and Esther saving the Jewish people from Haman who was trying to kill them – a story found in the Book of Esther. Considered a day of deliverance, the celebration of Purim entails several traditions, one of which is dressing in costumes. For more on the celebration of Purim, as well as its relationship to urban Zionism, see Shoham’s (2014) \textit{Carnival in Tel Aviv: Purim and the Celebration of Urban Zionism}. 

216
I am intrigued by Ofira’s discussion of the gendered nature of the Israeli military, particularly the increased stigma associated with males who do not serve. This leads to a discussion of the unique position she held in the army during her two-year service:

...I was not typical women in the army, like I was...a tank instructor (holds up photograph #2123)...[M]ost of women in the army serve as tea maker...like serve the officers, the males...It’s really chauvinist society and...system...I was a tank instructor and I remember it was such an empowering experience in the society as a strong women..."I know to fix...it more than you, males...I’m going to get stuck with you in the desert and I’m going to fix it and you’re going to learn from me and I’m going to teach you driving...” You know?

So I feel that the military service it’s something that really helps the society to keep women in a not good position in the society because...the society is just build up based on the military, right?...[B]ut nowadays it’s a little bit...people say better. I don’t think it’s better (laughs) because women get positions...like pilot and stuff like that and fighters. I prefer not to (laughing). I prefer to break down the military. You know what I mean? But I feel that...at least if the society is stuck with all this hierarchical like men and women, I prefer women to be equal in the [military] system...if...if! [But] I prefer to break it down (laughs).

Having clarified some of the gendered issues within the IDF, I return to Ofira’s decision not to return to Israel. I am interested to know if her, Ido, and the kids would move back if military service was not mandatory. Although she never directly answers my question, her lengthy and nuanced response addresses several related and highly significant issues. She begins by explaining that she and Ido had extremely different upbringings:

...[H]e’s really the original reason we were away because...all his life [he] was a peace activist...[and] grew up in Jerusalem...[H]e says his childhood is like you finish school and you decide if you go to this side of the sidewalk protest or...this side of the side[walk] protest. He really protest all his life...[T]his wasn’t my childhood...[H]e was really politically involved...early, early in his life. And I grew up...really not politically engaged...Really north, small city, like it was...almost a village, but (laughs) a small city and really homogenic (sic) in a way...[O]nly when I moved to Tel Aviv, to the army service, I encounter many things...[like] disequality (sic) and...hatred. Like it was really meeting the reality...only later like...around eighteen years old. So before that it was hidden kind of for me.

______________________________

123 Ofira is second from the left, facing the camera.
Yet it was not just “the Arabs’ narrative” that was hidden from Ofira. Her parents hid their stories from her as well. Here she returns to the lessons her parents taught her about the separation between Arabs and Jews, as well as her cousin’s untimely death:

I grew up knowing that we are all tzbars [which is]...the cactus...[I]t’s the image of the...new Israeli...So [in] the name of the new Israeli you need to give up all your traditions or history or narrative, right? It doesn’t matter if you came from the Holocaust, from Poland...you came from Europe or came from North Africa, you just forget about it and just like become the new Israeli. So forget about your narrative.

So imagine that I grew up...believing that we are all the same. Like it’s really naïve perspective, I would say. [My parents] didn’t put so much hatred in me, but at the same time moments like the one with Olla...and then losing my cousin. I think losing my cousin was the biggest shift in my life...[B]ack then I didn’t know...

Her cousin’s death signified a moment of political awakening for Ofira – one not shared or appreciated by her family:

[F]or years the trauma of the [entire] family...taught me that I don’t want to continue doing it to any person...[F]rom then I stopped looking at this side or this side of the conflict. It’s one side. It’s...one story of a conflict of people that just learned to hate each other...not listen to each other, and not knowing about each other. And I don’t want to continue it because [of] the suffering of my family. I kept saying – and it was really, really not respected in my family – ..."[W]hy should we continue this hatred? Like imagine...our family is broken for one! Imagine all these Palestinians losing more than one in one family."

Ofira's humanistic political views continue to cause tension between her and her parents, as well as other Israelis, including her ex-boyfriend pictured in photograph #2:

...[M]y parents all the time laugh at me saying that I care more about Palestinians than Jews...And I said, “No! I care about the people that suffer.”...[E]ven now in the last attack in Gaza, people said it was a war. It wasn’t a war from my perspective it was attack. Right? And in this attack (clears throat)...so many kids died, but nobody knew their names...I put on Facebook...a post that just B’Tselem put out with names...[J]ust the kids of Gaza have names. That’s all...[T]hey just saying, “Mohammad is dead, 4 years old, da, da, da...”...[L]ike just that, no pictures, no blood...People like to complain about “These bloody picture” that they are fake...I said, “No! Let’s put names.” This is fact right from B’Tselem. People were so mad at me. And many people really attacked me on Facebook and asked me to take them down. Even this guy (holds up photograph #1) that was my ex [who] you would expect...to be much more peaceful. He said, “No! Now we are under attack. Now it’s wartime. You can’t put us under judgment of the world.” And I said, “Excuse me. When two soldiers died we all
knew their names, their families’ history, their girlfriend friend name.” Like we knew everything, all details you could have about these three or two soldiers we knew. But what about these children? They don’t have life? They don’t have names? What’s the difference?

So this was the conversation that I keep having. Instead of putting effort on the details of the (in deep, authoritative voice) “Who killed in this war? And who wanted this land?” or whatever, all these political conversations, I’m saying like, “Give me names of all these people. Who are these humans that were born?” We were all born the same, from one mother, one day. Right? Doesn’t matter [where you are] from...like how you were born, but it’s like all of us have one mother that gave birth to us...like all of us, and it doesn’t matter what’s your history, what’s your story.

The tension between Ofira and her parents recently came to a head over her acknowledgement of and desire to learn more about the Nakba – something her parents associate with hatred for Israel and disrespect toward the Holocaust:

...I remember last visit in Israel I went to [a] Zochrot...event. I’m an adult! Almost forty years old! Right? Mother of two back then, now three. You can’t believe...how mad my parents were when they found out that I went to this event. What’s this event? One academic talked about his research in the US related to Nakba. Imagine! So they were so mad at me...[L]ike my parents...talk with me about everything...but that time for a week or so in our visit they almost avoid talking with me real conversations. One day I said, “...Can you tell me what happened? I feel like really bad vibes. What’s going on?” And they said, (in a deep, quiet, and serious voice) “We should sit down and talk, Ofira. You passed the limit.” I said, “What?” Like I never...remember them talking to me like that...[W]e...waited for the night, the kids went to sleep, and my partner was there too, and they said, (in a quiet and serious voice) “We have to talk. Your hate towards Israel is too much. Like you really passed the limit.” And I said, “What are you talking about?” (Laughing.) I really didn’t connect the dots...[T]hey said, “Oh...you act as you don’t know, but you know what we’re talking about.” I said, “I don’t know. Really? [Did I] do something? Did I post something on Facebook that you’re mad at?” And they said, “Where did you go on Tuesday night?” And I don’t remember because it was busy, busy...I said, “When I was in Tel Aviv?” I tried to connect. And they said, “Yes.” [I] said, “Zochrot event?” They said, “Yes. We heard from your sister that you went to a

---

Ofira is referring to the abduction and murder of three Israeli teens, Eyal Yifrach, Gilad Shaar, and Naftali Fraenkel, in June 2014, which resulted in fifty days of conflict between the IDF and Palestinians living in Gaza. According to B'Tselem (2016b), over the course of seven weeks 2,202 Palestinians were killed – 1,391 of which did not participate in the fighting and 546 of which were minors. In addition, approximately 18,000 homes were seriously damaged or destroyed and more than 100,000 Palestinians were made homeless. Furthermore, 63 Israeli soldiers and five civilians were killed. Additional information regarding both Palestinian and Israeli fatalities, including the victims’ names, can be found at http://www.btselem.org/2014_gaza_conflict/en/.
Zochrot event and we are (again in a deep, quiet, and serious voice) really mad at it. Did you check their website?"...I said, “Yes. I’m really proud of this [organization] actually...because I grew up not knowing about the Nakba and I think it’s really crucial to know about the Nakba. If we know about the Holocaust so much, we need to know about the Nakba.” And they say, (in a quiet, angry voice) “Do you compare between the Holocaust and the Nakba? Ofira...we don’t know if we can continue this conversation.”

Sharing this story causes Ofira to reflect on the generational differences between her and her parents, as well as the dangers of acquiescing to master narratives and collective memories:

...[F]or me it was the same time shocking, the same time not...because I felt like...sometimes...you need to go away from your puddle to see that you are in a puddle. You know?...[S]o many times I forgive my parents’ generation because they grew up with hate, because they ran away, because someone tried to kill my father’s father [in Tunisia] and someone tried to kill my mother’s father in Morocco...around ‘48, when Israel was established...I can relate to their pain, [but] at the same time I’m new generation. I need to take responsibility for my life and for their life (she points to Yuval)...[T]his earth is such a small place, why continue killing?...Why not just being with each other? Like I just look at the globe here (points to the globe that is in the living room, but out of the camera’s view) and I just...can’t understand when people continue with these conflicts – everywhere, not just in Israel – they just continue this hatred for no good reason...[P]eople just connect to their own narratives and they just build upon it so many things and I just don’t understand. I really don’t understand.
This reminds Ofira of her experience living with a German roommate whose father was a Nazi. This roommate, pictured alongside Ofira in photograph #3, “decided to move to Israel for a year or two just to live as roommate with Israeli Jews to experience reconciliation in a way, but on a personal level.” Although this woman struggled to find Israelis willing to live with her, Ofira felt it was an “honour”:

I told my other roommate, “I think it’s a good idea. This will be good chance for us to meet someone from Germany that actually maybe has stories to share with us to relearn our history.” Because we learned history from really one (laughing) perspective, like a really concrete narrative that someone created for us...I used to think history is history, but it’s not, it’s someone’s narrative about the history.

Interestingly, Ofira goes on to describe how listening to German actually triggers an embodied response related to the Holocaust: “When I hear German something clicks...like...“Be careful!”...[I]t’s embodied memory of movies of the Holocaust...[L]ike all the German you hear in Israel it’s relate to Holocaust movies.” And yet Ofira would ask her roommate to speak German so she could re-experience the visceral response it created in her body when she was young:

I grew up not with so much Holocaust stories around me...[I]t was just school thing for me, like I heard it at school a lot...[M]y parents had so much respect towards this time in history...[T]hey just say...“We never compare anything to Holocaust,” and “Holocaust is a horrible piece of history of our identity”...[I]t was really kind of from a holy, respectful way of looking at things. So for me it was untouched kind of. But at school and movies and ceremonies, right? It’s schools and Scouts and...Holocaust Day, and lots of movies. The Day of Holocaust, in Israel, all day there are movies, all, all, day movies, [in school and] also on TV. Everywhere, everything is about the Holocaust, twenty-four hours...So many times I remember myself watching these things and...at one point you hear German and the German associate with really bad things. So it’s really...you embody it. It’s like with Arabic...How many times in my life...I heard Arabic but...in the news...they put all this extremist that shout whatever they shout. So that’s the image you have...[T]hat’s the embodied experience you have. [T]hat’s the memory you have from hearing Arabic.

---

125 At this point, Yuval beings to cry loudly so we decide to stop the camera for a few minutes so she can nurse him. Off camera Ofira states that she is fine breastfeeding on camera, but is concerned that other participants, particularly the men, might find watching her breastfeed uncomfortable or embarrassing. At her suggestion, we decide that a good compromise is for her to cover Yuval and her breast with a throw pillow as he nurses. This way Yuval is content and settled, we can continue the interview without interruption, and any participant who might feel uncomfortable about her breastfeeding doesn’t have to watch. Once she has placed the pillow, I turn the camera back on and we continue our interview.
While Ofira admits that she still has a visceral response to hearing Arabic, she also positively associates the language with her maternal grandmother:

...[L]uckily my grandma still spoke Moroccan Arabic sometimes...[P]eople really all the time told her, “We’re in Israel speak Hebrew”...so she knew that she suppose not to. So we didn’t grow up knowing lots of Arabic...it wasn’t like something that was part of our lives. At the same time...in our wedding when we chose the deejay...she ask us about many Arabic songs because she knew that my background is from Morocco and Tunisia...I grew up hiding this piece of my life so...I was afraid from Ido’s family what...they would think about me and my family if we choose these songs. But I was so happy we chose this deejay...she said, (in a low and enthusiastic voice) “No! We should put several songs for your grandma...to celebrate...” And...I looked at Ido...and he said, “Of course!” He loves anything that comes from my family. And...I remember in the wedding...she put towards the end...songs like (starts singing) “Habibi, ya a’ny”[126] like all these, (in a hushed voice) and my grandma like stood up – and she’s old and fat and like real grandma...in the image of grandma from Morocco – ...and start putting her hands up and started dancing and we started dancing around her and it was like healing moment...I’m sure my partner’s family had problems, (whispers) but I didn’t care!

As Ofira continues to share stories about her grandmother, it becomes evident what a great impact she has had on Ofira’s political thinking, particularly with regard to the contending narratives and memories of the War of Independence and the Nakba:

...I remember one time, let’s say ten years ago or so, I came back from the US [where] I start like talking more with Palestinians and Lebanese and Egyptians and...many people from Middle East...I asked [my grandma] about her experience when she got her house in Akko and she said, “They have reasons to hate us.” And I said, “Who are they?” And she said, “Palestinians. Arabs.” And I said “Why?” And...if you would see her you would perceive her as rightwing because she’s Orthodox Jew...but...she said, “My best friends were Arabs, right? In Morocco. When we moved here to Akko I preferred to go to the Arabs section not the Jews section because I felt more relate like to their food, to their culture, to the souq[127]...everything. And they have reasons to hate us.” And I said, “Why do you say it?” And she said, “When I got my house in Akko I entered the house – I didn’t tell it many people – but I entered the house I saw food on the stove and laundry up in the air of people that ran away and I remember it forever this experience of receiving a house from someone that ran away like we ran away from Morocco.” She left like castles and everything. She said, “We ran away, but we made them run away, so we are equal and we should remember that.”

---

126 Habibi, ya a’ny means “my sweetheart, the apple of my eye” in Arabic.
127 Souq means “market” in Arabic.
...[F]rom then on I still have the memory of the moment when she said it. I imagined her house with laundry and food on the stove, you know?...I kept this memory with me as protection...[W]hen people say things...I [can] say, “You know what my grandma told me that actually...” You know? It’s like kind of connection to real experience...that is much stronger for me than any information I’ll receive...details...numbers or killing or how many people ran away. Doesn’t speak to me. But this this family ran away and this family gave their house to my grandma and she lived in that house for many years with lots of guilt, lots of guilt towards these people...[I]t’s funny because in Israel you call it “Arabs houses.” Arabs houses...I knew that my grandma lives in a Arab houses, but I thought it’s a design. You know what I mean? Because the design was Arab...you know like with arches and...beautiful floor. You know what I mean? Like Arab houses. But I think didn’t connect the dots as a kid that you mean actually Arabs’ houses, like someone’s lived here beforehand. I just didn’t know. All my life.

But I grew up with grandma that – like she’s still alive – I’m so proud of her because many times I feel that she really influence my thought about humanity in a really beautiful way, although I feel that she’s not free to share it with everyone. I feel she feels that with me and my partner she can share whatever she wants. She knows that we are different, like we just accept her stories.

Thus, like Itai, a significant moment in Ofira’s political awakening was the shocking realization that the phrase “Arabs houses” did not refer to Israeli made buildings of a particular architectural design, but rather buildings constructed and previously occupied by Palestinian Arabs who were displaced and dispossessed in 1948.

Leading from these stories I try to situate when her mother and father came to Israel and under what conditions. As it would turn out, although they were from Morocco and Tunisia respectively, rather than Europe, her parents also arrived in Israel by means of traumatic circumstances. The latter are not particularly clear, for as Ofira previously mentioned her parents hid their own narratives from her. Still, she shares what little she knows. With regard to her mother’s family, she believes they came to Israel around 1948 after having fled to France:

You can’t believe how many times I asked my mother about their story and she said, “Can you leave the past in the past?” Like Holocaust survivors that many of them didn’t talk. So I really grew up like not knowing at all. Now I start getting some pieces...Like my grandma just recently told us about the boats that they went [in when they fled]...when I talked with her about nursing...[S]he said that you were allowed to bring one child...to the boat so her friend nursed...my mom’s brother as if he is her son...[S]he didn’t have milk, but she had to
protect the baby so she nursed him and when they didn’t see, the people that worked on the boat, she brought him to nurse for real.

Here Ofira quickly notes the sacrifices her parents made to come to Israel before expanding on her father’s story:

That’s why for them, I think, accepting the fact that we live abroad is painful...They just say, “[Un]til we die we would not stop bothering you about it because we gave up on everything.” They left everything they had. [My mother’s family] took two suitcase with basic stuff so they can have food...and left behind everything. Houses, businesses, everything...because someone tried to kill...[my mother’s] father. In Tunisia the story was that an Arab friend...[of my paternal grandfather]...came from behind with [a big] knife and said, “You should go to your country. You should not stay here. You have no country, you should go” and...they just decided to leave right away...[So] my dad came later than the establishment of Israel...[He] actually came as a kid...not like two years old, [but] as a kid that stand up on his legs...and walks and studies...[I]magine what memories he has from this move...[He] arrived to the [Israeli] boarder and they told him, “What’s your name?” And he said, “Felix.” They said, “Felix don’t work here. You will be Israel.”...They wrote down, crossed his name and (in a hushed voice) “forget about your past.”

Suddenly Ofira is reminded of a photo book she created for her father’s seventieth birthday. Given that her hands are full with Yuval, she has me grab the book from a nearby bookshelf. When I hand it to her, she directs my attention to the book’s cover:

...I wrote here, in Hebrew, “From Felix, to Israel, to Daddy, to Grandpa. With love to you.” And...[his] [grandchildren]...said, “Felix!”...[T]hen he had to say a story about his childhood. So this picture (she starts flipping through pages of the album until she find the one she’s looking for) is when he moved to Israel. You see...he’s a kid...He arrived here as Felix, but forget about it...[F]orget about your life, you’re in a new place, you have a new name, just accept this culture, accept this place, learn Hebrew, and forget about everything. So my father like really never talked with us in Arabic...

Even the small amount of information Ofira has about the circumstances that brought her parents to Israel suggests that they consider the country a haven or refuge. Is it because of their respect and/or love for Israel that they consider Ofira’s

---

128 While the photo book can be seen in the video, Ofira did not feel that her family would be comfortable with the images being shared. As such, its contents were not scanned and shared with the other participants and, at Ofira’s request, any faces visible in the video were blurred.
acknowledgement of and interest in the Nakba disrespectful and/or an act of hatred toward Israel?:

Still up to this day they would say that whoever talks about Nakba is a hater...of Israel, is like against Israel. Who acknowledge the Nakba is...like it’s illegal. Basically in Israel now...there are many small grassroots movements...that talk about the Nakba and everything, but you should know in Israel it’s not common conversation. Nakba is not common term. Nowadays several extreme...teachers would mention it then they would get fired (laughing)...It’s not part of the narrative. I didn’t grow up with the word Nakba. I didn’t know Nakba. I didn’t know what is Nakba. I didn’t know it’s catastrophe. I didn’t know it’s the day of the Independent Day.

Having reflected on the development of her own political awakening and the impact that process has had on her relationship with her parents, Ofira shares several powerful stories, which demonstrate the lessons she has chosen to teach her own children, both with regard to their Jewish Israeli heritage and how that binds them to Palestinians, as well as other Arabs:

You know the other day...(laughs) – I’m laughing, but it’s kind of embarrassing – ...my daughter sat in this sofa (points to the sofa across the room), (laughs) and we talked something about Independent Day because we talked about flags...I said, “Yeah, but I have hard time celebrating the Independent Day of Israel.” And she said, “Why?”...I said, “Because imagine that when you celebrate something really good many others celebrate the worse day of their life.” And she said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Palestinians...” She said, “Uh, yeah.” She hears about Palestinians...all the time...[S]he has knowledge more than most high school level student in Israel these days. She’s seven and a half, but she grows up...with us knowing many things...[S]o I said, “Imagine...they call that specific day, that we call Yom Ha’atzmaut, the Independent Day...the Nakba Day, the catastrophe day, that they lost their houses, their land, and everything.” And I start explaining her about the conflict, how it started, and gave her some details and she said (in a low, hushed voice), “This is not fair! This is really not fair, Mommy!” And I said, “I know.”...And she said, “This is really problematic situation” [laughs], in Hebrew, we speak in Hebrew. She said, “This is really problematic. (Repeating the same phrase in Hebrew) Ze bhe-emet Ba-a-yati. It’s problematic.”...[I]t’s really hard for her to accept the fact that her family still lives there and [are] part of the occupation and the same time she loves them.

...[O]ne day – real story...from this playground here (points to her left outside their patio window) – she played outside and there was a kid, Muhammad – doesn’t tell you anything – Muhammad and Omi – that her name is Omer, full name – and like another girl and another girl and another boy, so just give you the feel that they are mixed, from
different places…[O]ne girl just moved here…I think it was Saudi Arabia, and let’s say, I don’t want to assume, but maybe her parents didn’t talk with her previously about differences and stuff and she got whatever she got from the media. Ok? So she comes to this playground and Omi…speaks with my son Hebrew at the playground. And [this girl] comes to [my daughter] and she said, “Are you from Israel?” And [Omi] said, “No, my parents are from there.” And [the other girl] said, “So you’re Israeli?” And [Omi] said, “No, I was born in the US, he was born here in Canada…[A]ctually, my family we don’t say...you are this and that, you were born there or there.”...[T]hen [the other girl] said, “All Israelis are so bad!”...My daughter say, “...You can’t generalize. You can’t tell someone that from somewhere that they this or that. You know, there are bad Canadians too…I’m sure there are many nice people in Saudi Arabia...but maybe many are not too. You can’t just assume that someone is from somewhere and they are that or that. Where did you hear it?” [The other girl] said, “In the television. They said all Israelis are bad.” And my daughter said, “No. You should meet my parents, they are not bad.” ...[I]magine this girl, the impact that she had that moment...just hearing my daughter, realizing that maybe there is one Israeli that is not bad. Maybe, maybe she got convinced. It was strong moment for my daughter because she’s not used to stand up for something.

...I all the time tell her, “You don’t need to defend, because I grew up defending Israel, and you don’t need to defend the US. US as a country do many bad things and many good things. And also Canada. So what is these countries? It’s a bunch of people, many opinions and many actions, and they are different in different times, when they have different leaders.” So I tried to pump into her this understanding and I think it’s settled now, like she really knows it by now. You know?

And we have...[in our complex]...people from everywhere, right? And (laughing)...the other day we told her, “Imagine people in Israel keep telling us be careful with your friends,” because we have friends from Iran and...next door, our previous house, was Palestinian from Jenin...[M]y daughter all the time remembers, she said, “The first time we saw Ahmed you just cried and say sorry.” When I first met them he said, “I’m Palestinian.” I said, “Where from?” And he said, “From Jenin.” And I start crying and said, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry for what we did in the name of...like in my name people did really horrible things for the place you come from.” And he said, “You know what? I never met Israeli that felt like you.” So it was a healing process. They lived next to us for a year and it was really healing process. We made food for each other. And my family was really scared. I live next door...like we shared a wall (laughing) literally. Right? (Laughing.) Like a wall!
I comment that these stories represent amazing and transformative experiences for all involved – experiences unavailable to those who chose not to engage with others. This reminds Ofira of yet another powerful experience signified by photograph #4:

... It relates to this picture (holds up photograph #4). I (clears throat) remember when I start my military service...[L]ook how enjoyable I looked, right? How happy! Why? Because I reached the stage of holding a gun and protect the country (starting to speak more softly) that we have to protect from the Holocaust...to happen again. So I just look at this picture all the time and think this is shocking. Look at the flowers around...like take the gun away for a second and it's just happy eighteen years old girl, really naïve...[H]olding the gun I felt that I protect the country from the Holocaust to happen again...I think this was the first real encounter for me with why we have to have army. Cause I got convinced – now I'm not – but I got convinced back then
that I’m in the army...to protect Israelis, Jews from the Holocaust to happen again. That’s what I believed. I was really in service.

...[B]ut slowly, slowly in my practice, because I was tank instructor, you have to try to shoot many guns and...it’s really cool, cool service. Right? Like they give you all type of guns to try...And I remember one day when I ran with...I don’t know how you call it in English, really big one...[like a rocket launcher]...and you run with it in the field. (Quietly) And I ran with it and I was scared for myself. I never killed anyone. I never fought. Like I all the time was behind the scene. [I wasn’t a combatant soldier]...(quietly) but I remember that day when I ran with the big one [in] the desert, (whispering in a shocked voice) I said, “Wait a minute! It’s really a gun! Like the movies! It can kill someone!” It’s like realization. I felt so stupid! You know...you’re brainwashed so well that you forget what you’re doing.

Amazingly, this memory leads to another transformative moment for Ofira, her children, and a neighbouring family:

...[A]nother incident that we had happened here relate to this gun picture. This is what had in mind all the time when I see guns these days. One day – it was a half a year ago, so let’s say [my son] was four years old, my daughter seven years old – they went to a garage sale of a neighbor, really across the street, it’s really common [in our complex]. So we do a garage sale and my son come back home with M16 plastic. And I’m in the beginning of pregnancy, so hormones and stuff to the extreme, right? He comes to the house, I open the door, and I see my son, this son that I cried when I realized he’s a boy, holding M16 plastic. I stood there crying, went to the ground, sat on the ground, and couldn’t talk. (Whispering) And my kids say, “What happened, Mommy? What happened, Mommy? What happened, Mommy?” and “Ima, Ima are you ok? Ima, Ima?” (Still whispering) And I just said, “I need to breath. Can you take this gun down please?” And I hugged him...and I’m pregnant...and my partner is no home...I just hugged them and I breathe and I practiced (laughing) my yoga breathing, you know (inhalation deeply), and I just, “Relax, relax, relax. Explain them why you behave like that.” And I said, “You know what I see here? I see a soldier. And that’s what I ran away from to raise you in different reality. I don’t want you to be a soldier.” He said (in the voice of a crying child), “I’m not, it’s a toy.” I said, “No. It start with a toy. When you normalize this toy...” and I talk with my kids like this level...[like I really told them, “You make it part of your daily life, you just think it’s ok. Then you become big and you believe it’s ok to kill and you just become soldier. And you kill and you just assume that it’s ok because you played with it as a toy, as a kid, so it’s not so different. So these people that make these toys (speaking in a quieter voice) I really, really angry at them because they really make you kids believe it’s ok and then you become soldiers...I’m not willing to have this toy at home. I just can’t have it. Let’s go back to talk with this

129 *Ima* means “mother” in Hebrew.
family.” They say, “No way! We don’t go with you,” it would embarrassed them, “you embarrass us Mommy!” I say, “We have to. This is our mission in this world and we have to share with them.” And they say, “No! No money back they said and I came to take the money now from home.” I said, “Don’t worry we’ll pay them for that, but don’t take it.” And they said, “No it’s really embarrassing, Mommy.” I said, “We have to do it.”

So we go there and funny enough they’re Arabs from Saudi Arabia, different family. I say funny enough because it’s embarrassing moment for Israeli, Hebrew accent, teaching Arabic family speaking...about arms...like about guns. It’s not healthy moment...I didn’t know where I am going because the kids took me to the house. Luckily I arrived at the right family. Lucky because I went there, the father opens the door and said, “Hello.” And I said, “My name is Ofira. What’s your name?” He said his name...and it’s obviously Arab name...[A]nd they see that I’m crying and I say, “I’m really sorry to come here” – and my kids hiding, hiding in the front – and I say, “I’m really sorry to come and bring you back this gun. We’re going to pay for it, don’t worry. I just want you to know why I don’t want to take it.” And I start sharing with him why we really decided to move from Israel and I was in army and this and that.

...[I]magine this guy standing there with these two kids of him listening. His wife comes and she listens too...I don’t where it takes us, right? I don’t know how they are going to react. (Quietly) And then he start having tears in his eyes and he said, “Thank you.” (Starts crying) And I said, “For what?” He said, “Thank you for sharing this story with me and my kids.” I say, “Why?” He say, “You know, people think that in Saudi Arabia we grow with guns and violence. Actually, we don’t. It’s really not common in Saudi Arabia...[M]y kids would never believe me if I would tell them this story, it would sound like lecturing, but coming from you it’s totally different story because they see how it hurts for you to grow up with guns, to grow up with hate, to grow up with all these...[Y]ou give them a lesson that this is someone grew up in Israel as Jew and doesn’t want to hate, doesn’t want to kill, doesn’t want to have it in her house.“ And you see my kids’ head (laughing) start popping out from the wall. And he said, “Thank you, thank you. Shukraan, shukraan.” And I said, “Afwan, afwan.”...[L]ike we just...start crying...[T]he wife comes and she said, “Thank so much for coming and approaching us and telling us...[T]ell you the truth, we didn’t buy it, the grandma bought it when she came to visit.”...[T]hen what’s interesting is that he comes out and said, “What do you want to take?,” the father to my son. [My son] said, “I don’t want anything.” He said, “No, you have to take. You have to take something fun.” We have a chair from them...like kid’s chair...[O]ne hour after I bring them hummus homemade...and like just soolcha...just have party...[T]hey

130 Shukraan means “thank you” in Arabic
131 Afwan means “you are welcome” in Arabic.
132 Soolcha means “reconciliation” or “a party to break a disagreement or fight” in Hebrew.
said, “Thank you so much.”...[T]he following day they bring our plate with baba ghanoush and we start like really reconciliation kind of.

...[J]ust before they leave...to Saudi Arabia, I [randomly saw] the mother...[in our complex], and she tells me (starting to cry), “You know we carry your story really with us (voice starts to crack) back home. I’m not sure what my kids would remember from [this complex], (begins to cry harder) but they will remember this story and my son ask us to break this gun and put it in the garbage before we left. He didn’t want to sell it again.” (Still crying) And I felt...this is painful picture for me, but at least I don’t raise more kids like that.

...[T]he other day my son wanted to [buy]...like bows...to target. And my partner told [him], “Do you want this [one] or this [one]?”...[M]y son said, “This looks too much like a gun. I’d prefer not to bring it home. Let’s take this one that looks like just arrow and bow...because I don’t want to make Mommy sad again.” So this is his memory from that day. So for him now guns are really not acceptable toy.
It is evident from Ofira's stories that her experience in the military resulted not only in an aversion to guns, but also a tremendous amount of guilt for the acts Israel has committed in her name, and a rejection of boarders and nationalism. She elaborates on the connection between all three while engaging with photographs #5 and #6:

...I picked these two pictures (reaches over to grab photographs #5 and #6), one of my partner and one of myself...[T]his is of my partner (holds up photograph #5)...[Y]ou see in the back here? You see the...Israeli flag? We are in Akko, in the Arab section, okay, in alternative theatre festival...like Fringe style...I remember when I saw this picture...(puts down photograph #5 and picks up and shows photograph #6)...this is my childhood, like high school...I’m in tenth grade, and this is my house, like porch, and you see our neighbor has like the flag here...I used to like the flag, but nowadays I can’t stand it. I can’t stand it because I feel like...[Jewish] rightwings took it from me...[I]n a way, I feel that I can’t enjoy flags any more because they mark for me separate between people...[L]ike if I go to Akko, the Arab
section...what I remember from this festival is these flags, Israeli flags, everywhere. This is wrong because it’s in the Arab section. You know? It’s wrong, from my perspective, because...it’s illegal for them to put the Palestinian flag here because this would be a protest. So if their identity’s practiced why mine is not? It’s really questionable. So I feel really bad...nowadays about flags, about nationalities, and stuff...[P]eople keep saying...“You’re Israeli.” I say, “No, I grew up in Israel. I got most of who I am from...growing up there, but I’m not an object of a country.”

In one of the only points of similarity with Ran, Ofira then makes reference to mixed schools. Here she shares her dream of establishing a similar school, but with the unique goal of eliminating national and occupation enforced boarders:

...[A]s a teenager, after my cousin was killed, my dream was to establish a school on the boarder of Palestine and Israel. On the boarder, so kids would not have to pass checking points. So you enter to the school from this side as Palestinian, this side as Israeli, but you share the school...So literally it was on the boarder.

At this point Ofira elaborates on her previous assertion that she is “nomadic” – a positionality she recently discovered is bound to her own identity:

...[A]s a kid I all the time questioned borders. What I found out lately was (laughing) that my name, Ofira...was the Sinai area that Israel occupied and then gave back to Egypt...This I knew all my life. So literally Israel gave me back...to a different country...I think it isn’t give back, it’s just existence between borders. But (laughs) what’s funny is that the meaning of Ofira is the hidden area of the treasure of King Solomon in the desert that nobody knows where it is...[I]t’s kinda hidden without borders, without anything, it’s just there in the desert, open like in the sand. So...many times I feel that even my name represent my belief that I’m not from here, I’m not from there, I’m just like somewhere...I’m of the world...And I like it because the idea of like borders is such problematic concept...

---

133 Based on the rest of this quote, I believe she means if their identity is not practiced, why is her’s or, alternatively, she is asking this question from the Palestinian perspective.
Before moving forward, I ask Ofira if there are any other photographs she would like to share. As she recalls the memory she associates with photograph #7, Ofira demonstrates how her humanism is grounded in her own exilic consciousness as an insider and outsider within her community, family, and nation – a positionality she feels requires the flexibility to adapt to the circumstance in which she finds herself:

...[T]he last one I want to mention, is this one (holds up photograph #7)...from a democratic school training that I went through as a teacher...[M]y bachelor degree was in creative education and...you had to take all course about democracy or go to democratic school experience it one day...[D]emocratic school...it's really, really democratic school...you question everything...I remember one day...and for me it's big...I [was] perceived as rightwing because (clears throat)...I grew up in a rightwing family...[T]he teacher say there one time, "Yay, in this reality you have to be leftwing," something like that. And I said, "No, I don't have to. You can't tell me what I have to be. I can...relate to what my family feels, at the same time care about Arabs as human beings."...I don't want to categorize myself on the right or the left. So I remember that moment...I realized that sometimes you need to take a political stand, but in the norms instead of just talking about people because otherwise they don't count your voice. You know what I mean?...[I]t's kind of like if you don't categorize it with this political agenda...it doesn't count. So we just talk about humans and don't talk about...all other things that political groups talk

---

134 Ofira is seated third from the left and is the only individual whose face is not blurred.
about...[Different instances]...call for different responses...I feel that this experience also shaped...something in my understanding...

Given the prominent role family has played in each of her stories, I ask Ofira what significance her chosen photographs and/or the images that appear in her father’s photo book might have for her children? How, if at all, does she think they might value these images? Furthermore, is it important to her that these photographs and the stories associated with them be passed on to her children? Although she briefly answers my question, her response is dominated with a discussion of the struggle she faced having to chose whether or not to include military photographs in her father’s photo book:

...[My kids] already look at our albums all the time and each time they see me with the army, with the tank...they say, “Can’t believe it’s you. We just can’t believe it’s you.” And I remember I put together this book for my father, it was...a year ago, and there are beautiful [and joyful] moments...[In one moment I told Ido, “I can’t avoid the army in the album. It will be really sad...it will be really noticeable (laughs) if I ignore the fact that four of us, four kids, served the army because this is part of his pride.” So what I did (laughing)...I made one page...with one picture of each of us, his kids, dressed up as soldiers. It’s one page covered all the years of service...Just like for him...to feel that we are part of the society...Really, that’s what it is...I found it fascinating (picks up her father’s photo book and begins flipping through it) in celebrating my father’s seventieth birthday I need to include the army for him to be noted as Israeli...(She finds the page she is looking for and shows it to the camera.) Here! (As she points to each of her siblings in each picture on the page.)...So this is the page, this four pictures covered (laughing) and I’m talking about years, right? You serve two years as a girl, as women, and boys, like males, three...I find it funny...If I would drop this page he would be really insulted...[When he saw it] he said, “Oh, so I see you put the army!”

By this point Ofira has addressed how the Holocaust has impacted her past, present, and might possibly affect her future, as well as her lack of knowledge about the Nakba growing up. Yet when I ask Ofira to clarify how old she was when she learned about the Nakba she is hesitant to say: “For real? It’s embarrassing. I think only when I moved to the US or maybe it was in my bachelor degree in the democratic school...[Like I really don’t remember growing up knowing this word.” Paralleling Itai’s language use and responses once again, Ofira remembers the shock of learning about the Nakba and the subsequent realization that, although she considered herself a critical thinking humanist, she had unwittingly and uncritically adhered to Israeli master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and War of Independence:
Probably someone mention [the Nakba] and I said, “What? Really? So for them the Yom Ha’atzmaut is such a…” Like you know...it in the background, but you don’t know it, and you don’t dive into it...[Nowadays…I’m embarrassed about the fact that I grew up (laughs) not questioning these facts...[I]t’s really interesting because nowadays if you know me little bit I question almost everything, really, really almost everything, but I grew up so convinced that there is truth about that. Like when you talk with me about so many other things...I am such postmodernist for years, but about that I didn’t question. I went to serve, I just like continue my life, and everything. It’s like, how come the brainwash is so good? The brainwash is well done, really well done. And I think in all schools, also in Arab schools, brainwash is like...not knowing other side’s narratives is really common. Now it is less because there are many people like us that try to raise the voice, try to support refuseniks...

I remember when we travelled in New Zealand – it was after my bachelor so I was like twenty something... – we talked with people from all around the world...I remember...my experiences, my stories, were from the army (in a hushed voice) and they kept giving me looks...I said (in a whisper), “What’s wrong? Should I hide it, that I was in the [army]? That’s what I’m learning? No, I should not hide the story of my life. But maybe it’s wrong?” Like...I start questioning, really late, really late...[T]hen just like...someone clicks and then it can’t move back? It’s like, [in hushed voice] “Whoa!” Shocking...[I]t’s shocking for me knowing myself, questioning everything all the time...[H]ow come I didn’t question the...military service? How come? I just can’t believe.

