AJSS

Palestine Edition

2026





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AMSTERDAM
Journal of Social Sciences

Masthead 2025-2026 Palestine: Themed Edition

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Preface

The escalation of violence following the attacks carried out by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent military response in Gaza has resulted in profound humanitarian consequences and documented violations of international law. However, the violence witnessed since October 7 cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, it unfolds within a much longer history of dispossession, occupation, and recurring cycles of conflict. In this context, legal scholars, human rights organizations, and international judicial bodies continue to examine allegations relating to war crimes, apartheid practices, and genocide. Accordingly, the need for sustained, rigorous, and critical academic engagement remains urgent.

Universities occupy a central role in such moments. As institutions dedicated to the production and dissemination of knowledge, they bear the responsibility of safeguarding academic freedom, fostering open debate, and modeling principled engagement with contentious issues. Scholars are therefore called upon not only to document unfolding events but also to critically examine structures of power and accountability, setting an example for future generations of researchers and citizens. At the same time, the ideals that universities claim to uphold often stand in tension with the realities they confront.

The international response to the occupation of the West Bank has long been shaped by power politics and diplomatic bargaining. Meanwhile, decades of systematic discrimination against the Palestinian people under Israeli rule have frequently been met with limited accountability. For this reason, the current crisis cannot be reduced to the events of October 7 alone; it forms part of a broader historical trajectory stretching back to the early twentieth century. While interpretations differ regarding the political and geopolitical factors that have intensified the conflict in recent years, it is widely acknowledged that prolonged inaction and silence have generated frustration and disillusionment among many observers. Within universities, these tensions have been felt particularly strongly among students, some of whom perceived institutional reluctance to address what they regard as clear violations of human rights. In response, student mobilization emerged as a means of making these concerns visible.

When students organize in response to perceived injustices, universities face difficult questions regarding governance, safety, and the role of dissent within academic communities. At the University of Amsterdam, student protests and building occupations brought these tensions into sharp focus.

The decision by university leadership to request police intervention, which resulted in the forceful removal of students, marked a significant moment in the institution's relationship with its student body. Regardless of one's assessment of the strategies adopted by protesters, the use of state force within a university setting raises serious questions about institutional responsibility and the protection of academic spaces as arenas for debate and contestation. The events left trust between students and the university significantly strained. It should never have reached this point.

If universities are to fulfil their purpose and contribute meaningfully to society, they must cultivate graduates who are able to engage thoughtfully with global crises. By dedicating this edition to Palestine, the AJSS reaffirms its commitment to lowering barriers to academic participation and to upholding the intellectual responsibility that defines academic institutions at their best. In this spirit, the contributions gathered here aim to foreground student voices and critical inquiry, reaffirming the role of the university as a space where difficult questions can be asked and where silence in the face of injustice is not taken for granted.

Solidarity, Entanglement, and Memory: Recollections from Amsterdam's Uprising

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Abstract

This essay examines *Between Palestine and us*¸ a collective archival project produced by activists in Amsterdam following the May 2024 university encampments in solidarity with Palestine. This work situates the book within a broader debate on the role of archives, power, and difference, arguing that *Between Palestine and us* exemplifies a recalcitrant form of archiving that challenges hegemonic narratives of institutionalized memory. Drawing on Jaques Derrida's reflection on the archive as a site of political power, and on Denise Ferreira da Silva's reconceptualization of difference as *entanglement* rather than *separability*, the analysis explores the ways in which the book resists dominant historical accounts. The book stands out for the assembly of testimonies, images, artistic works, and reflections that document both the events of the student uprisings and their emotional, political, and ethical aftermath. By doing so, it reclaims history-making as a bottom-up, participatory practice and exposes the limitation of institutional archives that marginalize dissenting voices. This work argues that this form of archiving constitutes an act of resistance in a political context characterized by rising authoritarianism and repression of solidarity for Palestine. Ultimately, *Between Palestine and us* is presented as an archive of entanglement and intentional solidarity, thus preserving not only memory, but also the possibility for future collective action and transformation.

Keywords

Palestine, Activism, Solidarity, Archive, Entanglement

Introduction

> "Solidarity is contagious. When Columbia University students organized an encampment protesting the genocide in Gaza in 2024, they kickstarted what was soon to be called the global student Intifada. [...] A year later, as the genocide persists, the West's complicity remains unwavering and the Palestine solidarity movement worldwide has been met with an intensifying backlash. With fascism now rampant, we're living through a moment in history where deranged state violence is threatening to breach all boundaries to destruction and repression. The annihilation of Gaza, with impunity, has made life everywhere less safe, more conditional, more threatened. Though our situation is incomparable, the stakes are personal

> nonetheless: if we're not fascism's first victims, we may well be its last. And so, in this moment of danger, we must still look for ways to bring intentional solidarity into practice, as it remains, as it always was, our only recourse." (Between Palestine and us 2025, 1-2).

These are the words the student activist collective chose to start *Between Palestine and us*: a collection of testimonies, photos, art, and reflections from the student uprising in Amsterdam. This book aims to carry the collective and personal lived experiences of activists through time and space, possibly arriving at safer and more peaceful times. It becomes relevant to explore archives as the means for stories to travel through time, creating what we call *history*. It calls for questions on power, difference and legacies.

This essay aims at exploring the way in which concepts of *difference* and *archive* have travelled to make *Between Palestine and us*, arguing that the book is exemplary in problematizing notions of hegemonic difference as it aims to collect the experiences of collective entanglement and solidarity in a format that can survive and persist through time. The concept of *difference* becomes central and crucial when one's goal is to focus on the *relational* nature of memory, thus understanding it as *positioned* and possibly *contested* (Rigney 2016, p.66). Moreover, a focus on archival work becomes appropriate when contextualizing it in its use to analyze activist movements, their cultural production, and what will be remembered as *history* (Podolsky 2022, p. 711). In the following, I will first introduce the concepts of archiving and difference, followed by an analysis of their encounter in the book *Between Palestine and us.*

Archive, Difference, and Power

Concepts exist not merely as words, but rather as tools to understand the world around us, to bridge and connect others by facilitating communications. Concepts as tools for communication and analysis are never static, as they travel through continents, people, and disciplines they acquire new meanings, and applications. In the following, I wish to introduce one of many understandings of *archives* and *difference* as tools of analysis, as they will guide our understanding of the book from student activists in Amsterdam.

Derrida reflects on the notion of *archives* in relation to psychoanalysis: he draws connections between the primordial fear of death and the sense of finitude (Derrida 1995, p. 19). He describes a fever-like urge of organization, unification, and accumulation of "objective" knowledge, ultimately institutionalizing memory and history all together (ibid.). Moreover, he remarks how there is no political power without *control* over the archive: the interpretation of "truth" is externalized, and the selection-and thus exclusion-of specific sources is naturalized (ibid). Ultimately, following Derrida's reflections, it becomes possible to understand archives as the institutionalization of memory, the -physical and otherwise-place that dictates *what has happened*: archiving a source inevitably leads to another source being excluded, highlighting the inherent power of those who get to make this decision **and the disruptive power embedded in archiving and creating memory outside of institutional frameworks**.

Thinking about what knowledge and products survive the archival process inevitably leads us to ponder on *difference*, what it means in relation to social and historical dynamics, and ultimately, what implications it carries. Denise Ferreira da Silva reflects on mainstream understanding of difference: in her reflection she identifies difference as popularly related to *separability*, thus creating *and* sustaining a moral discourse that generates,

institutes, and isolates the *Other* (Ferreira da Silva 2016, p. 63). On the contrary, the author posits an understanding of difference that *does not* presuppose separability, determinacy, and sequentiality, but rather that *is* the expression of an elementary entanglement (idem, p. 63-65). She argues that when the social ideal reflects such entanglement, sociality becomes neither cause nor effect of relations involving separate existants (ibid.). Thinking of difference as *entanglement* shines a light on the inherent connections between people, countries, and histories: privileging this view thus allows us to view not just people, but conflicts worldwide as inherently connected, creating also the possibility of collective action in our social imaginary.

Between Palestine and us: reclaiming history, recalcitrant archival action

The previous section was aimed at establishing the conceptualization this essay will embrace on notions of *archiving* and *difference*. Drawing on the examples from *Between Palestine and us*, this section will first introduce the book and then explore the ways it problematizes notions of hegemonic difference by gathering the experiences of collective entanglement and solidarity in a format that can survive and persist through time.

What is this book about? What is this book *for*? Between Palestine and us is the product of collective work from activists and the Spookstad editorial collective to preserve the memory of the May 2024 student uprisings in Amsterdam. The collective explicitly chose to assemble the sources–speeches, screenshots, pictures, drawings, poetry, theatre–in a way that allows the materials to speak for themselves, without the intervention of the collective telling the reader *what* they should understand and *how* it should be interpreted (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 3). By gathering memories, accounts, and cultural production around the encampments *outside* of institutional frameworks, this book constitutes an active attempt to counter-memory making and by proxy an active act of resistance against set-in-stone, top-down narratives.

The content of the book is not merely aimed at recounting-some of- the events that shook Amsterdam–and the world–in May 2024, but also exploring the aftermath of the protests, their meaning, their reach, limitations, and the inextricably entangled experiences of *hope* and *defeat*, the necessity of resistance, and the distance between Palestine and us (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 4). Recollecting the memories of those presents is essential for those stories and voices to not be forgotten, as they could possibly inspire, inform, and guide future intervention. It holds particular value in the current political context in the Netherlands and beyond, where right-wing populism and fascist ideologies are on the rise and rather prevalent in global politics (Wolf 2024). Ultimately, any attempt to preserve memory beyond institutionalized boundaries constitutes an act of resistance, aimed at giving voice to those often marginalized by institutional memory.