Here I shift gears and move onto my anticipatory questions. I begin by asking Ofira what she hopes her fellow participants will learn about her and her family by watching her video and viewing her photographs?:

(Lengthy pause) I hope that one day (pauses again) this separation between group of people would just not be a big issue. You know? Like just I want to be proud of my background...that I grew up in a Jewish family and from Morocco and Tunisia and like with lots of conflicted realities and so on...But I really hope that one day my kids could sit with people that hear their heritage is from Palestine, Israel, Europe, wherever they are from, and it would not be a big issue. That’s my hope. I hope that if I share something in the world that is like...just...(sighs)...I hope that we just stop closing our ears and eyes and just open our hearts and listen because there are so many narratives around us – not just Palestinians and Israelis – there are so many narratives of so many realities...[J]ust celebrate our life like together as humans. That’s what I want them to remember...[L]ike I grew up in a really loving family with really, really different values – in a way perceived as different values, I would say – but deep inside I think they [have] the same values like me because my mom would not hurt any Palestinian if she could. She would not do it. And my dad too. But they full of fears and they carry these fears and they try not to put
them inside us, but they do try to put inside us so we will be protected. So I hope that one day they will understand that what I’m doing is okay. And it’s okay to compare realities. Because one day when I compared the Holocaust with the Nakba...next to my mother-in-law (*whispering*) she was really mad at me. She couldn’t talk with me about that. She told my partner about it, that she was really, really...how dare I.

When I ask if connecting rather than comparing the two events might have elicited a more positive response from her mother-in-law, Ofira agrees and stresses that, in fact, she had not compared, but rather connected them. However, she asserts that she is “tired of this politeness” and proceeds to share a powerful and inspiring story about well-known Holocaust survivor Robert Mendler who passed away in 2009:

...I feel that the Holocaust is *horrible*, it was horrible time of history. And when I walked with...[Bob]...in Auschwitz...I remember, I took my shoes off to walk on the ground, to feel it, because that’s who I am, I want to feel things, I want to embody memories. And I remember the guide of the trip – it was big delegation with students, like high school students, and teachers and stuff – and he said (*in a stern muted yell*), “How dare you! Just put your shoes on!” And I said, “Excuse me?” – like I was...twenty-seven years old...[H]e said, “You should *not* try to pretend you know what it feels to be in the Holocaust!” And I said, “I don’t. I just want to relate. I want to experience something different. I want to embody the memory.” And he said (*in a quiet, yet stern voice*), “It’s really, really insulting.”...I said, “Really? I want to ask [Bob], not you, cause you were not here in the Holocaust, right? You were not here in Auschwitz. I want to ask Bob.”...I approached Bob and asked [him], “What do you feel about me walking barefoot?” And he said (*in a soft kind voice*), “You do whatever you do to take this Holocaust in your heart so you don’t hate anyone in the world.”

...Bob was a really inspiring person...[W]hen we arrived there he start shouting, but like an animal like (*in a muted guttural scream*), “Aaaahhhh!” And it was really adult – like he was like eighty years old or something and really respectful person from Pittsburg and everything – and he...cried for his mom and his sister (*begins crying*) and he said, “I never said goodbye to you and you were taken from me!”...I asked Bob many times...“How come you didn’t grow up to hate? How come you didn’t grew up to be one of these people?”...And he said, “How can it help? It would create more pain in the world. If I want you to remember something from me...just on any occasions that you talk something about Holocaust...mention me. (*Starting to cry again*) Mention that there was one guy, his name was Bob Mendler, and he loved human beings and he loved to live...[J]ust mention me [and] that...you learn a lot from pain...I learned not to hate. I learned to live...I was lucky enough to live, so I live it fully and I don’t waste my energy on hate.”...[H]e used to go to schools and churches and many, many places just to share his story because he was *amazing*, inspiring person. *Amazing!*
Remarkably, it appears that the lessons Ofira learned from Bob helped her link the suffering of the Palestinian people, not only to the Holocaust, but also to other forms of oppression and political violence around the world – lessons she once again tries to instil in her children through everyday experiences:

And with him actually, anytime that I hear horrible stories...[I]ike Holocaust and horrible conflict situation or trauma and everything, I compare it to Palestinians’ daily life. My only comparison is almost to the Palestinians’ life right now...[L]ike the ones that live there, because the one that live aboard they carry this trauma – I don’t say that they don't, I totally understand – but they don’t live the trauma as daily...It’s different than hearing the bombs and like feeling that you don’t have food...

...[F]or example...it wasn’t long time ago, my daughter didn’t have electricity...at the school...[T]he teachers were overwhelmed and the principal...and (laughs) they stood outside and told all the parents, “Maybe you should take your kids home because we don't have any electricity”...[Laughing] And my daughter came in and she said, “We can do something. Maybe we will do camping”...[S]he took her flashlights from the helmet from the bike and she made a campsite (laughing)...[T]ell you the truth the teacher was like really touched by that...I think it relates to the fact that she grows up knowing that the Arab people they (whispers) actually experience it on daily life. When she came back home and she told us all this we say, “You know Palestinians experience it all the time? No electricity, no water.” She said, “Yeah, I knew that.” (Laughing proudly)...[L]ike for her...the Palestinians’ situation right now is part of her life. I'm really, really worried that I don’t raise her to be too depressed about it...I really try to find the balance, to give her tools how to do it differently. All the time I approach it from education.

Returning to my anticipatory questions, I ask how she hopes or thinks the other participants will respond to her video and associated photographs:

I hope they would see that I’m just human like them, but I would understand if they don’t (laughs). I would understand if they would think that I’m just...really rare Israeli...and they should not...accept it...because in my name many died and my family continues to be part of this occupation.

But at the same time I hope they know that there are many things on the personal level, on the ground, that are different...[M]y mom, all her professional years...worked with Arabs in the Galilee and she never thought twice not to do it...I’m sure there were nurses who didn’t want to do it. And my sister [is] an educator...a professor in one college that is really mixed, Arabs and Jews, in Akko...[S]he’s industrial designer, but most of her classes she really allows all this conflict to be on the table and she does lots of...activities to raise voices and to bring holy days into the class...[L]ike they had many conflicts, so many times,
because…they are Arabs and Jews and she all the time tried to moderate and be with them and listen to them...[M]any of her students tell her, “...[W]e got more lessons from you about the conflict than about industrial design” (laughs). Now she’s also head of a design unit in a high school, so now she does many projects with Arab villages with her students...[M]y other sister...lives next to Arab city and they do many things with them...[O]ne day...on WhatsApp they said, “For proud aunt just to see your nephew” and he plays in a soccer game with Arabs. Just he is Jew and all of them are Arabs. And they said, “We were sure you will be proud of us.” (Laughs.) So it’s like jokes, but still I see that many things on the ground are real tries to come together...and just avoid all this created conflict from...governments...

When asked how she feels about having the opportunity to hear her fellow participants’ stories and view their association photographs, her feelings are mixed: “I’m excited and scared. I’m sure I’ll have waves of guilt...” Guilt has been a strong theme throughout Ofira’s interview, suggesting that it is something she has been working through and tries to be very open about. Still, is it the guilt she fears or something else?:

I’ll be really sad. That’s what I’m afraid of...I’m gonna be upset. I’ll be really upset about...many things that happened in my name and to people...It’s...like what happened to people just because they were born in the wrong group. So I’ll be really upset and I’m pretty sure that I will not sleep many days afterwards.

Only lately that I stop crying about any single thing that you talk with me about the conflict...[I]t’s just healing from [eleven and a half years] now aboard...[I]t’s a process...I used to go to any Lebanese restaurant, each Lebanese restaurant...like one time I went...with my partner [and]...he told the owner, “Did she tell you sorry already?” (laughs)...[G]rowing up in the north people just assumed that I was under attack all my childhood...because I grew up in shelters as a kid. But because I grew up in a shelter I know that they grew up in shelters...and many times they didn’t have shelters...Lebanese and Palestinians are the ones that I all the time ask sorry, like I say sorry, like I’m deeply sorry.

Moving on I am curious what Ofira expects or hopes to learn about the other participants, particularly the Palestinians, and their families?

I hope to get to know them on personal level. Like I shared now really personal narrative, so that’s what I hope for because I feel that I didn’t meet enough (clears throat) Palestinians in my life. People that grew up in this reality I would say, not even [just] Palestinians. It’s just people that grew up in this reality of the conflict I didn’t meet enough of them...I feel that I don’t have enough references like of real stories, real life experiences, someone that grew up with a father in jail (clears throat) or someone that lost family members...I don’t know enough of them. I think I know more Palestinians than most...
(laughing)...Israelis...but at the same time I feel like it’s really small number. That’s my hope...

Finally, I ask Ofira why she chose to participate in this particular project:

For a better future. That’s my reason...I really like the idea of your research and I just hope that it’s just beginning of something. I hope it’s not just that. I hope that we’ll do something with this videos, show it to people, engage with people, realize that people are just people, and there are Israelis like that and Palestinians like that...[J]ust a sense of hope because I don’t believe we can change all the world, but I believe we can leave it little bit better...than we got [it].

When I suggest that we can begin bridging the Palestinian/Israeli divide that was created by the traumas of the Holocaust and the Nakba by talking to one another and sharing our stories, Ofira responds emphatically:

...[Y]eah. I’m storyteller (laughs)! I believe in stories. I believe in personal experiences. I believe in memories in just daily life. That’s what I believe in. I don’t believe in just good history book. That doesn’t go through the heart...I think that these videos could go through many hearts...

...I hope that these videos would share what it means to be just human from that region. But it needs to be from there and not defending and not attacking and just what it means to be from there...I really hope that many people would watch it and say, “Let’s leave this media that creates hate all around everyone, against everyone.” I don’t feel it’s (in a low accusatory voice) “just against Israelis or Israel,” it’s against everyone. It create this hate among us and I’m tired of that.

Not surprisingly Ofira responds with an excited and eager “I do!” to watching all of the other participants’ videos and viewing their associated photographs, as well as meeting each of them in person. I wrap up our interview by asking Ofira if she has any final message for her fellow participants. Her message is simple yet inspiring:

Just let’s remember that each of us carries lots of pain and each of us has different pain, but each of us has pain...I just hope that we would recognize the pain of all of us and...live knowing that many of us are part of many bad things that happened...relate to the government we were under at that time, but instead of continue this we...recognize this pain and...make this world a little bit better. That’s all, really. Our kids...grow into this world and...[need a better future] and for us better present. We have fifty more years for us, at least...(laughing) why [are we] wasting it?
Chapter 7.

“The Complete Consort Dancing Together Contrapuntally”: Palestinian & Israeli Reflective Interviews

As noted at the end of Chapter 4, this chapter brings my participants into dialogue with one another through their reflective interview responses. A few comments regarding the organization and approach to this chapter are in order before continuing. While this chapter is organized by participant following the order of presentation reflected in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively, the content that proceeds each heading is not a full summary and/or transcription of that participant’s reflective interview. Rather, each section begins with the named individual’s reflections on sharing their own life story, (post)memories, and associated photographs, which are then followed by the other five participants’ interwoven responses to them. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the participants’ responses to exchanging life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs with fellow participants from both their own and the other community. Yet again, I had to make difficult yet practical choices about how best to represent my participants’ reflections to the reader within the limited pages of this dissertation while also continuing to underscore the importance and intricacy of their responses. As such, I continued to edit out superfluous words, phrases and/or stories and consigned relevant fieldwork observations and necessary contextualizing information to footnotes. It is my hope that proceeding in this manner will provide the reader with an opportunity to witness “the complete consort dancing together’ contrapuntally” (Said, 1993, p. 333).

Nick\textsuperscript{135}

The process of sharing his own life story, (post)memories, and associated photographs was very valuable for Nick. It brought up difficult memories of how the Holocaust and the Nakba have deeply impacted his and his family’s lives, but it also enabled him to share with Ran, Itai, and Ofira the pain and suffering of the Palestinian

\textsuperscript{135} Our second interview took place at Nick’s home on October 29, 2015.
people: “Some people maybe they think that we not have pain as…Palestinian[s], but we have pain…I need everyone to know what’s happened to [the] Palestinian people.” Thus, Nick approached the narration of his stories, memories, and images as an opportunity to educate Israelis about the plight of the Palestinian people at large. Beyond this broader goal, Nick appreciated having the opportunity to narrate his life story, (post)memories, and photographs directly to Israelis in his own voice, even if it was limited to written form.

It appears Nick was successful in communicating to his fellow participants the pain and suffering endured by the Palestinian people from 1948 onward, as each of the other participants sadly noted that his life is representative of the greater Palestinian experience. The other participants were also unanimous in underscoring how emotionally difficult it was to engage with Nick’s life story, (post)memories, and photographs. In particular, Amanda and Ofira found many of Nick’s stories simply inconceivable, even surreal:

Nick’s story was…very hard…[to read]. What he had said about being so young, but he had to work...in Israel...[I can’t imagine] how hard that must have been for him to work for the country that is occupying you [and is] the reason you are poor now. I can’t even imagine that. And having no choice. Right? ...Of course you don’t wanna work there, but you have to if you wanna support your family. (Amanda)

...Nick talked about...[how] the [only] way he could see his kids was through pictures. It’s almost like a movie, I swear! (Laughs) Like...these stories you hear in movies... (Amanda)

...[Nick] also said how one time his son didn’t recognize him [because he had been in jail for so long]. [That] just...broke my heart...I can’t imagine as a father how that would make you feel. (Amanda)

I just can’t imagine what he’s been through. It’s so hard. And then being labeled a terrorist [here in Canada]. Just horrible. (Amanda)

I remember...Nick [talked about] running for three years on top of the roofs [in Beit Sahour while] hiding [from the IDF]...I can’t imagine someone runs on roofs and the day...he had to call his friend, “Just come be with my baby...I have to run.” ...[It]...sounds like a movie! Right? It doesn’t sound real. And all the fear! (Ofira)

That’s so sad when his child didn’t recognize him after long time being away not by choice. (In low, intense voice) [He] become a stranger...To become a stranger [to] your child is such a hard feeling! (Ofira)
Given the haunting similarities between her father and Nick, Haifa was the least surprised by Nick’s stories, (post)memories, and photographs, albeit the most emotional, and consequently had little to say in response:

...[In] Nick’s transcript...there was a lot of talk about his time in jail and the torture...[T]hat was very difficult [to read] because a lot of what he told were stories very similar to my dad’s stories...I remember hearing from my dad about...the prisoners’ numbers – they had numbers for their wards and then numbers for the actual jail – the cigarette butts, the handcuffing, the dirty bags on the head...[T]hat was (pauses for a moment and then continues in a very soft voice) difficult to read.

The connection between the two men’s lives was also not lost on Haifa’s fellow participants. While Ran noted this link in passing,136 Amanda and Itai empathized with Nick and Haifa’s father’s decision to become political:

...[Haifa’s]...father said...“I wasted my life for a lost cause.” I think this is [a] very common thing that Palestinians say. My uncle actually also says that because he was very political and now [he’s not]...because he realized that there is no point and that...your family comes first and when you do become political...this affects your family in a huge way, as we can see with Nick and Haifa. For that to not go anywhere is even...more sad. You know? But then again it’s easy for us to say that. But it’s understandable...why they would wanna be political. Especially...what Nick was saying [about] how...he was living under occupation, very poor...he needed to support his family, and then this just drove him to be political in university, and do these things because you get to a point [where] you’re just desperate. You know? You’re frustrated and you feel like you need to do something even if it just means throwing a stone or a rock or whatever, you are, in a way, resisting still. You’re not accepting [the conditions]. And some Palestinians still speak like that...[They] say, “Oh, we know a lot of people say throwing a rock is not helping anything, but it is showing the army that, no, you cannot come to our territory...just to roam around, kill whoever, arrest whoever you want. You are gonna be met with the resistance.” (Amanda)

I have no doubt (laughing) that if I was born in the Dheisheh [Refugee Camp]137 I would be throwing stones or do[ing] worse. I have no

---

136 During the course of our reflective interview, Ran admitted that he had not read Nick’s transcript nor viewed his photographs, as he thought the associated links on the project website were not working. Although Ran did eventually engage with Nick’s transcript and photographs, the responses he provided, both over the phone and later by email, were extremely general. Aside from noting the link between Nick and Haifa’s father, Ran simply stated that it was obvious Nick has had a hard life, but that he did not know what else to say.

137 The Dheisheh Refugee Camp, which was established in 1949, is located in the West Bank just south of Bethlehem. More information on this camp, its history, and current conditions can be found here https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/dheisheh_refugee_camp.pdf.
doubt. Absolutely! …[A]nd I know…throwing stones is not just (making air quotes) “throwing stones,” it could be a cinder block that can kill somebody and I’ve seen that. I’ve seen people with a cinder block dropped on their head, right? So I know that throwing stones can be a very, very violent thing. And at the same time if you are born into oppression, why (laughs) wouldn’t you rebel? …And I’m not a violent person and I couldn’t kill anybody myself, I can’t even image myself killing somebody, but if soldiers come to my village I would resist. So who am I to tell Nick or Haifa’s dad…that what they did is wrong. I don’t even know what they did…but I know that there’s a very good chance that I would have done what they did and there’s a very good chance that what they did was exaggerated a hundred times in the process of sending them to jail. (Itai)

Much like the stories they signify, Nick’s photographs were also emotionally difficult for the participants to engage with, however, they especially impacted Amanda, Itai, and Ofira:

…[T]his person is in jail and he has a picture of his wife [and] his kids [that] he keeps with him. It’s hard because that’s such a private thing and you don’t want anyone else to touch these pictures or look at them. (Amanda)

…[W]hen I was reading Nick’s [transcript] I went back to the photos and looked at [them]. His were the ones that were torn by the soldiers, so they were particularly haunting. (Itai)

…[Nick] chose to bring these really personal pictures (in a low, soft, and intense voice) with turned down, like, tear[s]. (Continuing in a low, soft, and intense voice) You know, in the beginning when I start[ed] reading his interview and I saw these pictures…I said, “There is something in the pictures…telling me there is…big stories coming out because how come…all the pictures are just (slowly makes the sound and motion of a photograph being torn twice)?” You know? Like you see the glue and you see…the tape and you see that there is pain there. Right? It is so real, it’s like scars, the materiality…And then when he talked about the fact that the soldier in the jail just [makes the motion a photograph being torn] took these [and torn them up] and (in a low, soft, and intense voice) I felt that I could kill this soldier! You know? (Laughs) …[I]f someone would give me (makes a slapping motion) a hit, it would not hurt [as] much [as] if someone would take my family picture and [again makes the motion a photograph being torn] do it in front of me…Such a disrespect and a deep meaning, like, deep deep. You know that this is the only thing that this person has, these pictures that [give] him life…[T]his week my partner told me that…there are new rules in Israel that Palestinians now in jails can’t get letters and pictures…and visits sometimes. (In a low, soft, and intense voice) Come on! How far we go? How far? Like humanity? …When Ido told me that automatically I thought about Nick [and] that these pictures hold him together… (Ofira)
In fact, as Ofira looked at Nick’s photographs and read his stories of physical and psychological torture, she was reminded of the now infamous photographs taken by American soldiers of inmates at Abu Ghraib Prison – a comparison that ultimately leads her back to a discussion of brainwashing by the Israeli education and military systems, as well as the Holocaust:

[Nick’s] explanation about the soldier sounds to me like the stories coming from [Abu Ghraib in] Iraq and the American soldiers. That’s the connection I had... (In a quiet voice) This was the image I had! ...It was so scary and...[humiliating]...[Nick] talking about it, I just thought it’s not even if I would go through this, [what] if my father would go through this? You know...it’s even harder to hear it from Nick...[an] older person. That’s what he would carry...on for his life? This memory? ...For me it was more like Iraq, more personal. For me the Holocaust was more generic, if you understand what I mean...[What happened to Nick is] more insulting to do [because] it’s so personal. It’s like human to human, in a way. I mean generic [as in] bunch of [objects rather than people]...[which is] horrible by itself. But I all the time imagine, all the time, in all these conflicts that I hear about around the world...imagine the moment, the moment, of...standing next to another person and knowing that you are going to destroy this person’s life. It’s a personal moment that I have the hardest time with. Thinking about this solider with [Nick] at that moment. What happened to this person? Probably destroyed him too, the solider. I’m saying, for you Nick, I’m saying that probably this soldier carries it with [them] as a curse. You know what I mean? It’s a curse that if you do something so horrible to someone probably you would carry it with you too.

...[T]he brainwash[ing] is so strong you don’t have to be [a particular] type of person [to do such things]...[Y]ou can’t believe how [strong the effects of] brainwash[ing] can be...on someone...[When] [t]hey serve they’re on automatic pilot...

While Ofira clearly shows an incredible depth of empathy for Nick, she was the only participant to directly critique aspects of his transcript. First, she was initially frustrated with Nick’s focus on communicating the larger Palestinian experience to his audience:

...[I]n the beginning of [his] interview...I didn’t understand why he’s speaking for the group. You know what I mean? And in one point I said, “Come on! Speak your heart...your story...but you speak for the group you come from and you stand for and you fight for and so on...I want to hear you now for a moment.” ...Although it was nationalist, although he told the story of his group...[Nick’s stories] came to the more personal, [particularly once he began sharing his photographs].
Second, Ofira was sceptical about one of Nick’s concluding comments:

One thing that I had a hard time with – and I’m not sure if he really meant to say that and I wanted to clarify that I think he didn’t mean [it] – like he said...(reading from her notes) “He wants to watch all videos for checking if all of them agree with me.” And I wrote, “That’s [an] amazing point of view.” Here he lost me...And I want to be honest, right? ...And I want to check with Nick...if he really meant that’s the only thing he cares about [that] “they agree with me” or “being with me” or “seeing my point of view in connection to theirs.”

Aside from this one issue, Nick’s stories, (post)memories, and photographs were well received and greatly appreciated by his fellow participants – albeit for different reasons and with different outcomes. The most significant responses, however, came from Haifa, Itai, and Ofira. For example, Nick’s openness and willingness to engage with Israelis even after everything he and his family have endured not only comforted Haifa, but also made her hopeful:

...[Nick] talked about the Holocaust and how...[Palestinians] didn’t do that to [Israelis]...[T]hen he talked about, yes, he could have Israeli friends and...with time we could all heal. And it was good to hear that even the ones that suffered probably more than I did...have that willingness to engage and be peaceful. Because at the heart of it that’s what we all want. We all just want to have peaceful lives. As pessimistic and as hopeless and [as] bad [as] things seem, these attitudes give you that...glimpse of hope...[It’s] very comforting.

Itai was inspired to think about what actions he could take to assist Nick and other Palestinian refugees:

It made me think that maybe I can try to help Palestinians in Nick’s situation...Maybe that’s something that I could do outside of Israel. See if there’s any refugees anywhere that need help with anything. That’s what I thought about...[M]aybe that’s something I could do...I’m happy that he’s here...but...the struggle continues...I have faith that Nick’s situation will...get resolved because Canada is pretty good.

Finally, Ofira notes that the strength and perseverance Nick has demonstrated from his youth through to his present day fight to stay in Canada brings to mind the Holocaust survivors she has met throughout her life:

In a way, [he] reminds me of a Holocaust survivor because they are the strongest people. If you have a chance in your life to meet someone that survived it, they're the strongest people I’ve ever met in my life. I met several and nothing will [stop] them from...mov[ing] forward, doing good...try[ing] to find a small reason for hope because
if you stayed alive you have [a] big obligation...That’s the sense [I got from Nick], [but] only toward the end of his conversation...I felt like he must be really strong, but his pain must be huge because he went through such hard time[s]...

[He also said he would not stop fighting for his Canadian citizenship]. I would be like him. I would not be different if something would bring me to this point.

**Haifa**

Like Nick, Haifa expressed how difficult and emotional, yet also valuable and enjoyable, she found the experience of narrating her life story, (post)memories, and photographs. Unlike Nick, however, she confesses that although the interview itself was especially challenging, afterwards she felt that the process was very “healing,” “cathartic,” and “therapeutic,” as the need to tell her story had been fulfilled. Much as she did in our first interview, Haifa continued to stress the importance of Palestinians sharing their stories, particularly with Israelis, as they continue to seek recognition and justice. Thus, she also acknowledged the importance of communicating the larger Palestinian experience and was grateful for the opportunity to share her stories, memories, and images with her fellow participants.

Once again all of the participants stated that watching and listening to Haifa narrate her life story, (post)memoires, and photographs was very emotional, plus they each saw a clear link between her father and Nick. Building from this connection, the bulk of the participants’ reflections concerned the heartbreaking impact her father’s political activism had on her, her mother, and her siblings:

...[W]hat was mostly heartbreaking for me was Haifa’s story about her dad being in prison and then even when he came out he just wasn’t the person her mom pictured him to be to them. That was so hard to watch and listen to because she really lost her father. He couldn’t be there for them, even if he was [there] physically, mentally he wasn’t because he was so tortured...[She also talked] about her dad not liking music because they would play Fairuz everyday in prison (laughs) – poor Fairuz! (laughing) – ...so for him Fairuz is not like this lovely, angelic voice anymore. She reminded him of traumatizing moments in jail. So it’s completely understandable that he did not like music. It’s just...so sad to see all these things. (Amanda)

---

138 Our second interview took place at Haifa’s home in Toronto on September 27, 2015.
I mean, for me, obviously Haifa is the most...emotional story, as far as what her family went through and how she grew up...You realize that [a] story like family of Haifa there is thousands like this...I’m trying to look at it as a big context and it’s not a unique story. I’m sure that lots of them, obviously...varies, but it’s horrible! I mean, the fact that people have to go through it and...kids have to go through it...Yeah, it’s very heart moving, it was very heart moving to watch, and obviously she was very emotional and I can understand. And she grew up to reality that...nobody wish[es] on anybody. I’m sure she had some good moments there too, but in general it’s not a good experience. (Ran)

Haifa was very emotional when she was talking, so I was very emotional...watching her. Even to think that there are two girls by the name of Jaffa and Haifa (slaps hand on leg)...[Y]ou know [laughs], I think a lot of people in Israel would be very surprised by that or shocked...That shows you a lot about her dad. And then some of the stories...[R]eally the one that I will never forget, that really got to me, was...one of those times [her dad was] between [prison sentences] and a friend came over and [as they left Haifa’s dad]...said, “You forgot your baby,” and [the friend] said, “No, that’s actually...your baby.” I was just like (puts his right hand on his heart and makes a horrified face) gutted hearing that. (Itai)

Haifa crying about herself with her dad and that her dad once forgot her sister...[He] said, “Oh, you forgot your daughter”...something like that...I remember the moment...I remember that she said that they really had hard time when he came back and went away and came back and went away and it just comes to my mind almost every other day thinking about a child that grows with dad in jail...I never met someone that lost their dad for jail. (Ofira)

In a second parallel to their responses to Nick, as many of the participants discussed the profound impact Haifa’s father’s imprisonment had on his family, they also empathize with the path his life took. This was particularly true of the Israeli participants who, explicitly or implicitly, draw upon the notion that one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter:

I guess...she can call her father a freedom fighter for his purpose and I can see how it can happen. (Ran)

...[W]ho knows what they attach to him...it doesn’t really matter [what he did]...[W]hat I’m trying to say is that he had probably the right to do whatever he chose to do and that was his choice. (Ran)

It doesn’t matter what [Haifa’s father] did. It doesn’t matter if he was just political activist or killed someone, it really doesn’t matter, like the kid[s] lost [their father]...[T]he affect [on] the family, that’s what sits really (pauses and takes a deep breath in) heavy for me... (Ofira)
Itai’s response is of particular interest for two reasons and is thus quoted at length. First, not only does he join Ran and Ofira in expressing his empathy for Haifa and her father regardless of the nature of his political activity, but he also goes further by addressing the representation of Palestinians in Israeli society and media. Second, in the course of exploring the latter issue, Itai historicizes the aforementioned problematic representations by returning to the founding years of the Israeli state:

...[Y]ou can’t help but think that in Israel an Israeli might – and I’m sure a lot of Israelis if they watched this video they would think – “Oh, Haifa’s dad was a terrorist. Haifa’s dad must have done something really horrible.” And we don’t know what Haifa’s dad did or did not do from Haifa’s video, but when you hear her talk about it you don’t think he’s a terrorist...[A]nd now also knowing that people get constantly put in jail without trial – ...I think every...six month[s] you have to renew it – [and] knowing that...twelve year [old] kids go to jail for...[six months for]...throwing a stone...you realize that the moment that [Haifa’s dad] decided to be politically activ[e] he sealed his fate and he was gonna be in Israeli jail for the rest of his life. Whether he is a violent man – which I don’t think he is because he sounds like a nice guy and who knows, right? – ...or whether he is a political guy who writes pamphlets or calculates money...or does something that is completely not violent in any way, he got to spend...most of his life in jail and his daughter is forever traumatized by it and his children’s lives are all affected by it. So, yeah, I thought, “I’ve been hearing about these people my whole life on the radio and they are these terrorists who go to jail.” And you hear that all the time in Israel. Right? Because for instance even in the '50s...like in 1949-1950 there was thousands and thousands of Palestinians who were shot because they went back to either take something from home, jewelry that was hidden somewhere, or to work the land at night. They would go and work and some of them were old, seventy year olds, eighty-year-old people, who were shot, but in Israeli media [they’ve] always been portrayed as infiltrators who are coming to do terror attacks in Israel. And to [the] Israeli public they don’t know if the guy that was shot was a seventy year old man going to work his land or a twenty year old man going to stab somebody and they will never find out because in the Israelis’ mind these are all people who are trying to hurt us. And it’s so clear when you hear Haifa talk that they are people who are trying (laughing) to get back what was taken away from them and were immediately labeled as criminals.

It goes without saying that Nick was not surprised by anything he heard or saw in Haifa’s life story, (post)memories, and photographs – the similarities between himself and Haifa’s father so obvious that, much like Haifa, he had little to say in response: “Of course [I see a connection between me and Haifa’s father! [She] mention [the relationship] between father and family, father and wife, all of that...It is affect, for sure, affect!” To demonstrate the devastating impact the loss of Palestinian fathers to prison
has on young children, Nick retells the story of his son not recognizing him after he was released from jail, which he easily connects to the story of Haifa’s father not recognizing his own daughter when he himself was released from prison. In an effort to have his audience consider how he and Haifa’s father felt in those moments, Nick makes a somewhat indirect connection between the Nakba and the Holocaust: “So this is the holocaust. That feeling is the holocaust. So the Nakba is holocaust. What we living here is holocaust.” In a linked comment, Nick explains that Haifa’s discussion of the Jenin Refugee Camp was a strong reminder of how dirty, crowded, and impoverished the camps are and the resulting suffering endured by their residents, thus leading him to make another indirect connection between the Nakba and the Holocaust: “Just think about that. This is holocaust. That’s the holocaust.”

Nick was not the only participant to connect Haifa’s experience to the Holocaust. In a discussion of his late friend Naftali’s parents who were Holocaust survivors, Ran makes a connection to Haifa’s parents:

I think that the Holocaust generation is [the] same as, I guess, the parents of Haifa. [They] have a different perspective of the event and therefore have a different perspective of where their life [is] now and how it should be and where it should go.

He later connects the lingering affects of Haifa’s traumatic childhood to those experienced by someone who survived the Holocaust as a child:

I think...every facet of [Haifa’s] life is tough. I mean...obviously she...live[s] in Canada...but I think it’s there, I mean, the story’s there. The same as...in a way...[an] eighty year old Holocaust survivor...[D]espite the fact that he still have a job and he’s...working in an office and he’s an accountant...for fifty years, but still the story that he grew up in the Holocaust it’s there. I mean...you don’t see it...day to day, but I believe that it affect[s] your life...So for me [it was Haifa’s]...story that [had] the most emotion [even though I] know that there [are other] stories like this...

Haifa’s stories, (post)memories, and photographs were also very well received and greatly appreciated by the other participants, none of whom had a critical word to share. However, once again Itai and Ofira were among the most moved, with the former

---

139 Based on the full content of both our interviews, it is clear that in this statement and the one that follows Nick is not equating the suffering of the Palestinian people with the Holocaust, but rather connecting them as significant traumatic events. I have tried to signify this distinction by using a lower case “h” where and when necessary.
stating that “…[It was] Haifa who really maybe had the most profound affect on me” and the latter that “…[B]y far my favourite is Haifa.” However, unlike Itai, Ofira spoke at length about the significant impact Haifa had on her:

Haifa entered my heart and broke it from the inside…[I]t was…such a teaching moment that I will carry in my life…I will carry Haifa…[S]he really spoke from her heart and it was so personal and so brave…

…I think her honesty and sharing and taking the responsibility to share with us her story in such [a] brave way was so inspiring…I was really impressed and triggered and like moved and it made me really, really think.

Given that Ofira had never met a Palestinian who had a family member imprisoned, Haifa’s testimony was especially moving:

I was really touched by the fact that I heard a story from someone that experienced [having] a father being in jail. It’s something that all the time scares me, like jails…I know [this happens], but I never met someone…that talked about [their] childhood of having the father inside. You know what I mean? I never met. You…can all the time say that, “I heard about people from Beit Sahour and you heard about people from Jenin and you heard about houses that were burned and you heard about…” (tsks) but to meet someone…[N]ow I’ve met Haifa through the video and I really hope I will meet her in person…[I]t’s kind of these moments that teach you forever something…[S]he will stay with me. Whenever someone tells me about something…I’ll said… “Just think about the kids of this person, this political activist. [Is] it worth it to put them in jail? And what do we gain from it …as humans? What do we gain?”

Ofira also found strength and patience in Haifa’s quandary about whether or not to pass on her (post)memories of the Nakba and her direct memories of growing up under occupation to her two young sons:

The fact that she talked about her kids, now she’s not sure how much she want[s] to pass on to them that they will keep this story or allow them to live freely their own story. [In a low intense voice] Which is really strong because it’s kind of [like] do we continue to replicate the nationalistic master narrative. Right? In a way. Although she brings really personal aspect to it, although it’s her own childhood, although it’s her dad, although…but she said, “I question even…if I want to pass it on.” So brave of her to consider not sharing…Not passing is kind of stopping the master narrative, stopping the narrative I grew up with, and allow it to unfold, and allow it to just be. And I really appreciate[d] it because it takes lots of patience being a mother and not sharing at the moment and wait[ing] until it unfolded…[T]hat’s why I have big appreciate[ion] towards her because I feel like she talks a lot about her
boys...And maybe, maybe – I thought about that too – maybe because her partner is from Canada, not from there, maybe it helps her to not live only that story, it’s mixed...

Yet more than anything, Ofira wants to move beyond her guilt for Haifa’s suffering so they can share their pain together:

...I want to look at the eyes of Haifa and say she’s equal and I’m equal to her, like we are equal. The moment you have this moment it stays with you...I read [a magazine story] yesterday [and this man said]...for years people thought that [having] guilt about being oppressor and racism and so on would help, [but] the guilt just built another wall of protection. The guilt. But once we kick this guilt down, the wall, we say, “I feel the pain.” I just...want to allow myself to cry with you, with your pain. And you know what? Allow my pain in relation to your pain to come out too.

Amanda

Akin to Nick and Haifa, Amanda states that narrating her life story, (post)memories, and photographs was a “really nice opportunity” to share with Israelis and Palestinians stories about her childhood and homeland, as well as the impact the occupation has had on her life. However, unlike Nick and Haifa, she provides no indication that she found the process emotionally challenging. A degree of parallel also exists between Amanda and Nick, as she stresses how “empowering” it was to narrate her stories directly to interested audiences, particularly the Israeli participants:

...[S]omeone actually cares, they wanna know, they wanna hear these things. So when I was speaking I was in a good position knowing that whatever I’m gonna say is actually gonna be received...however, good or bad...That was pretty empowering and pretty nice to feel like your voice, your story, your family’s story, how this conflict [has] affected your life is actually gonna be heard by Israelis and Palestinians.

In fact, she claims that it “would have been enough” if only one committed and engaged Israeli watched her video and viewed her photographs, as she prefers the personal approach taken in this project over her stories, memories, and images being shared with a general and potentially uninterested and/or disengaged public. Yet, and in seeming contradiction to her claim in Chapter 5 that Palestinians “don’t have good luck,” Amanda confesses that she worried her stories would be “of little value” to the project because she herself has actually been very “lucky”:

140 Our second interview took place at Amanda’s home on November 5, 2015.
I don’t think I’ve had it as hard as other Palestinians and I am definitely not a representation of [the] majority of Palestinians. Like I haven’t had a loved one killed by Israel. I still have my home back home. I lived in relatively more peaceful area than anywhere else in Palestine, like Bethlehem is considered pretty safe – not right now – but...most of the time. So when I share my story I don’t really have something very like shocking or horrible that happened to me that I can share. But I wanna say that [such things have] happened to most...Palestinians, but I [am] just one of the lucky few...141

In the end, Amanda’s worries were unfounded. Each of her five fellow participants found immense value in her life stories, (post)memo...res, and photographs. Their positive responses were due in large part to Amanda being the study’s youngest participant whose normalized experiences of growing up under occupation not only moved, surprised, and inspired Israeli and Palestinian participants alike, but also forced them to critically rethink some of their own experiences. While I have been reticent to organize the other participants’ responses to any individual’s stories, memories, and images by community, clear and distinct themes emerged between Itai and Ofira’s, and Nick and Haifa’s responses to Amanda. Ran’s comments regarding engaging with Amanda stand outside of these theme groups and thus will be treated separately.

The three aspects of Amanda’s life story, (post)memo...ies, and photographs that deeply resonated with Itai and Ofira were the reoccurring issues of place and movement, her experiences with and impressions of Israeli soldiers, and her comment that Palestinians “don’t have good luck.” First, both acknowledged the injustice of the limited movement imposed on Amanda and her family, particularly when compared to their own ease of movement within and access to many of the very places she spoke of:

I’ve been to Beit Sahour. I’ve been to Jericho. Before the Intifada we had a good friend...who had a summer home in Jericho and we would go there...[K]nowing how easy it is for me to go to Jericho and hearing how hard it was for Amanda to go to Jericho as a kid [was emotional]. (Itai)

I’ve been to Beit Jala142 many, many times. I have a friend who used to live in Har Gilo, which is...the settlement that’s behind Beit Jala...[N]ow there’s a road from behind to get to [it], but when I was a

141 When I suggest that her concern actually negates how normalized the hardships and injustice of the occupation had become for her as a child, she agrees stating that, “…I grew up my whole life under occupation...[T]hat was just the way it is. I never knew any different…”

142 Beit Jala is located in the Bethlehem Governorate, two kilometers west of the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem City.
kid we would go through Bethlehem and...Beit Jala and we would stop for hummus on the way. You know? And like I said...as a kid I used to go to Beit Sahour and then as a soldier I was in Beit Sahour. And so all the places that Amanda grew up in I know and are not even a...fifteen minute drive from my mom’s house in South Jerusalem, which is just on the other side of the Green Line...[It] doesn’t get much closer. So, yeah...I got very emotional hearing Amanda... (Itai)

...[W]hen she spoke [about] and showed her [vacation] pictures...I thought, “This is not fair that that’s her only memory...of being able to make it [Jericho].” ...I feel like the conversation in Israeli society is all the time, “Poor us, we can’t do everything because of terror”...[b]ut basically every year I went [on]...family vacations...[to] Hof Dor – it’s [a]...really beautiful beach with...cabins... – and we travelled a lot...to all of our...extended families, anywhere we wanted. Right? [Amanda talked about] the journey to [get to Jericho]...I remember [the picture]...[was]...of pool...[F]or me it was really important to see the picture [and] to just feel connected to the fact that there are happy kids here and what a journey they needed to go through in order to be there and how they couldn’t go again. So for me it was really strong. (Ofira)

Inspired by Amanda, Ofira goes on to make a remarkable and embodied connection between present day Israeli checkpoints and Nazi ghettos:

I remember the boat [picture]...it’s about movement. Right? And you know, I wasn’t brave enough in my life, yet, to go and stand [at the] checkpoints...I could stand with non-profit organization[s]...[like] MachsomWatch143...but the reason I didn’t bring myself to do it yet (in a lowered voice) is that I was afraid that I will break down. Really. Like it will just destroy me (laughs) to see it. Like I read so much about it like from blogs, from posts of B’Tselem, whatever it is...But I remember one time I got lost on the way to Jerusalem, my partner’s family lives there in one place called...French Hill...it's the boarder of the settlements, kind of like the area of Palestinians...I drove, and I’m really not familiar with the area of Jerusalem there, and I kind of got lost and I ended up in a road that I really...felt (in a cautious, quiet voice) “Oh, maybe I’m on a...dangerous road.” You know in one point I felt that it feels different from Israel (laughs)...It was like with walls on the side and it felt empty and I felt, “Oh, maybe I’m on the road that actually Israeli government builds for the settlers and the Palestinians

143 MachsomWatch or Checkpoint Watch (2018) is an Israeli volunteer organization run by female peace activists who “oppose the Israeli occupation in the area known as the West Bank...the appropriation of Palestinian land and the denial of Palestinian human rights.” They also “support the right of Palestinians to move freely in their land and oppose the checkpoints which severely restrict Palestinian daily life.” MachsomWatch’s mission statement reads as follows: “Through our observations, reports, films, photographs and tours we aim to influence public opinion in Israel and throughout the world by recording and authenticating the impossible conditions faced by the Palestinians under Israeli occupation; conditions which also corrode the fabric of Israeli society and the values of democracy. We attempt to ease the frustrations and hardships of Palestinians by offering formal assistance wherever we can.”
are not allowed to use,” which is really kind of problematic…[I]n one point I stop on the side and I (laughs) call my mother-in-law...and she said, “Turn around...you’re almost at the checkpoint.” (In a soft, serious voice) And I was so scared. I was so scared not from being hurt, [but] from being there and feeling of entering a ghetto. You know? For me the connection is the Holocaust. For me it’s like you inside the ghetto or outside the ghetto. Like the checkpoints, for me, [are] the entrance to the ghetto...[M]y parents will be sad...and mad, but probably sad first, that I’m taking part in this research...to even consider comparing Holocaust or Nakba things, feelings, thoughts, but for me this is the connection I had at that moment.

As Ofira continues, she highlights how representations of the Holocaust in Israeli media and cultural institutions have factored into her understanding of the ghettos and the larger negation of the occupation:

...[G]rowing up in Israel...most of us don’t have the opportunity [un]til age fifteen and on to go to Holocaust places...[s]o you have only your imagination to live with...So you watch movies, you hear stories, you go to museums, but you create your own images...And my image [of a ghetto] was like soldiers stop you before you enter...and then...when you enter you are not allowed to go out without their permission...So for me this is the embodied like imagination...[While I was watching Amanda’s video] I thought about these thoughts because, in a way...you can live in Israel and avoid the occupation. Really, avoid. Not seeing it is easy.

Second, Itai and Ofira both spoke to Amanda’s childhood experiences with and impressions of Israeli soldiers, particularly those who, like Itai, tried to be or do “good”:

...[Amanda’s] stories about soldiers coming into her home and trying to be nice and putting napkins on the chair just brought me into tears because I was that solider...[I]t was many years ago and I’ve sort of tried to...put it out of my head, in a way, but it really brought me back. (Itai)

I wrote [in my notes] about [Amanda’s story where the solider put a napkin on the chair before he stood on it] because I was really pleased to hear it...because many of them don’t. So I’m glad that’s the experience she had. But I was really sad when a...good friend of mine’s son went to the army, like three years ago. He...[is]...really like...democratic education kid that...question[s] everything...At one point I ask[ed] him, “But why did you decide to? Like you know you have the choice. You know you can refuse. You know your parents will support you. You know that...you will survive [Israeli] society.” He said, “Because I want to have several different soldiers that will behave differently with Palestinians and will respect them”...[I] didn’t understand it in the beginning, but then he start[ed] coming with stories that his mom told me...[At] one point he was the officer like above many soldiers...and...[these soldiers] enter[ed] a house and they
jump[ed] on the bed with their shoes and he kicked them out and gave them a lesson about respect...But then he fought with the system, the army, to change the rules. And in the end, now, they have to come and put a piece of cloth [under their shoes] and they need to clean up after them[selves]...I’m not saying everyone [follows this], but at least he did something that he...wanted to do. Right? He did many things like that. So in a way I ask myself, “Am I really happy that he went to the army (laughing)?” You know what I mean? Like maybe there is a part of me that is a little bit happy that he went to the army, that he made a small difference. (Ofira)

But if Amanda’s stories of the Israeli soldiers she encountered during her youth were emotional for Itai to hear and engage with, they also forced him to critique some of the military activities he participated in as an IDF solider, which had previously seemed benign:

I remember particularly...when she talked about being a heavy sleeper and then going to pee in the middle of the night and her mom tackling her in the hallway with forks and knives waiting to leave the house. And then thinking that they’re being bombed and then finding out the next morning they were just all noise bombs, what we call shock grenades. But they’re just meant to shock you.

...[A]s a soldier shooting a shock grenade is...like shooting a blank bullet. Right? It's actually (shrugging his shoulders) a nothing. It's just to scare [the] civilian population. So if you want to clear an area you throw a shock grenade [and] everybody leaves, but...you're not gonna hurt anybody with it. So in my mind I always thought shock grenades are harmless. And then...you hear [Amanda talk about] how they terrorized [her] entire neighbourhood...[B]asically all of Beit Sahour thought they were being bombed for an entire night...only to find out that it was nothing. So, yeah, all these things I can relate to because I know them from the other side.

Because Itai could critically see himself reflected in the soldiers mentioned in Amanda’s stories, he was grateful she recognized that many of them were good people simply caught up in the problematic reality of Israeli political, social, and cultural expectations:

...Amanda...could also see that her and the soldiers are the same...[W]hen her [neighbour] said to the soldier, “You’re scaring the kids!” he said “Oh, I’m sorry!” and he lowered his gun...[H]e doesn’t wanna scare children [be]cause he’s not a bad man. He’s just put in an impossible situation and he doesn’t have the courage or the vision to resist [the] situation that he was born into, which is [a] very, very hard thing to do. I didn’t have it either and most people don’t...It’s [also] great that she could see that [the soldiers were bored].
Finally, while Itai briefly, yet emphatically, voiced his agreement with Amanda’s statement that “Palestinians have bad luck,” Ofira spoke in detail about the heartbreaking impact she feels this notion must have on the Palestinian psyche, particularly when contrasted with how she and other Jews are taught to view their own worth:

...I remember that she said, (reading from her notes) “Growing up knowing we are not lucky.” Such a sad sentence...[G]rowing up as Jewish, you know what you grow up with? Really. You are the chosen people. Doesn’t matter...that I’m questioning it all the time, but that’s what I grew up with. I can’t imagine how it can destroy the personality, destroy the soul [to grow] up knowing, “We are not lucky.” So different. I wrote...(again reading from her notes) “So different from Israeli growing up as the best.” ...And imagine...I didn’t grow up in a privileged family or something, but you grow up as the best. You have the sense of [it]...And imagine it’s almost the same pot that this plant come from...Her parents, her grandparents, my grandparents, almost the same pot. Imagine this plant. You know all this research now about you put two plants next to each other and you talk really not nice to one and you talk really nice to other and pet it and look at it with really good intentions and stuff, the other one may die...A plant! ...(Her statement about having bad luck] was really strong for me.

Ofira then connects the interlaced yet distinct notions of luck and worth to Amanda’s story about the significance of her family receiving Canadian citizenship:

She said something like, (reading from her notes) “Don’t have a country behind them.” Like the Palestinians don’t have someone behind [them]. You know it’s...like you have the sense [that] the Israelis are organized [and] the] Palestinians are not. Like that’s the sense that she grew up with. It’s really strong because if I want to pass something [on] to my kids with all my activism [and] community volunteering it’s that you [always] have someone behind [you] because you are in a community...[Y]ou are part of something bigger than you and you have a backup. But imagine without it! Imagine growing up without it! It’s just something that really struck me and I wrote (laughs) a lot about...Like she had the picture of the citizenship [ceremony]. Remember? It was strong picture to just say, “Now we have someone behind us.” Yeah, and I thought, “Luckily the government got changed here and someone is really behind her.” I hope! ...Let’s keep the faith for Trudeau. And I’m really impressed, the last thing about her that I wrote, that how after all this experiences, after all this journey she keeps saying that...she stays really open and caring for all. I wrote it, “Cares, but open...Caring for all.” This is so impressive. She must be really strong soul.
As we have seen, thus far the Palestinian participants generally found each other’s life stories, (post)memories, and photographs remarkably familiar and thus often had less to say in response. Nonetheless, they were still moved and/or surprised by particular aspects of what their fellow Palestinian participants shared. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Nick and Haifa’s responses to Amanda who they felt shone new light on their understanding of the Palestinian experience. In Nick’s case, even though he and Amanda knew each other prior to the commencement of this project, he was shocked when he watched her video:

I [was] surprise how [a] young lady like this know[s] about things like that…I [didn’t] know she will talk…this way, to be honest. I was thinking, “What Amanda will say? What her experience about what’s going on?” So I surprised! [That] also [made] me…proud of her. She know[s] and she feel[s] our situation right…[S]he give…[me and]…the other participants many things new…[to think about.]

According to Nick, the most pressing issue raised in Amanda’s video is the fear felt by Palestinian children on a daily basis, as illustrated by her story of the panic her and her friends experienced when an IDF solider pointed his gun at them. This story highlighted for Nick the urgent need to study and understand the psychological impact fear has on Palestinian children. In addition, and much to his amazement, it also forced Nick to think about the fear experienced by his own sons in the past, as well as how it continues to affect them in the present:

I remember, when I watch[ed] that video, my kids. When I was running [for] over…three years [and] I [was] not sleep[ing] in my house [because] I refuse[d] to go to the jail, how my kids coming to be hurt their feeling [because] I am not with them. They see me in one week maybe one time…So how they feeling? How they crying? How they now? What’s they thinking now? This is [a] good point. What they thinking now? I feel…they remember everything by heart. So this [is]…the feeling I want the Israeli[s] to see or to know. This is a holocaust. The Holocaust they teach you in the school…about (begins speaking loudly) burn, killing, feeling, scaring, all of that feeling, all of that feeling, you as a Jewish – or the Zionist exactly – put it in our people, in our kids, in our family…You punish us…When I watch Amanda it shock me! It did! It’s shocking! Yeah, what’s my sons feeling now? …I start[ed] to go back…to…[the First] Intifada…After [‘87 I was in and out of jail or on the run]. [During] all of this…what’s [my kids] feeling? How their psychology? …Just think about that…[P]lease [whoever sees] me now, think about that feeling.

As for Haifa, she was able to identify with Amanda’s stories, memories, and photographs, particularly those related to playing in the pool with friends and travelling to
Israel, yet they also gave her a window into how much conditions have worsened in 
Palestine since she left – conditions she has heard about from her family and on the 
news, but was only able to engage with more deeply now:

...[It was] a little bit saddening and depressing...because you just 
realize that things have gotten worse not better. Like it was bad when 
I grew up in Palestine and it’s horrible now. I just think about this 
younger generation, new people that are being born into this...How are 
they gonna get out of this? Like, this is just horrible.

...Amanda said something about Palestinians and how...we say...we’re 
basically screwed [laughs]! ...Itai said something [too] 
about...Palestinians [have] always been screwed by everyone around 
them (laughing)! ...It doesn’t matter which generation of Palestinian[s] 
you grew up [in][or] whether you still live in Palestine or you’re 
outside of Palestine...you’re just doomed! You know? You’re Palestinian 
and (laughing) you’re [doomed] too!144 (Laughing) Really, it’s a curse!

In the end, and in striking parallel to her comments about Nick, Haifa recognized that 
even though her and Amanda’s lives have been shaped by similar experiences, she is 
comforted and made hopeful by Amanda’s openness and willingness to engage with 
Israelis even after everything she have endured:

It was also comforting for me to hear Amanda because she grew 
up...in that period where...things are much worse, but she still had this 
willingness to engage with Israelis and want[ed] to have a positive 
experience with [them] and I found that very hopeful.

Ran apparently also found Amanda’s youthful perspective fresh and enlightening:

I have a daughter that is ten years older than Amanda, so for me it’s a 
different experience because I don’t meet Palestinian [of] this age. I 
mean I don’t have a chance...[I]t’s interesting to see what the people 
that came from different heritage [and age] think about this story.

And yet his only other response to Amanda focuses on her discussion of what she was 
told about the Nakba growing up:

I remember one interesting point in [Amanda’s] interview when she 
talk[ed] about her father...[who] said that people had the key for [their 
homes]...[O]bviously she grew up with the Nakba and it’s part of her 
heritage and history and is something that she [is] basically part 
of...[A]nd it’s interesting... – and even ask her about it – ...it always 
drive[s] me crazy this point of the history, did the Palestinian left 
because they wanted to and they thought they gonna come back or

144 Here Haifa is referring to me specifically.
the Israelis chased them out...[F]or me it doesn't really matter, I mean, the outcome is the same, but even she wasn't sure about it...[T]here's one point that she says that they expelled or...750,000 Palestinians...went away...and then [she] went to the story with the keys and then she tells the story about [how the Arab armies] told them that they should take the key because they will come back in two weeks...So I mean...it's look like...even there the facts are not really clear. And it probably was a combination...So, anyway, it was interesting part of the story...[A]s I said...I think the outcome...doesn't really matter.

When I ask Ran if he realizes that it matters to Palestinians, he responds as follows:

Yeah, I understand that, but what surprised me [was] that even her story is a double story. Even her story is like, “Yeah, we're gonna leave and come back in two weeks,” but yet when she start to tell the story she's talking about [how during] the Nakba about 750,000 people [were] displaced. As I said...for me it doesn't really matter if they [were] displaced by force or...displaced because they moved away [of]...their own will. So what, if they moved [of] their own will...it's not theirs or they don't have the right to come back? Either way they're still displaced. So the reason why they moved, for me, it doesn't make a difference, but the story's always there, like how much they were displaced by force, how much they displaced voluntarily. Anyway...I thought it was an interesting part.

Ran

In keeping with his first interview, when asked to reflect on the process of sharing his life story and (post)memories, Ran provides an allusive and ambiguous answer that instead addresses the connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba. As such, these responses have been left to Chapter 8. The only ostensibly concrete answer he provides is to my question about whether or not he found any aspects of sharing his stories and memories challenging:

No, I don’t think there was anything that I had trouble [with]...[U]nfortunately...I was...[making air quotes] “a professional soldier” for about ten years of my life...[E]ven when I was a soldier in the Israeli army I always looked at the conflict [as]...between Israel and the Arab countries surrounding Israel. I...never really looked at it as a conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians...[E]verything that I did was to make sure that Israel stay[ed] [safe]...[T]his is why I'm there, this is why I'm spending my time, is to make sure that Israel [laughs] is gonna stay safe as far as...Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, at the time. So this was...ten years of my life – eighteen to

________________________

145 Our second interview took place at Ran’s home on November 18, 2015.
twenty-eight – which is huge…[Y]et [the] Palestinian conflict was not part of it because it wasn’t conventional war [and] it wasn’t the conflict that I was dealing with as a soldier. Mind you I wasn’t on the ground…I was in the Air Force, so I didn’t have…contact with the Palestinian[s] on the ground. It wasn’t something that I experienced. So in this sense my experience as a soldier [has] nothing to do (laughing) with the Palestinian[s] even though…obviously…there is a connection.

While this response provides no indication of how valuable, if at all, Ran felt the process of sharing his stories and (post)memories was, it does demonstrate that he views his military service as divorced from the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. It also clarifies that he served in the Israeli Air Force for approximately seven years beyond the mandatory three years expected of Israeli males – information he was reluctant to share in our first interview. As we will see, although Ran’s stories and (post)memories of being an underdog and having no choice but to defend Israel from another holocaust were enlightening for two of the Palestinian participants, his removed approach to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, perceived lack of commitment to our project, and the unique nature of his military service, garnered him the most criticism of all the study’s participants.

Of the five other participants, Haifa and Ofira emerged as Ran’s greatest detractors. For her part, Haifa found it difficult to deeply engage with Ran’s life story and (post)memories partly because they were not narrated through photographs, but also because she “did not get the same genuine or sincere support for the Palestinians” as she did from Itai and Ofira based on “what [Ran] said and how he said it.” More specifically, she points to three issues related to 1948 that she hopes Ran can clarify.146 The first concerns the relationship between the native Palestinians and their assorted occupiers:

...[H]e said something about how the people that controlled the land had nothing to do with the people that lived there…[I]t came across as a little bit justifying because…he’s saying that [they] were really fighting the British and Ottomans…And I felt like, “It doesn’t matter…[B]asically what you’re telling me is that Palestinians have been occupied for centuries, which we knew, but that doesn’t justify [it] (laughs). Just because we were occupied when you came around doesn’t justify…[us] being occupied again by a new power.” So I don’t

---

146 Haifa leads into this discussion by acknowledging that of the study’s six participants Ran was born closest to the Holocaust. Later in our interview we both suggest that his proximity to the Holocaust may account for the nature of his stories and responses. As we will see, this is an observation explicitly noted by Itai and Ofira in their reflective interviews.
know if that’s what he meant to say, but that didn’t sit very well with me.

The second was Ran’s discussion of the various narratives concerning why Palestinians left their homes during the Nakba:

...[H]e talked about how they [fled] because they were promised by the Arab armies that as soon as the war's over they’re gonna come back, rather than...some of the stories about people...having to run away at gunpoint. And like to me...that doesn’t make it any better...I mean, that’s almost worse that they chose to leave their house because they were lied to by the [Arab] armies...And somehow that was better than the story of...being shot at by Israelis and Jewish people or...being forced to leave at gunpoint or...being slaughtered...[B]ut to me that wasn’t [laughs] better. You’re still fearful for your home and for your family and for your safety and you’re still forced to leave. Like it doesn’t matter how [they left]...[or] what kind of fear [they felt]...[I]t made me a little bit angry that people try to tell the story in a different way that makes them feel a little bit less guilty, when at the end of the day the effect is some people felt unsafe and they left their homes and they want to come back to their homes as soon as it became safe again and never...had a chance...And that sucks, it doesn’t (laughs) matter how that happened, it still sucks.

And finally, she states that although I made it very clear to all the participants that the objective of this project was not to compare the Holocaust and the Nakba, at times she felt Ran did just that:

...[This project] wasn’t about which one is more traumatizing than the other, but I think maybe he felt a bit defensive about that because...he said something about how eleven members of your family died versus someone who moved to live in a tent...[H]e talked about how...it’s still trauma and he’s not comparing, but it felt like comparing...[I]t felt like saying...you just basically had to move and live in a tent and that’s not as bad as eleven people dying from your family. And again, I wanted to yell back and say...there were families that lost [many members]...in the Nakba. There were massacres...[A]nyways...[laughs] moving to live in a tent is not an easy thing. So there were a few things [he] said that made me a little bit uneasy.

Unfortunately, these three “moments” caused Haifa’s emotions to take over, stopping her from engaging as deeply with the rest of Ran's video.

Ofrira also points to three specific, albeit different, issues that frustrated her about Ran’s video. First, she felt that he put her in a position where she had to defend the experiences of her “group,” something she herself had criticized Nick for:
...I had [a] really hard time with [Ran’s interview] because...I felt that by his comments I was...put in the position that I didn’t want to put myself, as the North African [Jew]...like an Arab Jewish Israeli...[At one point Ran said, "Imagine a kid that his parents are from Tunisia…"]

– (looking directly at the camera) my father is from Tunisia – “...and the Holocaust (swiping her left hand over her head) just pass above their head.” Imagine that! "They have to hear about the Holocaust in the education system.” (In a lower, intense voice) And it made me so mad! It made me like Nick, like standing for the group I come from. You know? In a way – this is the connection that I drew back to Nick... – when I heard...Ran saying that...I felt like Nick standing for the group...the North African [group]...I observed my behaviour and saw that I do the same like Nick, that I felt...defensive. I felt like, “Who are you to say (swiping her left hand over her head again) it goes above their head?” No, it didn’t go above (swiping her left hand over her head) the head of my family. It didn’t go. And you know what? These assumptions are so wrong. For example, my dad’s sister, dear sister, was married to Holocaust survivor. But Ran doesn’t know it, right? So for him my dad is from Tunisia [and] the Holocaust (swiping her left hand over her head) passed above his head...(In a low intense voice) it made me so mad (hits her fist on the table in front of her) it made me so mad (hits her fist on the table in front of her again) to be honest!

Second, and even though Ofira is quick to stress that there is much to admire Ran for, she nevertheless feels that he problematically clings to European master narratives of the Holocaust:

...I feel that...his interview...is so advanced in his openness and progressiveness...[There are] so many good things I can say about Ran. Right? But...I was really shocked that he keeps the master narrative alive. That’s what I felt. That although he is open, although he’s like progressive, although he’s pro humanity, although he says that he really wants good for everyone...like really it doesn’t matter if they are Arabs, Jews or whatever...I really felt that he means it. Ok? He walks his talk. It’s not that he doesn’t. But the brainwash, the hidden curriculum [is] so strong in him that he still tells you the master narrative. Doesn’t question it, in a way, he lives it. And I wondered – just to be critical little bit, not about Ran, but think critically – I thought, “[Does] it relate to the fact that he’s older than me and Itai?” [Itai and I are of a] different generation that [is] used to...question[ing] things...Like I feel...it’s really common for us to question the government...it’s not just accepting the adults’ [narrative]...it’s kind of a bit different. I don’t want to say that we’re the best or something, it’s not that...Generationally...it’s different. So I want to say that I was really surprised that he keeps the master narrative.

When I suggest that this might be the result of Ran having grown up in the newly formed Israeli state where silence surrounded the Holocaust, Ofira agrees:
Right! But, for example, in his interview he said *several* times, “Yeah, but you should understand it was the story of everyone,” something like that. It *wasn’t* (*taps hand on the table in front of her*) the story of everyone (*laughs*). Maybe your neighbourhood [but] it wasn’t the story of everyone. It was something that sometimes was removed...from your life, sometimes it was story of museums, sometimes it was of ceremonies. You know? In a way, to make a statement that it was the story of everyone it’s just *assuming* that everyone has the experience of knowing someone or thinking that this is the narrative we live by. Everyone...It’s really collective...

Finally, Ofira was frustrated by Ran’s decision not to share photographs, as well as what she perceived as his lack of commitment to the project. As such, and similar to Haifa, she found it hard to deeply engage with his stories and (post)memories:

I had a hard time with [him not sharing photographs]...[E]veryone has the right to choose whatever they want to share...and want to do. At the same time, we kind of agreed to take...part [in]...emotional research...more personal research...visual research...[A]ll these goals didn’t meet for me with his interview. You know what I mean? ...[O]nce we agreed to join your research I *felt* that this...is the goal, to...go through emotions and memories and pictures. So in a way, I felt that it’s kind of missing the point and of course it created[d] distance for me. On top of...this distance feeling, his comments and in addition to the fact that he mentioned towards the end of the video that he’s not sure he will watch all the videos and it depends if it will be interesting and...maybe he will just fast forward. And really once he said that I thought, “Imagine Haifa is crying there and you fast forward.” It was painful for me...[W]hen I heard [that] I thought, “Should I ask Nawal not to...give him my interview?” Really, just out of respect toward myself...I don’t want to just be passed by...I thought like, “If I’m willing to share with you and I sit now and listen to you for two hours, try to see what I can *learn* from your story in reflection to my story and in relation to Nick and Amanda and Haifa and Itai.” I *(inaudible)* to be part of a research. Right? So it’s kind of...it comes down to responsibility, but toward the group, and I felt that it’s disrespect.

Stressing that she just wants “to be honest” and “not *pretend* [or] *hide,*” Ofira concludes with a message specifically for Ran: “*(Laughing)* I hope I didn’t make *(pointing at the camera)* you mad...!”

For his part, Itai was not particularly critical of the stories and (post)memories Ran shared or his level of commitment to the project. However, he did highlight the differences between their IDF experiences and Ran’s reluctance to discuss the details of his service:
...I’m very different than...[Ran] who was a solider for many, many years and didn’t really talk about it much in his interview. But I was a solider for three years, which is the minimum, and I hated it and I never bought into it and I didn’t wanna be there and I thought what I was doing was wrong. I never bought into it, but that doesn’t justify anything though. Right? (Laughs) That doesn’t excuse anything, but it’s a very different place than...Ran who did buy into it, at least for a few years I assume, even though we don’t really know. But also the way he talks about it now is very different than me...And I was wondering if you gonna ask him and you didn’t go there (laughing)! [You got the sense] that he didn’t want to, but sometimes that’s when you need to push (laughing)!

...Oh, if you’re an officer for five or six, I don’t know, eight years...I can really imagine what Ran might have done or not done.

Still, similar to Ofira, Itai suggests that Ran’s unwillingness to speak about his service and the overall evasiveness of the language he used was undoubtedly characteristic of his generation:

He’s also a different generation, right? It’s...more like my parent’s generation. He’s a little younger than my parents, but they were the ones who felt anti-Semitism around the world. They were the ones who felt...the Jews need to have a state and that state needs to be Jewish...When I was born we were already cynical. We already knew that what we’re doing here is wrong...And certainly the generation after me...[is] cynical, even though a lot of them buy into it.

Interestingly, and even though he was often criticised by participants, as the study’s oldest participant Ran’s unique generational perspective provided Palestinians with a better understanding of the narratives at the centre of Israeli society’s focus on survival and militarization. Of particular interest to Haifa and Amanda were the underdog and no choice narratives he shared, especially given that similar narratives are common among Palestinians – the irony of which was not lost on either woman. On the one hand, Haifa claims that these stories and (post)memories surprised her more than anything else she heard or saw in the Israelis’ videos, leading to a productive, if not challenging, revelation:

...[Ran] talked about...how he grew up feeling that [he], as a Jewish Israeli in Israel, was [an] underdog...[T]hat was an interesting idea to hear because...of course, but I never thought about it. I never thought that Israelis...actually do see themselves as the victim because I saw

---

147 Throughout our second interview Nick only made one brief comment about Ran. While significant, his statement is much more pertinent to and better contextualized as part of our discussion in Chapter 8, thus it has been attended to there.
myself as a victim. I was...we Palestinians are, the underdog. It was interesting *(laughing)* and...a little bit hilarious when you think about it. We are fighting each other and we both think we’re the underdog *(laughing)*...We could actually unite around the fact that we are...underdogs. But maybe we couldn’t because...the reason we are oppressed and [persecuted] and we feel [like] the underdog is because of Israel...So, I don't know. I mean, we could unite around the *feeling*, but the fact is...they were victimized by someone else and then we were victimized by *them*...So if we could get over the [issue of] “who *caused* the aggression” and just focus on that feeling and the experience, then I think that could be very uniting.

*...[A]nother thing that came up...in all three Israeli interviews [actually], was...not just the feeling, [but]...being told that you have no choice. There’s no choice. You join the army or there's another Holocaust...[A]nd the zero tolerance*\(^{148}\)* to find out *“What* else?” “It’s this or what?” ...*[T]here’s no “what,” it’s just “this,” “We’re never to be weak again” or “never going to [be persecuted] again.” *...I reacted a little bit to that because it made me think a little about choice and how we think about choice. And I thought, “Well, I had no choice but to be sleeping in my house. You had a choice to not come to my house and arrest my father *(laughs)*.” You know? And that made me react in a defensive way when they talked about choice.*\(^{149}\)

While such revelations were difficult for Haifa to hear, she admits that Ran’s stories about feeling like the underdog and having no choice but to defend Israel by serving in the IDF made her stop and think, which was good for her. She also explains that she is happy to hear that, contrary to his youth, Ran is now aware of the Nakba, its magnitude, and its impact on the Palestinian people.

On the other hand, Amanda ties Ran’s discussion of the underdog and no choice narratives to his critique of the Israeli education system and what he criticized as her “double story” of the Nakba:

*...Ran was [talking] about the feeling of [being an] underdog, that...“If we don’t do this, if we don’t be...on the offensive all the time, we’re not gonna make it, we’re not gonna survive.” And that’s sort of what Palestinians think too because we always say that no one has come to our aid...so we have to actually defend ourselves and fight and resist

---

\(^{148}\) Haifa addresses this issue again later in our interview: “He talked about how *(reading from her notes)* “the majority of Israelis have zero tolerance to experiment with [the] enemy” and to me that was a bit saddening because it just felt *hopeless*. You know? It’s...like how are we ever going to solve this?”

\(^{149}\) While I have generally left statements pertaining to multiple participants for Chapter 8, I included this statement here as it was made during our discussion of Ran’s life story and (post)memories.
for our lives...[I]t's so funny how similar we are as people, we're very similar, and yet we cannot solve this problem. It's not the people – it's definitely not the people – it's just the governments.

...Ran talked about how...it's all about survival and the underdog feeling. That you have to do these things to be able to survive...[I]t's like fear mongering...[T]hen he talked about how the Nakba is not recognized in Israeli schools. I think all of them might have talked about it, but Ran said...how the story went is that Arab countries are the ones that attacked, which is true, but the way that Israel justifies it is that it is a war and Israel won, so what they had taken is justified...It is the War of Independence, it's not Nakba. Like, "Oh 750,000 people...either left or...got kicked out...this is just war...too bad. This happened to other people, it will happen now, it will happen in the future." Like it's interesting that this is the way it is taught in Israelis schools...[E]ven though Ran didn't really say the word brainwash...I think that's what he was trying to get at...[I]t is so sad to think that all of this history is just washed away and not even talked about. I wonder how it is now though? I wonder if it's any different? I don't know, probably not (laughs).

Itai

Of the six participants, Itai was the most comfortable sharing his life story, (post)memories, and photographs. As an artist whose work often deals directly with the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and who has been interviewed several times, he did not experience any difficulties or challenges during our first interview: "...[Y]eah, it was fine. I don't have much to say about the actual process of doing the interview. I didn't surprise myself with anything that I said." This is not to say, however, that Itai did not find the process worthwhile: "...[I]t's always valuable to phrase your thoughts into sentences and to evaluate what you believe and what you think, and to try to explain things to someone else. It's a very complicated issue, so it's always valuable..." Yet of the six participants, Itai was also the most critical of himself. He explains that in the process of reviewing his video before it was released to the other participants he was surprised at his defense of Israel and lack of openness – behaviours that he ties back to Ran's original interview:

...[W]hen I saw my own interview I was a little [pauses] I don’t wanna say embarrassed by it, but I wasn’t happy because sometimes I felt like I came across as trying to defend Israel or what’s happening or trying to explain...[W]hen you [are] put in [front of] a camera and you are Israeli and you are in this position then you immediately want to say, “Hey, hey, it’s not as bad as...” or “Whoa, we’re...” You know what

---

150 Our second interview took place at Itai’s home on November 10, 2015.
I mean? It’s a natural thing and I think maybe that’s what (laughing) happened to Ran a little bit is that you realize everybody else is Palestinian and you’re the Israeli here and there are two sides to this conflict and people do die on the other side also and all that...[W]hen I saw my own interview I felt like I...got caught in that or...I have an urge to defend what Israel is doing or Jewish people are doing...because I feel part of it and because everyone I love lives there...It’s like you stop being just yourself and you’re part of a bigger thing. Like I’m not just speaking in the name of Itai here, I’m speaking in name of Israelis or Israelis who left [Israel]...[I]t just happens naturally.

...I also felt like I kinda came across as smug, as somebody who knows this conflict, who knows what he’s gonna feel, been there done that. Whatever! Who cares! Who cares! Who cares! Who cares! Honestly, I couldn’t care less, but that’s why when I looked at it I was like, “How could I have not been more open?” ...If I was so open, I wouldn’t have been so surprised...But it’s all good...I didn’t lose any sleep over it or anything (laughs).

Contrary to Itai’s reaction to his own video, his fellow participants expressed great appreciation for his frank candour, particularly regarding his experiences serving in the IDF. Nick appreciated Itai’s honesty about not wanting to be a soldier in the first place and how much he ultimately hated the experience. Although previously aware of the Israeli refusenik and conscientious observer movements, this was the first time Nick actually heard an Israeli soldier admit that he did not want to serve in the IDF, but ultimately fulfilled his mandatory service because he feared being punished and/or stigmatized by Israeli society. Amanda echoes Nick’s latter statement, but takes it further by also emphasizing the significance of Itai’s decision to serve in light of his unique upbringing:

...I have heard a lot of stories of Israelis that don’t wanna serve and they don’t end up serving and then they have to face either jail time or a fine or something like that...or people who have served and then regretted it and they said, “This was not the right choice for me.” But Itai, I think, is unique in the way that...he said...he grew up in a leftist family and they’ve always recognized human rights and that Palestinians are people, but he still served. And I think that shows just how much pressure it is for Israelis to be in the army, especially for males. To be part of society is to be in the army and serve for a couple of years...[M]aybe they think of it as just something [they] just have to do and get it over with, like a job...But it’s just sad to see that they don’t really want to, they don’t believe in it, but [they] are sort of forced to do it.

Additionally, and as a fellow Israeli, Ofira found Itai’s choice to serve in the IDF in spite of his liberal upbringing and political beliefs comforting:
Talking about Itai…it made me feel – (laughing) I want to say good, but it’s ridiculous in this context because [it] is so sad and deep – but…I was so interested to see that Itai’s experience in Israel growing up…was so different from my experience. Right? Because it’s like he grew up in a really political family and activist and so on and in the end he ended up in the army like me…and now he moved away…In a way, really similar story. But I thought, “Wow! I thought that our stories will be much different.” …I was really kind of…(making air quotes) “happy” to see that, “Oh! I wasn’t the only one that fell into this trap.”

Building from these initial comments, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, and Ofira speak more explicitly about Itai’s efforts to be a “good soldier” during his time in the IDF. On the one hand, Nick was especially impressed by Itai’s choice to serve in Lebanon rather than the Gaza Strip because he knew he would be fighting trained and armed members of Hezbollah rather than defenseless women and children. Hearing this was extremely positive for Nick. Yes, Itai served in the IDF, but at least he chose to “fight another warrior” instead of unarmed Palestinian civilians fighting to “take [their] freedom.”

On the other hand, Haifa, Amanda, and Ofira focused more on Itai’s realization that regardless of the good he tried to do he was nevertheless an oppressor. Having grown up under occupation, it is not unexpected that both Haifa and Amanda concur:

...Itai said, “Even if you were a good soldier it didn’t matter because you’re a solider and they were afraid of you,” and it’s true. I mean…I did have interactions with nice soldiers that were friendly and joked around…but they’re still soldiers…they still had giant guns (laughing) on their backs, and they were scary. Right? …[I]t’s still occupation...The friendly soldiers, [in my] experience, were the ones at the checkpoints that...made my car stop, got us out of the car...now we’re late for whatever we needed to go...[Y]es, they were nice and they joked around, but (laughs) it’s still occupation, I’m still being prevented from going from...point A to point B without being checked. So you could have an asshole solider that will yell at you and...strip search you...or you could have a nice soldier who smiles, but they’re still carrying out the same duties of the same occupation...It’s the same thing. The solider[s] that...came to arrest my dad sometimes they were nice, they were...(making air quotes) “kind” about it...they did it in a nice way, but sometimes...it depends on the people...they would come and flip the house upside down and then take my dad. Sometimes they’d knock on the door, rather than slam it open, and ask [for my dad] and give [him] time to get dressed and then take him. Right? …[H]e got arrested so many times that we got all of these

151 More than once during our interview Nick underscores that nonviolent resistance is the best way to end the occupation and achieve the dream of a Palestinian state, as demonstrated by peaceful protests in the West Bank versus the armed resistance undertaken by Hamas in Gaza.
experiences, but at the end of the day (*laughs*) they’re coming to arrest my dad. (Haifa)

I think for Itai, because he’s a good person, he kinda just convinced himself that, “Oh, I’m doing a good thing…I’m not gonna hurt anyone.” But at the end of the day if you serve the army you are contributing to the occupation, even if you don’t kill anyone, even if you treat Palestinians (*making air quotes*) “nicely,” you’re still part of the problem. Right? When you put that uniform on and you go to an occupied territory and you’re controlling these people…that’s still the wrong thing to do…I understand why he would do it. The pressure, right? But it’s still…the wrong thing to do…He’s in the position of power…So even if you’re the nicest person you still have…power over these people…they are still afraid of you and you’re oppressing [them]… (Amanda)

However, when I ask Haifa and Amanda if they think the moments of kindness shown by soldiers like Itai make a difference to Palestinians, their answers are starkly different. While Amanda responds with a definitive “no,” Haifa acknowledges that these soldiers’ efforts to be kind humanized them in her eyes to some extent, plus provided moments of reprieve from the otherwise constant stress of living under occupation: “…[I]t makes a difference in that moment and that day…[T]hose tiny moments do add up eventually…”

Haifa’s vacillation between seeing IDF soldiers as oppressors on one hand and people she can connect with on the other is also apparent in her responses to both Itai and Ofira’s¹⁵² army related photographs:

...[T]hey’re both supportive of...Palestinians having the right to live in peace and freedom, which is great...but...pictures of them dressed in uniform posing very happily and excited and cheerful, that was hard because, you know...(laughs) I was [on] the other side...as a child at the checkpoints, a child visiting my dad in jail, the child sleeping at home and the soldiers came to arrest my dad...[S]o to me...soldiers and smiles and happy and excitement don’t mix. But of course it was fun and good times for them, but that was a bit painful to watch...[Y]ou were having fun [laughs] and enjoying that experience, but that experience involved...traumatizing and oppressing people like me...[S]o that was a bit painful to watch, to look at those particular pictures...[And yet]...[Itai] said, (begins reading from her notes) “Here is me a very impressionable eighteen year old solider” and child soldiers came up in my mind...I’m like, “They are children! Like these are children. Eighteen year olds are children...[O]f course...they’re laughing and posing in these pictures and being silly because they’re kids!”