Archiving the resistance

Recalling Derrida's words on archives, it is important to remember the inherent power dynamic to the archival process: from the power to choose to include/exclude artifacts and documents from a specific event, to the subsequent power of creating the *True Account* of what happened (Derrida 1995, p. 19). This dynamic is not only recognized, but also addressed in the work of the activists, who reflect on the inherently exclusive dimension of

archiving. They resolve this dilemma by framing incompleteness as inherent to such a project, leaving room for any number of additions, perspectives, interpretation and reflections (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 3).

The university has presented its own account on the events of the encampments, framing them as having created unsafe and hostile environments; moreover, the board claims openness of dialogue with students and their representatives on the matter (UvA 2024). While some of the property damage has also been documented by the collective–both from the protestors and the police–(Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 91;127), there is also plenty of evidence of (1) the effort to mindfully treat the occupied space (idem, p. 79) and (2) attempts to dialogue through institutional means that have been undermined and erased (CSR OV231010: 3§64-67 and FSR OV231128: 8).

With this reflection, this work wants to highlight not just the contrast between institutional and grassroot narrations, but also stress the way in which these are in conversation with each other, and arguably create a clearer picture *together* of *a* possible account. Moreover, it opens the possibility to *critically* engage with institutional narratives by providing *a* countermemory; without a plurality of accounts, the very possibility of dialogue and negotiation is undermined. In the context of monolithic and one-sided narrations being uplifted, the existence of a self-organized project for remembrance constitutes an act of resistance in its claim for *space* within the rather exclusionary discourse.

Recalling Derrida, it becomes natural to understand UvA's institutional account on the events that unfolded in May of 2024 as being informed by the interests of maintaining a stable image and a specific political positioning. On the other hand, observing the interventions captured in *Between Palestine and Us* can give one insight on the experiences of individuals, rather than an institution; we are allowed to witness glimpses of individual stories and emotions within a collective struggle.

Naturally, it is still unclear and therefore hard to assess what kind of impact this work may have in the future of the university and in the future of student movements, however, we already have records of the way in which student movements inspired each other, both across the years and across borders (Occupy the University! 2013). Archival work has already established, for instance, the way in which student protests sparked globally in the summer of 1968, a symptom of a global anti-Vietnam War movement (ibid.). Already at that time, the University of Amsterdam was protagonist of student protests and occupations, and the memories of those events are both carried in archives and oral history, highlighting the existence of *a* history that is as real as it is perhaps ignored in institutional accounts.

The strategies and dynamics of previous movements constitute a form of heritages for those who come after, both in terms of potential strategies but also in establishing that such attempts have existed and have had an impact (Occupy the University! 2013.). Lastly, documenting the repression of student movements both in the Netherlands and abroad further stresses the way in which they challenge, question, *and* disrupt the legitimacy of institutional and governmental power.

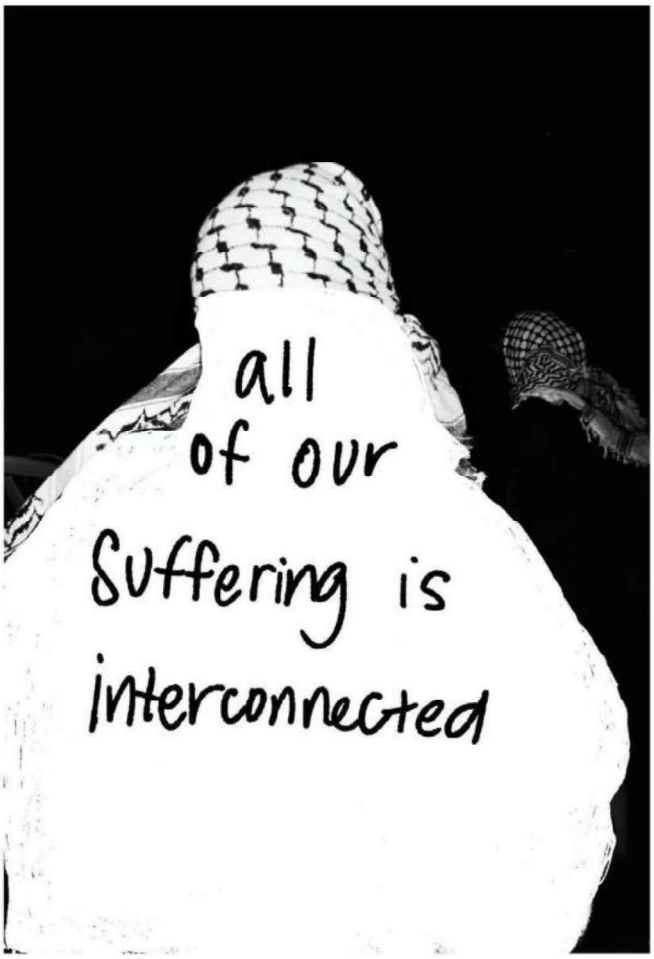
Ultimately, *Between Palestine and us* aims at documenting a clear statement: police repression exists because a free Palestine-and an advocacy for such a cause- threatens the very order that legitimizes institutional power and institutional violence (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 61). Leaving a mark, on paper and digitally, of the counter-narratives around Palestinian solidarity worldwide is urgent and necessary to stop the slaughter of the people in Gaza and, hopefully, to avoid these mistakes from occurring again. Lastly, documenting how the

resistance took place, its victories and its pitfalls, will prepare future readers if similar events unfortunately happen again. Documenting resistance means documenting the *possibility* for *transformation*.

Why? Solidarity and Entanglement

When thinking about the student encampments, and by proxy, when thinking about *Between Palestine and us* a crucial question arises: why? Why would someone do this and why would they document it? The answer lies in *intersubjectivity*: the concern that binds procedure with power and empowerment, with pedagogy and the transmitability of knowledge (**Bal 2002, p. 11**). The notion of intersubjectivity is yet another expression of the concept introduced by Ferreira da Silva: *entanglement*.

(**Illustration from *Between Palestine and us*, p.207**)



From the Netherlands, we are fundamentally entangled with the Palestinians regardless of the "differences" imposed by power structures such as (neo)colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, islamophobia, etc. We are tangled as our *choices* of consumption affect the economy of war that sustains the Palestinian genocide, our *universities* collaborate with institutions complicit in the occupation of Palestine, and our *governments* send weapons to the occupying forces (Albanese 2025, p. 6-9). Moreover, those same forces that aim to manufacture difference as inherently exclusionary, the forces that enable a televised genocide to take place as we watch it, are the same forces that oppress us in our homes. The threads that entangle us stretch out through borders and continents and, more akin to ropes, suffocate us.

Being connected to what the *status quo* wants us to perceive as *Other* brings forth one conclusion as expressed in the book: "Though our situation is incomparable, the stakes are personal nonetheless: if we're not fascism's first victims, we may well be its last. And so, in this moment of danger, we must still look for ways to bring intentional solidarity into practice, as it remains, as it always was, our only recourse." (Between Palestine and us 2025, p. 2). All we have left as activists, as civil society, is each other, and the awareness of the threads that connect us.

Recalcitrant archiving

Between Palestine and us holds a distinctive position in the international landscape of documentation of the solidarity movement for Palestine. It becomes an example of archiving *against*–and *complementary* to–the institutional narrative of the events. It is subversive, *recalcitrant*, as it embraces the generative role of culture and cultural products in the critical understandings of the political power of historical formation. Building on Gramsci's work, one must understand that cultural hegemony has to be achieved *prior* to the realization of political power: this approach seeks in education and knowledge the means able to consistently challenge the *status quo* that is not an object to be possessed as information, but rather the inclination towards critical pedagogy and constant engagement (Chambers 2017, p. 107).

The work of activists involved showcases an intrinsic awareness of the entanglement with those suffering in Palestine, creating an archive that does not posit itself as complete and set in stone–as it would be incompatible with the nature of an archive–but rather as authentic, and never-ending. The book performed the very theory outlined in this work: it *materialized* entanglement by situating Amsterdam within global histories of colonialism, repression, and resistance while also *reclaiming* archival practice as a tool of solidarity rather than domination. It challenged hegemonic difference by demonstrating the relational, contested, and incomplete, always in the making nature of memory. Archival work not only preserves *what happened* in the past, but more importantly defines *what is thinkable* about the past, making this an attempt to expand these conditions, insisting that solidarity, once practiced and recorded, can travel across time.

Creating an alternative, *collective*, account of the events rather than advocating for objectivity, calls for a more productive lens: plurality. It sets a precedent for a kind of archival work that is aware of its *entanglement* with the outside world, is aware of the *power* of history and history-writing, and that can *exemplify* the many shades, shapes, and flavors of resistance, solidarity, and global movements.

The end of a journey?

This essay has explored concepts of archive and difference, and the way their journey meets in the book *Between Palestine and us*, a collective work from activists of the Amsterdam protests of 2024. This work posited that the book stands as exemplary as it challenges hegemonic notions of *difference* and history-making, thus constituting an intervention in the political dimension of memory. Ultimately, *Between Palestine and us* sets a precedent for bottom-up archival work, gathering the stories, feelings, and artistic productions of those that partook in the events that it aims to encapsulate to never be forgotten.

Through Derrida, this work highlighted that archives are not neutral repositories of facts, but rather sites where power dictates what becomes understood as *history*. Ferreira da Silva's contribution called us to rethink difference not as something that *separates*, but rather that *entangles:* a condition that questions and unsettles hegemonic binary divisions between "here" and "there", "us" and "them". *Between Palestine and us* operates in the intersection of these two concepts by refusing the institutional monopoly over *narrations* while also challenging the logic of *separability* that renders Palestinian suffering as distant or too abstract to grasp.