¹⁵² Again, while I have generally left statements pertaining to multiple participants for Chapter 8, I included these responses here because it was Itai’s comments regarding his own photographs that lead Haifa to have the forthcoming revelation.
In fact, Haifa admits that she has similar photographs of her and her friends (minus the military uniforms and guns, of course) from when she studied in Norway between the ages of seventeen and nineteen. Thus, while these images were difficult to engage with, they also served as points of identification between her and Itai, as well as Ofira. But Haifa’s ability to connect with Itai did not stop there. In the course of discussing the most positive aspects of his video – which included his views on the conflict and his support of Palestinians’ right “to peace and freedom” – she explains that she kept picking up on potentially “unifying” commonalities shared by Palestinians and Israelis, particularly their struggles with PTSD and reverence for and symbolic use of the cactus or sabra.153

While Ofira was surprised by Itai’s decision to try and be “a good soldier,” she connected his choice and subsequent revelation first to her friend’s son, who as noted earlier also tried to do good from within the IDF, and then to her own husband:

I thought about [my] friend’s [son]...I connected the two, and I was surprised that Itai thought about it. But that’s probably result of where he came from, politically aware and so on...He went to the army more aware and I wasn’t at this stage...Ido, my partner, all the time says...“You know, yeah, I can say like many other friends that...I can be a nice Israeli, I can be nice Jew, I can do good there. At the same time, I dressed as the oppressor.” Like it doesn’t matter even if (tugging at her shirt) these clothes, you’re present you’re the oppressor.

Although none of the participants commented on what Itai perceived as his defense of Israel, their responses were not wholly positive and/or uncritical. On the one hand, Haifa and Amanda both explain that aspects of Itai’s life story, (post)memories, and photographs, while valuable, were difficult to reconcile with their own experiences:

He made the point of really connecting the Holocaust to joining the army, which...cements the whole connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba...I thought that was interesting. The story of his stepmother – she’s the one [whose] mom survived [the Holocaust] – that was difficult to hear. And then some of the other things that were difficult is he talked about his years in the army and it came across as...the army is a fun, kinda young, experience...where all the young people go. That was a bit difficult because...again...I know it was traumatizing [for him], but I think the way that it’s presented to the young people in Israel [is] like, “Come to the army and have this great experience and then you can go out into the world.” Right? ...No one tells you, “Come to the army and kill some Palestinians and traumatize...

153 Haifa briefly notes that she also picked up on the shared symbolism of this plant during Ofira’s interview.
(laughing) their children”...but that’s really what you’re doing. So that disconnect felt a bit difficult for me. And he [also] talked about serving in Tulkarum...[T]hat’s where my mom comes from...so I spent a lot of time in Tulkarum visiting my grandparents and aunts and uncles. [S]o that was (begins speaking very quietly) a bit emotion for me when he talked about being in Talkarum and showed the picture with Tulkarum in the background. (Haifa)

One of the sad things when listening to and watching Itai’s video was how pessimistic his views are on the conflict...[I]t made me sad because I kinda felt the same...[L]ike I do have hope that eventually this is all gonna be figured out, but I think my feeling is in the near future or the coming years it’s just gonna go from bad to worse and to much, much, much worse and that makes me very sad. But I found the story he told about the professor he talked to [about] the Crusades and how they were there for 300 years and now it seems like a blip in history...[T]hat was [a] very interesting way of tying things. But...I think that’s part of the story of that part of the land. Like everyone wants to get there and control it and almost no one lasts and it’s just one person after another and that’s just, I guess, the curse of that tiny little piece of land (laughs). (Haifa)

A lot of the stories that were told by the Israelis [about] how the Holocaust affected them [are] kind of linked to how the Nakba affected Palestinians. Right? Like when Itai...said his [stepmother’s mother] became...so sick [after the Holocaust] that she [locked her daughters in the basement and then his stepmother horded food as a result, it showed how even]...if you haven’t experienced it directly...it still affects you. And that’s the same thing with the Nakba. So it was good to see the connection between the two...because us Palestinians, when you grow up, all you hear about [is] the Nakba. We learn about the Holocaust too, but not as much, you don’t understand it as much. So it makes the Israeli experience relatable when you understand how the Holocaust [has] affected many, many generations...[T]hat was very valuable [for] me to understand, [but] hard at the same time because...in my mind, like you don’t wanna make excuses, almost. It’s like, “Oh, I understand why they’re acting the way they are.” It’s almost like justifying...[Still,] you have to understand the full picture and get to know...the other person’s point of view to really solve the problem. Otherwise, if you just see your point of view and only your point of view, we’re not gonna go anywhere. So, yeah, I really enjoyed that. (Amanda)

On the other hand, Nick and Ofira went further by challenging Itai to rethink or think beyond some of his initial comments, particularly regarding responsibility and moral obligation. Nick takes issue with Itai’s statement that he will worry about the Israelis and let the Palestinians worry about themselves. Nick reads this as Itai suggesting that Israelis and Palestinians are equal – a notion he adamantly disagrees with:
I [don’t] agree because I realize that they equal the Palestinian with Israel. This is wrong situation, we’ve never been equal with Israel. Israel she always have the power, she have the guns, she have everything. As a Palestinian we have [stones]. That’s what we have. We fight with the stones. Stones [don’t] kill anybody. Maybe it will hurt, but it will not kill anybody. [With] one gun he can kill anybody. [With] tear [gas] they can kill sick people. All of this we cannot equal them. [Also], we are under occupation. We didn’t come to Israel to take their land, they come to our land. So you can’t put us…equal with…Israel. You suppose to understand (laugh) that. [Anyone who says that] we are equal, no, he[’]s wrong. We are not equal.

Ultimately, Nick’s response to Itai is a stern reminder that Israelis are responsible for the pain and misery suffered by the Palestinian people:

Our problem is your problem. You are Jewish, you’re responsible about my problem. If you not here, I have no problem. So you make [my] problem. I not make your problem...You make my miserable life. You do that, not me.

While Ofira is clearly inspired by Itai’s art and activism, she also challenges him to think beyond the sense of moral obligation he feels toward Palestinians:

[Itai] talks a lot about moral obligation...(Reading from her notes) “For me, it’s beyond that. It is more for the hope in this...the faith” ...I was really interested that he all time took it to the moral. And I felt that the moral obligation takes it a bit from the personal...Recognition is more like saying “I hear you,” but...it’s different to move and find...a common reality between us so then we can communicate...[O]ne philosopher that I really love [is] Gert Biesta...[H]e says empathy...puts you above...If you [only] have empathy toward someone it means that you are above them...it’s not being with them...The being, the active, being engaged, feeling...it’s different...[Empathy is a] [g]ood start, but it’s not enough. So that’s what I’m saying, that moral obligation it’s not enough...[Itai] talks a lot about moral obligation, but I think he has much more than [a] moral obligation...[Still,] I learned a lot from [his] interview. I really enjoyed listening to him. And he brought so many different, although similar, but different voices within me...I would hope that more people would bring their activism like Itai...I know he’s (laughing) a pessimist, so [Itai] sorry to bring you positive thoughts about you, but you do something good (laughing)...

Finally, and once again, Ran is the outlier of the group. While he originally insists that he did not watch Itai’s video with much interest as his stories are familiar to him, he later makes the following comment: “As far as Itai, amazing story that...bring the
personal story to explain and make you wonder why can’t we live with respect to each other.”

**Ofira**

Like Haifa, Ofira found narrating her life story, (post)memories, and photographs very healing. However, unlike Haifa, who was simply grateful for the opportunity to finally tell her story, Ofira appreciated being given the time to stitch together previously scattered stories and memories into a comprehensible whole:

[It was], [i]n a way, healing...I think it was the first time (laughing) someone beside myself had the patience to sit (laughing) and talk with me through [it]. Really it’s the first time I got the whole story together. You know? Kinda connecting so many things, events that happened in my life or around me and to other people, and then all connected...[T]hanks to your interview, I felt that the net...connected now...I really imagine it as a net that had holes in it and (moving her right hand through the air as though sewing) you just kinda helped me sew it. So it’s kinda like now all together, all the net...

Nonetheless, Ofira stresses that her first interview was not without its surprises and challenges. First, she admits that the process of sharing her stories, memories, and images made her “very sad,” as does the reality of her homeland. Second, as she watched her own video before it was shared with the other participants, she was shocked by her choice of photographs, as well as how similar they were to Itai’s:

I was really interested to watch my...video and then see which pictures I picked because I watched my video long time after [we did the interview]. I went through many changes in my life, Yuval grew up...I thought a lot about this research, so I was really surprised about the choices I made. But what I was really interested...to see [is] that...Itai chose such similar pictures, like relate to army. I was really surprised because I thought it’s so personal (laughing)...You know sometimes you have your own story, but then you find that it’s in relation to...others around you...[I]t was kind of making sense when I saw his pictures. I thought, “Oh, it makes sense...We had this experience and then this is the connection we make unconsciously about the fact that

---

154 During the course of our reflective interview, Ran admitted that he did not take notes while watching the other participants’ videos, something I had asked each participant to do. He then stated that, in addition to reviewing Nick’s transcripts and photographs for the first time, he wanted to go back and re-review the other participants’ videos and photographs. The quote provided here was thus provided over email several months after our reflective interview.

155 Our second interview took place at Ofira’s home on November 20, 2015. Once again she nursed and cared for her young son, Yuval, for the duration of our interview.
the army relate to protecting the country, protecting the country relate to the Holocaust. So...the brainwash worked *(laughing)*...[I’m still confident about the pictures I chose] because I don’t have any other pictures that...represent better the connection for me between Holocaust and my life. Really. These are the strongest, *although* I was shocked *(laughing)* about it.

Finally, after we completed our first interview, Ofira worried that she had been too open:

> I thought – like it’s really *[a]* normal thought for me – “Did I share too much?” ...I forget about the camera. With you I feel *so safe* so I was kind of scared...*[O]nce you left the house I thought, “Was it good? Is it negative that I shared too much?”

As she explains, her answer to this question differently dramatically after watching Ran’s video and then Haifa’s:

> ...*[E]specially...after watching Ran’s video...I felt that it was much more removed...less personal, “I’m not going to show pictures.” It’s kind of much less personal and emotional. But then I watched Haifa and *[she] made me feel, “No, actually I’m happy that’s what I did...No worries. It’s *all* good. Whatever needed to happen, happened and we should not bring our judgmental thoughts about ourselves.”

Similar to Amanda and Itai, Ofira’s fears were ultimately unfounded, for it was her genuine openness and skilful storytelling that made her a favourite amongst the other participants. For instance, Haifa states that Ofira’s was undoubtedly the most “emotionally engaging” of the three Israeli interviews: “I found myself *crying* with her, smiling with her...I think *[she’s]* an amazing storyteller...I really enjoyed watching her video.” Haifa’s positive response was due in no small part to the fact that she was able to relate to Ofira on several levels, e.g.) Haifa grew up in the northern region of the West Bank while Ofira grew up in northern Israel; Haifa is a mother as is Ofira; Haifa’s family is very similar to how Ofira describes her own\(^\text{156}\); Haifa has a visceral reaction when she hears Hebrew much like Ofira does when she hears German; and Haifa agrees with Ofira that together Palestinians and Israelis constitute “one side, of one story, of one conflict.” Additionally, Haifa “loved” the stories Ofira shared about her maternal grandmother and late Holocaust survivor Robert Mendler. With regard to the former, Haifa was especially taken with the story of how her grandmother’s confession about the state of her home on the day she inherited it led Ofira to realize that the house had

\(^{156}\) Elsewhere in our interview, Haifa states that listening to Ofira’s stories about her family’s opposing views on the conflict and negative responses to her personal choices was difficult and made her emotional.
previously been owned and inhabited by Palestinians displaced and dispossessed in 1948:

...[Ofira] talked about the Arab houses in Akko and...that triggered a memory of me and my mom in the ‘90s. My mom was involved in a dialogue program where they brought in Israeli...[and] Palestinian women and they talked...about feminist issues and women’s rights, but it was bi-national...[S]he made [a] really good friend with...an Israeli women who lived in Jerusalem and that women invited us to her home...so my mom brought me...I remember...we were in her house and it looked very Arab. Like the house just looked like...my grandmother’s house and I kept thinking, “They couldn’t have built that...since 1948...[T]his must have been one of those houses...”...[T]his women is involved in a dialogue [program] so she sees...Palestinians as – I hope anyways – equal human beings, yet she lived in this home...We slept in that house and it never came up and I kept thinking – and I was a child at the time – ...“Does she ever wonder about the people that used to live in this house because obviously (laughing)...some Arabs used to live [here].” ...[Regardless of]...the narrative that you heard [about why they left]...it must (laughing) have been very obvious that people used to live there and...now...live somewhere else...or they got killed. Right? So either way it’s not a good experience. And...I remember...all night long I was sleeping in that house and I kept thinking of that women and how...weird it must be for her to live in that home...So it was interesting that for [Ofira] they were called Arab houses, but no one ever made the connection, they thought it was an architecture design. I’m like, “Wow!” It’s amazing...just the way your perception of things are so [skewed]...The way that you’re told stuff. Like you could be...told something, but just one apostrophe “s” (laughing) makes all the difference. Like Arab houses versus Arabs’ houses (laughing)!

With regard to the latter, Haifa was inspired by the message Ofira passed on at Bob’s request:

...I loved the story she told about Bob and (reading from her notes) “learning from pain and learning not to hate. And...how he thought he was lucky to live and so he had lived fully and did not want to waste energy on hate.” And I thought that was just an amazing human being.

But it was Ofira’s life story overall, particularly her discussion of the personal choices she has made, that truly inspired Haifa and gave her hope:

...[S]ometimes we struggle with how complicated this conflict is and how hopeless it is and [we think] there’s nothing we can do...[And] sometimes we don’t think that personal choices and personal relationships make any difference. But from her story I left feeling that, no, like the tiny little personal choices we make actually [do] make a difference because they all add up into one big change. It was
very positive and left me feeling a bit more hopeful that even small tiny little things that we [do], steps that we take, could actually help...[S]o I really enjoyed her.

In the end, and most importantly, it was in Ofira’s video that Haifa finally found the recognition that she so greatly desired for herself, her father, and her family:

...[I]t's always...really (laughing) good for us Palestinians when we meet Israelis that...recognize the trauma and the pain and the oppression that we suffered as a result of the Israeli occupation. It’s very gratifying...well not gratifying, but I guess it validates our pain. Right? I mean it’s that recognition that we need...I could feel [that Ofira] was very genuine and...very sincere, and so it was healing for me to be able to watch her videos and get those messages from her...I really enjoyed that. It was good.

In an interesting parallel, Itai was also very emotional while engaging with Ofira’s life story, (post)memories, and photographs, plus speaks to the difficult choices she has made in her life, yet the emotions and connections that prompt these responses from Itai are much different than for Haifa:

I got extremely emotional listening to Ofira...Like hearing Ofira – I’m getting all emotional just talking about it now – ...saying that as soon as she realized she [was pregnant with] a boy...she [knew] she's not going back to Israel...[I]t made me think immediately...about my nephew who was going to go to the army one day and it was absolutely devastating for me, or any child in Israel that I know that is facing that reality. So, yeah, it was very powerful.

In fact, Itai goes on to speak at length about the difficult choices that connect him and Ofira to one another while simultaneously differentiating them from Ran:

...I think [Ofira] and I really see things eye to eye...I think Ran is different partly because he was in the army for eight years and...[because] he’s from a different generation...I can’t speak on Ofira’s behalf, but I think that [what] both Ofira and I have done is a hard, hard thing to do. It’s kind of disowning yourself from where you grew up and it makes you feel alone in the world...I constantly get criticized heavily by my family and my friends in Israel and I constantly get into [arguments]...I was just in Los Angles seeing a family friend that I haven’t seen in years and I met her husband for the first time and we got into a big political argument...he was also an officer...[a]nd I kept apologizing...[A]s I left I was like, “I’m so sorry we got into this argument.” She was like, “Are you kidding? We’re Israelis that’s what we do, we argue! It's all good, it's all good!” But I felt shit for days because I haven’t seen this women in years and we got into a screaming match over politics...In Israel it’s not even considered that intense, but you know in LA the neighbours probably thought we were
killing each other and we were just having a political argument. So it’s very hard to do that and to be that, but I think I feel – and I think also Ofira does – that there is no other choice…[O]nce you know something you cannot unknow it. And (laughs) once you see that there’s a horrible atrocity going on that’s how you see it and you can’t see it in any other way.

...There’s a great novel called *You Can’t Go Home Again* by Thomas Wolf...[He wrote this book] because...his first novel was about this town where he grew up and it was received very badly in the town. He got hate mail and death threats and people hated him and he felt like he can’t go home again. And on the plane to Israel I finished reading this novel and I was very sad because...I suddenly realized that I can’t go home again...[O]nce of the reasons I can’t go home again and there is no home is that my mom died and the family sort of fell apart a little bit, but also I don’t think I left because of the political situation, but I can never go back because of the political situation...[O]nce you feel like that – and I think Ofira feels the same – ...you can never go home again. It’s heavy. It’s heavy because you feel displaced (laughing) in a way...ironically, not displaced like a Palestinian would be. And it’s not like Vancouver isn’t home – Vancouver is a home – but it’s a home that was almost forced.

Furthermore, Itai recognizes that while his and Ofira’s individual levels of political awareness before and during their mandatory service, as well as their roles in the IDF, were starkly different, they were both complicit in the occupation: “[Ofira was not a combatant solider]...but the people she trained then went on to do all kinds of things that she endorsed at the time or believed in at the time and so did I.” With that said, and following from a discussion of the differences between his and Ofira’s generation versus Ran’s, Itai refers to a story from Ofira’s childhood that highlights the difference between his leftist upbringing and her youth in the Galilee:

...[Ofira’s] story about going to...her Arab friend’s – which sounded great – and then coming back to her mom and says, “She reminds me of my cousin,” and her mom says (in low angry voice), “No, you can’t ever compare them to us.” And this is a mother who let’s her daughter go and hang out with Palestinians and sleep at Palestinians’, but still says you cannot compare. So the racism is rooted deep, deep, deep into society. And she grew up north where Arabs and Israelis live together. In the Galilee there are no boarders...everybody lives together and people get along, you know, sort of, and still there’s racism there.

While Haifa and Itai had the most apparent points of identification and connection with Ofira, Amanda and Ran both responded to Ofira’s stories regarding the IDF and the militarization of Israeli society. Amanda’s comments focused primarily on the pressure
placed on young Israelis to complete their mandatory service, as well as the stigmatization they face if they forgo this obligation:

The pictures, [I] found it interesting, but almost not surprising that so many of the pictures were of soldiers’ uniform (*laughs*). It just goes to show how...being in the army is part of life (*laughs*). That in Israel the way life goes is that you’re born, you go to school, and then you go to the army, and then you travel, and then you go to university. Like this is how it is. And it’s not like that in many countries. Right? ...[I]’s just (*laughs*) literally part of life. You have to go to the army and you have to serve and it’s because – most of the participants used this word – they were brainwashed to believe that if they don’t then you are not part of this society, you are not helping your country... you’re just a deadbeat citizen, and no one wants to be that...[T]here’s so much pressure in the Israeli society to join the army because of *fear*. I think at the end of the day it’s *fear* that, “We have to be strong. We have to be on...the offensive all the time, otherwise the Holocaust might happen again...”

This discussion also carried over to Ofira’s photograph and discussion of her ex-boyfriend who did not served in the IDF:

...(Laughing) Ofira’s so funny! ...I think it was a Halloween party...and her ex-boyfriend was dressed part civilian, part soldier and it *embarrassed* her...because she thought that he wasn’t contributing to the society. Like he wasn’t [in] full uniform...I thought that was very interesting because...if I saw someone dressed like that I don’t think I would make that connection. Do you know what I mean? Like I don’t think I would think... “Oh, like, this is embarrassing,” but because she’s Israeli and that’s part of the society, that’s the way she use to think...Huge stigma. Yeah, it’s brainwash, like she said. Her and Itai both used that word, brainwash.

Amanda also comments on the anger some Israelis face from their own community for empathizing with Palestinians:

...Ofira...[talked about]...the latest assault on Gaza...[and how]...she posted on Facebook the children’s names...their age[s], and pictures of them and so many people were *mad* at her because she spoke out...[W]hat she was saying was just facts and truth...and she still got criticized by Israelis. And that just again shows how much pressure [there] is in Israel. You have to be almost like right-wing otherwise you’re not Israeli...you hate yourself, you hate Jews, you’re not true to your country...I definitely knew [about this pressure before] and that...leftists in Israel are just kind of shunned. In this society they call them traitors...

At the same time, Amanda was impressed and moved by Ofira’s post-IDF political awakening and how she has tried to pass the lessons she has learned onto her children:
But yeah, it’s a huge shift now...[S]he even...told her story about when her kids went to a garage sale and they bought a fake [gun] – just a toy, right – but for her I think that psychologically it brings back memories that she probably doesn’t wanna remember. And what it represents for her is what she ran away from...That was so powerful...so emotional to see...[L]ike what a coincidence that these people were Arabs (laughing)! (Still laughing) And they all ended up just crying (laughing)! I loved that story!

While Amanda states that Ofira’s story about breaking down when she realized that she would not return to live in Israel after she found out she was pregnant with her first son was “amazing,” Ran read this story differently. In fact, he suggests that had Ofira stayed in Israel maybe her own son could have been a “good solider”:

The fact that she have a boy and the boy is not gonna go to the army, I know lots of women like this...[M]aybe if she think[s] like this she [could] educate the [him] to be...[a] good solider, as far as human being solider. And if he would be in the army maybe he would have effect and it would be different...But she chose that her son is not gonna be [in] the army...[T]he problem for me is not that...I chose that my son [would not be] in the army...[or]... that I feel guilty that my son is not gonna go and protect Israel – cause I think Israel can protect itself fairly well – the problem is that my son...[who]...grew up with my education is not gonna be there to act as an Israeli soldier behave. That’s my issue (laughs)...I think...the soldiers today don’t know different...I knew different. I grew up before and after, so...I understand that this is not the right situation. But (heavy sigh) I don’t know...I think that more and more younger soldiers would think that...protect (inaudible) [is] the right thing to do...Lots of them...refuse, what they call the refusenik kids...and so it applies to any war, I mean, the same as the people who didn’t want to go to Vietnam.

Beyond this, Ran’s comments about Ofira are similar to his responses to Itai. That is, he did not watch Ofira’s video with much interest, as her stories are familiar to him, yet he later makes the following comment: “As far as Ofira, I was focused on the baby most of the time 😊 nevertheless she describe her personal experience beautifully, real and simple; we are all the same regardless of where we came from.”

When it came to Ofira, Nick appeared as the outlier. He asserts that engaging with Ofira’s video was also “very positive.” In fact, unlike Ran who seemed distracted by baby Yuval, Nick “loved” that Ofira continued to nurse him throughout the interview. To him, this demonstrated her “good spirit” and deep commitment to having her voice

157 Much like Ran’s earlier comment regarding Itai, this quote was provided over email several months after our reflective interview.
heard. While he jokes that he felt sorry for the baby, he also emphasizes just how “proud” he is of Ofira, remarking that “this is...something [Palestinians] need to see.” Additionally, and much as he did in our first interview, Nick reiterates nostalgia for Jewish/Arab relations in the region prior to 1948 (as well as his own birth), yet now he connects this longing to the stories Ofira shares about her maternal grandmother’s own nostalgia for life in Morocco before immigrating to Israel. These stories, he asserts, let him “feel” how Jews and Arabs lived together happily and peacefully before political Zionism divided them. He hopes others will also feel this sense of peaceful coexistence as they listen to Ofira’s stories.

Palestinians’ Responses to Their Own Community

Even though Nick, Haifa, and Amanda found each other’s life stories, (post)memories, and photographs very familiar, the process of exchanging videos, transcript, and images with one another was still valuable and rewarding. As we saw, they were also moved, surprised, and made hopeful by what they heard and saw. When asked if they would encourage other Palestinians to participate in a project of this kind, they each responded enthusiastically:

Yeah, for sure...I would say that. Because it is healthy when we talk, it is good...[T]his project, I think, [has] good value [because it] let[’s] people understand each other [even if] they cannot do anything. So it still have some point or some light to come...up...Conversation will not hurt anybody. (Nick)

I found it very therapeutic and I think if we all could do that that could actually make a difference because I think that a big part of what we want is to be able to tell our stories. So you get to do that and then you get to listen to other person’s stories and you realize that you’re all the same and I think that could be a very, very positive impact. (Haifa)

Yeah! Absolutely...It’s very rewarding. It’s a very good experience and there’s nothing to loss from it so, yeah, why not...But I agree with people who don’t want [to] because Palestinians have been arrested for just posting things on Facebook, so that makes sense. Right? I don’t know, a project like [this] where you’re just sharing your story I don’t think is very dangerous. But, yeah, for some people like Nick it might be, of course, because of his experience. I can understand that. (Amanda)
Palestinians’ Responses to the Other Community

Overall, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda truly enjoyed engaging with Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s life stories, (post)memories, and photographs, plus voiced their appreciation for the experience and its positive value. Nick was especially happy that he was able to directly speak and listen to the Israeli participants – an experience that was “new,” “special,” and “interesting” for him:

...[W]hen I...[watched the Israelis’]...video[s] I [saw] points I like...some points I...[want to] discuss with them, how they thinking about the situation. So this is for me...interesting. I keep looking to the video, looking to them, try to understand how they[’re] thinking...[T]his [gave] me a new experience...especially [because] it is coming to me...That’s for me so I want to see it and they will see me too. So this is, for me...good point. I see it like a special [and interesting] event...

...I [did] not see [anything] negative. I see it as very, very, very positive. Yeah...I have [some] issue[s], but...[t]hat's...democracy. How they see it they say it and how I see it I say it.

...We used to talk with Jewish when we are in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, all of that. Also, we have friends from Jewish there, but I forgot them now because the years coming on. But we never [had] a chance to talk about our situation, what’s the pain we get. So now...this...video, this...project...let them hear my voice, my real voice, directly to them and I...[heard] from [them] what’s they thinking...I heard from them something...new [to] me. I live all of my life overseas in Bethlehem, but this [is the] first time I hear something new for me. So this is good point, interesting for me.

More specifically, Nick was taken with Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s decisions to move to Canada, as well as their honest critiques of the Israeli education system:

The best thing is they don’t want to fight our people. That’s the best thing I hear...[T]hey came here because they don’t want to fight our people because they [do] not agree [with] their government...[killing] our people. This is more interesting for me too.

...I think what they do is the right way...[T]hey left there, they living in Canada so [that means] they refuse to stay [and fight]...If they stay there, they need to fight. Especially...when they talk about how they...taught them in...school about the Holocaust and how they suffer and how they killed or all of [those] things. But [the] problem is they [say] that...Palestinian[s]...did that. When I saw how they teach them about the Holocaust, they taught them that...we did that for them. And...last week or two weeks ago...Benjamin Netanyahu also talk[ed] about [the] Holocaust...[H]e said, “Oh the Arab[s] told Hitler to kill the
Jewish or they [will] come back to you,” all of that stuff. All of that [is] a [lie]. They keep teach[ing] them the wrong, wrong information.

Having listened to the Israeli participants’ critical assessments of the Israeli education and military systems, Nick also understands how and why the Holocaust and the threat of annihilation are ever-present for Israelis, as well as how these fears have been transferred on to Arabs and Palestinians:

...[O]f course, it affected them. When you catch a young boy...and start [telling him] from 6 years [old], “Holocaust! Holocaust!...They burn us! They kill us!...Oh and look the Arab[s] they want to kill us!” So...[then we]...see them take the gun and shoot...[A]s we saw many times how the kids training the tank, the machine gun, all of these kind. So this...fills their minds to hate the Arab people, to hate Palestinian[s].

However, when asked if he was surprised that Ran, Itai, and Ofira never knew or learned about the Nakba growing up in Israel, Nick asserts that, “they know about the Nakba, but the wrong way. They teach them about the Nakba, but in the Jewish...or Zionist way.” Seemingly in an effort to counter these problematic Israeli master narratives of the Holocaust and the War of Independence, Nick repeats key themes from our first interview, e.g.) the Nakba is a direct consequence of the Holocaust; the Nakba has continued unrelentingly from 1948 to the present day; the Palestinians are still paying the price for a tragedy in which they played no part; and peace will only come after the bloodshed ends, a two-state solution is implemented, and both communities have time to heal. Thus, while Nick once again underscores his empathy for the suffering of the Jewish people – “[Palestinians are] not happy for the Holocaust...It is pain for them, it’s pain for us as human being[s]” – he also reiterates that Palestinians have been punished for this tragedy since 1948 and, as a result, are suffering a holocaust of their own: “How they suffer from German[s], how we suffer from...the Zionist[s].”

Analogous to Nick, engaging with Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s life stories, (post)memories, and photographs was a positive and interesting experience for Haifa: “I was happy that I had the chance to watch their interviews. It made me want to meet all of them...[T]hey seem like really nice people...the kind of people that I would be good friends with.” Again, the biggest take away for Haifa was just how much Palestinians and Israelis have in common:

158 During his speech at the 37th World Zionist Congress in October 2015, Netanyahu stated that Hitler had only planned to expel the Jews until Haj Amin al-Husseini, then Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, convinced him to exterminate them instead (Richards, 2015).
...I think the biggest thing that I learned was that we have so much in common in terms of positive, but also in terms of negatives. Like our fears and traumas and worries and concerns are pretty much the same. And you can find hope in that cause I think it’s easy to unite against negative experiences...They say that in Arabic...“When there’s disaster...that brings the families together.” And so...maybe that’s a good thing that we all kinda identify with the pain and the suffering. We could maybe find a way to identify more on that together and find a solution.

As expressed earlier, however, Haifa was shocked by the “underdog,” “victim,” and “no choice” narratives touched upon by all three Israeli participants. Nevertheless she was still able to connect their stories to her own experiences and ultimately empathize with them:

I was surprised by the “underdog, “victim,” “no choice” [narratives] because...you know, coming from the other perspective, I just assumed that I (laughing) was the one that had no choice. I was the one that was the victim. I was the one that was the underdog. And it was a bit...surprising...almost a bit of an a-ha moment like, "Oh, wait! ...[T]hey’re not doing that because they just want to be mean they really actually are (laughing) afraid and feel that they have no choice.” And that kind of fate can turn you into a bit of a mean person.

...[Y]ou feel like the whole country [of Israel] feels that they have no choice but to be this asshole they don’t want to be. Like...no one wants to be doing that kind of stuff, but they feel they have no choice and I just wanted to shake them and say, “But you do!” [Laughs]. You know? And it’s sad that this whole nation feels that they have no choice but to be an occupying, oppressive power. And no one [laughs] – I mean no one – should be in that position. That’s traumatizing by itself. And that’s coming from me the occupied (laughs) (inaudible). Right? It’s sad.

Given Haifa’s specific reflections on Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s interviews and photographs provided above, it is not unexpected that as she watched their interviews she vacillated between empathy and connection, on the one hand, and defensiveness and disengagement, on the other, depending on who was talking and what they were saying. Yet she also explains that because they are men Ran and Itai reminded her of the predominantly male soldiers she interacted with during her youth and so she read them first and foremost as soldiers:

In my experience growing up in Palestine, mostly during the First Intifada, I’m a lot more familiar with male soldiers than female soldiers. And so to me...a lot of it wasn’t watching the videos and hearing the stories of an Israeli person as much as a soldier because they talked a lot about their time in the army and...it brought up a lot
of memories for me that connected to Israeli soldiers. And so it’s like, “Oh…now I’m getting to actually talk to this person who was standing at [the] checkpoint with a gun, the Israeli solider that I grew up…with in my experience as a Palestinian, that’s their story…[N]ow I get to hear the perspective of that solider,” which was really interesting.

Finally, participating in this project fulfilled Amanda’s desire to meet “normal” Israelis:

I really thought this was such a good opportunity to be able to get to know real Israeli civilians, just normal people, who have their own problems in life and have experienced things that might be similar to me or different in their own way.

In parallel with Nick, Amanda was shocked and impressed by how critical and outspoken Ran, Itai, and Ofira were of the Israeli government:

That was pretty surprising to see, pretty nice to see, because most Israelis that I have met or talked to are not at all. I think I told you this story…but in the mall I’ve met quite a few Israelis and…I honestly don’t know if they’re lying or if they actually don’t know what’s going on because when I share my story with them they act so surprised like they’re hearing this for the first time. So I really don’t know if someone can be this ignorant or they’re maybe embarrassed and they just wanna act like, “Oh really! My government? Oh I didn’t know that!” So I don’t know…It’s hard to tell. I will never know [laughing]!

…[But] I figured anyone who participated in this project is going to be open so I wasn’t surprised by anything like, “Oh you didn’t just say that!” [laughing] kind of thing. But, yeah, [I was surprised by] how critical they were.

She especially appreciated their critiques of Israeli’s problematic use of the Holocaust:

…I’m so proud of all of them…[because]…they recognize that the Holocaust is being so misused right now. Right? …[It] is so sad to use such a horrific thing…to do bad things to other people and oppress them. The fact that they recognize this was amazing to see, definitely…And it’s insulting to the people who have died in the Holocaust too. You’re using what happened to them to justify these things. Like it’s wrong, completely wrong, and it shouldn’t happen.

When I ask Amanda if she thinks Ran, Itai, and Ofira are courageous for being so critical and outspoken about their government, she continues to express her admiration:

Yes! Oh, definitely, yeah! …Most people are proud of their country…it’s easy to say nice things about your country, but it’s hard to say bad things…so the fact that they do is just amazing to see. Right?
...[H]ow brave they are to act on what [they] believe in. Because a lot of people might believe in a lot of things, but they might not act on it...like that's a very hard thing to do. To just leave your family behind and move to another country, that's not easy at all. And to do it because of what you believe in is huge and very admirable.

While Amanda found the experience of engaging with the Israeli participants' life stories, (post)memories, and photographs very positive overall, as gestured to in her comments above regarding the impact of the Holocaust on Itai's family, she periodically felt a level of incongruence or ambivalence:

...[L]ike I said before...hearing their stories and how the Holocaust affected them makes you understand their point of view more, but you kind of don't want to, but you do. So I think that's the only thing for me...It would feel like if I completely understand where they come from and their point of view it's like...I’m justifying all the government’s actions, which I’m not and I never will. Yeah, I think that this is the problem like, “Oh, okay, I understand why they acted the way they did,” but I don't at the same time. [Laughing] Do you know what I mean? Yeah, that was the most challenging part I think.

Learning about Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s lives was very enlightening for Nick, Haifa, and Amanda, however, it did not drastically change their perceptions of Israelis more generally. Rather the experience simply confirmed what they already knew:

To be honest with you I know [about] the Jewish...I used to work in Tel Aviv, Haifa, Jerusalem, I can speak little bit [of] their language. It is not new, but the new things, as I said before, [is] the way...they talk, [it’s] different...[W]e never talk about this stuff...I talk with Jewish here in Canada, met a few times, plus I used to work with them so I have nothing against Jewish as Jewish, but I have against the Zionist. (Nick)

...I mean I’ve had Israeli friends and I’ve had positive interactions with Israelis and spoken to Israelis that...came to my hometown and they believe in the Palestinians’ struggle and our right for equality and all that. So...I already had that mindset so...it wasn’t a radical change, but it just cemented it and reinforced it. And especially now...[L]ast year with the Gaza attack and the election in Israel, a lot of what is coming from the Israeli government is really, really depressing, so it’s nice to meet people from Israel who are just...nice (laughs). (Haifa)

No, I don’t think [it changed the way I view Israelis]...because it’s not like before...I was like, “All Israelis are like this.” I always knew there were good people who don’t want this conflict to continue. So I don’t think it changed anything for me in terms of how I view Israelis because I never grouped them in one big group. No, never. But [it] definitely made me...appreciate these people, like [these] specific participants. I really liked them, yeah, them specifically, but I can't say that it changed my view about...all...[Israelis]. (Amanda)
In the end, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda expressed genuine interest and enthusiasm when presented with the possibility of engaging with more Israelis in the future:

For sure, yes, yes. I’m interested [in meeting]...many people, to talk directly with them, and to let them know our situation honestly. (Nick)

Yeah...I mean, we just have so much in common and I loved listening to them talk about some of the traditions they have and their homes and their families and their mothers because I could relate to those. You know? I think a Jewish mother and an Arab mother are very similar (laughing). I think the younger generation could unite around that, you know, our relationship with our mothers...Yeah, [I] definitely want to engage more. (Haifa)

Yes. 100%. I wanna meet more people like Itai, Ofira, and Ran. I want to, yeah, because they’re lovely people and I think we can get along very well. [You said you’d introduce me to nice Israelis]...and you delivered (laughing)! (Amanda)

Israelis’ Responses to Their Own Community

The generational divide that separated Ran from Itai and Ofira was acknowledged and addressed by all three participants, yet it also appears to have delineated a split between participants in terms of their interest in each other’s stories, (post)memories, and photographs. Ran expressed a lack of interest in Itai and Ofira’s stories, memories, and images primarily because they were already familiar to him and thus “much...less revealing” than the Palestinians’. Yet the following comment seems to imply that they still made him pause and consider the variances between their military experiences by putting himself in their shoes:

...I thought a few times...[what]...if I was a soldier...in the last twenty years and...had to go and do what these people [did]. I don’t know where I’d be...I don’t know...it’s very hard because...I grew up in a different time. I never fought Palestinian[s] in my life. The only people I fought [were the] countries that surrounded Israel. So for me it’s a different experience. I never [stood at] a checkpoint on a road in the West Bank, it’s not part of my army [experience]. So it's very hard for me to say. I don't envy any of them. And if I...[still lived]...in Israel...if I had a son go to the army, this is not something that I would like him to do and who knows what he would do. So...it's very hard for me to relate to it. It's a different situation even though it’s only ten, fifteen, twenty years different[ce]...[T]he army experience is completely different between mine and theirs. So it’s hard for me...I mean, obviously, I know Israelis that were soldiers and I know Israelis, young kids of my friends, that there and I know the problem, but yeah, it’s tough.
And while Ofira was very vocal in her criticisms of Ran, both she and Itai found value in his life story and (post)memories. Nevertheless, it was Itai and Ofira who really identified and connected with one another, particularly in terms of their political awakenings and the tremendously difficult choices they have made since. In fact, as Itai explains below in his response to the Palestinian participants, he was deeply moved by Ofira. Thus, Itai and Ofira’s responses to one another demonstrate that there is great value to be found in Israelis sharing their life stories, (post)memories, and photographs with one another.