In the future I hope for the concepts of archive and entanglement to travel to happier, more peaceful times, allowing us to reflect on the implications of the existence of such a book and the way it preserved through time a recalcitrant telling of the history of Amsterdam and the global solidarity movement for Palestine carrying the memory of entanglement and the imagination of transformation.

Conflict of Interests

No conflict of interests to declare.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the community that gathered to create the book *Between Palestine and Us*, the activists of the encampments, and the global solidarity movement.

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Melodies of Resistance: Palestinian Women's Expression of Resistance through Music

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Abstract

This thesis illustrates how Palestinian women in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation. The thesis seeks to contextualise Palestinian resistance in the circumstances imposed by the occupation, which violate international legal frameworks. An interdisciplinary approach is adopted to highlight the legal obligations on Israel as a state as well as an Occupying Power and its inability to abide by these legal standards. The first question posed explores the themes of resistance articulated by Palestinian women in their songs. A thematic analysis was conducted on 11 songs performed by Palestinian women from Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The songs highlighted three predominant themes: strategic displays of resistance, the politicisation of homeland and attachment to Palestine. Afterwards, a doctrinal analysis outlined the main legal frameworks in International Law which should protect Palestinian women. The analysis found that these legal frameworks are not upheld by Israel in the occupied territory, thus prompting Palestinian resistance. This thesis demonstrates the importance of music as an outlet of political expression and resistance to occupation and oppression.

Keywords

resistance, women, music, resilience, occupied Palestinian territory, Israeli occupation

Introduction

"In order for me to write poetry that isn't political, I must listen to the birds, and in order to hear the birds, the warplanes must be silent."

– Marwan Makhoul, Palestinian poet

Palestinian women are key actors of resistance against the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, otherwise referred to as the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). Throughout this thesis, I will use the "occupied Palestinian territory", or oPt to refer to Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. This terminology is conventionally accepted to describe Palestinian territories under ongoing Israeli military occupation since 1967 (Imseis, 2003). Women take it upon themselves to convey messages of hope, resilience, and dignity to

their fellow Palestinians through the use of music. Palestinian women express the hardships which they face under occupation, whilst focusing on resistance as the necessary response to occupation (Veronese et al., 2021). This thesis demonstrates how music is a rich outlet where women express resistance to the Israeli occupation. My analysis of the songs reveals three themes of resistance: the strategic display of resistance, the politicisation of the homeland, and the singers' attachment to Palestine as an expression of commitment to the Palestinian cause. The thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach, outlining the international legal frameworks which exist to protect Palestinians and their lack of application in the oPt, breeding a movement of Palestinian resistance.

This thesis will ask the following questions: Palestinian women in the oPt use music to express resistance to Israeli occupation? How have Palestinian women disproportionately suffered from Israel's failure to uphold international legal frameworks as an Occupying Power?

To answer the first question, I will conduct a thematic analysis of song lyrics, identifying patterns which convey messages of resistance to the occupation. As for the second question, a doctrinal analysis will outline international legal mechanisms pertaining to Palestinians in the oPt, and then verify whether they can be applied to the case. The legal question clarifies the reasoning behind the resistance movement, simply why Palestinians resist in the first place.

Historical Background

To understand the questions, a contextualisation of the occupation is crucial. Palestinians remain under a brutal occupation in the guise of settler colonialism which has contributed to their ethnic cleansing for 76 years (Pappé, 2006). Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the occupation has been met with diverse forms of resistance by the Palestinians (Pearlman, 2011). Men and women in Palestine have used both violent and nonviolent tactics to resist the occupation of their land (Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007).

Zionism is a nationalist movement aiming to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. The Zionist movement succeeded at the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, resulting in the destruction of 531 Palestinian villages and the forced displacement of more than 750 000 people (Pappé, 2006). This cataclysmic event, known as the *Nakba* (or catastrophe in Arabic), is largely considered an operation of ethnic cleansing by historians, even from Israel itself (Pappé, 2006; Bashir & Goldberg, 2018).

Palestinians have continued to suffer under Israeli rule, especially since the Six Day War of 1967 when Israel militarily occupied Gaza and the West Bank (Raby, 2023). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 242, which was unanimously adopted in 1967, demanded that Israeli forces evacuate all occupied territory, including Gaza and the West Bank (UNSC, 1967). To this day, the resolution has not been implemented (López, 2023). Nowadays, international organisations, like the United Nations (UN), characterise Gaza and the West Bank as occupied territory. This denomination designates Israel as an Occupying Power, responsible for fulfilling the duties of an Occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (GC IV, 1949, Art. 55, 56 and 59).

Despite the many attempts to reconcile both parties since the 1990s, the oPt have suffered deeply under Israel's military control. Today, Israeli settlements in the West Bank are growing exponentially (UN, 2023). According to the European Union Representative in the Occupied Territories, there has been a 22% increase in settlements in 2022 compared to 2021 (Office of the EU Representative, 2023). These settlements result in the "demolition of

Palestinian structures, daily violence and continued inflammatory rhetoric by their [Israeli] Government representatives" (UN, 2023).

Apartheid is a system of segregation against a minority which does not promote the equality of all citizens regardless of their ethnic, religious or cultural identity (Greenstein, 2020). According to Amnesty International, Israel upholds an apartheid system, wherein legal regimes prioritise the freedom, safety and right to self-determination of Israeli Jews, whereas Israeli Arabs, Palestinians in the West Bank, and those in Gaza do not enjoy the same rights (Amnesty International, 2022). These manifest as the denial of self-determination, the restriction of freedom of movement and an unequal distribution of resources.

Palestinians have revolted against the injustice imposed by the occupation on several occasions. In 2000, the Second Intifada resulted in Israel's disengagement from Gaza, which was followed by a complete blockade through air, sea and land. The blockade was perceived by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) as a form of collective punishment, as criminalised by Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. UNHRC officials called Gaza "the world's largest open-air prison" (UNHRC, 2023). In 2018, the Great March of Return in Gaza symbolised a peaceful protest against the relocation of the American Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem which was met with fierce repression by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) (Amnesty International, 2018). In 2021, large-scale demonstrations erupted when Israel announced its intention to demolish the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah in the West Bank to build settlements. The protests spread to Gaza and in the span of 11 days, Israeli bombardments killed around 253 Palestinians (OCHA, 2021). Despite resorting to overtly peaceful forms of protest after the Second Intifada, Palestinians have continuously been met with further violence and oppression under Israeli occupation.

Having said that, Palestinians have also practiced more covert forms of resistance which are ingrained in their everyday lifestyles. From cooking generations-old recipes to keeping the keys that once locked their homes before Nakba, the expression of hope and resilience is not uncommon in Palestine, especially amongst its women (Atallah, 2017). This thesis focuses on music as a medium of expression, thus shedding light on unconventional methods of resistance.

Literature Review

Having established the material context in which resistance has emerged, I will now engage with the existing literature on women's activism in Palestine. In "The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance" (Khalidi, 2020), a widely cited contemporary history of Palestine, Rashid Khalidi only mentions the words "woman" and "women" 14 times in 325 pages. Additionally, he mainly depicts them as victims of violence committed by the Israeli forces, rather than activists of the Palestinian resistance, often referencing them alongside "children" or "old people" (Khalidi, 2020, p. 93). This example illustrates the widespread inattention given to the role of women in shaping Palestinian history.

Frantz Fanon (1961) famously argues that "decolonisation is a violent phenomenon" (p. 35). Indeed, Palestinians have, on many occasions since the establishment of Israel, taken up arms to fight their colonisers (Pearlman, 2011). Many women have also participated in violent resistance to the occupation (Irving, 2012). Still,

violent resistance groups tend to be highly male-dominated and organised, and they often occupy the most visible political sphere in the oPt (Pearlman, 2011).

Merely studying resistance and occupation without adopting a gendered lens discards the gendered impact of the occupation. Many Israeli policies of apartheid disproportionately impact women (Griffiths & Repo, 2021). Griffiths and Repo (2021) look at the Israeli army's perpetration of sexual harassment of women at checkpoints, which can be daily points of passage for Palestinians. These checkpoints are described as "contact zones and borderlands where cultures meet and contest within the highly uneven power relations that constitute colonial space" (Griffiths & Repo, 2021, p. 251). Additionally, Griffiths and Repo (2021) listen to testimonies of Palestinian women which have been sexually assaulted by the IDF in occupation prisons. Gendered impositions generate the material reality of occupation, which is contested by Palestinians. Rought-Brooks et al. (2010) shed light on Palestinian women's exceptional case, having to withstand both patriarchal and colonial structures to survive.

The gendered aspect of the occupation makes it necessary to study feminine mechanisms of resistance. Several studies have looked at how Palestinian women engage in informal methods of resistance to the occupation. Richter-Devroe (2018) conceptualises Palestinian women's activism as an "informalisation of politics", which creates hidden channels through which Palestinian women can voice their disapproval and demand rights (p. 76). These strategies of resistance are not, by any means, apolitical. Their political nature stems from many women's refusal to normalise the existence of a settler-colonial system striving to control every aspect of their lives (Richter-Devroe, 2011). Arnd-Linder et al. (2018) follow up on the informalisation of politics; with a paper titled "The Political is Personal", they analyse the manifestations of occupation in the everyday lives of Palestinian women. Their aim is to shed light on the *very* real impact of the policies of occupation on the experiences of women. They find that, for women living in the oPt, occupation is ubiquitous: it is felt in Israeli checkpoints but also in the pervasive feeling of insecurity, even at home (Arnd-Linder et al., 2018).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2006) explores the politicisation of the *home*. She argues that, for Palestinians, home demolitions are a constant risk. This is due to Israeli expansionism in the West Bank, or the numerous military operations launched on Gaza with the aim of destroying violent resistance capabilities. The operations in Gaza are called mowing the grass, implying their levelling of entire buildings or neighbourhoods to the ground (Alareer, 2014). By insisting on rebuilding homes, and reinstating security for their families, Palestinian women are engaging in resistance to Israel's policies of destruction (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006). This is another perspective on unconventional methods of resistance which insist on survival despite severe difficulties.

Ryan (2015) studies the concept of *sumud* (steadfastness or resilience in Arabic), a keyword in the vocabulary of Palestinian resistance. She defines it not as "living *with* uncertainty, but, rather, living *despite* uncertainty" (Ryan, 2015, p. 300). S*umud* has embodied the tactical use of resilience as a method of resistance. This concept has also served as a basis for the persistence of intergenerational hope despite the hardships imposed by the occupation.

The expression of *sumud* is typical in Palestinian songs. Palestinian music has been produced and transmitted across generations as a way to resist cultural erasure and provide a positive outlook on the future, essentially for the youth (Kanaaneh et al., 2013). For decades, the Palestinian song has held a significant mobilising role for the anticolonial struggle for national liberation (Massad, 2003). Withers (2023) criticises the focus of agency at the expense of intersectionality when analysing Palestinian women's political expressions through music. She

emphasises the relevance of material reality, in addition to agency, which renders resistance necessary. Therefore, this thesis will explore themes of resistance as a consequence of the structures imposed by occupation and its illegality. The doctrinal analysis serves to ground women's resistance in the reality produced by occupation.

Relevance

The focus of this thesis on gender dynamics under occupation and the variety of resistance movements in the oPt is essentially political. Women's participation in activism is a testament of the politicisation of the *personal* and the *everyday* (Richter-Devroe, 2018). This thesis is written on Palestinian women's resistance efforts in light of current events taking place in Gaza. Since Hamas, an armed resistance group from Gaza, launched a deadly attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023, the Israeli military has declared war and announced a full siege of Gaza (Holmes, 2023). As of June 2024, more than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed (UN, 2024). Israel's blockade of Gaza has restricted the entry of food, water, fuel, medical supplies, and aid to the Strip (HRW, 2024). As a result, the UN Special Rapporteur for food has accused Israel of "mounting a starvation campaign in Gaza" (UN, 2024).

Since December 2023, South Africa has filed a case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing Israel of the crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip (ICJ, 2023). The Court has ruled the case "plausible", indicating that Israel's actions in Gaza could be "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part" (ICJ, 2024). Today, more than ever, it is essential to shed light on the Palestinian cause.

However, the time frame chosen for this analysis is the previous decade, hence from 2013 to 2022, excluding the current war in Gaza due to the fast-paced nature of its events. Nevertheless, this thesis cannot be read without consideration of recent developments. To understand how women use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation, I will conduct a thematic analysis, identifying themes of resistance in songs written by Palestinian women in the oPt. Additionally, to complement the thematic analysis, I will conduct a doctrinal analysis, underlining international legal frameworks and their disregard by Israel in the oPt, justifying the adoption of a gendered lens when studying the Palestinian resistance movement.

Theoretical Framework

In the following section, I will present theories in which both the thematic and doctrinal analyses are grounded. I start with an overview of the depiction of women in International Relations, confining them to the private sphere and primarily viewing them as victims. I attempt to reshape this narrative by portraying the women studied in this thesis as agents of change who participate in anti-colonial resistance movements. However, agency is not absolute: the material context in which social phenomena occur also determines the ways in which they develop. Critical realism thus resolves the dilemma between agency and context. Later, I expand on the disproportionate effects of colonialism on women, which push them to resist, often using informal and unorganised methods, such as music, a key form of creative resistance.

Women in International Relations

To go about analysing the concepts of women, occupation and unconventional methods of resistance in the Palestinian context, it is necessary to adopt a feminist lens through which we will clarify the inherently gendered aspects of occupation and resistance. If we look at the complex history of Palestinian resistance under occupation, we mostly see men and weaponry (Meiering et al., 2020). Feminist International Relations give us the space to ask: "where are the women?" (Zalewski, 2015 p. 9). Are they resisting, and if so, how? By asking these pertinent questions, we produce a different narrative, one that relates the personal, the private, and the invisible to the international (Zalewski, 2015).

In mainstream International Relations, gender remains a determinant of an individual's perceived agency, innocence or ability to take action (Carpenter, 2003). Women are often confined to the private sphere, along with children. The "women and children" framework currently grounding International Law, institutions, and UN resolutions infantilizes women, and portrays them as victims in constant need of protection. It perpetuates the narrative of women's inability to act as agents of change and take on roles outside the private realm or beyond motherhood (Peuchguirbal, 2004). Such depictions serve to uphold the patriarchal status quo wherein men are granted access to public life and political deliberation and women remain restricted to much less visible domains of activity (Krystalli, 2021). They also imply that men will partake in violent and direct acts of resistance whereas women will dedicate themselves to procreation and child rearing (Meiering et al., 2020).

To this day, women, and especially Arab women suffer from "under-representation and continued oppression [...] in academic contexts" (Lin & Kennette, 2022, p. 246). The intersectionality of Arab women's identities both as women and as Arabs allows for the reproduction of patriarchal and orientalist narratives, further exacerbating their depiction in Western academia. The Western dominance of academia reflects an Orientalist perception of the Arab world, which is perceived as the binary opposite of the *superior* West (Said, 1977). Research conducted on Arab populations can start with assumptions that imply the irrationality and inferiority of these people (Lewis, 1982). Indeed, there is a considerable lack of recognition of their agency and a fixation on their helplessness and oppression (Alhayek, 2014). This thesis challenges narratives that centre Arab women primarily as victims by presenting evidence of their contributions to the Palestinian resistance movement.

Women's agency emerges as a response to oppression (Abrams, 1998). Abrams (1998) defines agency as being targeted at cultural, political, and individual ends: "A feminist account of agency supplies the insight that people may be hindered by obstacles that bear on them as members of a disempowered group" (p. 831). However, by acting against oppressive norms and regimes, members of a disempowered group, specifically women, engage in resistance which is inherently a manifestation of agency (Abrams, 1998).

Critical Realism

Considering that this thesis emphasises the importance of resistance, it is crucial to understand the circumstances in which said resistance emerges. Critical realism perceives the *social* as inherently rooted in the *material* (Patomäki & Wight, 2000). Particularly, it underscores the importance of context: it is only through contextualisation that social phenomena can be understood as products of both agency and social structures. Critical realism is interested in "the real, the actual and the empirical" (Parr, 2015, p. 195). By adopting a critical realist lens, this thesis prioritises *the real* which outlines the underlying mechanisms and structures which produce

reality (Clegg, 2006). Critical realism asserts that "context and individual agency is intrinsically involved in causal processes" (Parr, 2015, p. 196). This implies that a focus on agency, in this thesis embodied by women who engage in resistance, is insufficient to explain social activity. Easton (2010) summarises it with the question "in what ways may the external contingency affect the events that have occurred?" (p. 121).

Occupation is especially effective in wholly transforming the material reality experienced by the occupied. Hence, the structures imposed by the Occupying Power deeply impact the social dynamics under occupation, including the manifestations of resistance. The inception and development of resistance movements is therefore a product of the material reality in which these movements emerge. This thesis aims to ground its analysis of resistance in a legal and political contextualisation of the Israeli occupation.

Decolonial Theory

The section below contextualises Palestinian women's resistance movement using decolonial theory to reflect the violent reality of colonisation which prompts resistance. Carolyn Nordstrom (2004) introduced the notion of "the time of not-war-not-peace" to designate occasional military action in a no-active-conflict context (p. 165-167). For Palestinians in the oPt, the Israeli military is a constant presence, regardless of the status of active warfare.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) conceptualises the notion of "the naturalisation of the *non-ethics of war*" under colonialism, which describes the coloniser's dehumanisation and subsequent violation of the native's rights (p. 247). Without active conflict, the coloniser remains entitled to perform cruel acts towards the colonised people. These acts become naturalised: their perpetration seems natural, and even necessary, to maintain the power dynamics relating both groups to one another (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). In other words, war and the grave violations that accompany it become an aspect of the daily lives of the occupied whose entire existence is dictated by the coloniser (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Such acts include the normalisation of the rape of non-white women, murder, the excessive exploitation of a woman's labour, and the objectification of women's bodies for the sake of the coloniser's pleasure (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

The aforementioned examples are manifestations of colonialism's disproportionate impact on women. In the context of colonialism, patriarchal structures intersect with ethnicity, social class, and identity. These structures create a robust system of oppression founded on the colonised woman's *non-whiteness* and *non-masculinity* (Park, 2017). Maldonado-Torres' decolonial theory serves as a basis to understand the power imbalance between Israel and the Palestinian people studied in the thesis, but also provides a framework to view the oppression of Palestinian women from an intersectional lens.

Informalisation of Politics

Colonised women defy occupation in various ways. They can resort to non-institutional actions, including armed and unarmed resistance. The latter encompasses all non-institutional acts where the people convey their disapproval of the system (Dudouet, 2014).

Infrapolitics designates the disguised, informal, and unorganised forms of resistance and dissent (Scott, 2017, p. 183). Infrapolitics is often led by subordinate groups who have no other mediums of communication with power due to their political exclusion and limited access to freedom of expression (Scott, 2017). The pressure which they

exert on the domination systems from below is unique by its likelihood to remain present across time. The words and actions of subordinate groups exist as a foundation to other social movements, which they strive to enforce (Scott, 2017). It is by the aggregation of disobedient acts that the powerful state starts to lose its perceived omnipotence over society, laying the ground for larger and more vocal mobilisations (Scott, 2017). Rituals of subordination are broken through the subordinate group's defiance of pervasive rules imposed by the dominant group (Scott, 2017). The existence of minor instances of resistance in street-level politics shapes the relationship between the regime and the people (Bayat, 2012). These acts of subversion symbolise the inception of large-scale resistance movements supported by bottom-up resistance of marginalised groups (Bayat, 2012).