Leading from this, when asked if they would encourage other Israelis to participate in a project of this kind, Ran, Itai, and Ofira all provided positive and encouraging responses:

I am trying every day, and will keep trying until I die. (Ran)

Absolutely. Absolutely...[I]t’s funny because people always talk to me about my one-man show and I always say, “You should do a one man show. Everybody should do a one-man show...It’s an amazing thing to do.” And I feel the same about this. I feel if every Israeli was forced to meet a Palestinian it would be the best thing that ever happened to them. Just force them to sit in a room for two hours (laughs) lock them up with one another (laughing)...Force them to listen to each other for an hour. Right? (Laughs)...You don’t have [to make] them talk about politics, you just have them talk about personal things, (in a quiet voice) just about their lives, and then they’ll see that the [person on the] other side is [a] human being...You know? (Itai)

Yeah, actually I talked to several...People are so interested [in this project]...they are friends of mine...I would encourage them for their own experience. Really. Because I think they will get a lot from listening to them and themselves and the relation...I can think of two people that would say yes right away...I’m really looking forward for the moment that we can share the videos because I didn’t yet. Like a friend of mine really, really, want, really, she really want[s] [to watch them]. (Ofira)

Israelis’ Responses to the Other Community

Ran, Itai, and Ofira also enjoyed and valued engaging with Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s life stories, (post)memories, and photographs. While the nature of the Palestinian participants’ stories were not completely new to Ran, they did shed better light on the Palestinian experience:

In general all participants, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda, provide[d] a side to the story that I was never fully exposed to. I can say that up to
1967 I grew up with very little exposure to the Palestinians existence beside Israel; I was young and never had the chance to meet Palestinian[s] or even Israeli Arabs. The narrative was more like Israel vs. Arab nations enemies.

After 67 and the immediate euphoria of the war, things change[d] and the stories of Nick, Haifa, and Amanda provided a real exposure to the Nakba effect on them and strengthen the impossible situation it puts the Palestinians in.

Ran also noted that “[t]he harsh conditions and difficult situation of the Palestinians” made listening to and/or reading Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s stories “challenging since [he] consider[s] [his] people…part of the problem.”

Itai undoubtedly had the most immediate and emotional response to Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s stories, memories, and images. Within days of being granted access to their materials, he sent me the following email:159

Hi Nawal,

I watched (and read) all the videos / transcriptions, and I took notes as you asked. I have to tell you that I agreed to participate because I wanted to help you, I didn’t think it would do much for me and boy was I wrong. I got very emotional when I watched the videos, I cried quite a bit and I was so happy to be part of this research. When I moved to Canada I stayed away from the Jewish community, or anything [M]iddle [E]ast, I wanted to stay as far away from the conflict as I could. Your project made me realize that you can take Itai out of the conflict but you can’t take the conflict out of Itai, I carry it with me everywhere I go. Clearly I am not traumatized like the Palestinians in this research, I was never oppressed by anybody, but we have so much in common. Anyway - good for you for doing this and thanks for asking me to be involved.160

Talk soon,

Itai

When asked to speak to this email, Itai elaborates not only how emotional he became while engaging with the other participants’ life stories, (post)memories, and photographs, but also how they caught him by surprise:

159 Itai gave me permission to read this email on camera during our second interview. As such, I include it here as part of his reflective interview.

160 Given that SFU’s University Ethics Research Board (REB) does not allow researchers to directly contact and recruit potential participants, Itai initially expressed his interest in this project to our mutual friend, Dima, who then put us in contact.
Well I felt quite moved by it and...I thought you’d be happy to hear that. Yeah, I was really surprised...I have spoken to many Palestinians in my life...and so I thought, you know...I kinda know what it's (laughing)...like to be a Palestinian or that I can understand and I was surprised! I was really surprised with how emotional I got. I got extremely emotional listening to Ofira also. So it was the Palestinians and Ofira that really got to me. Yeah...[A]s an artist everything I do is about my life...I’m a theatre maker, but the shows I create are autobiographical...so I think there is no coincidence that I’m trying to write a play about this conflict...because I feel guilty and because I feel responsible and I feel that as an artist I have some sort of responsibility. I’m not interested in creating art that is just for entertainment sake. I wanna do...theatre that changes the world or at least tries to or has a political or social change coming from it. And so this topic is one that is, obviously, extremely close to my heart...

...And I was surprised at how emotional I got. I was a mess. I was just sobbing watching those interviews. Yeah. Yeah. And that’s why I wanted to thank you because it’s not like I’m emotionally numb...I’m an emotional guy (laughing). I cry in the movies, I cry when my team wins sports events, you know, I cry quite easily, but it was different...[I]t felt like an important thing to do and I sort of wish that every Israeli could hear what it’s like to be a Palestinians. (Laughs) Or even what it’s like to be another Israeli.

...I should have known better because I am constantly surprised by...documentaries that shake me or...stuff that...I know already and still I get really, really moved. So I should have known better.

In terms of whether or not this experienced changed the way they view or understand Palestinians, the Israelis participants were again split along generational lines. On one hand, Ran’s perception of Palestinians did not change, although the process gave faces to stories he had heard before, which he feels is “always stronger [than]...if you read an article in the newspaper.” On the other hand, Itai and Ofira both affirm that their perceptions of Palestinians did shift:

...I did put myself in [Haifa’s] shoes or in Amanda’s shoes or in Nick’s shoes and I did think what it’s like to be them. And so it did change a little bit the way that I see the other side. (Itai)

...[L]ike now...[if] I read or watch videos of Palestinians I feel that I watch it differently and I hear it differently. I just think, like, “Oh, this could be Haifa’s family. This could be Nick.” Right? I know that Amanda, most of her family went away, right, so I still think about

---

161 Ofira’s reflective interview was rich with very specific reflections on each participant’s life story, (post)memories, and photographs, which I have shared throughout this chapter. The only general comments she made about the Palestinian participants are shared below.
Nick’s family and Haifa’s family. They’re more there and I think that they really brought me to this point. (Ofira)

Ultimately, Ran, Itai, and Ofira expressed sincere interest and eagerness when presented with the possibility of engaging with more Palestinians in the future:

Sure! Absolutely. Absolutely. (Ran)

Absolutely. Yeah, like I said, it made me think [about]...what can I do to help Palestinian refugees...[I]t also made me wanna meet Amanda, Haifa, and Nick, and it made me wanna meet you. (Itai)

I all the time want it (laughing). I all the time want it! ...I all the time feel like I want to meet more [Palestinians], but more engaged on this real level not the surface of saying, (in a mocking tone) “You’re Palestinian, I’m Israeli. Wow! ...(trails off)” (Ofira)

Aside from some continuing apprehension from Ran regarding the time commitment and his lower interest level in fellow Israelis, all six participants expressed a desire and commitment to watching – or in Nick’s case reading – each other’s reflective interviews, meeting in person, and exploring various extensions of this project outside of my dissertation, e.g.) creating an online archive that would showcase their life stories, (post)memories, photographs, and reflections, plus invite similar contributions from Palestinians and Israelis worldwide and/or holding a public event where they could share their life stories, (post)memories, photographs, and reflections, and then field audience questions and comments. I will speak to these creative possibilities, as well as additional imaginings, in my Conclusion. For now let me simply close by stating that, much like my participants, I hope this project is just the beginning of something much greater, for as I will argue in Chapter 8 Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira have courageously demonstrated that although difficult, taking up the challenge of willing the impossible in the contemporary moment is not only still very necessary, but possible.
Chapter 8.

Willing the Impossible in the Contemporary Moment

In this final chapter I bring my fieldwork findings back into dialogue with the political visions of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay to consider how conceivable it is for everyday Palestinians and Israelis to will the impossible by exchanging (post)memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba through storytelling and photography. As noted in Chapters 1 and 4, as an unprecedented and thus exploratory effort to bring the theories of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay into praxis, my method, and thus this project, privileged the fieldwork process and experience for my participants over the mining of their narratives, memories, and photographs for data that could be analyzed and disseminated as conclusive research findings and prescriptive outcomes. My objective was to provide my participants with the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for willing the impossible through storytelling and photography with no expectation or assurance that such a difficult yet necessary task could or would be achieved. In this chapter I do not employ Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s theories as a checklist of criteria by which to judge if, and to what extent, participants have measured up to or fallen short of these scholars’ moral, political, and/or ethical demands, but rather as gathering points for contemplating how we might read willing the impossible in the contemporary moment.

Revisiting the Question of Palestine

As outlined in Chapter 2, the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible Said left to us entails three crucial steps: thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, that is, connecting them while continuing to respect their differences; morally and ethically engage with alterity; and, envisioning a new polity based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights. Such a morally, ethically, and politically demanding task, Said reminds us, requires both Palestinians and Israelis “to admit the universality and integrity of the other’s experience and to begin to plan a common life together” (Said, 2003a, p. 208). Just as Said predicted, committing to this task made different demands of and entailed distinct journeys for Palestinian and Israeli participants.
Connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba: A Contrapuntal Reading

According to Said, the first and most significant step that Palestinians and Israelis must take toward willing the impossible is acknowledging that, although not equal, the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba are connected. That each of my participants had already made some degree of connection between the two tragedies prior to the commencement of this research suggests that their ability, willingness, and/or desire to bring these events into counterpoint played a significant role in their decision to participate and thus their self-selection. Nevertheless, the depth and/or nature of the connections they had made between the Holocaust and the Nakba prior to their involvement in this project not only varied amongst participants, but also substantiate the unique challenges Said’s contrapuntal approach demands of Palestinians and Israelis, respectively.

Although Nick did not identify exactly when or how he learned about the Holocaust and its link to the Nakba, he asserted that he has always been aware of their connection – never more so than when he was being tortured by IDF soldiers during his imprisonment. He also expressed his empathy for the loss and destruction wrought by the Holocaust and his conviction that such horrors should never be perpetrated against anyone again, Jewish or otherwise. At the same time, the link between the Holocaust and the Nakba was not as well established for Haifa or Amanda, both of whom state that, even though they were aware of the Holocaust while growing up in Palestine, they do not remember being taught about it in school or really hearing it discussed in Palestinian society more broadly. As a consequence, they only began to comprehend the event’s magnitude, and thus truly empathize with the experiences of the Jewish people, once they left Palestine as teenagers. Regardless of how or when they made this connection, as Said suggests, the ironic yet organic link between the Holocaust and the Nakba was not lost on any of the Palestinian participants. Alongside their acknowledgement of the Holocaust and empathy for the Jewish people, Nick was adamant that Palestinians should not be punished for a crime in which they played no part, while Haifa and Amanda expressed shock and confusion that a people as victimized and oppressed as the Jews could displace, dispossess, and occupy another people. Thus, much as Said encouraged Palestinians to do, during their first interviews Nick, Haifa, and Amanda demonstrated compassion and comprehension for Jewish
suffering while simultaneously demanding recognition, empathy, and indemnification from Israelis for the Nakba, which each asserts continues unabated today.

As Haifa shrewdly observed in her initial interview, while Palestinians often view the Holocaust and the Nakba as a sequence of related events – a matter of cause and effect – the link between the two traumas is fundamentally broken for Israelis, making it much harder for them to see themselves as oppressors. Whereas Nick, Haifa, and Amanda were at the very least aware of the Holocaust while living in Palestine, Ran, Itai, and Ofira each definitively stated that they had not heard the term Nakba until adulthood and even then only after they began to re-educate themselves about the history of the conflict and/or dialogued with Palestinians. The Israeli participants’ critical assessments of the Israeli education system’s sanitized master narrative of the War of Independence, as well as the Israeli state’s use of the Holocaust to – in Itai and Ofira’s words – “brainwash” young Israelis and justify state violence against Palestinians, unquestionably validate a number of Said’s assertions. For instance, they speak to the wilful ignorance surrounding the ethical and moral implications of the displacement and dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948, the inadequate consideration of the link between anti-Semitism and Jewish suffering, and the catastrophe experienced by the Palestinians, and the institutionalized negation of the native Other in Israeli national, cultural, and social life. Most importantly, however, Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s life stories demonstrate just how much farther Israelis must go to connect the tragedies of the Holocaust and the Nakba.

I believe this struggle is best substantiated by Itai’s life story. As he himself contends, even though he had the “advantage” of being raised by humanists who taught him that Palestinians are people who deserve rights and have a claim to the land, as well as the unique experience of socializing with Palestinians during his youth, he still believed the Israeli master narrative that the Palestinians left their land, homes, and possessions of their own free will in 1948, never stopped to consider the origins of the Arab architecture he so admired, and believed that Jews had no choice but to proceed as they did in 1948. Furthermore, Itai and Ofira’s life stories speak to the backlash many Israelis face from fellow soldiers, friends and/or family members for empathizing with and supporting Palestinians – a form of filial pressure seemingly absent from the Palestinians’ life stories. Given the strategic negation of the Nakba in Israeli society and its general absence from the global stage of history, Ran, Itai, and Ofira only began to
challenge Israeli master narratives and collective memories once they made the conscious decision to re-educate themselves as adults. Doing so enabled them to gain empathy for the suffering endured by the Palestinians from 1948 to the present and to co-memorialize the Nakba alongside them – a process that has generated varying experiences of guilt, obligation and/or responsibility for each of them.

Yet if all six participants had begun to think the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally prior to their involvement in this study, engaging with each other’s life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs helped deepen these connections for Haifa, Amanda, Ran, and Ofira:

...[T]he idea of connecting the two traumas together [is] not something that I thought about very much before. I mean, I always knew chronologically that...the Holocaust happened and then as a result the state of Israel was created, the Nakba happened, and then we suffered...from that. But to think about both traumas together and how they kinda connect...that was very valuable...[It] gave me the chance to think about it a bit more seriously and more deeply. And as a result the experience of the Israeli participants and how...their life was affected by the trauma of the Holocaust and mine was...that's not something that I would have had the opportunity to think [about]...before and I found that very valuable. (Haifa)

I think...[this project] helped cement that connection and understand[ing]...[W]e're all part of the same cycle, the same story, the same history. (Haifa)

...Actually before [this project] I haven't really gave [the relationship between the Holocaust and the Nakba] much thought and now I actually understand it a lot more and I can see a connection. Before I didn't really...because before, for me, the Holocaust was just the reason that the world sympathized with the Jews and decided to give them a homeland, but I didn't really understand like the...psychology behind it and how it affected generation, after generation...just like the Nakba. I understood the Nakba a lot more...because I'm Palestinian and...[it's] part of my history...[B]eing able to see how the Holocaust has that effect as well was really good to see and to make the connection because...honestly I've never thought of it that way before. (Amanda)

...[In] a normal...situation I would not take these two events and connect them. And I didn’t think about them as equal or parallel...[It was] only when you came by [that] I realized that basically...it’s two big traumatic events that shaped the existing life of these two nations. So in this case I think it’s given me a different perspective on the whole conflict and [I] realize that the two people have actually something that maybe anchor[s] them in a way that it’s not a day to day, you know, another stone here and another stone there, but it’s
two events that really keep this story going and maybe effect the existing situation more than I thought before. And as I said...the Nakba was not something that, as an Israeli kid...[I] grew up [with]...in the sixties. [I]t wasn’t part of the narrative, it wasn’t part of the curriculum...Obviously, I was exposed to it later on in my life...[I]t’s not that you’re the first one that told me about it, you know, but it’s become a term that only as a mature person I learned about...and this is how the Palestinians see themselves. So it was an eye-opener for me as far as to understand...the effect of it and maybe the relationship between these two events. (Ran)

I did gain [an] understanding that the [Holocaust and the Nakba] impact the two nations tremendously. There is no way to discard or undervalue these events as foundations to the present and future of the two nations. (Ran)

...[F]rom even before the research I told you that many times when I hear Palestinians I think about the Holocaust, this is the comparison in my mind. And I remember once when I did this comparison, I don’t know if I told you, but my mother-in-law said that I’m rude that I compare these and that it’s not allowed, because her family, her parents and grandparents, are Holocaust survivors. And I tried to make my claim clear that it’s not that I compare. This is the images (laughing) that come to my mind. This is the thoughts that my mind makes, like connections. This research really reassured [me] that there are many reasons to make the connections between these two. [It strengthened the connection.] ...I remember...[Haifa] said..."I don’t understand how the people that felt all these experiences do the same to others," something like this...and I thought, “Yeah, that’s what I told [my husband] Ido several years ago and he told me!” (Ofira)

As for Nick and Itai, both men concisely stated that engaging with their fellow participants’ stories, memories, and images, did not change or deepen the links they had previously made between the Holocaust and the Nakba, but it did confirm them. While Itai simply noted that the process “just solidified everything that [he] already thought,” Nick went on to express his hope that when Ran, Itai, and Ofira now “look to the Holocaust, they [also] look to the Nakba.”

If my participants had each individually begun to bring the Holocaust and the Nakba into counterpoint before encountering one another, sharing and exchanging their stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs enabled them to acknowledge and begin working through the differences and similarities concerning victimhood and survival that bind them. In doing so, they shared new counter-narratives and voices that allowed for ethical engagement and dialogue between them. Importantly, over the course of our fieldwork none of the six participants minimized the other’s trauma and suffering, adhered to strict national or religious allegiances or called for or defended
unwarranted justifications for senseless violence. In this way, I believe they enacted a Saidian secular humanism for which “dwelling in simultaneity...is a gesture of transcendence; that is, thinking together inevitably entails thinking beyond the ruins of history, the loss of memory, and the limits of identity” (Varadharajan, 2010, p. 455). By being willing and open to continue shifting and expanding their consciousness regarding the connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba, all six participants undoubtedly made a courageous choice to ethically engage with alterity and a commitment to new beginnings.

**Exilic Beginnings: Dispersion and Alterity**

It was in the aftermath of the failed Oslo Accords that Said articulated the political vision that sits at the heart of this dissertation. At the time he argued that the lives of Palestinians and Israelis had become so interwoven that a two-state solution was simply inconceivable. He was also ruthlessly disparaging of both Palestinian and Israeli leaders who, in showing a “lack of vision and moral courage,” had abandoned their people as they teetered together “at the edge of a precipice” (2003a, p. 204). To say that the Palestinian/Israeli conflict has worsened since the time of Said’s writings would be an understatement. Recruitment for this project began in November 2014 just months after a particularly brutal summer of violence, which included, but was not limited to, Israel’s devastating aerial and ground offensives in Gaza from early July to late August, the abduction and killing of three Israeli teens by Palestinians, the death of nine Palestinian youths by Israeli missile strikes as they watched the World Cup on television near a beach in Khan Younis, and the death of four Palestinian boys by Israeli naval fire as they played on a beach in Gaza City. Circumstances continued to worsen during fieldwork, which began in late December 2014 and continued until late November 2015. Of particular significance during this period was the overwhelming re-election of Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing Likud Party in Israel’s March national election, Netanyahu’s controversial October statement that Palestinians were responsible for the Holocaust, and the spike in violence across Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank between

---

While an argument could be made that Ran minimized the suffering of the Palestinians, disregarded the life stories, (post)memories, and photographs of his fellow Israeli participants, maintained Israeli master narratives, and justified the violent events of 1948, as I will argue below, I believe that his seemingly cold comments, as well as Haifa and Ofira’s critical responses to them, are better understood as examples of the agonism and judgment that Arendt argues are inherent to the risky process of disclosing oneself to others in the public sphere.
early October and late November. Were these events not disheartening enough, 2014 and 2015 were also marked by the continued embargo on Gaza, establishment of illegal settlements in the West Bank, restrictions on Palestinian movement and access to basic necessities, settler violence, home demolitions, construction of the separation wall, and the arbitrary detention of Palestinians, including many children.\textsuperscript{163} Faced with a significantly different yet equally pivotal moment as Said, it was clear that my participants came to this project with no delusions about the faltering and ineffectual peace process overseen by Palestinian, Israeli, and third-party leaders. Rather similar to Said, they placed their hopes in everyday Palestinians and Israelis like themselves who, in already having begun to make the aforementioned shift in consciousness, might express and then will into being a “new theory of coexistence” (Said, 2003a, p. 204) based on mutuality and a “new kind of history” (Said, 2003a, p. 248) defined by integration and inclusion. As Amanda stated, “If the governments don’t want to work for [peace], then the people can work for it...[Y]ou can start...from the bottom and work your way up...” Thus, when faced with the seemingly hopeless state of the conflict and the continued failings of both Palestinian and Israeli leadership, my participants’ decision to be a part of a joint research project that aims to think the Holocaust and Nakba together undoubtedly marked a courageous choice to exercise their human will so as to begin again.

As Said articulated, new beginnings offer willing and courageous Palestinians and Israelis the possibility of moving outside of the various communal moorings that call for their uncritical and passive filiation toward endlessly productive affiliations that enable ethical engagement with alterity. This requires challenging any pressures that might seek their obedience to limiting and/or unethical relations with the Other and instead choosing to move together into the world so as to affect change. I believe that my participants’ ability to step away from their respective communal moorings is strikingly proven by the complete absence of racial and/or religious hostilities, minimal nationalistic

\textsuperscript{163} For full accountings of the events that transpired in Palestine/Israel during the recruitment and fieldwork stages of this project (November 2014 to November 2015), see Human Rights Watch’s 2015 (for the events of 2014) and 2016 (for the events of 2015) World Reports, which can be found at the following links, respectively: https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/israel/palestine and https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/israel/palestine.
antagonisms,\textsuperscript{164} their deep expressions of empathy for the other, and repeated gestures to and proclamations of humanism throughout their life story and reflective interviews. However, whereas Said outlined what he understood to be the different yet equally challenging tasks this entailed for both Palestinians and Israelis, my participants’ testimonies demonstrated that here again Israelis face a much longer and harder road. For instance, if Nick, Haifa, and Amanda were willing and courageous enough to not only acknowledge the Holocaust and its devastating destruction, as well as its lingering impact on Israeli consciousness, aside from two comments made by Nick – the first, about having to hide Israeli friends in his home from other Palestinians who would be angered by their presence; the second, that he does not care if other Palestinians disagree with his views and actions – their life stories and reflective interviews lacked tales of pressure from the anti-normalization and/or boycott, divestment, and sanctions movements and their supporters. Of course, this does not mean that Nick, Haifa, and Amanda have not experienced such filial pressures. It is possible that such demands have simply not impacted their lives enough to be mentioned, lessened or become absent over the years they have lived in diaspora, and/or been infrequent or non-existent because the Israelis they have chosen to develop relationships with have been supportive of the Palestinian cause and ending the occupation.\textsuperscript{165}

It was in the Israelis’ life stories and reflective interviews that we truly glimpsed the unproductive forms of filiation of which Said spoke. True, Ran, Itai, and Ofira were able to take up the challenges outlined by Said by refusing to be party to the continued negation of the Nakba, taking responsibility for what Israel has done to the Palestinians from 1948 to the present, and working to build upon the lessons of the Holocaust by expressing their opposition to the occupation and the injustices it entails. Yet, unlike the Palestinians, the Israeli participants, especially Itai and Ofira, clearly indicated that they have done so in the face of tremendous pressure and criticism from fellow soldiers, friends, and family, often to the detriment of professional, personal, and/or familial relationships. But if the roads these two communities of participants have travelled to

\textsuperscript{164} This is not to say that the nation-state and nationalism were not in play during my participants’ interviews, but rather that there was no presence of aggressive and/or hostile nationalistic conflict.

\textsuperscript{165} Maxine Kaufmann-Lacusta (2011) suggests that while some Palestinians are against normalization they are still willing to engage with and work in solidarity with those Israeli groups and/or individuals who they feel truly support their fight for justice, human rights, and ending the occupation.
arrive at this meeting point were dissimilar, they nevertheless all made the audacious choice to cross, rather than enforce, the line of separation that divided them.

I would like to argue that the acts of crossing the line of separation and thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally indicate that my participants began from an exilic consciousness, which facilitated their ability to be a part of and, at the same time, apart from their respective filial attachments. In Saidian terms, I believe that they embodied “that inevitable combination…of belonging and detachment, reception and resistance” that marks them as both “insider and outsider to the circulating ideas and values…at issue in [their] society or…the society of the other” (2004, p. 76). While negotiating such a “two-in-one condition” (Spanos, 2012, p.144) is undoubtedly difficult, as Butler (2012) reminds us, it is also a necessary state of ethical relations that enables “an ethics in dispersion” and “a response to claims of alterity” (p. 27).

Like Said, both my Palestinian and Israeli participants exhibit a “critical Jewish sensibility” (Hochberg, 2006, p. 47) whereby they relinquish and yet at the same time maintain ties to their traditional moorings by exposing them to critique. In doing so, they represent the “dialectically fraught, so sensitively located class of individuals” identified by Spanos and Said as non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Jewish Jews or, more specifically, non-Israeli Israelis. While my participants’ enacting of these comportments toward being is unmistakable in their life stories and reflective interviews, a level of generational influence and/or transference is also perceptible. Each of the participants makes reference to family members who similarly exhibited varying degrees of exilic consciousness and an ethics in dispersion. Put differently, throughout their lives all six participants witnessed productive and ethical relations with alterity, which undoubtedly influenced their thinking. Nick, Amanda, and Ran each made brief references to their fathers’ stories of peaceful Jewish-Arab relations prior to 1948, productive working relationships with the other, and a lack of antagonism toward members of the other culture, respectively. The remaining participants spoke of such experiences at greater length: Haifa shared her parents’ deep friendship with Arna, Itai highlighted his parents’ humanism and passion for social justice, and Ofira provided a glimpse of her grandmother’s secret humanism and connection to Arab culture.\footnote{As Ofira explained in Chapter 6, although not a family member, the late Holocaust survivor Robert Mendler also had a tremendous influence on her humanism.} While my participants certainly experienced a generational transfer of trauma related to the Holocaust and the
Nakba, it appears that they also experienced a generational transfer of humanist and
exilic thinking. As Itai explained, “[What] makes all the difference is the way we’re
brought up…I was brought up [to believe] that all people are equal…there are no
exceptions.” We also witness such an ethics of dispersion being passed on to the
participants’ children and/or younger family members through Haifa’s speculation about
what to tell her sons about her and her family’s lives in Palestine, Itai’s mentoring
of his younger brother, as well as nieces and nephews, and the powerful lessons Ofira seeks
to teach her children. Such stories feed my hope that an ethics of dispersion, as well as
the comportments toward being necessary for peaceful coexistence, cannot only be
passed on, but also grow stronger from one generation to the next – a finding that
undoubtedly warrants further consideration and research.

The substance of my participants’ interviews also demonstrates a “keeping-in-
difference inseparability of the Jew and Arab” (Hochberg, 2006, pp. 47-48). Put
differently, they “collapse the structure of oppositional difference [between them]
without…erasing difference itself” (Hochberg, 2006, p. 47). As Said warned, accepting
the inseparability of alterity cannot be achieved by “dispensing palliatives such as
tolerance and compassion but, rather, by attending to it as a troubling, disabling,
destabilizing secular wound…from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved
or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself” (2003b, p. 54). In truth, I
initially read Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s surprisingly similar and consistent
claims that Palestinians and Israeli are “all the same” and/or “have so much in common”
as problematically uncritical and redemptive proclamations of humanity, potentially made
for my benefit. However, I have since come to appreciate their comments as expressing
an acknowledgment that they are ethically bound to the Other by “proximitities [both]
willed and unwilled” (Butler, 2012, p. 27). For instance, consider Ofira’s statement that
although her and Amanda, as well as their ancestors, come from “the same pot” their
lives have differed tremendously based on how their worth was defined and by whom;
Itai’s suggestion that the only difference between himself and the Palestinian participants
is “the luck of where you’re born”; as well as Nick and Amanda’s assertions that the
antagonist division between Jewish and Arab Palestinians only began with the arrival of
political Zionism in nineteenth century. Ultimately then, far from generic platitudes that
ignore the uneven power relations and material realities that divide them, my participants
statements regarding the commonalities and similarities that bind them in fact
demonstrate an ethics of dispersion beyond geography, or what I have come to think of as a contrapuntal understanding of self and other, which allows for innovative and daring possibilities for achieving justice and ultimately coexistence.

Envisioning a New Polity: Non-belonging and Binationalism

In his analysis of the decolonizing efforts of the early twentieth century, Said (1993) suggested that the refugee or migrant best exemplified exiles and/or dispersions of both geography and consciousness, thus positioning them as the principal political figure of the modern age. Again, the contemporary political moment is much different than that of Said’s, as well as the historical period he was reflecting on, yet his thinking continues to be relevant and valuable. While the struggle for independence has ended for most formally colonized nations, it continues unabated for Palestinians as they struggle to obtain recognition, rights, reparations, freedom, and/or statehood from the settler-colonial state of Israel. As a result, the struggle for Palestine continues to produce “homeless wanderers, nomads, vagrants, unassimilated to the...structures of institutional power, rejected by established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness” and whose state of in-betweenness “articulates the tensions, irresolutions, and contradictions” (Said, 1993, p. 332) inherent to colonialism and imperialism. In other words, it is still important to recognize “that liberation as an intellectual mission, born in resistance and opposition to the confinements and ravages of imperialism, [have remained] shifted from the settled, established, and domesticated dynamics of culture to its unhoused, decentered, and exilic energies” characteristic of the refugee or migrant who continues to epitomize “the political figure between domains, between forms, between homes, and between languages” (Said, 1993, p. 332).

I argued above that each of my participants embodies the morally, politically, and ethically productive comportments toward being of either the non-Palestinian Palestinian or non-Israeli Israeli. However, there can be no doubt that their ability to take on such positionalities is due in part to their being refugees and migrants living in diaspora. In making this statement I heed Said’s caution that significant differences exist between my participants’ experiences of exile (particularly given that some of them are themselves intellectuals and artists) and those of the masses of people who continue to be displaced

167 Interestingly, and even though he did not leave Israel solely for political reasons, in his reflective interview Ran stated that he considers himself a refugee of Israel.
globally, however, by demonstrating two unique yet bounded states of in-betweenness—physical displacement and the exilic consciousness that it enables—my participants unquestionably exhibit the capacity to experience the sadness, dislocation, loneliness, and loss of being unhomed, while at the same time critiquing and working through these very same forms of attachment. As we saw in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, this dialogic relationship manifested differently for each participant, yet in demonstrating such inbetweenness or worldliness they each revealed themselves to be significant and unique political figures on the contemporary political landscape. Nevertheless, I believe Nick, Itai, and Ofira stand out as exceptional in this regard, as the depth of their sadness and longing for the homes to which they cannot (Nick) or feel they cannot (Itai and Ofira) return is just as palpable as their unflinching critiques of Israeli government and society, and, in the case of Nick and Itai, Palestinian leadership. The latter critiques not only resulted in each of them living outside of the region (albeit for starkly different reasons and with very distinct consequences and/or levels of risk), but also, as we will see below, culminates in their fierce and courageous resistance to the demands of the nation-state.

Much as Said predicted, the aforementioned dispositions of in-betweenness or worldliness have equipped my participants with an “originality [or plurality] of vision” that, in allowing for productive and creative forms of hope and possibility, constitutes one of the “pleasures of exile” (2000b, p. 186). Proof of this duality of vision are substantiated by my participants’ self-selection for this research, willingness to think the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, ability to ethically engage with alterity, and enthusiastic desire to continue engaging with and working in solidarity alongside one another beyond this project. The enacting of such exilic consciousness not only constitutes them as an alternative community born out of exile, but also provides a contemporary illustration of how Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora, who are not faced with “the daily pressure of occupation and dialectical confrontation” (Said, 2003a, p. 208), are uniquely well positioned to transcend the limiting pitfalls of their communal moorings and the competing claims of victimhood that they entail so as to begin anew.

\footnote{168 Here I am referring to Nick’s specific critiques of the Palestinian Authority (PA), as well as his and Itai’s somewhat ambiguous comments about Palestinian adherents of violent resistance and Palestinians’ spending of money on missiles rather than food, respectively, both of which I read as possible references to Hamas and their supporters.}
Nevertheless, of the six participants, only Nick, Ran, and Itai gestured to how, if at all, Palestinians and Israelis living in diaspora might help resolve the conflict and corresponding intercultural divide ‘back home.’ On the one hand, Nick seemed to recognize the productive possibilities working in diaspora offers. For example, in his life story interview he explained that living in Canada enables him and the Jews and/or Israelis he has met here to choose more productive and ethical relations with one another than they might have in Palestine/Israel. Then, in his reflective interview, he briefly suggested that because Ran, Itai, and Ofira live in Canada rather than Israel, they are free to speak to other diasporic Jews and Israelis about supporting Palestinians in their struggle for statehood – an achievement that would ultimately result in peace for all.

On the other hand, Ran and Itai were less optimistic. When commenting on the guilt both Itai and Ofira expressed in their first interviews, Ran suggests that their remorse stems from choosing to live in exile rather than face the conflict head on in Israel:

...[P]eople like [myself], Itai and [Ofira]...have our thought[s]...or opinion[s] about the conflict or how it should proceed or how it should be solved [which are] shared by lots of people that live in Israel. It’s not that all the people that think that it should be different live in Canada. I mean there is huge amount, you know, hundreds of thousands of Israelis that think like me, but they chose to stay there. So the only guilt that we have as a people that don’t live in Israel [is] that we basically removed ourselves from the conflict. We chose to remove ourselves from the conflict instead of [saying], “[O]kay, if you have opinion that something is wrong you should stay there and try to fix it.” Even as a voter to choose somebody in the parliament that represent your opinions. Okay? ...[T]his is always something that, for me at least, is a problem. I mean we made the choice and the choice is, in a way, not to deal with the conflict because we removed ourselves from [it]. Maybe if we were there we, obviously, could be more involved and...have a little bit influence on where it is going...Now you can still be active [and] not live in Israeli. Right? Like be part of Peace It Together...but I think that we definitely – let’s not lie to ourselves – we [are] much less effective dealing with it in Vancouver...than dealing with it...in Israel...[B]ut the people that we talk with and met...I think...they feel...there is some kind of guilt feeling that we are not there to help decide...that these things should be different and dealt [with] different[ly]...especially on the political side...

Finally, Itai admits that he has been struggling with the very question of whether or not activities undertaken in diaspora such as his plays or my research can assist the resolution of the conflict and/or improve Palestinian/Israeli relations in the region. If, like Ran, Itai is pessimistic and sceptical, his response is nevertheless indicative of the spirit essential to the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible:
...[I]t’s a real dilemma whether what we are doing here is just masturbatory (laughs) and will never help anybody and instead it’s better to actually try to help people [in the region] or if opening the minds of some Israeli[s] in Canada actually helps anybody. It’s a good question and I don’t really know the answer. But I also am writing [another] play about this conflict because I feel like that’s the only thing I can do...Ironically, there’s a saying in Hebrew (laughs), from the...Talmud Mishnah from hundreds of years ago, that says, “He who save[s] one soul...save[s] the entire world.” So, yes, of course it’s important to open some people’s minds and to change public opinion or to make people think about things...[Also], in this case, the diaspora is bigger than the actual people [in the region]. There’s more Palestinians living aboard than in Palestine; there’s more Jews living aboard than in Israel.

[So]...I’m curious to see where this experiment leads. I think a lot of people who want to participate in it do so, like me, because they want to change something...I don’t know that talking to people in Vancouver does change anything, but...we do what we can...[T]his is what your work is and so you try to do your best. I think any time there’s dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians it’s a good thing and so you should encourage all kinds of dialogue and try to have as much of it as possible. You know, I was always very sceptic[al] about...Peace It Together...or all those things. I’ve always been very, very sceptic[al] about how much they actually help people in the region, but they clearly help people in the diaspora feel better about themselves or feel like they’re doing something...Who am I to tell people not to? You know what I mean? I think anything that happens towards peace or...understanding between Israeli[s] and Palestinian[s] is a good thing and I encourage all such activities. However, I am sceptic[al]...I’m very pessimistic about the whole peace process. I’m pessimistic where we’re going with things...I’m very sceptic[al] about the ability to actually change anything by doing all these activities...[Still]...[i]t’s better than not doing it...[W]hat else can we do? (Laughs)

Still, as Spanos (2012) reminds us the pleasures and possibilities of exile go beyond exilic beginnings to facilitate the imagining of a new polity. He explains that Said envisioned the exilic refugee or migrant as enacting two interrelated forms of resistance that render the modern nation-state and its calls for filliative belonging obsolete: the first, “a comportment of ‘not belonging,’ of refusing to be answerable to the call of the nation state” (p. 166); the second, “a form of political ‘belonging’ grounded precisely on the ‘not belonging’ – the ‘not counting’ – that authorizes the nation-state” (p. 166).169 I believe that each of my participants has enacted both forms of resistance. On the one hand, whether intentionally or not, by leaving the region and choosing to live in diaspora Nick,

---

169 Given that a Palestinian state has yet to be realized, plus the fact that Nick, Haifa, and Amanda never indicated that the Palestinian leadership exerts any control on or makes any demands of them, the nation-state rendered inoperative here must be understood to be Israel.
Haifa, and Amanda refused to remain non-citizens and thus objects of Israeli’s continued oppression, violence, and discrimination,\(^{170}\) while Ran, Itai, and Ofira refused to continue as perpetrators and/or beneficiaries of the occupation (Azoulay, 2012). And it is here again that Nick, Itai, and Ofira truly stand out, as they embody the very “intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness” (Said, 1993, p. 332) Said assigned to the refugee or migrant in exile: Nick has refused to allow Israel to continue punishing him for resisting the occupation and fighting for his, his family’s, and his people’s freedom, safety, and security via non-violent measures; Itai has refused the IDF’s call to serve as a reservist; and Ofira has refused to allow her children to become tools in the service of the IDF. Ofira expressed this form of non-belonging and worldliness best when, during her life story interview, she professed that she is a nomad who lives between boarders and is thus not the object of any country, but rather is of the world. On the other hand, in refusing to belong or be counted by the Israeli state, my participants found solidarity and community together in diaspora through this project, which assisted them in initiating a new beginning outside of the powers that seek to divide and control them (Azoulay, 2012). In doing so, they again expose themselves as a “dialectically fraught, so sensitively located a class of individuals” (Said, 2004, p. 77), comprised of both non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis who, in refusing to belong to or be counted by the nation-state, assume varying degrees of morally, ethically, and politically productive risk.\(^{171}\)

Although each of the participants embodies both forms of resistance, not all of them were able to imagine alternatives to the Israeli nation-state and the “wretched forms of binationalism” (Butler, 2012, p. 4) that it currently entails. As previously argued, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s life stories and (post)memories were weighty with hopeful yet melancholic resilience focused on a new and just polity yet to come, with their visions for a new form of binationalism falling along a continuum. On one end, Nick insisted on initially having two separate states where each nation would have time to heal on their own, after which the two communities could “start again” and “live in peace together,”

\(^{170}\) This comment is not meant to suggest that Nick, Haifa, and Amanda have chosen to break their links with Palestine, as it is clear from their interviews that each is deeply bound to its land, culture, and people.