Women are often some of the most present actors in informal politics. Their methods of resistance begin with a disobedient way of life and an attempt to shape discourse and narratives that defy what is prescribed by the dominant power (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Through music, an unconventional outlet of resistance, women express their dissatisfaction and question the status quo (McKinnon, 2010). *Creative resistance* is the use of artistic means as a source of empowerment, manifestation of cultural traditions, and expression of discontent with the status quo and hope for a brighter future (Darts, 2004). This concept, varying from music to art, poetry, and literature, "reveal[s] tears in the social fabric" (Darts, 2004, p. 318). It exposes the divergence between the dominant discourses on equality and liberal values, and the ugly reality of oppression under the status quo (Darts, 2004).

Music has historically been recognised as an expression of resistance (McKinnon, 2010). Musical resistance creates an alternative autonomous space for oppressed people to express their dissent and be heard by those who are subjected to the same oppression (McKinnon, 2010). Bohlman (1993) describes music as "an arresting form of attention, a means of commanding public spaces, and a context for the narration of history" (p. 413). Passed down to generations by virtue of its timelessness and memorability, musical defiance creates a community that relates to the political messages articulated by the songs. Its informality invites deep expressions of both positive and negative emotions. Additionally, the familiar nature of music allows singers to communicate their perceptions of the reality of occupation in tangible terms which resonate with all those who have experienced the same oppressive structures. Hence, music is an effective method of resistance.

The informal nature of music does not overshadow its political significance. It creates an easily accessible and understandable medium of political expression. When the colonised sing in their own language unfamiliar to the coloniser, they establish a reality of which they have full authority. The coloniser cannot intercept this realm of political expression due to its full dependence on vernacular, popular anecdotes and idioms, and collective memory stemming from the shared experience of occupation. In other words, music is the product of a material reality understood only by those who experience it.

Women's performance of music is a testament of their agency as actors in the Palestinian resistance movement. Nevertheless, their resistance can only be understood as a product of the context of occupation in which said resistance materialises. Therefore, this thesis aims to portray the significance of music as means of political expression against occupation. It sheds light on the informal side of politics from which resistance movements emerge.

Methods

Research Design

This thesis seeks to understand how Palestinian women from the oPt use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation. Additionally, it will contextualise the messages of resistance by analysing the illegality of the occupation and its disproportionate effects on women. The thesis' interdisciplinarity is reflected in its qualitative approach, employing both thematic analysis and doctrinal analysis to answer each research question respectively. Using two different methodologies, I will examine two different sources of data: song lyrics and international legal conventions. This variation will help me reach more substantive conclusions about the status quo in the oPt and the resistance it instigates.

First, thematic analysis is a process where qualitative data is coded into separate yet interrelated themes, or ideas, which aim to answer a research question (Terry et al., 2017). In this thesis, the thematic analysis will serve to identify the patterns of resistance throughout song lyrics which have been publicly sung by Palestinian women about their homeland. Starting from a critical realist lens, this analysis emphasises "participants' experiences as lived realities that are produced, and exist, within broader social contexts" (Terry et al., 2017, p. 47). The assumption of the contextual reality of the meanings conveyed in the songs begs the question of: what is the context in which the messages in these songs were produced?

Therefore, a doctrinal analysis will be conducted to examine the legal frameworks in International Law that should protect Palestinians as a national group, and more specifically Palestinian women, and Israel's repeated failure to abide by them. Doctrinal analysis asks the question of: what current legal frameworks exist concerning a specific case? "Doctrinal analysis has been the dominant legal method in the common law world" (Hutchinson, 2015, p. 2). The second analysis will consist of a collection of the legal principles in International Law which aim to protect Palestinians, and especially women, as well as an examination of how these principles materially play out in the oPt.

By using thematic analysis, I will be centring narratives shaped by women, acknowledging the originality of female expressions of resistance under occupation and the value of the messages which they convey. To centre Palestinian voices, I will present the thematic analysis first. The doctrinal analysis will follow due to its reliance on international institutions dominated by Western voices and interests, often disregarding Palestinian ones (Karatas, 2020; Assaiqeli, 2020). In this thesis, it serves a secondary role of contextualisation.

The thematic analysis focuses on the use of certain words, expressions, or metaphors to highlight different aspects of resistance which will be grouped into larger themes. The songs serve as a basis to understand what aspects of the occupation Palestinian women contest in their songs. The doctrinal analysis will provide information on the reality of the situation in the oPt. It will emphasise the lack of application of fundamental principles of human rights by Israel, in violation of the law of occupation in the oPt.

Data Collection

To analyse Palestinian women's use of music to express resistance to the occupation, this thesis employs 11 songs performed by Palestinian women from Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem from 2013 to 2022. The last decade was marked by continuous expansion in Israeli settlements and the Sheikh Jarrah protests of 2021 in

the West Bank, as well as numerous wars on Gaza including military operation 'Protective Edge' in 2014 and the 2018 Great March of Return. These events have sparked large-scale movements calling for the liberation of Palestine across the world (Amnesty International, 2022). This decade has witnessed a variety of methods employed by Palestinians to express their resistance to the occupation. Hence, it has led to the production and performance of many songs which articulate the emotions of Palestinians who have been affected by these significant events, either from physical or emotional proximity to their homeland as well as their demands for freedom.

The common criterion guiding the choice of songs is their performance by Palestinian women in recent years. The performer's choice of lyrics to publicly sing, implies her identification with them and desire to repeat their message. All singers featured in this thesis originate from the West Bank, Gaza, or East Jerusalem. This narrows the scope of Palestinian women's resistance by excluding Arab Israelis whose music often gains more popularity among Palestinians all over the world (Kanaaneh et al., 2013).

It is important to note that not all songs analysed in this thesis were written by women. Some of them were originally published as poetry and have since been re-adapted. Others are folkloric melodies which continue to be sung by women. However, a significant limitation to data collection was the lack of songs originating from Gaza. This is due to structural obstacles resulting from the blockade imposed on Gaza by the Israeli forces as well as to the ruling party, Hamas' ideology. As a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas cracks down on Palestinian artists in Gaza, accusing them of engaging in "immoral activity" (Kanaaneh et al., 2013, p. 90). The songs analysed throughout this thesis have all been found online, on global platforms like YouTube, or smaller ones like Anghami, the largest digital music streaming service in the Arab world (Alyakoob, 2022). The decision to include each song depends on its ability to convey a message of resilience and hope to other Palestinian listeners instead of the song's popularity, which varies highly. Many songs were omitted due to their insufficient relation to the Palestinian struggle. Appendix A lists the 11 songs used in the thematic analysis. For each song, it indicates the release date, the name of the artist and her city of origin.

Data Analysis

Before developing the analysis, I independently translated all songs from Arabic to English. Translation can typically distort the meaning of certain words and expressions unique to the language. As the translator, my interpretation of these songs impacts the way I translate them, potentially creating an ethical issue. I have tried avoiding it by consulting several speakers from both languages to verify whether the translation seems logical to them. To conduct a thematic analysis of the patterns of resistance identified in the songs, I used online software ATLAS.ti to code the songs. I conducted the initial coding step: the classification of lyrics under many codes, or ideas which repeatedly arose in the songs. The codes emerged inductively from the song lyrics, no codes or themes were expected to be found beforehand. This approach allowed for the song lyrics to be fully heard with no predetermined ideas as to what they would discuss. The codes were constantly refined and grouped until I ended up with 18 codes which were divided into 3 coherent analytical categories, or themes, that will guide the analysis. The codes were also used to refine the theoretical framework grounding the analysis, relying on an inductive approach that centres song lyrics. This analytical method provides a clear perception of the common ideas held by Palestinians and expressed by different people, as part of the larger resistance movement which has existed since the establishment of Israel.

The doctrinal analysis involves a collection of international conventions concerning human rights, like the UDHR, and international criminal conventions like the fourth Geneva Convention which highlights the responsibilities of an Occupying Power. First, I analyse these legal frameworks and shed light on the principles which they serve to uphold, with a focus on their conceptualisation of women's rights. Second, I apply them to the situation in the oPt from 2013 to 2022 and highlight their insufficient implementation, further criminalising the occupation.

Both analyses complement one another; the thematic analysis is grounded in the cultural expression of resistance to occupation and the doctrinal analysis explores the material reality in the oPt. The Israeli occupation effectively dominates the material reality which Palestinians experience. Their lands and resources are controlled by outsiders whose success lies in the erasure of proof of Palestinian identity and indigeneity (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014). Therefore, as Palestinians continue to be more stripped of their ability to take ownership of their fates due to the occupation, they resort to abstract spaces which they can manipulate by imposing their own narratives. Songs, by virtue of their accessibility and easy memorisation, present a channel of political expression which cannot be fully dominated by the Israelis. Songs allow for politically-dense messages to be heard in a counter-space which is still relatively possessed by Palestinians. The doctrinal analysis is therefore necessary to understand the context behind the messages conveyed in the songs.

Thematic Analysis

This thesis explores the themes of resistance which Palestinian women in the oPt express through music to reflect on the role women undertake as agents of change. Contemporary music conveys values such as resilience and strength to Palestinian people in the oPt, but also across the world. They translate the general Palestinian sentiment towards the occupation, while centring a message of hope. The analysis is structured around the three major themes which were found in the songs and will progress from the most to the least recurring theme.