\(^{171}\) As noted in Chapter 4, such risk is very real as an institutional apparatus is necessary for exilic migrants and refugees to receive and maintain their rights. Nick’s current and very precarious status in Canada, as well as the importance Amanda and her family placed on receiving their Canadian citizenship, certainly speak to this.
presumably in the spirit of the pre-1948 relations for which he holds such great nostalgia. On the other end, Haifa envisions a binational state that encompasses both peoples living together “under some kind of arrangement” that would provide equal rights and freedom to all, plus allow individuals to live peacefully anywhere they chose within the region. Finally, Amanda falls somewhere in the middle stating that she would be happy with either one or two states, yet echoes Nick by stressing her belief that Palestinians and Israelis can live together in peace and prosperity, much as they had done prior to 1948. It is my belief that even though their imaginings of a new polity differ somewhat, each ultimately culminates in a variation of the very polity Said envisioned, i.e.) they render “the Us and them/Friend and enemy logic of the nation-state inoperative...[by] radically secularising its sacred exclusive inclusive biologic of belonging,” and thus exemplify “a polyphonic Palestine: a polis consisting of Palestinians and Jews – two different “voices” – that, however, contrary to the monolithic symphonic Voice of the nation-state, nevertheless belong together in loving – and always inventive, open-ended, and creative – strife” (Spanos, 2012, p. 196). Ultimately, and paralleling Said, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s visions for new and just forms of binationalism will only come to fruition if and when “the complete consort [is] dancing together contrapuntally” (Said, 1993, p. 332).

Conversely, Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s life stories and (post)memories entailed pessimistic yet unwavering determination to will the impossible. If Ran, Itai, and Ofira believe that Palestinians deserve justice, rights, and statehood or citizenship, unlike the Palestinians, they were unfortunately much more pessimistic about the future of the conflict, potentially making it harder to imagine what an alternative and just polity might look like. Ran and Itai were certainly the most sceptical. They both stressed that the unstable political landscape in the Middle East and the increasing international criticism of and activism against Israel only serves to put the country even more on the defensive. They both suggested that the Israeli left is simply too small and ineffectual to create meaningful shifts in mainstream Israeli consciousness, particularly given that most Israelis do not believe that Palestinians are or should be equal – if even human – and/or are unwilling to risk experimenting with those they perceive as the enemy. If Ofira is somewhat more hopeful that a better future is possible, her stated wish is a world in which all forms of separation dividing humanity are eradicated, not just those between Palestinians and Israelis. But even if Ran, Itai, and Ofira did not share visions for a new
and just polity of Saidian design, it is clear that they are open to such a possibility and have made a commitment to work toward improving Palestinian/Israeli relations and/or ending the conflict in their own way: Ran notes that unlike some other Israelis he is open to giving a two state solution a try and that he is wholly committed to working toward mutual understanding, ethical dialogue, and peacebuilding with Palestinians for the rest of his life;\textsuperscript{172} Itai, though unquestionably the most pessimistic, nevertheless persists with his activism and continues to dedicate much of his theatre making to raising awareness about the conflict and testifying to what he witnessed during his time in the IDF; and Ofira not only passes her moral, ethical, and political consciousness on to her children each day, but also holds great hope that this project is just the beginning of something greater – something that will allow her and her fellow participants to touch the hearts of others and ultimately leave the world just a bit better than they found it.

But as Said knew \textit{willing bi-nationalism} and coexistence into being will take more than connecting the Holocaust and the Nakba, gaining mutual recognition and compassion, and enacting exile consciousness. Yes, these acts of openness and possibility lay at the moral, ethical, and political foundation of his vision for Palestine, however, he was very clear that those courageous enough to take up his challenge of willing the impossible must also make a conscious choice between “either apartheid or justice and citizenship” (Said, 2003a, p. 285). This means resisting and working to eradicate Israel’s exclusionary, oppressive, and discriminatory policies and practices, for a true binational state requires that the interlaced hegemonic structures of Zionism and settler colonialism be replaced by a new polity “that would imply complex and antagonistic modes of living together, an amelioration of the wretched forms of binationalism that already exist” (Butler, 2012, p. 4). While rising up against the Israeli state undoubtedly entails pronounced risk for Palestinians, as we have seen, it also requires Israelis to take responsibility for and action in the service of Palestinians even in the face of significant communal backlash. Thus, even though he recognizes and greatly appreciates the fact that Ran, Itai, and Ofira are much more open, empathetic, politically conscious, and active in their resistance than most Israelis, Nick is insistent that they must do more:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{172} In his email response to the semi-structured reflective interview question “Would you encourage other members of your community to take part in similar initiatives, i.e.) those geared toward mutual understanding, ethical dialogue, empathy, witnessing and peace building” (see Appendix H), Ran stated the following: “I am trying every day, and will keep trying until I die.”
\end{flushright}
You need to let your voice be heard...You not need just to say, “I do not like it.” No! You need to say in a very loud voice, “Stop it Benjamin Netanyahu!” I hope...for this project somebody at least, if just one, come on the news anywhere to say, “Stop that Netanyahu!” For me if I see my people killing your people I will say, “Stop that!” But blood bring[s] blood...Stop the blood...We need to stop that! Just accept two state[s], stop [the building of] settlement[s]. Settlement[s]...give us more headache, more war, especially the [settlers, they are]...very bad people, they are killing anyone, they do not care about any [humanity]. So please...that’s why this project, to let everyone hear your voice. It is not enough to say, “Ah, I am here in Canada because I do not want to fight there.” It’s just not enough.

...We hope they [say] “No!” for their government. [Ran] served for...[s]even years, eight years...We never know what’s happening these years. He said nothing, but who know[s]. Eight years in Palestine...is big...But now it is time [to] ask forgiveness by telling his government, “Stop killing people! Stop!”...Since they agreed to participate [in] this project that mean[s] they have a good heart. Since they have a good heart they need to move on another step to tell their government, “Stop!”...and do more things, say [more] things...We need every Jewish with very high voice [to say], “Stop Netanyahu! Stop Netanyahu!” It will change everything...

I am certain that Said himself would support Nick’s call to action, however, he would also continue to encourage all Palestinians and Israelis to advocate together for the equal sharing of land, self-determination for both groups, and the extending of citizenship and thus equitable rights to all. And while this calls for “an innovative, daring, and theoretical willingness to get beyond the arid statement of assertion, exclusivism, and rejection,” I believe my participants would agree with Said that, having acknowledged and accepted one another as equals, “the way forward has become not only possible but attractive” (Said, 2003a, p. 319). For even if thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba together, engaging ethically with alterity, and advocating for a new and just polity is immensely challenging, as acting and courageous non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis able to acknowledge their organically linked histories and experiences of victimhood, displacement, and exile, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira have, knowingly or not, accepted Said’s challenge to will the impossible in the contemporary moment.
Revisiting the Question of Israel

Based on my contrapuntal reading of Said and Arendt’s political visions in Chapter 2 it is fair to argue that if my participants have taken up the difficult yet necessary Saidian task of willing the impossible, and thus the question of Palestine, they have also taken up the strikingly similar mission set forth by Arendt, and thus also the question of Israel. But whereas Said’s political vision immediately makes demands of both Palestinians and Israelis, Arendt’s leaves the bulk of the initial work in the hands of the latter. In other words, if Said’s vision begins with a call for both Palestinians and Israelis to recognize the organic yet ironic connection between the Holocaust and the Nakba, Arendt’s starts by raising separate questions about the Holocaust and the Jewish state that first requires Israelis to wrestle with the question of Zionism and only then demands the presence and cooperation of Palestinians. Consequently, Arendt’s vision for Israel, and thus my analysis below, continues to substantiate Said’s claim that willing the impossible entails an equally difficult yet significantly different and longer journey for Israeli participants.

Wrestling with Zionism: Thoughtless Escape, Thoughtful Action

Ron H. Feldman (2007) emphasized that although the aforementioned sets of questions about the Holocaust and the Jewish state are linked, they actually correspond to different moments in time: the Holocaust “raises questions about the past – how and why it happened,” while the Jewish state “raises questions about what it means to be part of the Jewish people today and in the future” (pp. xlv-xlvi). As we saw, wrestling with these questions brought forward both Arendt’s reverence and scorn for Zionism. On the one hand, she viewed the establishment of a Jewish homeland as the best remedy to anti-Semitism and the Jewish problem, and was thus an active and self-identified Zionist for approximately a decade. On the other hand, she was immensely critical of Herzlian Zionism, particularly its focus on survival and “dignity at any price” (Feldman, 2007, p. 386), which she felt would unquestionably result in a modern form of Jewish thoughtlessness. Ultimately, Arendt opted for Lazarian Zionism, which resisted the pariah status ascribed to the Jewish people, instead employing it as motivation for taking political action on behalf of all oppressed people. In Arendtian terms this meant that “[a]s soon as the pariah enters the arena of politics and translates his status into political
terms, he becomes perforce a rebel” and that being Jewish meant one “should come out openly as the representative of the pariah, ‘since it is the duty of every human being to resist oppression’” (Feldman, 2007, p. 284).

At the end of the Holocaust Jews stood at a critical juncture: adhere to Herzlian Zionism, which cultivated unreality, thoughtlessness, and worldlessness by fixating on the survival of a Jewish state in Palestine or accept Lazarian Zionism, which empowered reality, thoughtfulness, and worldliness by taking moral, ethical, and political action in the service of Jews and non-Jews. Inspired by her love for the Jewish homeland and veneration for Lazare, Arendt chose the latter, which fuelled her criticism of Israel, calls for Jewish-Arab cooperation, backing of the binational movement, and contrapuntal reading of the Holocaust and the Nakba. Like Said, Arendt was concerned with Zionism’s wilful disregard of the Arab Palestinians as it undercut possibilities for Arab/Jewish cooperation and thus peaceful coexistence. Unlike Said, however, her concern for the native Arabs was not grounded in a passion for social justice, but the urgent need to save the Jewish homeland and her fear of “the insult of oblivion” (Arendt, 1990, p. 69; Curtis, 1999). As Butler (2012) and Spanos (2012) cautioned us, however, if Arendt’s approach to the Arab Palestinians was chillingly pragmatic, even Eurocentric, it is still noteworthy that her vision for saving the Jewish homeland required Jews to accept the unalterable reality of the Arab Palestinians and therefore take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for them. Thus, Arendt’s answer to the question of Israel was to be found in her own Jewish sensibility and humanism, rather than national, religious, or ethnic filiations.

Differing significantly from the immediate post World War II era, the contemporary political moment has inarguably seen Arendt’s worse fears come to life. True her prophetic warnings regarding the “final tragedy” (Feldman, 2007, p. 394) have come to fruition in Israel, but conditions in the region have only continued to worsen. Consequently, today’s Israelis find themselves at a significantly different crossroads than that of Arendt and her Jewish contemporaries, but one that still demands wrestling with the choice between Herzlian and Lazarian Zionism. The continuation of this contest is evident in Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s life story and reflective interviews. And although a generational divide continues to mark their responses, each of their struggles with Zionism is defined by the courageous choice to transition beyond some degree of unreality, thoughtlessness, and wordlessness toward reality, thoughtfulness, and
worldliness. Such choices were not only a product of their dedication to Jewish sensibility and refusal to acquiescence to the demands of their communal moorings, but as we will see below, distinguish them as conscious pariah.

First, as Ran admitted, he grew up as a Zionist committed to protecting Israel and thus deeply invested in the “underdog” and “no choice” narratives he shared – master narratives unmistakably seeped in Zionist concerns for dignity and survival at any price. Given that he was born into the immediate Holocaust postmemory generation and grew up surrounded by survivors, it is not surprising that Ran adhered to Zionist master narratives of the War of Independence, viewed the conflict in the region as a war between Israel and its menacing neighbours (rather than between Israelis and Palestinians specifically), and had little to no interaction with Palestinians during his youth. As previously suggested, these factors may in fact account for some of the seemingly cold and Eurocentric comments he made during his life story interview for which Haifa and Ofira criticized him. However, and while he clearly still sees the validity of the “underdog” and “no choice” narratives, during his life story interview Ran speaks of being a Zionist in the past tense, noting that he became much more critical while living in Israel during his twenties. After re-educating himself about the conflict and engaging with Palestinians he now believes that Israel is the “culprit” in the continuing Palestinian/Israeli conflict and feels that if he still lived in Israel he would not allow his son to serve in the IDF, plus would send his kids to mixed schools – choices that seemingly result from his critiques of contemporary Israeli leaders and the state education system. I believe, however, that Ran’s struggle to choose between Herzalian and Lazarian Zionism is most clearly evidenced by his ruminations on the value of the “Jewish dynasty,” which I read as corresponding to the national vision of Herzalian Zionism upheld by the Israeli right who continue to dominate Israeli society and politics in the contemporary moment. I feel that the following words, taken from his life story interview, are significant enough to the task at hand to be re-quoted here at length:

...[F]or me...the first question that...you want to ask yourself – and it’s...a dilemma, right? – ...if you want to stand with Israel, if you want to stand with Jews, if you want to think that this history is important...the dynasty of the Jewish people...everything that threaten this dynasty or whatever you call it, you have the right to do everything you can in order to preserve it. And when I say everything you can, lots of bad things. It doesn’t work for me. So if I had to choose, if I have to do these bad things...to maintain the dynasty, I might choose give up the dynasty. But that’s me. I don’t know if I’m
right or wrong, but I see myself first as a human being and then all
the rest. I think...history, everything that you grew up is important. I
think...the history of the families, history of the religious (inaudible),
everything...that brought you up is part of you and I think that's
important, but then you have to ask yourself what is more important...

In the end, and as demonstrated by his participation in multiple joint Palestinian/Israeli
initiatives, including this study, Ran has made a conscious choice to accept the reality of
the Palestinians and work in cooperation with them to achieve peace and justice for
Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Second, like Ran, Itai has always recognized the need for a Jewish state and the
very real threat of anti-Semitism. Unlike Ran, however, he was raised as a humanist and
thus has always been critical of Zionism and the Israeli state. Beyond the disparities in
their upbringing, Itai also attributes their differences to Ran’s generation feeling the
immediate threat of anti-Semitism whereas his own generation was born cynical. And it
is this cynicism that enables Itai, much like Arendt, to divorce the Holocaust as a
horrendous historical event from Israel’s political use of it to justify state practices and
policies, particularly the continued occupation of the Palestinian people. Nevertheless,
Itai admits he was still “brainwashed” and “lied to” by the Israeli government, education,
and media systems about the War of Independence, leading him to serve in the IDF and
ultimately his own participation in the oppression of the Palestinians. Consequently,
even if Itai has always accepted the reality of the Palestinians and taken responsibility
for them, he admits that it still took a journey of re-educating himself before he learned
about the Nakba. Since this political awakening, he has channelled the guilt,
responsibility, and sense of moral obligation he feels toward Palestinians into his daily
life and professional theatre making. In doing so, he continues to testify to what he
witnessed during his service in the IDF, encourages other Jews and Israelis that criticism
of Israel is not only acceptable but necessary, and chooses supportive and cooperative
relations with Palestinians whenever and however he can.

Third, Ofira never mentions Zionism, however, it is very clear from her stories
and (post)memories that her family views Israel as a safe haven from the persecution
and violence they experienced in Tunisia and Morocco and, even though they lived
amongst Arabs in the Galilee, continue to support the separation between Palestinians
and Israelis. Beyond her family, and in striking similarity to Itai, Ofira also feels that she
was “brainwashed” by the Israel government, education, and media systems to serve in
the IDF, only becoming critical and learning about the Nakba later in life. While re-education was certainly part of Ofira’s process of shifting away from Herzalian Zionism, it was her cousin’s death that truly launched the political awakening that, much to her family’s disapproval, continues to navigate her, Ido, and their children’s lives. Inspired by her grandmother’s nostalgic stories of peacefully living with Arabs in Morocco and Bob’s inspiring mentorship grounded in the lessons he learned from surviving the Holocaust, it is clear that, even though riddled with guilt, Ofira has chosen to take responsibility for and continues to cooperate with Palestinians – lessons that she works tirelessly each day to pass onto her children.

There Is Always a Choice to Be Made: The Social Parvenu or the Conscious Pariah

Whereas the failure of the Oslo accords served as a significant moment in Said’s thinking on the question of Palestine, the First Arab/Israeli War served the same function for Arendt with regard to the question of Israel. And while there can be no doubt that her priority was saving the Jewish homeland, her calls for Jewish/Arab cooperation and prophetic warnings of what was to come if the latter opportunity was forsaken had pressing consequences for and necessitated the action of Jews and Arabs alike. Consequently, Arendt viciously criticized the Zionist and Arab leaders of her time for their irrational desire “to fight it out at any price” (2007, p. 389) and denounced individuals who, in having surrendered to the insult of oblivion, refused to recognize the indisputable presence and needs of the Other, thereby failing to take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for them. Instead she praised the small minority of Jews and Arabs who, in choosing to commit to “the plural diversity of worldly existence” (Curtis, 1999, p. 60) rather than refuting reality, might work together to save the Jewish homeland.

Arendt recognized that the political moment ushered in by the First Arab-Israeli War presented willing and active Jews and Arabs the prospect of new beginnings. Comparable to Said, she understood such beginnings as prompted by human will and agency, particularly through speech and action, rather than origins or traditions. As a result, she beseeched her predominantly Jewish audience to abandon thoughtless isolation in favour of thoughtful cooperation. She cautioned that if Jews and Arabs chose the former the Jewish homeland would be lost, the dangers of thoughtlessness and isolation from the world would be reinstated, and the existence of the resulting Jewish
state would be continually fixated on surviving threats from surrounding enemies. Alternatively, supporting a binational state that entailed Jews and Arabs living together peacefully afforded both peoples the chance to prove themselves as vanguards in the world, demonstrate that thoughtfulness and plurality can enable the transcendence of difference, and guarantee the survival of both communities. Ultimately, then, Arendt challenged both Jews and Arabs to make a crucial choice between the comportments toward being embodied by the social parvenu and the conscious pariah.

As outlined in Chapter 2, as early as 1948 Arendt viewed Jews who supported the new Israeli state and the negation of the Arab Palestinians as having acquiesced to, rather than resisting, the dangerous oppressive conformity, disciplinary normalization, and elimination of the individual demanded by the social. That is, they accepted the novel form of governmentality characterized by the new Israeli state, which resulted in a monolithic society focused on survival and little else, and therefore thoughtlessness and isolation. This marked them as parvenus who viewed themselves as victims of history and failed to realize that they possessed the ability to act in and for the world as individuals. Alternatively, she praised those Jews and Arabs who resisted the pressures of the social by acting in the public realm with others and recognized their ability to shape their own destiny, and thus chose cooperation and binationalism as conscious pariahs of the Lazarian kind. For Arendt it was the mutuality and plurality resulting from being seen and heard by others that established reality and the common world. Yet she also recognized that disclosing oneself to others within the boundlessness and unpredictability of the public realm was a courageous and heroic act, for there was no guarantee that one can control what they reveal or the costs of such disclosure. And this, again, is precisely the point – if the social defines individuals by what they are, the public realm reveals who they are.

As noted in my discussion of Said above, the contemporary moment in which this dissertation was undertaken presents active and willing Palestinians and Israelis the chance to began anew – an opportunity all six participants embraced when they chose to bring the Holocaust and the Nakba into counterpoint and ethically engage with one another. In Arendtian terms, beginnings in the contemporary moment, which is marked by conditions direr than even Arendt's worst predictions, demands that Palestinians and Israelis make a crucial choice between the dispositions of the social parvenu or the conscious pariah. Here again my participants demonstrated they were up to the
chall
age. In light of the failures of the current Israeli and Palestinian leadership, they 
looked to individuals such as themselves who not only chose to cooperate with one 
another for the sake of the common world, but also courageously disclosed themselves 
to one another in the public realm through speech and action irrespective of the 
uncertainty and risk that such disclosures entailed. In making this choice, they did more 
than accept Arendt’s challenge to initiate new beginnings; they also took up the 
disposition of the conscious pariah that, in remarkable parallel with Said’s non-
Palestinian Palestinian and non-Israeli Israeli, entails a blueprint for an ethics in 
dispersion and a response to claims of alterity.

Just like Said’s exilic consciousness, Arendt’s conscious pariahdom epitomizes a 
two-in-on condition that demands the tremendously challenging yet necessary fight to 
detach oneself from communitarian moorings. I have already demonstrated that this trial 
was almost completely absent from Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s stories and 
(post)memories, yet strongly underscored by Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s struggles with 
Zionism in which their Jewish sensibility and humanism won out. However, if all three 
Israeli participants lived up to Arendt’s challenge of taking on the disposition of the 
conscious pariah, it is Itai and Ofira who, much like Arendt herself, truly experienced a 
schism between themselves and their own people. In fact, during his reflective interview 
Itai spoke at length about navigating this schism, both in terms of the harsh treatment he 
has endured from other Jews and Israelis, as well as why he persists with his 
professional and personal activism nonetheless:

...[O]n one hand, it really sucks and it is hard. On the other hand, like 
I said, I feel like I have some sort of duty...[L]ike when we start talking 
about politics I cannot just close my eyes. I cannot. You know? I used 
to get into fights with taxi drivers in Israel all the time because they 
would say something racist and I would say something back and we’d 
get into [a] big argument and I’d get thrown out of the taxi. You know, 
because I just cannot be quiet and I feel like...I have some sort of 
moral obligation or a duty to not be quiet about these things. I also 
know that I am very knowledgeable about this conflict, a lot more than 
most people that I talk to are. Having been a solider, growing up with 
Palestinians, being (laughing) arrested in demonstrations, and so on, 
I’ve been on all sides of this conflict. And every time I go to Israel I 
take tours into Palestine with various organizations to see what it’s 
like. Every single time I do it.
...I've never done a Zochrot [tour]. I've done MachtomWatch. I've done Shovrim Shtika\textsuperscript{173} tours. I've done B'Tselem tours. So you go into Palestine and met Palestinians, you see what it's like. Most Israelis grow their entire life without ever meeting a Palestinian, unless it's the guy doing the garden or whatever, you know, and even then they don't talk to them. And so on one hand, it is hard, but I never shy away from it, ever. And I also feel like I know what I'm talking about. I feel like I make very (laughing) strong arguments and I feel very passionate about it. Sometimes I go (in a quiet, tired, and weary voice), "Oh no! I just don't...I'm just exhausted." Sometimes I'm just like, (again in a quiet, tired, and weary voice), "I can't get into this argument with you right now cause I'm just exhausted." But most of the times I feel like...I need to speak up. So it's hard when...I go to Israel and I hang out with...high school friends...and then somebody starts talking and...you realize that I'm a tiny minority here and I'm surrounded by people who think something very differently than me. But most people know already how I feel because they got into this argument with me once and so they already know.

...I gotta say the aggressive people don't bother me. I did [the play] \textit{My Name is Rachel Corrie}\textsuperscript{174}...Alan Rickman [the actor]...together with Katherine Viner, a reporter...took [Rachel's] diary and her emails and made then into a play...[I]t's not a great play unfortunately, but it's good...I did that play in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, and we had talk backs after and there were angry Jews in every single talk back. And I did the talk back cause I was the one Israeli guy working on the show. So I got used to being yelled at by aggressive Israelis and I can handle those, I really can. The louder you yell, the more aggressive you are, the easier it gets for me to handle you. It's the smart people who don't even know that they're racist that are hard to handle. I've been called, many times, a self-hating Jew and a...what do you say? ...It's a Hebrew expression because the 5th battalion, or whatever, was in Hitler's army and that's who betrayed...it's another way of calling you a traitor. In English they would say a Judas, which Jews don't use. So I've been called a self-hating Jew and many, many things by people like that and I really can handle that because clearly I don't hate myself at all – I really love myself – and I love a lot (laughing) of Jewish people and I love a lot of things Jewish and I feel very Jewish and I'm not ashamed to be Jewish and I see a big, big difference between being Jewish and being a Zionist, which a lot of people don't

\textsuperscript{173} Shovrim Shtika or Breaking the Silence (BtS) (2019) is an Israeli non-profit organization of veteran IDF soldiers who seek to educate the Israeli public about the realities of everyday life in the Occupied Territories. Their stated mandate is as follows: “We endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on a daily basis, and are engaged in the control of that population’s everyday life. Our work aims to bring an end to the occupation.” To learn more about their activities, including the tours Itai mentioned, visit their website at \url{https://www.breakingthesilence.org.il}.

\textsuperscript{174} Rachel Corrie was an American activist who died in Rafah on March 16, 2013 after an armored IDF bulldozer ran her over as she protested the demolition of Palestinian homes. Controversy surrounded her death with fellow protesters who witnessed the event stating that Rachel had been intentionally run down, while the IDF claimed that her death was an accident, as the soldier driving the bulldozer could not see her from his cab.
see at all. So I can handle all the bigots that are...screaming that I’m hating myself...because those arguments are [not true].

Here we might also reconsider the following comments from Itai’s life story interview in which he makes a connection between his love for Israel and the need to criticize the nation-state:

...Jews, in particular, feel that they can never criticize...Israel, that dirty laundry should be laundered inside. And I think that’s horribly wrong (laughs) and that if you love Israel that’s why you should criticize it more...[E]ven as a Jew I feel (laughs) like – given the Holocaust, given all the history that happened to Jews – Jews should know more than anybody how to treat other people (laughs)...[S]o I want to make a play that shows people that it’s okay to criticize Israel.\textsuperscript{175} If I’m Israeli and...Jewish and everybody I love is there, nobody can blame me for being anti-Semite. I am Jewish more than anybody...[I]f I can criticize Israel, then so can you...I feel that the more we tell people about the atrocities that happened in Palestine then it’s good, then...more people know, then maybe we can shift something in the public opinion in the world...I feel like I have a moral obligation of telling people what I saw, what is happening in Palestine, what Israelis are doing. But on the other hand I feel like...I wanna make a play that makes it okay for Jews to criticize Israel...because...that’s the only thing I can do.

These statements unquestionably echo Arendt’s belief that “there can be no patriotism without permanent opposition and criticism” (Arendt, 2007, p. 467), for “the hallmark of true patriotism and true devotion to one’s people [is] intense discontent” (Arendt as cited in Curtis, 1999, p. 130). In other words, while Itai is clearly very proud to be Jewish, it is precisely his Jewishness that lays the foundation for his humanism and motivates his commitment to living both inside and outside his own community.

It is obvious from Ofira’s life story and reflective interviews that she too has experienced a schism between herself and other Jews and Israelis, yet it is the rupture that occurred between her and her family after her cousin’s death that has had the greatest impact on her life. In her reflective interview she elaborates on the fact that although her choices are not seen as legitimate by her family she nevertheless works diligently to impart the significance of choice to her children:

In a way, when you are part of the [Israeli] system, education system, you have less choice. Right? Cause the education system is much more oppressive than most (laughing) of the other systems in the

\textsuperscript{175} The play Itai is referring to is titled \textit{A Very Narrow Bridge} and can be viewed online in its entirety at \url{https://vimeo.com/161258686}.  

317
society, I think. This is my research *(laughing)*, beside this project, *(laughing)* [my research is] about democratic education. I think the education system is so strong, especially in centralized education system as Israel because it’s such a small place, so it’s really controlling lives. Right? So I feel that the choice comes only later and the choice comes really when people *(making air quotes)* “graduate” from army. And that’s why, I think, you see all this travelling and stuff of many Israelis after the army because it’s kind of, “Okay, now I have a choice. I decide and I go and I do whatever I want and *(in a low, serious voice)* nobody tells me what *(laughing)* to do.” It’s kinda of sad, I think, I feel that the choice sense, I didn’t experience so much choice earlier. And choice is really something truly important for me...[I]n Hebrew we have a book about the bad guy that enter you and behave instead of you *(laughs)*, like when your behavior is out of your control. So I all the time I say [to my older son], “You have a choice. You have a choice.” I all the time use this word, “You have a choice.” And yesterday he had *[pieces of apple on a plate]*...and he took them – because I believe he just didn’t think it’s *[a] big deal – so he took three of them. And then Yuval said *(imitating her younger son)*, “Ah, ah!” *[like]* “I want one.” And he said, “No.” ...And then when my partner told him, “You have to give him one. C’mom, you have to.” And I said, “You don’t have to, but you have a choice. You have a choice to be kind to him because you’re his brother.” The moment I said that he gave him one and he said, “Do you want another one?” But he’s so like me, his behaviors, once you tell me I have a choice I’m good. Once you tell me I have to, I don’t know if it’s something I was born with or *[if]* it’s a combination of the army, military service that now I don’t agree to do things that I have to. Because I have to? And I feel like resistance in me.

...I made a choice when my cousin was killed. Right? I made a choice that was really different from my family, really different direction. It’s a choice. Sometime we should just remind ourselves that society everywhere *[is]* full of people that got convinced that they don’t have a choice. And Passenger the singer – amazing singer – he has a song that *[goes]*, “Act as if you have a choice” *(laughing)* ...I love this sentence! *Act as if you have a choice! You know? I love this song!* ...It’s so strong. Even if you feel you don’t have a choice in a situation, *act as if you have a choice and then it will free you.* You know? The choice is the thing that I think would keep me alive.

...It’s scary *[to make a choice]! ...I do told me last week... “I realized that when I meet all our friends” – here we have friends from all over, from Iran, from Saudi Arabia, everywhere in the world, Guatemala and everything – he says, “it’s so obvious for me that they have a choice to immigrate and live here...but because we come from such a story in Israel we feel...as if our choice is not legitimate.” ...For our family it’s not a legitimate choice. It’s not right...So...he said, “When I meet them like it’s so obvious that they have this choice. C’mom! How come...we

---

176 Ofira is referring to her doctoral research, which she was undertaking while also participating in this research project.
kill ourselves with all this guilt for twelve years that we live aboard? But in all other aspects in our lives we have a choice and we make choices and we make choices that many people don’t like about many things.” (Knocks fist on the table) Not this! We are not free yet (laughs) from the guilt. The guilt. Guilt is a strong tool.

Here again, I believe it can be argued that it is Ofira’s Jewish sensibility that grounds her humanism and binds her to her family while simultaneously driving the difficult choice to live apart from them.

Second, according to Butler (2012), Arendt recognized that “Jewishness can and must be understood as an anti-identitarian project insofar as…being a Jew implies taking up an ethical relation to the non-Jew” (p. 117) – a claim affirmed by Arendt’s rallying for Jewish-Arab cooperation and assertion that the former must take responsibility for the latter. However, as I outlined in Chapter 2, it is also supported by Arendt’s theory of cohabitation, which (based on her critique of Eichmann) emphasizes that, although we do not have the right to choose with whom we should or should not inhabit the earth, we can choose to preserve and nourish “the unchosen character of inclusive and plural cohabitation” (Butler, 2012, p. 151) and commit to protecting the lives of those we live with rather than “enter into a policy of genocide” (Butler, 2012, p. 24). I previously argued that all six participants demonstrated a contrapuntal understanding of self and other, i.e.) they recognized their irreversible boundedness without erasing the distinctions between them, thus demonstrating an ethics of dispersion beyond geography. Shifting from a Saidian to Arendtian lens, here I contend that my participants embodied the same ethical imperative by acknowledging their inseparability, choosing to take responsibility for one another, being open to working together to find a solution to the conflict that would ensure a generative and equitable life for all, and expressing their abhorrence for the current conditions of horrific and violent forms of binationalism that exist in the contemporary moment. In this instance, then, we can argue that it is their commitment to conscious pariahdom and an ethics of cohabitation that empowers their non-belonging and Arendtian inspired visions for a new binational polity focused first and foremost on ending state violence so as to ensure the survival of both peoples.

Envisioning a New Polity: Non-belonging and Binationalism

Decades before Said (1993) published his thinking on the political significance of the refugee or migrant, Arendt (1976; originally published in 1951) documented the process
by which increasing masses of refugees and stateless people, particularly Jews, were rendered rightless and silent in Europe between the two World Wars. Such individuals, she asserted, had lost both “the right to action [and] the right to opinion” (1951, p. 296), as well as the common community they authorized. She took this as a sign that the purportedly hallowed Rights of Man were neither secure nor enforceable and that the nation-state had been rendered inoperative, as it was neither inclined nor capable of guaranteeing or safeguarding the rights of those most vulnerable. Nonetheless, and paralleling Said, it was during Arendt’s own exile that she “turn[ed] the condition of the countryless refugee…upside down in order to present it as the paradigm of a new historical consciousness” (Agamben, 2000, p. 14). She reasoned that although the “status of outlaws” had been forced on both parvenu and pariah by history, it was “those few refugees who insist[ed] upon telling the truth, even to the point of ‘indecency’…[that] represent[ed] the vanguard of their peoples” (2007, p. 274). As argued in Chapter 2, the latter individuals showed themselves to be conscious pariah who, rather than acquiescing to the dangerous pressures of the social, chose not to belong or remain silent and instead stepped into the public realm by speaking and acting in and for the mutuality and plurality of the world.

I previously demonstrated that by being geographically and consciously dispersed or unhomed Arendt’s refugee or stateless person experiences the same distinct yet interconnected states of in-betweeness and their accompanying two productive forms of resistance through non-belonging characteristic of Said’s non-Palestinian Palestinian and non-Israeli Israeli. Therefore, I will not bother to reiterate these arguments here. Suffice it to say that given the parallels between Said and Arendt’s thinking on this point, my arguments above for viewing Nick, Haifa, and Amanda as non-Palestinian Palestinians, Ran, Itai, and Ofira as non-Israeli Israelis, and all six participants as conscious pariah, it is more than fair to assert that – regardless of whether their unhoming and subsequent life in exile was chosen – my participants have shown themselves to be vanguards amongst their people and highlighted the dangerous yet productive potentiality such comportments toward being entail. Once again, I believe special attention and consideration must be given to Nick, Itai, and Ofira in this regard.

But if it is fairly easy for us to reconcile the productive possibilities of Arendt’s homeless vanguard with Said’s exilic refugee, Arendt significantly deviated from Said by not leaving her audience a “heuristic directive” (Spanos, 2012, p. 196) for her vision of a
binational state. Again, I agree with Spanos (2012) that we can read Arendt’s pleas for Jewish-Arab cooperation and her commitment to the notion of a binational community “as remarkably prophetic, if not an explicit vision, of a singular denationalized and non-identitarian, binational community...[or in Saidian terms] a polity that, unlike those founded on ‘filiation’ or ‘affiliation’ is (un)founded on the (il)logic of a-filiation” (p. 189). Yet diverging from Spanos, who looked to Agamben’s (2000) vision of Jerusalem as a extraterritorial or aterritorial space for hope and guidance in this regard, I turned to Butler’s (2012) much more detailed, persuasive, and feasible, yet still Arendtian inspired, binational vision, which directly confronts the vile forms of binationalism that typify the everyday lives of Palestinians and Israeli in the contemporary moment.

According to Butler, equitable and ethical modes of cohabitation can only be realized if and when Israeli settler colonialism and state violence against Palestinians ceases. Grounding her argument in Arendt, Butler emphasized that the only way to avoid the destruction of either people and politically exemplify the principles of cohabitation is for Israelis to defend not only themselves, but also Palestinians, “for the destruction of Palestinian lives and livelihoods can only increase the threat of destruction against those who perpetrate it, since it gives ongoing grounds for a resistance movement that has its violent and nonviolent versions” (p. 119). And this is exactly the point Nick made when he pleaded with Ran, Itai, and Ofira to raise their voices up against their government in an effort to “stop Netanyahu” and the oppression, discrimination, and destruction wrought under his command. As a champion of nonviolent resistance, Nick is insistent that the violence on both sides must stop. However, he also stresses that Palestinians will continue to resist Israeli settler colonialism and occupation until they have gained their rights and freedom, plus achieved statehood. The Israeli participants speak to Butler’s argument as well. While it is evident that they have and will continue to take responsibility for the Palestinian people and work alongside them in joint solidarity, it is also very clear that Ran and Itai’s pessimism regarding the possibility of finding a resolution to the conflict is grounded precisely in their lack of confidence that the majority of their fellow Israelis would be willing to do the same. Furthermore, having participated in this project, Ran, Itai, and Ofira gained and/or deepened their understanding of and empathy for those Palestinians who, like Nick and Haifa’s father, have and continue to dedicate their lives to the struggle for Palestine.
This is all to say that if not all six participants were able to envision a binational state of Saidian design, they were open and dedicated to achieving and cultivating Arendtian modes of ethical cohabitation. And even though Ran and Itai are undoubtedly pessimistic about the possibility that the violence will end and peaceful cohabitation will emerge they, along with Nick, Haifa, Amanda, and Ofira, continue to work toward this goal undeterred. Again, I believe such unwavering dedication is a product of their tremendous courage to acknowledge and explore their linked histories of suffering, the need to acknowledge and take responsibility for one another, and the hopeful possibilities enabled when productive forms of resistance are undertaken together outside of and in opposition to the powers that seek to divide and control them.