The first theme identified was 'strategic displays of resistance', alluding to Ryan's (2015) definition of resilience as a "tactic of resistance" (p. 300). The term "tactic" asserts the importance of strategic forms of resistance to exhibit fearlessness and the adaptation to the hardships imposed by the occupation via displays of joy and dignity. The second theme identified; '*Al-Watan*: The Politicisation of Homeland' incorporates questions in relation to human rights, freedom and the right of return. It outlines the political demands of the Palestinians which are inherently revolutionary. Finally, the third theme 'Attachment to Palestine' encompasses the sentimental relationship which connects Palestinians to their land. Elements such as the holiness of Palestine and the centuries-old memories which Palestinians transmit from one generation to the other are sung about to emphasise the Palestinian people's indigeneity.

Strategic Displays of Resistance

The most common theme found in the songs was 'strategic displays of resistance'. This theme encompasses the emotions displayed by the Palestinian people, specifically women, distinguishing them by the way in which they resist. The theme incorporates resilience, hope, joy, unity, strength, and dignity as internalised emotions which

Palestinians showcase in their everyday lives. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of cultural symbols, such as the Dabkeh, the traditional Palestinian (or more broadly Levantine) festive circle and line dance, folklore music, and art as accessible outlets to display sentiments of resistance.

Palestinian women often sing about resilience, or *sumud* in Arabic: "resilient in the face of all adversity" and "[Palestinian] children carrying the resilience of the land" (Salute to Gaza, 2019; Returning, 2021). Their music displays significant resilience in the face of the occupation, dispossession, and dehumanisation by employing phrases such as "determination and pride" and "throwing defeat behind them" to signal their perseverance, despite hardship, to achieve their ultimate dream; liberation from the occupation (Salute to Gaza, 2019; Gaza, 2021). S*umud* is a strategic method of resistance in which Palestinians are socialised and consider one of the most important values to uphold (Ryan, 2015). *Sumud* is seen as a tactical display of resistance in everyday life which encapsulates the intuitive willingness to adapt to difficult life circumstances posed by the occupation. The concepts of strength and dignity emerge as values attached to *sumud*. Palestinian women also mention: "pride", "determination", "dignity" and "honourable" as prerequisites of this resistance (Salute to Gaza, 2019; As Long as I Have, 2021). These values prompt them to maintain their honour while coping with life under occupation (Ryan, 2015).

Sumud is also tied to the physical struggle of resistance. When singing about the war on Gaza in 2018, the Daughters of Jerusalem honour the martyrs; "they bury martyrs everyday", while emphasising the martyr's consistent resilience (Salute to Gaza, 2019). Even after his death, a child "spread a curtain over the rubble" (Salute to Gaza, 2019). This euphemism downplays the harsh reality of the transformation of homes into rubble, allowing the child to simply cover up the destruction and continue fighting. *Sumud* is also manifested by Palestinians' unwillingness to leave their land; "I will not let my land go" (Where Are the Millions, 2022). Songs like Salute to Gaza (2019), written by artists from the West Bank, shed light on the situation in Gaza. This display of unity enforces resistance to the territorial divisions which forbid Palestinians from Gaza from travelling to the West Bank and vice versa.

Expressions of hope are very common among Palestinians: they use music to remind each other that "no darkness ever lasted" and remind Palestine that "your [her] children are returning" (Returning, 2021). Hope is an extension of resilience: it grants the occupied the strength to uphold their demand for freedom by fixating on the bright future ahead, insisting on the transience of the "darkness", or the occupation (Returning, 2021). The Daughters of Jerusalem speak of "a candle to light on the rocks and dry away the tears" (Gaza, 2021). The candle being a symbol for the light in the darkness, sends a message of hope despite the hardships or "tears".

Another emotion prominently instrumentalized by Palestinians to express their steadfastness, and consequently resist to the occupation's pervasiveness, is "joy" (Jaffa — Everything has Changed, 2021). More specifically, weddings as festive occasions have become crucial to understand all facets of resistance: "the wedding is ours and the bride and groom are celebrating", "carrying the forthcoming wedding" (Tell his Mother, n.d.; Returning, 2021). 'Tell his Mother' is a traditional Palestinian song which is performed in both weddings and funerals, invoking Palestinians' ability to celebrate new beginnings as well as tragedies. This song symbolises the Palestinian struggle as a whole: an ability to remain steadfast despite the occupation. Palestinian women particularly express joy as another manifestation of *sumud*, or resistance to the desperation which the occupation tries to inflict: "tell his mother to rejoice and celebrate" (Tell his Mother, n.d.). By planning big weddings for their

children, Palestinian women highlight the possibility for normalcy, and even joy, despite the struggles of living under siege or occupation (Richter-Devroe, 2018). The songs invoke the importance of weddings as occasions to resist and showcase Palestinian cultural heritage through music and dance: "Joy, wedding veils and gowns" (Returning, 2021).

The lyrics analysed in this research have conveyed in many instances the importance Palestinians grant to music, dance, art, and literature as a means to document their existence and struggle but also challenge the erasure of Palestinian heritage by Israel (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014; Kanaaneh et al., 2013). They speak of: "a small library", "students, poets", "Arabic words in my homeland" and "our songs, our dances, our Dabkeh" (As Long as I Have, 2021; Jaffa — Everything has Changed, 2021). Culture thus becomes a metaphorical counter-space used by Palestinians as a set of reactionary practices which become safe zones where they can visibly exercise agency (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006).

This section aims to portray how the overt expression of specific emotions or values allow Palestinians to assert that they are able to adapt to the hardships imposed by the occupation and face them fearlessly. The narratives created by these songs add a different perspective to the occupation; it is not only Israel that possesses strength from its military capabilities, but Palestinians' ability also to face the power of the occupation is an embodiment of strength as "only iron can withstand iron" (Salute to Gaza, 2019).

'*Al-Watan*': The Politicisation of Homeland

Al-Watan, the Arabic word for homeland, holds significant patriotic meaning. It encapsulates the love and devotion one feels for their place of birth (Joffe, 1983). The politicisation of the term *Al-Watan* has colonial origins. It is the primary word used for mobilisation purposes by colonised Arab nations (Joffe, 1983). The theme is titled '*Al-Watan'* because it outlines the demands of freedom, liberation, and self-determination. When Palestinian women sing about decolonisation, they are directly instrumentalizing music for their political movement and therefore engaging in creative resistance (Darts, 2004).

In their music, Palestinian women explicitly denounce the conditions under which they are living. They sing about Israeli guards, checkpoints, gates, and walls: "no need of checkpoints, walls or guards", "erasing the shackles" and "open the gates" (The Holy City, 2018; Salute to Gaza, 2019; Returning, 2021). Expressions which can normally be perceived as metaphors of captivity are employed as literal descriptions of the landscape of the oPt where gates and shackles are omnipresent and largely restrict freedom of movement (Amnesty International, 2022). The critique of prison-like infrastructure and its material consequences on the lives of Palestinians and their ability to move freely is a demand for freedom and peace. The Daughters of Jerusalem dream about "the new Jerusalem, where gates were open wide and people from each faith on Earth in peace lived side by side" (The Holy City, 2018). By emphasising peace and religious tolerance in their vision of Jerusalem, the singers imply that these qualities are currently lacking. The Daughters of Jerusalem thus establish themselves as the champions of peace, which they are actively seeking. This portrayal is not unique to them: by their name, they are insisting on their representation of Jerusalem as a whole, centring peace and freedom at the heart of the Palestinian struggle.

In addition to the demand for freedom, Palestinians also demand their right to ownership in spite of Israel's continuous dispossession and demolition of homes. The idea of a *home* is central to the Palestinian struggle (Richter-Devroe, 2018). The singers insist that: "the house is my house and the homes are my homes" and "the

home that remains, they [Palestine's children] are shielding" (Tell his Mother, n.d.; Returning, 2021). Palestinians insist on property ownership as a symbol of intergenerational inheritance of the land, proving their ancestry and their unwillingness to leave.

Furthermore, the demand for the right of Palestinian refugees to return has been repeatedly mentioned in the songs: "your children are returning", "I cry tears of separation, I am yearning for the day of return" (Returning, 2021; I Love You, Palestine, 2013). Central to Palestinian liberation is the refugees' right to return which has been denied by the State of Israel since the Nakba of 1948 (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014). In the Arabic language, Palestine is referred to as a feminine noun, allowing for the attribution of a feminine role of maternity to Palestine. Nai Barghouti addresses Palestine as a mother who is awaiting the return of her children who will be denied entry to Palestine as long as the land is occupied: "do not worry mother, your children are returning" (Returning, 2021).

Finally, it is important to note the feeling of pride conveyed through the songs of Palestinian freedom fighters who engage in violent operations as part of their struggle for liberation. In fact, throughout their music, Palestinian women mention the "enemies" or "repugnant monsters" when referring to their occupiers (As Long as I Have, 2021; Salute to Gaza, 2019). These negative depictions justify, and even render mandatory, violent forms of resistance to the occupation. Palestinian women refer to "a restless war" and "a weapon in the hands of the revolutionaries" to declare their approval of armed resistance (As Long as I Have, 2021). Palestinians take it upon themselves to express their support of the "revolutionaries" who are perceived as liberators (As Long as I Have, 2021). This makes martyrdom, as "they bury martyrs everyday", an honourable component of the Palestinian struggle (Salute to Gaza, 2019). The pursuit of violent resistance, according to the songs, is fundamentally the price of freedom. They call their homeland "a prize of war", rendering violent resistance necessary to achieve their fundamental rights (To Our Homeland, 2022).