The current and ever-worsening “wretched forms of binationalism” (Butler, 2012, p. 4) that characterize the contemporary moment attest to the fact that, while remarkably courageous, Arendt and her supporters were unable to achieve the vision of cooperation, binationalism, and cohabitation that she advocated for so strongly, particularly in 1948. However, all hope is not lost. Having made the choice to begin again by accepting reality and thus moral, ethical, and political responsibility for one another, acting together as conscious pariah and vanguards in and for the world, and committing to an ethics of cohabitation founded on joint solidarity and non-belonging, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira have, consciously or not, also accepted Arendt’s challenge to will the impossible in the contemporary moment.

**Revisiting Willing the Impossible through Storytelling and Photography**

By revisiting the questions of Palestine and Israel, respectively, I have shown that my participants have in fact taken up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible advocated for and embodied by both Said and Arendt. However, as asserted in Chapter 3, bringing Said and Arendt’s political visions into praxis necessitated drawing out additional points of connection between and imaginative possibilities empowered by their political thinking. Consequently, I conclude this chapter with a consideration of how storytelling and photography generated the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for my participants to begin willing the impossible through civil imagination in the contemporary moment.
The Possibilities of Narrative & Photography: From Representation to Emancipation

The Saidian task of willing the impossible demands that we first identify and understand the master narratives and collective memories of both the Holocaust and the Nakba that have been created and manipulated by Palestinian and Israeli leaders and their adherents, and then work to disrupt, complicate, and unsettle them. Said (1993) argued that “the power to narrate, or to block...other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them” (p. xiii). Yet, he also asserted that “grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilized people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjugations” and that “in the process many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they fought for new narratives of equality and human community” (p. xiii). Thus, Said’s contrapuntal approach lays bare the historical and contemporary processes by which colonial and/or national narratives represent, subjugate, displace, dispossess, and exclude the other, as well as how various counter-narratives serve as forms of resistance, emancipation, and liberation.

Said was particularly concerned with how the cultural practice of narration is connected to identity formation. On the one hand, he argued that master narratives create an unyielding and false dichotomy of “us” versus “them,” which is maintained through culture and traditional, and accompanied by “rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour” (p. xiii). His repeated references to education as a cultural battleground where students are expected to study and adhere to their own national narratives before and to the exclusion of others, as well as “appreciate and belong loyally, often uncritically, to their nations and traditions while denigrating and fighting against others” (p. xiii), are undeniably corroborated by Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s life stories and harsh critiques of the Israeli education system. Just as Said warned, not only were the Israeli master narratives of the Holocaust and the War of Independence, which strategically negate the Nakba, taught to Ran, Itai, and Ofira in school and reinforced by the IDF and

177 It should be noted that the problematic aspects of Palestinian collective memory identified by Said and outlined in Chapter 1, which result in the minimization of Jewish suffering and/or denial of the Holocaust, were not present in any of the participants’ life story or reflective interviews, however, it is telling that none of the Palestinian participants remember or mention being taught about the Holocaust in school while growing up.
Israeli media, but they were also accompanied by the dangerous expectation that they should venerate Israeli culture while simultaneously divorcing it from Palestinians and their culture and suffering. In fact, this narrative process is exactly what Itai and Ofira were referring to in each of their interviews when they asserted they were “brainwashed” to believe that the Arab Palestinians fled of their own accord in 1948 and that by serving in the IDF they were protecting Israel from another holocaust. While Ran does recognize that the Israeli education system has constructed and manipulated a single and very specific master narrative to facilitate national needs much to the detriment of the Palestinians, he does not feel that he was brainwashed to serve in the IDF. For example, in his life story interview he explained that during his educational upbringing “everyone [was] fed from the same book and ate the same garbage that the education system provide[d]…[T]he narrative is one and that’s about it.” Also consider the following discussion from his reflective interview:

When I grew up...Israel was fifteen [twenty] years old...[A]t that time...the narrative was, “[W]e have to be strong. We have to be the strongest. We cannot lose once because we have only one chance...[E]very eighteen years old have to go to the army, the same as our dads went to the army...[T]he stronger we are the more chance we have to survive.” It was survival for us...[I]t’s not a matter of choice. It wasn’t even a question...I can tell you that there’s questions now. I mean there’s way more young people that now [question]...I have...cousins and nephews, I talk with them, some of them [don’t serve in the army]. [There was] no option like this [when I was growing up]. I’m sure there was odd, you know...one, two [people] in a hundred thousand that maybe...had the bigger vision than an average sixteen years old. But you have to understand that by the age of fifteen you’re going to a first screening, by the age of eighteen you are already in the system...So it’s a machine...through the education system...When I grew up it wasn’t even a question. So when [Itai and Ofira] said that...they were brainwashed, yeah, you can call it brainwashed... (Pausing for a moment.) Yeah, I don’t know if brainwashed is the right word...I don’t think that there was somebody sitting there on the top and kinda puppet everybody to brainwash and kill themselves in the war, but the narrative was a brainwash.

---

178 As Ran reiterates in his reflective interview, “We knew about...the refugees. We knew about the repercussions of [the War of Independence]...on the Palestinians, [but]...the term Nakba was never introduced to me until later on in age...[T]he fact that...there were people displaced, I mean, everybody knew it...[The narrative] was more like, “They left...There was a war, we won [and] they lost”...So it wasn’t really something that left you a lot of room to ponder.”
That said, and immediately leading from the statement above, Ran began to justify the use of this narrative approach:

...[And] maybe, honestly, there was no choice. [Israel] was a young country that went through three wars before it even become a country. Become a country (inaudible) military war, which is what we call [the War of Independence], ‘48, which become the Nakba, and then...’56 Sinai War, then ‘67. So there was constant war there...[T]here’s no time to think, I mean, you have to be there, you have to be strong, you have to be educated – militarily educated – because if you are not [there] might be an episode...[T]hat’s (laughing) the way we grew up!

It is this vacillation between criticizing and defending Israeli master narratives that Haifa and Ofira picked up on in Ran’s life story interview.

On the other hand, Said emphasized the importance of reintroducing the stories of those excluded from such national master narratives, as they serve as “narratives of emancipation and enlightenment” (p. xxvi). Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s insistence regarding the importance of sharing their and their family’s stories, as well as those of the Palestinian people at large, validate Said’s assertion. Their objective for their participation in this project was not to present their stories as separate from those of the Israelis, but rather to assert their presence and integrate their counter-narratives within them. Furthermore, it can be argued that my Israeli participants also sought to assert their presence and integrate their counter-narratives of the Holocaust and War of Independence, which following their re-education include the Palestinians and the Nakba, within Israel’s broader national master narrative. In other words, the Palestinian counter-narratives that Ran, Itai, and Ofira heard both before and during this study “stirred” and thus inspired them to also fight for “new narratives of equality and human community” (Said, 1993, p. xiii) alongside Palestinians.

Applying these same arguments to memory, Said (2000a) outlined how collective memories, which are part of the aforementioned national master narratives, are invented, manipulated, and exploited to “construct a desirable loyalty to and insider’s understanding of one’s country, tradition, and faith” (p. 176). Such “false...[or] invented [collective] memories” (p. 178) of Zionist histories of geography and memorialization of the Holocaust, he argued, were not only used by the newly established Israeli state to create a new sense of national identity, but also as a mechanism for consciously forgetting and negating the Palestinian people, and their culture, narratives, and civil
rights, thus reducing them to stereotypical, homogenized, and menacing ‘Arab’ terrorists in mainstream media. Here again my participants confirm Said’s claims. First, Ran, Itai, and Ofira all reference the emergence of the sabra, tzbars or “new Jew” in Israeli society prior to 1948. Second, and as noted above, all of my participants recognized and critiqued Israel’s active memorialization and unethical leveraging of the Holocaust to, amongst other things, repudiate the catastrophe suffered by the Palestinians from 1948 to the present day. Finally, both Itai and Ofira made references in their interviews to how Israeli media frame Palestinians and Arabs as “infiltrators,” “extremists,” and “terrorists” – problematic representations of the ever-present enemy that appear to have been juxtaposed with collective memories of the Holocaust across all political, social, and cultural institutions, including the mainstream media.

It is within this contemporary arena of dominant meaning making that Palestinians like Nick, Haifa, and Amanda continue their fight for “the right to a remembered presence…to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality (Said, 2000a, p. 1984), and “[p]ermission to [n]arrate” (Said, 1984, p. 27) their own stories and memories, which counter, disrupt, complicate and unsettle Zionist and Israeli master narratives and collective memories. The fact that questioning and open Israelis like Ran, Itai, and Ofira have sought out, found, and engaged with counter-narratives storied by Palestinians, thus subsequently coming to acknowledge and co-memorialize the Nakba, demonstrates that the latter’s struggles to be remembered and their unrelenting perseverance to be heard, particularly by their occupiers, have not been in vain. And while it is true that the Israeli left is still a small minority and the new polity Nick, Haifa, and Amanda dream of and hope for currently resides only in their imaginations, there can be no denying that narrating and exchanging counter-narratives and counter-memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba has allowed them and their fellow Israeli participants to connect, rather than compare, their histories of suffering, survival, and 179

---

179 Just before concluding Ofira’s reflective interview, I asked her if she had a parting message for her fellow participants. In response, she gives the peace sign and, while laughing, says, “Give peace a chance!” Interestingly, she then tells me she has always been afraid to make this gesture and does not remember doing it before, as her parents always told her it was “a Palestinian move.” That is, Palestinians would make this gesture when they were being released from prison, the connotation being that “these are dangerous days,” i.e.) once a Palestinian is released from prison you never know when the next terrorist attack might take place. Based on her comment in Chapter 6 that the media created an association for her between Arabic and “extremists,” and the fact that prior to this study she had never met a Palestinian prisoner and/or their family before, I believe both her and her parents are referring to the narratives and images of Palestinian prisoners they were exposed to in Israeli media.
exile, take responsibility for one another, and explore the productive potentiality of joint resistance through non-belonging and binationalism – exigencies Said (2000a) insists must be met if hope, justice, and peace are to be realized.

It is also within the aforementioned contemporary realm of hegemonic meaning making that photography, much like narrative, has proven itself to be a “double-edged sword” (Iskandar & Hakem, 2010, p. 13). On the one hand, and although Itai and Ofira do not speak specifically to photography, their brief references to how the Israeli media represent Palestinians specifically and Arabs more generally gesture to Said’s (1986) claims that the visual can be violent and exclusionary in its ability to create and sustain reductive and dehumanizing representations of Palestinians while simultaneously rendering invisible the actuality of their suffering and exile. On the other hand, and in keeping with the importance of photographs within Palestinian society, we see that Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s family photographs serve as evidence of their families’ very social, cultural, and political existence in Palestine, as well as the conditions of their lives as a result of the Nakba (Iskandar & Hakem, 2010).

Yet Said (1986) recognized that photographs offer Palestinians much more than documentation of life before, during, and after catastrophe. As “an alternative mode of expression to the one usually encountered in the media” (p. 6) they also hold great potential for emancipation. Much like Said’s personal interpretation of the Jean Mohr photographs that comprise After the Last Sky, I believe that Nick, Haifa, and Amanda’s storying of the counter-narratives and counter-memories associated with their own family photographs also provide “personal rendering[s] of the Palestinians as a dispersed national community – acting, acted upon, proud, tender, miserable, funny, indomitable, ironic, paranoid, defensive, assertive, attractive, and compelling” (p. 6). In the process of replacing the aforementioned simple and harmful media representations with narratives that unearth the complexities of their historical and contemporary existence, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda enact a “double [or multifaceted] vision” that speaks both to their status as insiders and outsiders within their own communities and the exilic consciousness that such “inbetweeness” (p. 6) enables. In doing so, they too confirm that while photographs have contributed to the creation and reinforcement of Zionist and Israeli master narratives and collective memories, they also provide imaginative and hopeful possibilities for Palestinians to story their counter-narratives and counter-memories, thereby documenting their existence and suffering, and asserting their agency and
identity. Yet as I argued in Chapter 3, if Said’s writings on photography focused on the Palestinian experience, they also hold emancipatory potential for Israelis. This was clearly demonstrated when Itai and Ofira enacted their own “double [or multifaceted] vision” (p. 6) as they shared their counter-narratives and counter-memories as storied through their personal and often military focused photographs, thus revealing themselves to be much more than one dimensional IDF soldiers and/or unquestioning adherents to Israeli master narratives and collective memories.

This is all to say that, just as I speculated in Chapter 3, by choosing to narrate and then exchange their counter-narratives and counter-memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba through associated photographs, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira were able to move beyond the problematic and reductionist representations and invented traditions that support origins and filiative associations, toward emancipatory forms of self-representation and ethical engagement that created and fostered affiliative relations. By jointly initiating a new beginning rooted in exilic consciousness and non-belonging, my participants were able to connect rather than compare their histories of suffering and survival, ethically engage with one another, and envision and/or commit themselves to working toward a shared future based on coexistence, justice, and equitable rights. Ultimately, with the assistance of narrative and photography Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira were able to begin again so as to will the impossible.

The Possibilities of Storytelling: “Fictional” Versus “Real” Stories

Arendt’s political vision for Israel, and thus her iteration of the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible, begins with a call for critiquing and challenging Herzalian forms of Zionism, which create thoughtlessness, unreality, and the insult of oblivion, and whose followers prove themselves to be social parvenu. As we saw, she believed that storytelling had the power to both create and correct the worldlessness and alienation inherent to the social. Arendt (1998) declared that “fictional” stories are “made” and strategically employed by “invisible authors”, while “real” stories come into being when individuals courageously “act…speak…[and] insert [themselves] into the world [to] begin a story of [their] own” (p. 186). Accordingly, “fictional” stories, which are produced within the isolation of the social realm, determine “what” we are, while “real” or “life stories,” which begin within the plurality of the public realm, disclose “who” we are (p. 184).
I previously correlated “fictional” stories with master narratives made and manipulated by the nation-state and adhered to by their supporters, and “real” stories with counter-narratives grounded in marginalized and subjective experiences (Stone-Mediatore, 2003) that are shared in and for the world by courageous and acting beings. Given the clear parallels between Said’s master narratives and Arendt’s “fictional” stories, as well as the fact that I have already read my participants’ interview responses against the former’s discussion of master narratives and their associated collective memories, I will not repeat these arguments here. However, the counter-narratives and counter-memories my participants storied and then exchanged do warrant being re-read through Arendt’s “ethics of storytelling” (Bilsky, 2001, p. 251), that is, as “real” stories.

First, during their life story interviews each of the six participants expressed a desire to both tell and hear personal stories of experience related to the Holocaust, the Nakba, and/or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. In particular, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda stressed their appreciation for the opportunity to share “real” stories about themselves, their families, and the Palestinian people, and Ran, Itai, and Ofira expressed their interest in hearing and engaging with such stories. Then, during their reflective interviews, each participant expressed their gratitude for the life stories shared through this project – enlightening, emancipatory, and personal narratives that they themselves juxtaposed against problematic, exclusionary, and impersonal master narratives, especially those regarding the Holocaust and Israeli nationhood found in official history books and/or media. As Ran stated in an email following his reflective interview, “[a] personal story is always more to the point and take[s] the historic events out of the book…” Ofira expressed the same sentiment in her life story interview when discussing the power of – in her own words – “real stories”:

...I’m [a] storyteller [laughs]! I believe in stories. I believe in personal experiences. I believe in memories in just daily life. That’s what I believe in. I don’t believe in just good history book. That doesn’t go through the heart...I think that [the stories shared in] these videos could go through many hearts...

Second, as conscious pariah they not only courageously chose to cooperate with and take responsibility for each other, but they did so by disclosing themselves to one another in the public sphere by sharing stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives, regardless of the unpredictability and risk such disclosures entailed. Choosing to narrate their life stories and (post)memories to other acting beings
within the public realm meant accepting that they were not the authors of their own stories. Yet it was precisely through the intersubjective act of exchanging and negotiating their stories within the “web’ of human relationships” (Arendt, 1998, p. 183) created by the occasion and conditions of this project that new political meaning emerged. Put differently, it was by acting and speaking with one another in the public realm of this study, as well as the agonism such engagement entailed, that they revealed the rich and multifarious nature of both their, their families’, and their communities’ lives, as well as the common world they all share.

Third, Arendt understood storytelling as a chance for storytellers and their audiences to enlarge their understanding of one another and the world, rather than a means by which to defend and/or endorse deeply held “truths” (Calhoun & McGowan, 1997). Chapter 7 highlighted several points of expected and unexpected understanding, appreciation, commonalities, and boundedness that emerged between the participants across the course of their reflective interviews, yet it also showcased moments of agonism. Yet even when a participant's comments called into question the stories of their fellow participants, their families, and/or nations, their listeners took responsibility for them and showed them hospitality by exercising judgement, i.e.) working to reconsider the world from their perspective, and expressing a desire for future clarification and/or discussion. Haifa and Ofira’s responses to Ran’s life story were particularly demonstrative in this regard. Even though some of Ran’s comments caused Haifa to disengage with his stories and memories, and his seeming lack of commitment to his fellow Israelis and the project as a whole made Ofira question whether she even wanted to share her stories and photographs with him, both women persevered, ultimately coming to learn from Ran’s contributions to the study, and, rather than shutting down the possibility of debate, expressed a desire to engage with Ran further. The same can be said for Ran’s expressed lack of interest in Itai and Ofira’s life stories and (post)memories. To be honest, I first read Ran’s indifference as failure to show his fellow Israeli participants the hospitality and responsibility they had shown to him, thereby closing off the possibility of response and address. Nevertheless, in their reflective interviews Ran, Itai, and Ofira contemplated how the Israeli experience differs across generations and ultimately expressed a willingness to engage further. This exchange of knowledge, understanding, and openness, while not wholly unproblematic, still worked to enlarge the mentality of all involved. Across this study my participants demonstrated that
difference and agonism could lead to plurality, mutual understanding, and a desire for sustained debate.

Finally, given the unpredictability of this study, the participants’ desire and willingness to risk disclosing themselves, engage with others, and release their private stories into the public realm is nothing short of courageous. I believe that the plurality and mutual understanding created in this project through speech, action, and agonism empowered them by “dislos[ing] [current] realities…establish[ing] relations and creat[ing] new realities” (Arendt, 1998, p. 200) and imaginative possibilities. Unlike the social parvenu who remains complacent and isolated, my participants felt a “mutual aesthetic provocation” (Curtis, 1999, p. 36) to disclose themselves to one another within the boundless and unpredictable “space of appearance” (Arendt, 1998, p. 199) where they experienced togetherness, and thus reality, through speech and action. Ultimately, and just as the testimonies of Zindel Grynszpan and Abba Kovner at the Eichmann trial confirmed to Arendt herself, the “real” and heroic stories Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira shared in this study continue to prove “that under conditions of terror most people will comply but some will not” and that “[t]he holes of oblivion,” which are created and sustained by “fictional” stories, “do not exist…[for] there are simply too many people in the world to make oblivion possible. [Someone] will always be left to tell the [‘real’] story” (Arendt, 1997, pp. 232-233).

Once again the assumptions I proposed in Chapter 3 bore out. By choosing to tell and share “real” stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira were able to take a vital first step toward the kind of Arab/Jewish cooperation Arendt supported so fiercely. Furthermore, as conscious pariah in search of new beginnings, they challenged Herzalian forms of Zionism and the “fictional” stories they create, proved themselves to be vanguards in and for the world, and honoured an ethics of cohabitation by taking responsibility for one another. In the process they demonstrated that storytelling between acting and courageous Palestinians and Israelis within the plurality and mutuality of the public realm is a practical everyday means by which to take up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible.
Willing the Impossible through Civil Imagination & the Civil Contract of Photography

Because Arendt never attended to the moral, ethical and/or political possibilities of photography and/or photographs, in Chapter 3 I turned to the Arendtian inspired work of Azoulay. As I outlined earlier, Azoulay (2012) begins by highlighting the limits of the political imagination suggesting that “under conditions of regime-made disaster” (p. 1), such as the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, it “runs the risk of remaining cramped, limited and circumscribed [by] often re-inscrib[ing] existing forms” (p. 3). She was especially troubled by how citizenship within the existing nation-state has suffered a “civil malfunction” (p. 2) whereby the rights and privileges associated with it are applied and accessible to only a segment of the governed population. Following an analysis of this malfunction as a product of the social, Azoulay stresses that political imagination must be reconceptualised in ontological terms as “a form of imagination that transcends the single individual alone and exists between individuals and is shared by them” (p.5). She identifies this new formulation as the “civil imagination” (p. 9).

Given that the moral, ethical, and political possibilities of political imagination are inhibited by the demands of the nation-state, which create and maintain master narratives and collective memories of trauma and disaster (Azoulay 2011), Azoulay (2012) appeals for the creation of a civil discourse “that suspends the point of view of the governmental power and the nationalist characteristics that enable it to divide the governed from one another and to set its factions against one another” (p. 2). Instead civil discourse “lay[s] bare the blueprint of the regime...[and] strives to make way for a domain of relations between citizens and subjects denied citizenship by a given regime...[based] on their partnership in a world that they share as [people] who are ruled” (pp. 2-3). In this way, civil discourse “isolate[s] potential factors in the real world that might facilitate the coming into being of such relations of partnership, instead of the power of the sovereign that threatens to destroy them” (p. 3). It is precisely this form of discourse, empowered by civil imagination, that allowed my Israeli (citizens) and Palestinian (non-citizens) participants to acknowledge and critique the master narratives and collective memories of disaster made by the nation-state and then jointly story counter-narratives and counter-memories of these same events outside of and in opposition to the powers that seek to divide and control them. In fact, I believe that all six
of my participants were driven to participate in this project by a “civil intention” (p. 106) to take responsibility for one another and the common world they share.

Yet Azoulay maintained that the best medium for realizing the moral, ethical, and political potentiality of the civil imagination is photography, for it “create[s] a space of political relations that are not mediated exclusively by the ruling power of the state and not completely subject to the national logic that overshadows the political arena” (2008, p. 12). Echoing Arendt’s analysis of storytelling, Azoulay warned that no one owns a photograph nor can they decide and/or constrain the stories that it tells. Instead it is the photographic encounter between the photographer, spectator, and photographed subject that becomes the space of political relations between citizens and second class and/or non-citizens. When considered in the context of my fieldwork, we can see that as spectators Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Itai, and Ofira did more than simply look at other’s photographs, rather they “watched” them thereby recreating each photographic event to produce new and alternative readings outside of the original photographers’ intentions. By utilizing the “civil skill” (p. 14) of “watching” other’s photographs, i.e.) by taking up the position of the civil spectator, these five participants accepted the challenge of trying to reconcile the differences in how they and the photographed subjects are ruled and then demanded that they not be ruled in this way. Such “civil negotiation” (p. 16) both enables and calls for the reimagining of photographed subjects as “participant citizens” (p. 17) within the “civil contract of photography” (p. 85), for the spectator has an ethical duty to deterritorialize and rehabilitate the photographed subject’s citizenship. Following Azoulay’s analysis, I believe that, as photographed subjects, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda called on Ran, Itai, and Ofira to “recognize and restore their citizenship through...viewing” (p. 17). In response Ran, Itai and Ofira were able to “break away from [their] status as citizens...[to instead] exercise their citizenship – that is, [they] turn[ed] citizenship into the arena of constant becoming, together with other (non)citizens” (p. 118). Conversely, and while the photographs Azoulay analyzes almost always have Palestinians as their subjects and herself, an Israeli, as spectator, my study demands an

---

180 The civil contract of photography Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Itai, and Ofira entered into through this study positions them as both subjects and narrators of their own photographs, as well as spectators of their fellow participants’ photographs and audience to their accompanying stories. This made for a much more complex and nuanced civil contract between my participants than Azoulay accounts for or theorizes, i.e.) in her writings and analysis she generally only “watches” photographs of individuals she is not familiar with and whose narratives she does not know or have access to.
extension of her theory to consider a swapping of roles. That is, as photographed subjects themselves Itai and Ofira call on Nick, Haifa, and Amanda to reimagine them as partners and fellow citizens within the civil contract of photography, rather than as Israeli citizens beholden and acquiescing to the call of the nation-state.

Furthermore, while empathy was undoubtedly at play and even increased as participants’ “watched” each other’s photographs and listened to the stories and memories associated with them, much as Azoulay cautioned empathy cannot be the sole purpose and/or only product of their engagement. Rather, and in Nick’s words, they had to “take another step” to rehabilitate citizenship within the political arena in which they are both ruled so that a new “political space [was] created in which a plurality of speech and action...[was] actualized” (p. 25). In this way, they suspended the power of the Israeli state, which can no longer ensure nor provide their rights to have rights. Ultimately, by entering together into a civil contract of photography, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira created a civil discourse that petitions for Palestinians’ right to be citizens and Israelis’ “right not to be...perpetrator(s)” (Azoulay, 2012, p. 243), thereby reinstating the presence of the Palestinian people, deterritorializing citizenship, and resisting the powers that seek to divide and rule them.

Yet how, if at all, might we read Ran’s decision not to share photographs? I believe that Ran did enact his civil imagination during this study. He contributed to the creation of a civil discourse that helped expose the blueprint of the Israeli state and, if not always consistently or unproblematically, challenged Israeli master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the War of Independence, as well as the strategic forgetting of the Nakba and the continued suffering of the Palestinian people. And while Ran made very few, if any, specific comments about his fellow participants’ photographs, I have no reason to believe that he did not look at or “watch” them. Nonetheless, in choosing not to share his own photographs, he unwittingly excluded himself from elements of the civil contract of photography that his fellow participants readily and willingly took up. Ofira’s frustration with Ran’s perceived lack of commitment to the “personal research” inherent to this study is telling. As noted in Chapter 7, she felt that she might have responded more positively to Ran’s life story if he had shared photographs. To clarify her point she cites the fact that even though Nick did not show his face on video or in his photographs she was still touched by and able to empathize with him because of the personal photographs and accompanying stories he shared. In
the end, I am left wondering what other “real” stories Ran may have storied had he found photographs that resonated with him and the objectives of this study, as well as how differently, if at all, his fellow participants’ might have responded to him if they had the opportunity to “watch” his photographs through a civil gaze.

Nevertheless, taken together Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Itai, and Ofira’s photographs create “a civil archive which makes it possible to view the catastrophe they [record]” (Azoulay, 2011, p. 7) – a regime-made disaster that the Israeli state has worked tremendously hard to disavow and negate. Similar to the civil archive Azoulay herself created in *A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950*, by employing a “civil gaze” (2012, p. 97) Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Itai, and Ofira not only challenged and disrupted Israeli master narratives of the Holocaust and the War of Independence, but also enabled the reimagining of the past, present, and the future. In doing so, they laid bare the “civil malfunction” (p. 14) inherent to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, made it addressable, and then voiced a civil demand for “a different kind of participation and cooperation across space and time” (p. 16). It is this ethical challenge that this dissertation now passes on to you, the reader, as a potential civil spectator.

In closing, this reading of my fieldwork findings through the lenses of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s political thinking confirms my earlier supposition that storytelling and photography are the best media for everyday Palestinians and Israelis to take up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. It is my ultimate hope that even though the contemporary moment is marked by ever worsening conditions in Palestine/Israel the tremendous courage, audacious hope, and imaginative possibilities exhibited by Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira throughout their life stories, (post)memories, and photographs will morally, ethically, and politically inspire other non-Palestinian Palestinians and non-Israeli Israelis to take up the challenge of bringing Said and Arendt’s political visions for Palestine and Israel into being.
Conclusion

Reflections on an Intentionally Utopian Ethnographic Project & the Possibility for Multiple New Beginnings

I began this dissertation by reflecting on the email that inspired this study. The photo essay it contained (Appendix A) starkly demonstrated the dangerous cycle of contending master narratives and collective memories of the Holocaust and the Nakba that are at the root of and continue to underlie the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. After unpacking this process, whereby the collective memory of the other is destroyed and/or negated through the creation of one’s own, I briefly spoke to the rewards and challenges of undertaking peacebuilding work with Palestinians and Israelis both inside and outside the university. Most importantly, I explained that by choosing to take on the position and responsibilities associated with Said’s oppositional public intellectual I challenged myself to develop a means by which to assist Palestinians and Israelis living in their respective Canadian diasporas to begin the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible.

Moving to deeper analysis, I proceeded to outline the morally, ethically, and politically productive Saidian imperative of willing the impossible, which entails thinking the Holocaust and the Nakba contrapuntally, ethically engaging with alterity, and envisioning a new binational polity grounded in peaceful coexistence, justice, and equitable rights. I then brought Said’s political thinking and vision for Palestine into counterpoint with Arendt’s political thinking and her vision for Israel, thus demonstrating that she too left us with the difficult task of willing the impossible. Through an Arendtian lens, this challenge initially calls on Israelis to critique Zionism and then take responsibility for the Palestinians, thus positioning themselves as conscious pariah, rather than social parvenus. Only then can Israelis cooperate with Palestinians to actualize Arendt’s theory of cohabitation, which might work to end the occupation and ensure a generative life for all. Next, and with the assistance of Azoulay, I demonstrated that Said and Arendt understood storytelling and photography as the primary media through which to make their political visions a reality.
With my theoretical foundation delineated, I moved on to outlining the unique and innovative three-stage photograph-based storytelling method that I specifically developed for this dissertation, which entailed participants narrating their life stories and (post)memories of how the Holocaust and the Nakba has impacted their lives using family photographs; exchanging their life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs with their fellow participants; and then reflecting on sharing their stories, memories, and images, engaging with those of the other participants, and the research process as a whole. After presenting and analysing my fieldwork findings, I argued that storytelling and photography did, in fact, enable the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for my participants to begin willing the impossible through civil imagination. That is, by narrating and then exchanging their stories and (post)memories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba through associated photographs, my participants were able to connect rather than compare their histories of suffering and exile, take moral, ethical, and political responsibility for one another, and imagine new forms of cohabitation and citizenship grounded in justice and equitable rights for all.

In this conclusion, I briefly reflect on the successes and limitations of this project, as well as the possibilities that my method holds for the initiation of various new beginnings, both inside and outside the university, as well as in the contemporary moment and beyond.

**Successes & Strengths**

As outlined in Chapter 1, inspired by the work of Culhane (2011b; 2017) specifically and the field of experimental and performativé ethnography more generally, I developed and executed this study as an unprecedented, exploratory, and thus “intentionally utopian ethnographic project” (Culhane, 2011b, p. 257). Not only did I have to develop a research method to undertake this work, but I also knew that there was no guarantee or expectation that my participants and myself would be able to truly achieve the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible. Thus, I set realistic goals for my participants, this project, and myself, with the sole objective being to create the moments and conditions of possibility necessary for Palestinians and Israelis to begin willing the impossible. To me this meant assisting my participants in the initiation of a new beginning, facilitated by storytelling and photography, which might contribute in some small way to the visions laid forth by Said and Arendt, as well as Azoulay. Most
important to me, however, was that the fieldwork process be meaningful and significant for my participants.

After much reflection, I firmly believe that my participants, this study, and I can claim a number of modest successes and thus I present here – in response to the series of “What Ifs” that set the stage for this project and dissertation – a series of “I/This Method Did”:

*I did* design a research method that brought Said, Arendt, and Azoulay’s theoretical approaches to willing the impossible into praxis.

*This method did* enable the occasions and conditions of possibility necessary for everyday Palestinians and Israelis to begin willing the impossible through storytelling and photography.

*This method and project did* privilege the fieldwork process, particularly in terms of the value it holds for participants, over specific academic products and/or prescriptive outcomes.

*This method and the fieldwork it entailed did* prove to be valuable and productive for my participants.

*This method did* demonstrate the potential to be a valuable and productive means of addressing other intercultural conflicts.

Given that my participants were not made aware of the specific theoretical and methodological foundations at the heart of this study, the above assessment is mine alone. However, when asked to reflect on the research process as a whole, Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira’s responses were extremely positive and encouraging. Three strengths of the research process repeatedly came to the fore. First, and as stressed in Chapter 7, Nick, Haifa, and Amanda were especially grateful for the opportunity to narrate their life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs in their own words and/or voices directly to engaged Israelis. Furthermore, as per Chapter 8, each of the six participants expressed how valuable they found the process of exchanging life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs with their fellow participants. Second, and as highlighted in Chapter 8, although I set the topic of research, my participants stressed the value of bringing the Holocaust and the Nakba
into counterpoint, both historically and in the present moment. In fact, Nick claimed that focusing on the Holocaust and the Nakba was the very best aspect of the project as a whole. Finally, my participants felt that this research project was well designed and executed. More specifically, throughout the process Nick felt extremely comfortable, Haifa felt supported and informed, and Ofira felt safe and protected. Ofira also expressed her appreciation for my flexibility, the time she was given to process her thoughts and emotions at each research stage, and the depth of the study, which she contrasted with the “hit it and go” structure and approach of other dialogue programs, such as Seeds of Peace and Peace It Together.\footnote{Much to my surprise, Ofira told me that she learned a lot from me during the fieldwork process, resulting in her changing aspects of her own doctoral research, particularly with regard to how she approached her participants and the decision to extend her fieldwork process.}

Given that I intentionally prioritized my participants’ experience of the fieldwork process over academic outcomes, I am very proud of and made hopeful by the aforementioned modest successes, as well as my participants positive feedback. Not only did Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira demonstrate tremendous courage and openness throughout this process, but they also invested in and committed to this project in ways that I never could have imagined or anticipated. Their generosity was most clearly evident in their willingness to engage with each of their five fellow participants’ stories, (post)memories, and photographs, as well as their enthusiasm for future engagement and collaboration – a level of commitment that undoubtedly made this project stronger and, I would argue, truly speaks to the productive potentiality of the method I developed.

**Limitations & Weaknesses**

Because this project achieved the goals I set out for it, there are no true failures of which to speak. Nonetheless, honest reflection requires acknowledging the weaknesses and/or limitations of my method and this study, as well as any potentially valuable and productive goals that I did not set nor endeavour to meet.

First, **we did not** overcome the power imbalances that exist between Palestinians and Israelis, achieve any tangible forms of social justice, disrupt and/or end the occupation, and/or establish the architecture for a new binational polity, but nor did we
attempt to. While there will surely be critics who question the successes and impacts of this study, it must be remembered that this project was envisioned and executed simply as a beginning initiated by active and willing Palestinians and Israelis who courageously chose to accept the tremendously difficult challenge of willing the impossible. In other words, we would do well to remember that – in the refreshingly honest words of Culhane – “[a] project is not a revolution” (2011b, p. 269).

Second, my participants did not watch each other’s reflective interviews, meet in person and/or initiate any of the joint initiatives that we considered undertaking outside the official parameters of this study, but nor were they required to. While it would be quite easy to facilitate the exchange of reflective interviews between participants in the near future, were this not to happen Nick, Haifa, Amanda, Ran, Itai, and Ofira will still have the opportunity to learn how their fellow participants responded to their life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs through this dissertation. Furthermore, while the possibility of having the participants meet in person outside of the study was always in play, two issues stopped such a gathering from taking place. First and foremost, Nick’s refugee case remains unresolved, thus necessitating that I continue to ensure his anonymity. I certainly could have brought together the remaining five participants, however, I strongly felt that excluding Nick would be unfair, even unethical. Add to this the fact that Haifa moved to Toronto in 2014, Amanda moved back to Beit Sahour in 2016, and Ofira’s decision to return to the Galilee just this past August, and the possibly of all six participants meeting face to face became immensely challenging.

That said, something Ofira said to me at the end of her reflective interview continues to haunt me: while having the participants meet and move forward with other joint initiatives was not necessary for my dissertation research, it was tremendously important to her and her fellow participants as people. I fully recognize that it was not my responsibility to bring my participants together outside of the parameters of this dissertation, yet I cannot help but wonder if I could have worked harder to accommodate their desires and needs. In truth, a part of me will always wonder what might have transpired over the years that have passed since the completion of fieldwork had my participants been given the opportunity to continue trying to will the impossible together outside of this study. Still, I hold out hope that they will eventually met – whether it be individually or as a group, with or without me, in person or online, in diaspora or ‘back home’ – and that as a group we might continue trying to will the impossible, particularly
through the online Holocaust and Nakba postmemory archive first suggested in the “Future Uses” section of the Initial Consent Form (Appendix D) and which all six participants were excited about and interested in being a part of (see below for more).

Third, this study did not include Holocaust and Nakba survivors, less open and/or more religious and/or militant Palestinians and Israelis, and/or non-diasporic Palestinians and Israelis, but nor was this its aim. While Ran stressed that the inclusion of such individuals would make for a much richer and interesting study and thus the storying of very diverse life stories, (post)memories, and/or photographs, I justified my recruitment parameters in Chapter 4 and continue to stand by them. With that said, it is important that such individuals also begin to connect the Holocaust and the Nakba, morally and ethically engage with alterity, and begin envisioning a new polity, however, I believe such work would require the revising of my method and/or the development of another method sensitive to the conditions at hand. With regard to future uses of my method and/or iterations of this project, I most certainly hope to increase the number and diversity of my participants. In particular, I would like to work with Palestinians and Israelis in the wider diaspora, i.e.) both outside of the lower mainland and Canada, plus include Israeli Palestinians, a group that was not represented in this study, but who I wish had been.

A Method in Development

Based on the above series of successes and limitations, as well as my participants’ feedback, there is only one modification to the three-stage photograph-based storytelling method developed and utilized for this study that I might suggest: if and when possible participants should meet either as part of the fieldwork process or very soon after. This was a popular suggestion noted by all six participants, but particularly voiced by Haifa, Amanda, Itai, and Ofira. However, the participants’ suggestions as to when this meeting should take place and its relationship to the other three stages of the research process differed. For example, Haifa recommended that participants meet face to face in a documented real time meeting either in place of or before the reflective interview. Such a meeting, she suggested, might be more beneficial in terms of the participants’ experience of the fieldwork process, as well as the research project as a whole. Amanda also liked this idea, however, unlike Haifa, she would prefer to meet each of the other participants one-on-one rather than as a group, as she felt that
the latter option would force participants to divide their attention far too much. Finally, although Ofira also liked the idea of meeting her fellow participants face to face either as a group or one on one, she would prefer that such a meeting take place after the reflective interviews, as she needed and appreciated having time to clarify and process her thoughts throughout each stage of research. While I still stand by my argument in Chapter 4 that responding to each other’s life stories, (post)memories, and associated photographs in person would have limited participants’ ability to speak honestly and without interruptions, I do agree that having the opportunity to meet, engage further, and possibly initiate other morally, ethically, and politically productive beginnings would be ideal and, if circumstances allow, should be pursued. At the very least, facilitating their meeting outside of the research process would serve as a gift back to the participants for their generous time and engagement. At most, their meeting could become an integral part of the research process. The latter would, of course, complicate already complex fieldwork and analysis, however, the rewards for the participants, the research as a whole, and efforts toward willing the impossible may very well be worth the time and effort.