To sum up, the theme *'Al-Watan'* encapsulates the discourse on the political movement for liberation. It explores demands which are central to the Palestinian cause. The prominence of the notion of *the homeland* in the songs politicises music, making it a space to contest disapproval of the current material reality. Nevertheless, at the heart of these politically dense songs lies a humane and sentimental message to Palestine.

Attachment to Palestine

Throughout their music, Palestinians display significant emotional and physical attachment to their land. The third theme demonstrates Palestinians' sense of indigeneity through their connection to the land's natural symbols, but also its religious ones. Thus, it is unsurprising that songs would be used to convey emotions, not just activism and concrete demands. The singers show their feelings of affection and love towards Palestine, which go hand in hand with positive memories of the land and its people.

For centuries, Palestinians have been living on the Holy Land and cultivating its trees, marking that they are profoundly connected to the land and its nature (Abufarha, 2013). Palestinian women highlight this connection to the land through music: they mention "cactus tree", "olive", "lemon", "orange fields" and "basil", flora which is known to grow on their land (As Long as I Have, 2021; Salute to Gaza, 2019; I Love You, Palestine, 2013). Olive trees, which grow in the mountainous regions of the West Bank, symbolise the intergenerational wealth transmitted for centuries in Palestine (Abufarha, 2013). Settlers have historically been guilty of destroying nature, which is

used as a tactic of demoralisation of the native (Braverman, 2009). This takes the form of uprooting of olive trees, symbolising the forced rupture of the connection which Palestinians have maintained with their land for generations (Braverman, 2009). Nonetheless, olive trees, just like lemons and oranges, remain emblems of Palestinian national liberation. Choosing native plants to represent a national group is a declaration of the group's indigeneity to the land in which the crops are cultivated. This sentiment is expressed in Barghouti songs: "returning to open the gates, to cultivate" (Returning, 2021). By connecting the idea of freedom ("open the gates") with land cultivation, she is stating that both concepts are central for freedom.

The concept of indigeneity strongly characterises the Palestinian struggle. By emphasising their connection to the land, "I swear on the life of your basil", Palestinians are combating Zionist narratives (I Love You, Palestine, 2013). Zionist slogans have served to legitimise the establishment of a Jewish state, designating Palestine as "a land without people for a people without land" (Nassar, 1982). This dismissal of the Palestinians' existence and presence on the land justifies their insistence on indigeneity in their fight for liberation. Palestinians express profound love for their homeland: "I carried you between myself and my eyes" is an Arabic expression relaying how attached one feels to something to the point of it feeling closer to her than her eyes (I Love You, Palestine, 2013).

The proclamation of love in the song 'I Love You, Palestine' (2013) goes beyond abstract terms as the singer swears "on my [her] life [...] that I would die for you". The promise of sacrifice is, once again, an illustration of Palestinians' attachment and indigeneity to their land. The consideration that death is the price of freedom, which Lina Sleibi puts as "the freedom to die", shows the extent to which Palestinians are willing to go to achieve liberation. The love for Palestine is also a product of the oral transmission of history across generations. From stories told by the older generations who witnessed Nakba, to poetry and art which narrate the Palestinian experience, a shared memory is created. The Daughters of Jerusalem declare their intention on resisting as long as they have "a small library", "the photograph of a deceased grandfather" and "lessons of history" (As Long as I Have, 2021; Salute to Gaza, 2019). The conservation of memories is essential to teach younger generations about the origins of the Palestinian movement, and once again, to prove Palestinians' existence on the land for centuries (Sa'di, 2002).

Moreover, the holiness of the land of Palestine has, across history, made it one of the most desirable places in the world, from the Crusades in the Middle Ages, to the establishment of the State of Israel on the God-given Promised Land (Armstrong, 1998). It is not surprising when Palestinians are also connected to religious attributes of their land, mainly the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, deemed as the third holiest site of Islam (Armstrong, 1997). The Daughters of Jerusalem sing about "The Holy City" of Jerusalem, calling it "the mother of peace on Earth" (The Holy City, 2018). Abeer Sarsour, another Palestinian singer, calls it the "cradle of prophets" (For you, my Homeland, 2019).

The final theme illustrates the emotional density of the songs analysed in this thesis. It highlights that, at the core of each message, there is an expression of love and affection. These feelings forge a strong bond between Palestinians and their land, as a result of their indigeneity and intergenerationally-transmitted memories. This theme ties together the willingness to remain steadfast demonstrated in the first theme and the liberation movement in the second theme.

In conclusion, the themes of resistance illustrate how music is instrumentalized by Palestinian women to express efforts of resistance and demands of liberation. Through their employment of notions of liberation and their emphasis on the reflection of Palestinian identity in remarkable values, Palestinians insist on the importance of their struggle. They start by sending a strong signal of steadfastness to their oppressor despite the hardships they endure under occupation.

Each theme analysed throughout this thesis is a response to illegal aspects of the occupation, or otherwise difficult circumstances imposed on Palestinians. Although the focus of the songs remains on messages of hope of liberation, strength, and dignity, Palestinians also honour all forms of resistance, from violent to nonviolent and extend their support to all those who engage in such acts. By expressing the general sentiments of the Palestinian people, the singers are inherently engaging in resistance. Part of the Palestinian struggle is to maintain a degree of control on discourse to counter narratives which legitimise their oppression (Sa'di, 2002). The mere act of vocalising these thoughts pushes the boundaries which limit women to the private sphere, and allow them to be visibly active agents of change leading the struggle for liberation.

Doctrinal Analysis

Having completed the thematic analysis of songs written by Palestinian women in the oPt, I will now conduct a doctrinal analysis of legal material prescribed in International Law. This analysis aims to establish the existing legal structures which function as a shield against human rights violations. I will apply the principles mentioned to the case of the Palestinians in the oPt to examine the violations which they are subjected to by Israel. The doctrinal analysis will conclude with an explanation of the illegality of the occupation, amplified by Israel's lack of respect towards International Law in its treatment of the Palestinians. The doctrinal analysis answers the question of: what are Palestinian women resisting? It provides a clear explanation of the mechanisms of occupation denounced by Palestinian women through their songs.

International Legal Frameworks

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) sets the common standards of human rights which shall be upheld by every state (Hannum, 1998). The UDHR starts by stating the primacy of freedom and equality in Article 1, without distinctions based on race, sex, or religion (Art. 2). The right to life is also emphasised by the Declaration, which is defined as both "an extension of the conditions necessary for life to continue [...] and a recognition that all forms of human life will need some basic level of protection" (Wicks, 2012, p. 211). These basic criteria outline the responsibility given to states to ensure that all people under their control have access to basic rights and socio-economic necessities to be able to live beyond survival.

Moreover, many other rights inscribed within the UDHR are significant to the Palestinian case. I will enumerate these rights and show their applicability to Palestinians in this section. Article 13 stipulates the individual's freedom of movement, and the right to leave and return to one's country without restrictions. In addition, Article 17 protects the right to own property and for it not to be arbitrarily taken away. Article 22 emphasises the importance of economic rights. Article 25 designates the right to receive adequate healthcare, with an emphasis on mothers' access to medical attention. Finally, the UDHR underlines the importance of cultural rights and all people's right "freely to participate in the cultural life of the community" (UDHR, 1948, Art. 27).

The UDHR's universality implies its intention to protect all individuals regardless of their legal status (Wicks, 2012). For the Palestinians, this means that citizenship in a state charged with the protection of human rights should not be a prerequisite to their entitlement to these rights. In other words, the UDHR's purpose is to protect all human life, regardless of political denominations.

While the UDHR is not legally binding, other human rights conventions, which were based on the principles of the Declaration, are binding and especially relevant to the Palestinian case (Hannum, 1998). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) starts with the establishment of the right to self-determination for all peoples (ICCPR, 1966, Art. 1). Just as the UDHR, it reiterates the right to life (Art. 6) and the right to freely leave and return to one's country (Art. 12). Finally, the ICCPR can be distinguished by its explicit emphasis on ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities' right to practise their cultural and religious traditions (Art. 27).

While it mentions minority rights, the ICCPR fails to acknowledge that all states are obliged to protect such rights. Article 27 starts with "in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist", implying that some countries do not contain minorities. The phrasing permits some states to deny the existence of minorities on their territory, naturally exempting themselves from the responsibility to protect the rights articulated in Article 27 of the ICCPR (Pejic, 1997). Another key human rights convention which can be applied to the Palestinian case is the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965). The ICERD bans all forms of racial discrimination (Art. 2). Article 3 of the ICERD explicitly criminalises racial segregation and apartheid, both of which the State of Israel has been accused of by Amnesty International (Amnesty International, 2022). The aforementioned conventions outline basic and largely indisputable human rights which ground International Law. The following section will focus on other key conventions which outline rights that can be specific to women.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) discusses the importance of access to healthcare services in addition to provisions for maternity protection (CEDAW, 1979, Art. 12). Women, and especially mothers, are disproportionately affected by violations of the right to health and by extension, reproductive rights. The provisions for maternity protection include social benefits such as maternity leave, and other measures which aim to protect women by granting them unimpeded access to reproductive healthcare. CEDAW is often referred to as "the international bill of rights for women" due to its focus on principles of equality and non-discrimination (Saksena, 2007, p. 482). CEDAW was created as an attempt to frame human rights as a feminist issue. By employing CEDAW, this thesis puts women's rights at the forefront of the Palestinian issue.

The right to health is not unique to CEDAW: it was also mentioned in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with an insistence on prenatal and postnatal healthcare for mothers (CRC, 1989, Art. 24). It was again mentioned in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as a "special protection accorded to mothers before and after childbirth" (ICESCR, 1966, Art. 10). Finally, it was ascribed in the ICERD to emphasise the importance of non-discrimination in medical care provisions (ICERD, 1965, Art. 5).