Beyond this one possible modification to my method, the participants also offered a handful of other suggestions that are certainly worth considering. In terms of the method itself, Nick proposed also using it to facilitate honest discussions about specific everyday issues that characterize the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, most importantly the inequality between Palestinians and Israelis in terms of access to water, electricity, employment and salaries, as well as the significant difference in death rates. Haifa also suggested narrating life stories and (post)memories through family heirlooms in place of or alongside photographs. In terms of the logistics of the fieldwork process, Ran suggested that the videos be edited to reduce their length and cut down on dead or non-relevant parts; Haifa asked if the two interviews could be conducted closer together; and Ofira expressed her frustration with not being able to discuss or share her fellow participants’ stories with anyone else – a restriction she found especially challenging given the traumatic nature of the life stories, (post)memories, and photographs she was engaging with.
The Possibility for Multiple New Beginnings: The Contemporary Moment & Beyond

My participants and I all share the hope that this modest pilot project will be the beginning of something much bigger. Therefore, I end this dissertation by looking to the future and the possibilities it holds for multiple new beginnings, both inside and outside the academy, as well as the contemporary moment and beyond.

First, subsequent to my doctoral defense, I plan to launch the aforementioned community-based, collaborative, and globally accessible digital Holocaust and Nakba postmemory archive, which will not only showcase my participants’ stories, associated photographs, and reflective responses, but also invite Palestinians and Israelis living in Israel, the Occupied Territories and/or diaspora to share their own stories and photographs, as well as respond to others’ submissions. As noted above, not only did all six participants express interest in and excitement for creating, maintaining, and/or promoting this project, but it would also allow us to continue working together outside of this dissertation regardless of circumstance and/or geographic location. Such a project would simultaneously allow me to continue utilizing and strengthen this method, plus extend this project well beyond its pilot run.

Second, I also plan to begin exploring how my photograph-based storytelling method can be applied and/or adapted to assist other communities in conflict. Given that my participants and I worked and lived on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples – particularly those of Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Kwikwetlem, Kwantlen, and Katzie Nations – during the fieldwork process, my next research project will offer this three-stage photograph-based storytelling method to local Indigenous leaders as a gift of reciprocity aimed at assisting in the collaborative facilitation of ethical dialogue, reconciliation, and joint solidarity between Indigenous and settler communities in the Greater Vancouver Area. This project will not only further extend my dissertation research, but is also well informed by my teaching and four years working as a public historian dealing with claims of abuse at Indian residential schools in

---

182 We must remember that although the exilic condition of the migrant or refugee does hold great moral, ethical, and political potential with regard to conflicts in one’s homeland, such individuals are still settlers on Indigenous lands – an undoubtedly problematic and privileged position that needs to be confronted and addressed.

183 Haifa’s reflective interview was the only interview not conducted on these specific lands.
British Columbia. It should also be noted that a local Indigenous leader has expressed interest in using this method to foster better relations between local Indigenous and settler communities, particularly in the Downtown Eastside, thus strongly suggesting that this method does hold value for other communities in conflict. While the general moral, ethical, and political thinking of Said, Arendt, and Azoulay is still relevant to such a project, both the project and the method would need to be reimagined and grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and research methodologies. First and foremost, this would require that Indigenous community leaders determine the topic of research between these communities to ensure that it would best serve, rather than work against, their needs and objectives. My hope is that I will be able to run and expand such a project alongside the Holocaust and Nakba postmemory archive.

Finally, though the successes my participants and I achieved through this project may be modest, they are far from insignificant. Even the briefest of glances at the news coming from Palestine/Israel indicate that conditions in the region have remained the same, if not worsened, over the years that this dissertation was imagined, planned, executed, and written. This requires a constant and unremitting effort to will the impossible no matter how difficult or futile our efforts feel and/or how intractable the conflict seems. Efforts to bridge the Palestinian/Israeli divide, end the occupation, and ensure justice, rights, and security for both communities has never been more crucial, however, as I have warned, they must be informed by both intellectual rigor and ethical activism.

Therefore, I conclude this dissertation by reasserting my commitment to willing the impossible, both inside and outside the university and through the multiple new beginnings outlined above, as well as beyond. Furthermore, and much as I have done throughout this dissertation, I challenge you, the reader, to take up the difficult yet necessary task of willing the impossible by being both active witnesses to my participants’ life stories and (post)memories, and ethical spectators of their photographs. Yet, I hope that your engagement and commitment will not stop there. I undertook this dissertation in the hopes that other oppositional public intellectuals, public activists, and/or everyday Palestinians and Israelis will use my method, both within and beyond the halls of the academy, to continue trying to will the impossible. Remember, it is precisely because this task seems impossible that it is still so very necessary. Will you join me?
References


Erdal, Itai. This is not a conversation. Vimeo. Retrieved from https://vimeo.com/209683020


Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People. (2017). The Palestinian Centre for Rapprochement between People. Available at https://www.rapprochement.org/


Appendix A

THE GRANDCHILDREN OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS FROM WORLD WAR II ARE DOING TO THE PALESTINIANS EXACTLY WHAT WAS DONE TO THEM BY NAZI GERMANY...

BUILDING WALLS & FENCES TO KEEP PEOPLE IN PRISONS
CHECKPOINTS NOT TO ALLOW PEOPLE BASIC FREEDOMS OF MOVEMENT
ARRESTS & HARRASSEMENTS
DESTROYING HOMES & LIVELIHOODS
GIFTS (WITH LOVE) FROM THE CHILDREN OF PEACE-LOVING & CIVILIZED COUNTRIES
THE CLASSIC PROPAGANDA MACHINE – YOU WILL FIND IT IN BLACK & WHITE IN ALL AMERICAN AND SOME OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES HISTORY BOOKS, ENCYCLOPEDIAS, LIBRARIES, MUSEUMS… THAT DEPicts A YOUNG JEWISH BOY WITH HIS HANDS UP WHILE NAZI TROOPS POINT THEIR GUNS AT HIM AND HIS FAMILY IN ORDER TO EXPEL THEM FROM THEIR HOMES… (IT’S SUPPOSE TO MAKE YOU SYMPATHIZE WITH THE VICTIMS & TO SUPPORT THEIR CAUSE FOR JUSTICE & A HOMELAND)

THE ISRAELIS PRACTICE THE SAME TACTICS
Appendix B

Recruitment Cover Letter/Email (Version: October 16, 2014)

Dear [Mr. / Ms./ Mrs. LAST NAME],

Thank you for your interest in my PhD graduate thesis entitled Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba: Peacebuilding Through the Storying of Postmemory. I am writing to ask whether you would be willing to pass along the enclosed information to any contacts, friends and/or family members who you feel may be interested in learning about and/or possibly participating in this research project. Along with this letter, I have included a recruitment notice and the study “Consent Form.” Please note that you are under no obligation to share this information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Nawal Musleh-Motut

PhD Candidate

School of Communication

Simon Fraser University

Home Office: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Cell Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Email: nawal_motut@sfu.ca
Appendix C

Recruitment Notice (Version: October 16, 2014)

Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba:

Peacebuilding Through the Storying of Postmemory

I am a PhD Candidate in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and am looking for participants for my study about how sharing personal stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have shaped their lives might facilitate ethical dialogue, mutual understanding, empathy and peacebuilding between Palestinian and Israeli immigrants currently living in Canada.

My project begins by working individually with each participant and a selection of their family photographs to generate personal recollections of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives, as well as how such recollections might differ, if at all, from official Israeli and Palestinian collective memory.

After telling their stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives, each participant will exchange their stories and a selection of family photographs with a fellow participant from the other culture.

Following this exchange, participants will have the opportunity to reflect on the process of telling and sharing their stories, listening to and viewing other participants’ stories, as well as the research process as a whole.

As noted above, the purpose of this project is to provide the occasions and conditions necessary to facilitate ethical dialogue, mutual understanding and empathy between Palestinian and Israeli immigrants currently living in Canada in the hopes of contributing to the process of peacebuilding.

To participate in this project, individuals must be: 1) a Palestinian or Israeli immigrant to Canada; 2) born after the Holocaust and/or the Nakba, i.e.,) Israelis must be born after 1945 and Palestinians after 1948, and be 19 years of age or older; and 3) must be interested and willing to participate in each of the three research stages laid out above and in the attached “Consent Form.”
If you would like to learn more about this study and/or are interested in participating, please contact me at the phone numbers or email address provided below.

Sincerely,

Nawal Musleh-Motut

PhD Candidate

School of Communication

Simon Fraser University

Home Office: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Cell Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Email: nawal_motut@sfu.ca
Appendix D

Initial Consent Form (Version: October 16, 2014)

Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba:
Peacebuilding Through the Storying of Postmemory

Who is conducting this study?

The principal investigator (PI) for this study is Nawal Musleh-Motut, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX; Email: nawal_motut@sfu.ca. This study is being undertaken as part of the PI’s PhD graduate thesis and, as such, is being conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University.

Who is funding this study?

This study is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Why should you take part in this study? Why are we doing this study?

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a Palestinian or Israeli immigrant to Canada who was born after the Holocaust and/or the Nakba, but whose life has still been impacted by one or both of these events. Not only will the project give you an opportunity to share your stories about how these events have shaped your life, but it is also an opportunity to exchange your stories with members of

Instances of postmemory can be identified and measured based on the following criteria. Postmemory is experienced by individuals who are at least one generation removed from and have close proximity and/or connection to a previous generation who experienced traumatic events that took place prior to the individual’s birth. While the individual will have generational distance from the events in question and those who experienced it/them, they will nonetheless have a strong personal connection to the memories that they inherit. Given that the individual has not directly experienced these trauma(s), the reality of these events is seen as incomprehensible and therefore not reproducible. Although this powerful and specific form of memory is fragmentary and constructed, it still dominates the individual’s present reality – it speaks to a past that will not go away, but which also cannot be integrated into the present. Subsequently, the individual seeks to mediate such memories by means of creative expression and re-presentation through various media, such as photography.
the other culture to see how such a process might allow for ethical dialogue, mutual understanding, empathy and peacebuilding between you.

Your participation is voluntary.

You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. If you chose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all the data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed upon your request.

What happens if you agree to participate in this study? How is the study done?

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to take part in the following 3 research stages, which will be undertaken over a 6 to 8 month period. Each of these 3 stages will be undertake at a pace you are comfortable with and, as such, the length of each stage will vary. Please note that priority will be given to the process of you and your fellow participants telling and then exchanging your stories with one another, rather than the technical quality of the videos produced and/or whether they are publicly shared.

Stage 1. Photograph-based Oral History Interview

You will be asked to choose a selection of family photographs and/or family photo album(s) that you feel signify and/or represent how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted your life. You will then be asked to narrate these photographs and/or album(s) and their meaning to you in the presence of the PI. Following your narration of these photographs and/or album(s) the PI will ask you a series of semi-structured questions meant to address any issues relevant to the project that may not have been addressed in your earlier narration. Please note that these photograph-based oral history interviews will be videotaped.

Stage 2: Exchange of Photograph-based Oral Histories

Once completed, you will exchange your photograph-based oral history interview with a fellow study participant from the other culture. This exchange can either be facilitated through the PI, i.e.) she will present your photograph-based oral history interviews to the participant from the other culture for you, or be undertaken directly between study
participants at a gathering where everyone meets, depending on which you would prefer. Please note that if your photograph-based oral history interview is exchanged with, as well as viewed and then discussed, in the presence of fellow study participants, this process will be videotaped.

**Stage 3: In-depth Reflective Interview**

After you have watched and contemplated the other participants’ photograph-based oral histories, you will be asked another series of semi-structured questions meant to have you reflect on the experience of watching and listening to the other participants’ photograph-based oral histories, as well as the research process as a whole. These questions can either be answered in a one-on-one interview with the PI or in a group workshop attended by fellow study participants, depending on which you would prefer. Please note that this interview and/or group workshop will be videotaped.

**Is there any way being in this study could be bad for you?**

It is not believed that there is anything in this study that could harm you or be bad for you, as this study has been designed so that you are not put at any greater risk than you would be if you initiated dialogue with someone from the other culture on your own and/or through community dialogue programs focused on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, i.e.) emotional challenges related to the telling of and/or listening to recollections and/or memories associated with the Holocaust, the Nakba and/or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict; disagreements that might arise when engaging with members of the other culture about the conflict; criticism from members of your own community for engaging with members of the other culture. In other words, by agreeing to participate in this study you have acknowledged that you are interested and willing to engage with members of the other culture about the Holocaust, the Nakba and/or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and are aware that you will likely encounter points of view that might be challenging and/or result in disagreements. However, because the purpose of this project is to share and discuss different personal experiences and memories concerning these events, you have been made fully aware of the aforementioned possible challenges and understand that part of the process is to hear stories and perspectives that may challenge and/or complicate your own.
With that said, some of the questions you will be asked and/or stories you will share and/or hear may upset you. Please let the PI know if you have any concerns. If at any time during this study you experience increased emotional stress, please consult the attached list of accessible and affordable resources and/or counselling services (see “Counselling Resources and/or Services” below).

Will being in this study help you in any way? What are the benefits of participating?

There are four potential benefits to your participation in this study.

1) It will allow you to engage with and broaden your understanding of members of the other culture within a safe and productive space.

2) The photograph-based oral history interviews, reflective interviews and/or my final dissertation will serve as records of your familial histories and counter-memories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba. As such, you and/or your family will be able to retain and preserve copies of these materials for current and/or future generations.

3) If you are willing to share your photograph-based oral histories and/or reflective interviews outside of this study, they would serve the local and international Palestinian and Israeli communities as valuable means by which to initiate and/or facilitate engagement, dialogue, understanding and peacebuilding between and across communities (see “Future Use of Participant Data” below).

4) The collaborative nature of this study allows for the possibility that you may acquire transferable skills related to the production of digital videos (see “Future Use of Participant Data” below).

Will you be paid for your time/taking part in this research study?

You will not be paid for the time you take to be in this study.

How will your identity be protected? How will your privacy be maintained?

Your confidentiality will be respected. At your request, you will be assigned a preferred pseudonym that will appear in any written and/or digital materials produced through this
study (see “Participant Consent and Signature” below). At your request, images and/or voices contained in your photograph-based oral history interview and/or reflective interview, which you would prefer not to have made public, will be distorted (see “Video Images and Research” below).

The video/audio files of your photograph-based oral history interview and/or reflective interview, as well as digital scans of your photographs, will be kept on a password-protected external hard drive, which will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in the PI’s home office. Any hard copy transcriptions of your photograph-based oral history interview and/or reflective interview, as well as any hard copies of your photographs, will also be stored in a locked cabinet in the PI’s home office. No one except the PI will have access to these materials.

Two types of data will be collected during this study. If you choose not to use a pseudonym and/or image and/or voice distortion, the PI will be collecting data that directly identifies you. However, if you request a pseudonym and/or image and/or voice distortion the PI will be collecting coded data. In other words, a log of codes will be retained, which links your chosen pseudonyms and/or distorted images and/or voices to your actual name and/or original video/audio so that data can be re-linked if necessary. The PI will be the only individual with continued access to this log of codes.

Given how valuable your and your fellow participants’ photograph-based oral history interviews and/or reflective interviews will be to both the local and international Palestinian and Israeli communities these materials will not be destroyed. Rather, they will continue to be stored in the manner outlined above even after the PI leaves Simon Fraser University, but will not be used for any future projects without your consent (see “Future Use of Participant Data” below). As noted above, your confidentiality will be respected. At your request, you will be assigned a preferred pseudonym that will appear in any written and/or digital materials produced through this study (see “Participant Consent and Signature” below). At your request, images and/or voices contained in your photograph-based oral history interview, which you would prefer not to have made public, will be distorted (see “Video Images and Research” below).

The PI will contact and/or engage with you about the logistics for this study either over email, the telephone and/or audio/audio-video chat technology (such as Skype or
FaceTime), depending on your preference. Please note that, although no one aside from the PI will have access to these interactions, these are not confidential communication media.

**Study Results:**

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and/or books (following the terms of the consent forms). At your request, an electronic and/or hard copy of the PI’s completed and defended thesis will be provided to you. To facilitate this, please provide your email and/or mailing address where designated below under “Participant Consent and Signature.”

**Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?**

Please contact the PI with any inquiries concerning the procedures for this study. The PI’s contact information can be found at the top of this consent form.

You may also contact the PI’s Senior Supervisor for this study, Dr. Kirsten McAllister, Associate Professor, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Telephone: 778-782-6917; Email: kmcallis@sfu.ca.

**Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?**

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Telephone: 778-782-6593; Email: jtoward@sfu.ca.

**Future Use of Participant Data:**

There are two possible future uses of the data collected from you for this study – one is a possible additional research stage that would be part of the PI’s study research and the other is the possible dissemination of your photograph-based oral history interviews, photograph-based digital stories (see below) and/or reflective interviews to the greater public outside of the PI’s study research.
First, because you and/or some of your fellow participants may feel more comfortable presenting each other with a more cohesive life story and/or may prefer that portions of your photograph-based oral history interviews not be made public, an optional stage to the three stage research process outline above has been developed. This would entail you working closely with the PI to reflect upon and then transform your photograph-based oral history interviews into photograph-based digital life stories that could also be exchanged with and viewed by participants from the other culture (either instead of and/or in conjunction with your photograph-based oral histories). In other words, the stories you tell within your photograph-based oral history interview would be reworked into a single and focused life story told in your own voice and from your own perspective, and would be accompanied by a selection of relevant photographic images.

Second, following the research process outline above, you and your fellow participants will be asked to determine if and/or how you might like to disseminate your photograph-based oral histories, photograph-based digital life stories and/or reflective interviews to the public outside of this study. For instance, you may want to:

1) create a community-based, collaborative and globally accessible online archive, which would showcase your photograph-based oral histories, photograph-based digital life stories and/or reflective interviews, as well invite other Palestinians and Israelis to do the same;

2) alternatively and/or additionally, you may want to hold a public event where your photograph-based oral histories, photograph-based digital life stories and/or reflective interviews are screened, thus allowing all participants to meet and engage with each other face to face (if you have not done so already) while also inviting audience questions and comments.

Please note that the components/projects noted above, i.e.) the additional research stage, online archive and public event, are not part of the PI’s PhD thesis. If at a later date it is determined that undertaking one or more of these components/projects would be desirable and valuable to you and/or other participants, consent will be obtained from you at that time. As such, by signing this consent form you are only agreeing to partake in a discussion about the possibility of undertaking such components/projects once the current study is in process and/or completed.
Future Contact:

As per “Future Use of Participant Data” above, please indicate if the PI has permission to contact you about possible future uses of your personal information:

Yes __________   No __________

Video Images and Research:

Before signing below, please answer the following ‘yes’ or ‘no’ questions:

1. Do you wish to be video recorded during:
   
a) your photograph-based oral history interview?

   Yes __________   No __________

   b) the exchanging and viewing of photograph-based oral history interviews if undertaken in the presence of your fellow participants?

   Yes __________   No __________

   c) your reflective interview?

   Yes __________   No __________

2. If you wish to be video recorded, do you wish that your image/voice be distorted?

   Yes __________   No __________

   If you answered ‘yes,’ please check off those you would like distorted:

   Image __________   Voice __________

3. Do you permit the use of your video image in public dissemination (thesis, papers, conference presentations, etc.) directly related to this research project (NOTE: Due to the nature of digital video images, once the video image is disseminated to the public, the researcher does not have any control over how the video images are distributed and/or used)?

385
Yes __________   No __________

**Participant Consent and Signature:** Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse participation in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

____________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature   Date (yyyy/mm/dd)
____________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant (signing above)
____________________________________________________________________
Requested Pseudonym, if desired (please print)
____________________________________________________________________
Email and/or Mailing Address (please print)
Counselling Resources and/or Services

As noted above, this study has been designed so that you are not put at any greater risk than you would be if you initiated dialogue with someone from the other culture on your own and/or through community dialogue programs focused on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, i.e.) emotional challenges related to the telling of and/or listening to recollections and/or memories associated with the Holocaust, the Nakba and/or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict; disagreements that might arise when engaging with members of the other culture about the conflict; criticism from members of your own community for engaging with members of the other culture. However, some of the questions you will be asked and/or stories you will share and/or hear may upset you. Please let the PI know if you have any concerns. If at any time during this study you experience increased emotional stress, please consult the following list of accessible and affordable resources and/or counselling services.

To locate a registered clinical counsellor in your area, please contact:

The BC Association of Clinical Counsellors

#14-2544 Dunlevy Street

Victoria, BC V8S 5Z2

Phone Toll Free in Canada: 1-800-909-6303

Phone (local to Victoria): 250-595-4448

Fax: 250-595-2926

Email: hoffice@bc-counsellors.org

Website: http://bc-counsellors.org

---

185 If you have an extended medical plan through your employer and/or your spouse, please review the details of your plan, as you may be covered for free and/or discounted counselling services. If you are on a reduced income and/or financially unable to pay regular cost, please ask prospective counsellors if they offer sliding scale rates.
If you are unable to afford counselling services and live in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, please contact the following organization, which offers free counselling services:

New Westminster UBC Counselling Centre

#821-8th Street

New Westminster, BC V3M 3S9

Phone: 604-525-6651


If you require immediate assistance, please contact:

The Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of BC’s Distress Line

Toll free – Lower Mainland/Sunshine Coast: 1-866-661-3311

Greater Vancouver: 604-872-3311

BC-wide: 1-800-784-2433

Seniors’ Distress Line: 604-872-1234

Mental Health Support (BC-wide): 310-6789

Online Services: [http://crisiscentrechat.ca](http://crisiscentrechat.ca)

763 East Broadway Vancouver, BC V5T 1X8 (Business Office)

Phone: 604-872-1811

Fax: 604-879-6216

Email: info@crisiscentre.bc.ca
Appendix E

Semi-structured Questions for Photograph-based Oral History Interviews (Version: October 16, 2014)

1. You have been asked to select a number of family photographs or a family photograph album that you feel signify and/or represent how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted your life.

   • Why did you choose these particular family photographs or this particular family photo album?

   • If you have chosen a selection of individual family photographs:

      o Can you please tell me more about each of them, both as visual images and as material objects?

      o Can you please tell me about the postmemeories\(^{186}\) of the Holocaust and/or Nakba that you associate with them?

   • If you have chosen a family photo album:

      o Can you please walk me through it, telling me more about the photographs contained in it, both as visual images and as material objects, as well as the photo album itself?

\(^{186}\) Participants were made aware that instances of postmemory can be identified and measured based on the following criteria outlined by Hirsch (1997). Postmemory is experienced by individuals who are at least one generation removed from and have close proximity and/or connection to a previous generation who experienced traumatic events that took place prior to the individual’s birth. While the individual will have generational distance from the events in question and those who experienced it/them, they will nonetheless have a strong personal connection to the memories that they inherit. Given that the individual has not directly experienced these trauma(s), the reality of these events is seen as incomprehensible and therefore not reproducible. Although this powerful and specific form of memory is fragmentary and constructed, it still dominates the individual’s present reality – it speaks to a past that will not go away, but which also cannot be integrated into the present. Subsequently, the individual seeks to mediate such memories by means of creative expression and re-presentation through various media, such as photography.
Can you please tell me about the postmemories of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba that you associate with these photographs and/or the album?

- How, if at all, have different accounts of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba impacted your life, both in the past and the present?
- How, if at all, do you think different accounts of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba might impact your future, either personally and/or through later generations?

2. As you know, the stories that you have shared today will be exchanged with one or more fellow participants from the other culture through this photograph-based oral history interview.

- What do you want them to learn and/or understand about you and/or your family?
- What do you want them to learn and/or understand about how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted your life?
- What do you want to tell and/or show them?
- What do you hope they will take away from hearing and seeing you tell your stories?
- What are the different ways in which you think they will respond?
- How do you hope they will respond?

3. As you know, you will have an opportunity to watch and listen to one or more of your fellow participants from the other culture tell their stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impacted their lives.

- What are your thoughts about having this opportunity?
- What do you expect and/or hope the experience will be like?
• What do you expect and/or hope to learn from their stories, either about them and their families and/or the Holocaust and/or the Nakba?

• How, if at all, do you understand the Holocaust and/or the Nakba to be related?

4. What, if anything, do you hope your participation in this research project will achieve? Why did you agree to participate?
Appendix F

Addendum to Appendix E: Semi-structured Questions for Photograph-based Oral History Interviews (Version: December 9, 2014)

• What is your name?

• How old are you? When were you born?

• Where were you born?

• What is your nationality?

• When did you immigrate to Canada?

• When and for how long did you live in Palestine and/or Israel?
Appendix G

Supplemental Consent Form (Version: June 22, 2015)

Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba:

Peacebuilding Through the Storying of Postmemory

Who is conducting this study?

The principal investigator (PI) for this study is Nawal Musleh-Motut, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX; Email: nawal_motut@sfu.ca. This study is being undertaken as part of the PI’s PhD graduate thesis and, as such, is being conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University.

Who is funding this study?

This study is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Prior to participating in the above noted project, you signed and were given a copy of the initial project Consent Form. What follows is a supplement to that Consent Form. Please read and answer the following questions, then sign below and submit the completed form to the PI, either in person and/or using the email address listed above.

Following the completion of your first interview for the aforementioned project, you were advised that your completed photograph-based oral history interview and associated family photographs would be posted on a password protected webpage located on the PI’s project related website (https://nawal-muslehmotut.squarespace.com) for your review and approval. You can access this webpage using the link and password provided below:

Link:

Password:
1. As you were previously advised and subsequently consented to, the video of your photograph-based oral history interview is embedded on the PI’s project related website, but actually streams from a private and unsearchable page on YouTube.com.

Please confirm that you consent to having your photograph-based oral history interview streaming from a private and unsearchable page on YouTube.com and then embedded on the PI’s project related website.

Yes __________ No __________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

2. As you were previously advised and subsequently consented to, your project related family photographs have been posted on the PI’s project related website.

Please confirm that you consent to having your project related family photographs posted on the PI’s project related website.

Yes __________ No __________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

3. Have you watched your photograph-based oral history interview?

Yes __________ No __________
If you answered ‘yes,’ does this interview contain any audio and/or visual elements that you would like edited out and/or distorted, i.e.) details that might affect yourself and/or others if someone other than the PI viewed them?

Yes __________       No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ please list below, in detail, what audio and/or visual elements you would like edited out and/or distorted. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

4. Have you viewed your associated family photographs?

Yes __________       No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ are there any visual elements of these photographs that you would like distorted, i.e.) details that might affect yourself and/or others if someone other than the PI viewed them?

Yes __________       No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ please list below, in detail, what elements you would like distorted. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

5. The second stage of this research process requires the exchange of photograph-based oral history interviews and associated family photographs between study participants. As such, we would like to grant your fellow five study participants access to your password protected webpage. Please note that if you answer ‘yes’ below no one
other than the PI and your fellow study participants will be given access to this webpage
unless and until you consent to any of the “Future Uses for Participant Data” previously
outlined in the initial Consent Form.

Do you permit your fellow study participants access to your password protected
webpage?

Yes _________  No _________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that
you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI,
by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

6. During your photograph-based oral history interview, you expressed an interest in
watching all five of the other study participants’ photograph-based oral history interviews,
as well as viewing their associated family photographs. Are you still interested in and
committed to watching all five of these photograph-based oral history interviews and
viewing all of the associated family photographs?

Yes _________  No _________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that
you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI,
by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

7. During your photograph-based oral history interview, you consented to having all five
of the other study participants watch your photograph-based oral history interviews, as
well as view your associated family photographs. Are you still interested in and
committed to having all five study participants watch your photograph-based interview
and view your associated family photographs?
Yes __________ No __________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

8. To ensure participants’ privacy and safety during the current research process, once you are given access to your fellow participants’ photograph-based oral history interviews and associated family photographs, these materials should not be shared, redistributed and/or remixed privately and/or publically until such time as study participants have individually committed to and given their consent for such distribution and/or reuse. In other words, until you are advised otherwise, under no circumstances should you be sharing other participants’ story details, videos and/or photographs with anyone outside of this study.

Do you agree to not share, redistribute and/or remix your fellow participants’ photograph-based oral history interviews and/or associated family photograph until such time as study participants have individually committed to and given their consent for such distribution and/or reuse?

Yes __________ No __________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

9. In order to ensure that you retain copyright and/or license over your own photograph-based oral history interview and associated family photographs, if and/or when you and your fellow participants choose to make your stories public outside of the PI’s dissertation, these materials (along with the project website as a whole) have been
licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. This means that if and/or when you and your fellow participants choose to make your stories public outside of the PI’s dissertation, viewers will be free to share and redistribute your photograph-based oral history interviews and/or associated family photographs for educational and/or community purposes as long as they:

a) give you appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes have been made;

b) do not use the materials for commercial purposes;

c) if they remix, transform, or build upon the materials, they do not distribute the modified materials.

Please note that this license cannot be enforced and, as such, some viewers may choose not to comply with the license. More information about this particular Creative Commons license can be found here: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/.

Please also note that this license will be reviewed with you and possibly revised if and/or when you consent to any of the “Future Uses for Participant Data” previously outlined in the initial Consent Form. At such time, you will be asked to review and/or sign a separate consent form, which will specifically address any future uses of your materials.

Have you read and understood the above information regarding the licensing of this project and its related materials under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License?

Yes __________ No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ if and/or when you consent to any of the “Future Uses for Participant Data” previously outlined in the initial Consent Form, do you consent to having your photograph-based oral history interview and family photographs licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License?

Yes __________ No __________
If you answered ‘no,’ please list, in detail, any questions and/or concerns you. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Towar, Director, Office of Research Ethics at jtoward@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Participant Consent and Signature: Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study with the additional supplements noted above and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

______________________________________________________________
Participant Signature Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

______________________________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant (signing above)
Appendix H:

Semi-Structured Questions for Reflective Interviews (Version: October 16, 2014)

1. You have now completed your photograph-based oral history interview. Can you please share your thoughts on this process?
   - What aspects, if any, did you find valuable, rewarding and/or enjoyable?
   - What aspects, if any, did you find to be of little value and/or challenging?
   - What aspects, if any, might you suggest changing? Why would you change them and how would you suggest doing so?

2. You have now had the opportunity to watch and listen to one or more fellow participants from the other culture tell their stories of how the Holocaust and/or the Nakba have impact their lives through their photograph-based oral history interviews. Can you please share your thoughts on this process?
   - What was this opportunity like for you?
   - What aspects, if any, did you find valuable, rewarding and/or enjoyable?
   - What aspects, if any, did you find to be of little value and/or challenging?
   - What aspects, if any, might you suggest changing? Why would you change them and how would you suggest doing so?
   - What, if anything, did you learn from what you saw and/or heard?
   - Were you surprised by anything you saw and/or heard?
   - Did this experience change how you view members of the other culture?
   - Did this experience change your understanding of the Holocaust and/or the Nakba and/or how they relate to one another?
• Has this experience made you want to learn more about and/or engage more with members of the other culture outside of this project?

• Would you encourage other members of your community to take part in similar initiatives, i.e.) those geared toward mutual understanding, ethical dialogue, empathy and peacebuilding?

3. Are you interested in disseminating your photograph-based oral histories and/or reflective interviews to the public outside of this study? If yes, which of the following projects might you want to participate in (please note that alternative suggestions are welcomed and encouraged):

• create a community-based, collaborative and globally accessible online archive, which would showcase your photograph-based oral histories and/or reflective interviews, as well invite other Palestinians and Israelis to do the same;

• hold a public event where your photograph-based oral histories and/or reflective interviews will be screened, thus allowing all participants to meet and engage with each other face to face (if you have not done so already) while also inviting audience questions and comments.

4. If you answered ‘yes’ to question 3, is there any information provided for this project that you think you and/or your fellow participants might not want to share online and/or offline and why?
Appendix I

Second Supplemental Consent Form (Version: February 22, 2016)

Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba:

Peacebuilding Through the Storying of Postmemory

Who is conducting this study?

The principal investigator (PI) for this study is Nawal Musleh-Motut, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX; Email: nawal_motut@sfu.ca. This study is being undertaken as part of the PI’s PhD graduate thesis and, as such, is being conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University.

Who is funding this study?

This study is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Prior to participating in the aforementioned project, you signed and were given a copy of the Initial Project Consent Form. After completing your photograph-based oral history interview, you also signed and were given a copy of a Supplemental Consent Form. What follows is a Second Supplemental Consent Form. Please read and answer the following question(s), then sign below and submit the completed form to the PI, either in person and/or using the email address listed above.

You have now completed both your photograph-based oral history and reflective interviews for the aforementioned project. The video/audio files of your photograph-based oral history and reflective interviews, as well as digital scans of your photographs, have been and will continue to be kept on a password-protected external hard drive, which is securely stored in a locked cabinet in the PI’s home office. In addition, any hard copy transcriptions of your photograph-based oral history and reflective interviews, as well as any hard copies of your photographs, have been and will continue to be stored in a locked cabinet in the PI’s home office. No one except the PI has had or will have access to these materials.
With that said, the PI would like to post a copy of your reflective interview to a private and unsearchable page on YouTube.com as an additional means of data backup. Please note that your reflective interview will not be embedded on the PI’s project related website nor will your fellow participants be granted access to it unless and/or until you and/or your fellow participants consent to any of the “Future Uses for Participant Data” previously outlined in the Initial Consent Form. If and/or when you and your fellow participants consent to any of the aforementioned “Future Uses for Participant Data” you will be asked to sign a separate consent form, which will specifically address the posting of your reflective interviews on the PI’s project related website and/or the possibility of granting access to these videos to your fellow participants and/or the public at large if applicable.

1. Please confirm that you consent to having your reflective interview posted on a private and unsearchable page on YouTube.com as an additional means of data backup.

Yes __________  No __________

If you answered ‘no,’ please explain, in detail, your reasons and/or concerns. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics at jttoward@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Participant Consent and Signature: Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study with the additional supplements noted above and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.
Participant Signature  Date (yyyy/mm/dd)

Printed Name of the Participant (signing above)
Appendix J

Third Supplemental Consent Form (Version: May 17, 2019)

Reconciling the Holocaust and the Nakba:
Peacebuilding Through the Storying of Postmemory

Who is conducting this study?

The principal investigator (PI) for this study is Nawal Musleh-Motut, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6; Telephone: XXX-XXX-XXXX; Email: nawal_motut@sfu.ca. This study is being undertaken as part of the PI’s PhD graduate thesis and, as such, is being conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University.

Who is funding this study?

This study is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Prior to participating in the above noted project, you signed and were given a copy of the Initial Consent Form. After completing your photograph-based oral history and reflective interviews, you also signed and were given a copy of two Supplemental Consent Forms. What follows is a third supplement to the Initial Consent Form. Please read and answer the following questions, then sign below, and submit the completed form to the PI, either in person and/or using the email address listed above.

Following the completion of your reflective interview you were asked if you would consent to having the videos of this interview posted on private and unsearchable pages on YouTube.com as an additional means of data backup.

1. If you did consent to having the videos of your reflective interview uploaded to private and unsearchable pages on YouTube.com as an additional means of data backup, the PI would now like you to review the videos of your reflective interview. The purpose of having you review these videos is to provide an opportunity for you to advise the PI of
any information that you do not want made public. You can access the videos of your reflective interview at the links provided below:

Part 1:

Part 2:

Have you watched the videos of your reflective interview?

Yes __________  No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ do these videos contain any information that you would like edited out, i.e.) details that might affect yourself and/or others if someone other than the PI read them in her thesis?

Yes __________  No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ please list below, in detail, any information you would like edited out. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

2. If you did not consent to having the videos of your reflective interview uploaded to private and unsearchable pages on YouTube.com as an additional means of data backup, the PI would now like you to review the transcribed portions of your reflective interview that she has provided along with this Third Supplemental Consent Form.

Have you read the transcribed portions of your reflective interview?

Yes __________  No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ do these transcripts contain any information that you would like edited out, i.e.) details that might affect yourself and/or others if someone other than the PI read them in her thesis?
Yes __________ No __________

If you answered ‘yes,’ please list below, in detail, any information you would like edited out. Note that you may submit this information and/or request a private in person meeting with the PI, by contacting her through the email address and/or phone number listed above.

Study Results:

As you were previously advised and consented to, the results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and/or books (following the terms of the consent forms). They may also be discussed at academic events and/or conferences for educational purposes.

Please confirm that you consent to having the results of this study, which would include portions of your photograph-based oral history and reflective interviews, as well as your associated photographs, published in journal articles and/or books and/or discussed at academic events and/or conferences for educational purposes.

Yes __________ No __________

Future Use of Participant Data:

You were previously presented with and expressed interest in the following possible future uses of the data collected from you for this study, which would take place outside of the PI’s graduate thesis:

1) create a community-based, collaborative, and globally accessible online archive, which would showcase your photograph-based oral histories and/or reflective interviews, as well invite other Palestinians and Israelis to do the same;

2) hold a public event where your photograph-based oral histories and/or reflective interviews are screened, thus allowing participants to meet and
engage with each other face to face (if you have not done so already) while also inviting audience questions and comments;

3) exchanging the videos or transcripts of your reflective interview with your fellow participants.

If at a later date it is determined that undertaking one or more of these components/projects would be desirable and valuable to you and/or other participants, consent will be obtained from you at that time. As such, by signing this consent form you are only agreeing to partake in a discussion about the possibility of undertaking such activities once the current study is completed.

Future Contact:

As per “Future Use of Participant Data” above, please indicate if the PI has permission to contact you about possible future uses of your personal information:

Yes __________               No __________

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics at jtoward@sfu.ca or 778-782-6593.

Participant Consent and Signature: Taking part in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to refuse participation in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative impact. Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in this study with the additional supplements noted above and that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

____________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature                        Date (yyyy/mm/dd)
___________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant (signing above)