These conventions all ground International Human Rights Law. They, however, do not specifically target occupied people as inherently having a unique relationship with the state occupying them. Therefore, they do not outline the responsibilities which an Occupying Power has towards the occupied people; self-determination being the only principle directly correlated with colonialism (ICCPR, 1966, Art. 1). These responsibilities, nonetheless,

are a key component of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (GC IV, 1949). The Geneva Convention clearly criminalises all forms of collective punishment (Art. 33). According to the Convention, an Occupying Power bears the responsibility of protecting the occupied people and preventing harm to these protected persons (Art. 27).

The Geneva Convention obliges the occupier to provide adequate necessities of life, like food and medical supplies to the population, in addition to ensuring the functioning of proper hospitals and healthcare services to not hinder life (Art. 55-56). It directly instructs colonial powers to create a well-functioning society, with adequate social and economic provisions (Arai, 2009). The law of occupation not only protects the occupied from physical harm and violence, but also guarantees their social and economic stability and even flourishing from the provisions they are entitled to receive from the occupier. In short, "the duties on the occupant are not merely of negative nature, but also of positive nature" (Arai, 2009, p. 116).

Violations of International Law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Having summarised the legal obligations on states with regards to human rights, women's rights, and occupation, I will now apply these legal frameworks to the case of the Palestinian people in the oPt. This section demonstrates Israel's lack of respect towards International Law in its occupation of the Palestinian people, contributing to the structural conditions that make resistance both necessary and meaningful. Gaza and the West Bank have been under military occupation by Israel since 1967. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2019), Israel's actions in the oPt are in violation of the law of occupation and the Occupying Power's core responsibilities (GC IV). Several Israeli policies in the oPt disproportionately affect Palestinian women.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has previously said: "Israel is not a state for all its citizens… [but rather] a nation-state for Jewish people and only them" (Amnesty International, 2022). In 2018, Israel passed a Basic Law stipulating that Jewish people are the only ones entitled to the right of self-determination in Israel, leaving out Palestinians and other minorities (ICCPR, Art. 1; Brandes, 2020). This Basic Law also encourages the idea of 'Jewish settlements', legalising what is otherwise perceived as an illegal practice by International Law (Imseis, 2003). This move has institutionalised apartheid, the system of oppression which has legitimised depriving Palestinians of citizenship and access to civil and political rights (ICERD, Art. 3; Amnesty International, 2022).

Currently, Palestinians in the oPt are denied freedom of movement (UDHR, Art. 13). The West Bank has become deeply fragmented after the construction of the Separation Wall, inhibiting Palestinians' freedom of movement and access to their own territory, according to UNSC Resolution 242 (UN, 1982). To maintain control, Israel constantly increases watch towers, checkpoints, and 'settler-only' roads (Dana, 2017). Checkpoints are daily points of passage where Palestinians are searched and often detained for hours (Amnesty International, 2022). As an important interface, checkpoints allow Israeli forces to inflict fear, humiliation, and shame onto Palestinians (Cooperman, 2021). Israeli soldiers have been accused, on several occasions, of committing sexual harassment in checkpoints (GC IV, Art. 27; Griffiths & Repo, 2021). Extensive reports have shown that women are strip searched by Israeli soldiers who forced them to take all their clothing off (Cooperman, 2021).

Israeli settlements have drastically increased in the West Bank. They are legalised by the Israeli High Court of Justice (Milner & Kedar, 2023). Settlements rely on the dispossession of Palestinians from their properties in areas which they mainly dominate (Cooperman, 2021). Palestinians in the West Bank are arbitrarily deprived of

their homes and lands (UDHR, Art. 17). The 2021 protests contested Israel's intention to replace the Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood with settlements (OCHA, 2021). Discrimination is also ubiquitous in the West Bank (ICERD, Art. 2). Palestinians endure violent attacks by settlers, with 2022 being "among deadliest years for Palestinians in the West Bank" (UDHR, Art. 3; UN, 2022). In addition, occasionally in Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, Israeli forces storm Al-Aqsa Mosque, beating worshippers who gather to pray (ICCPR, Art. 27; Amnesty International, 2023). Such practices, linked to apartheid, become institutionalised forms of oppression for Palestinians living in the oPt.

Moreover, Gazans' experience with occupation differs from that of Palestinians from the West Bank. Gazans face even stricter restrictions on freedom of movement (UDHR, Art. 13). Since 2007, Israel has built an isolation wall all around Gaza, trapping a population of 2.1 million and restricting the entry of goods as well as the exit of people (OCHA, 2022). An air, land and sea blockade has devastated the lives of Palestinians, perceived as a form of collective punishment by the UNHRC (GC IV, Art. 33; UNHRC, 2023). According to the UN, "unemployment levels in Gaza are amongst the highest in the world" (UDHR, Art. 22). A report by UNICEF (2019) revealed the chronic shortage of medication, medical supplies and facilities in the Gaza Strip due to the blockade.

Palestinian women in the oPt and especially in Gaza, suffer from a lack of provision of healthcare by Israel (GC IV, Art. 55-56; OCHA, 2022). Healthcare inequalities disproportionately affect women in the oPt due to their need for special medical attention during pregnancy, childbirth in addition to other general medical conditions (CEDAW, Art. 12; Bates el al., 2017). In fact, pregnant women in Gaza have reported having to walk for an hour to be able to reach a health facility (UNICEF, 2019).

Finally, since 1953, the Law of Return has obstructed Palestinians from the diaspora from visiting and residing in their homeland (ICCPR, Art. 12). This phenomenon has deeply fragmented the Palestinian population and identity (Jabareen, 2014). It defies the right of return to one's country (UDHR, 1948, Art. 13). By extension, the UN has strongly emphasised Palestinians' right of return under International Law (Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, 1978). This section highlights the human rights violations Palestinians in the oPt are subjected to. Many of these violations are central in the songs, such as the obstruction of return and the denial of self-determination. In any respect, these violations further illegalise the occupation and they push for calls for liberation in the oPt, which are transmitted through songs.

Discussion

By expressing their hope for freedom and liberation through music, Palestinian women are constantly challenging legal obstacles placed by the occupation. Not only are their lyrics directly in defiance of the systems of oppression imposed on them in the oPt, but the mere act of performing a song and spreading a message on a global scale is resistance. Palestinian women are disproportionately impacted by patriarchal structures in society, enforced by the occupation (Rought-Brooks et al., 2010). The conditions of life in which they are forced to survive are rendered difficult, and in times of war, unimaginable. Nevertheless, by practising *sumud*, Palestinians adapt to the hardships they endure, while using the little means at their disposal to delegitimize the occupation (Ryan, 2015).

When Palestinian women sing about their homeland, it is to mirror their entire group's sentiments. They contribute to the consolidation of a Palestinian national identity built on a shared traumatic history and ongoing struggle for liberation. The themes of resistance expressed are inherently intertwined. The songs convey the emotional and physical attachment of Palestinians to their land, justifying their intent to resist its colonisation.

The informalisation of politics has stimulated expression in more subtle and unconventional spheres. Music, being one of them, is a channel of diffusion of the ideas of the movement. Lyrics simplify what are otherwise politically dense messages allowing for their universalisation across space and time. On one hand, folkloric music, like the song 'Tell his Mother' (n.d.) is an example of the intergenerational transmission of political messages. It insists on upholding old Palestinian traditions, like big weddings, to send a message of resilience to the occupier. On the other hand, Nai Barghouti, an artist from the West Bank, currently stages performances from Kuwait to Geneva, according to her Instagram page, globalising the ideas of Palestinian resistance and liberation. The accessibility of the songs reinforces cultural heritage and traditions, also cementing the bond tying Palestinians to their homeland. In the age of digitalisation of art and music, Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza can publish their songs online and more easily rise to fame beyond their territory.

Having said that, the singers which have featured in this thesis mostly come from the West Bank. Although women living in the West Bank face many structural obstacles as part of the apartheid system upheld by Israel, they are able to issue more travel permits than Palestinians living in Gaza. West Bank inhabitants face less structural obstacles and looser military control than in Gaza. Due to their ability to perform in big cities in their territory, but also worldwide, singers from the West Bank are able to grow their platforms of listeners faster than those in Gaza.

The main limitation which has complicated my ability to study creative resistance in Gaza and the West Bank was the lack of content issued from Gaza. Singing, and specifically having the means to publish music online and rise to fame, is nearly impossible for a Gazan living under a blockade. In 2013, a Palestinian male singer, Mohammed Assaf managed to convince the Israeli authorities to let him out of Gaza into Egypt to audition for the Arab version of American Idol, Arab Idol. He had to jump off the fence of the building in which the auditions were taking place and was nearly denied entry. He later won the contest, and became one of the only iconic singers to have come from Gaza (Brehony, 2018).

Assaf's story encapsulates the structural hurdles which a Gazan person, let alone a woman, would have to go through to achieve fame. Rahaf Shamaly, who sang 'Where Are the Millions' (2022), was not allowed to perform

on stages in Gaza, "simply because she is a woman" (Khoudary, 2019). As previously explained, the lack of data from the Gaza Strip can also be explained by Hamas' crackdown on musical activity on religious grounds, especially targeting women (Kanaaneh et al., 2013). This thesis' data is therefore unequally distributed between women from Gaza and the West Bank. However, the thesis attempted to address this gap by referring to several songs written by women in the West Bank in solidarity with Gaza, acting as spokespersons for their suffering. These songs strengthen the ideas of solidarity and Palestinian unity honoured in the lyrics.

Furthermore, the thesis remains limited in scope due to the time frame chosen. Although it reflects significant moments of Palestinian history, it does not consider data from one of its most pivotal moments. Since October 7th, Israel's siege and declaration of war on Gaza has resulted in the murder of more than 35,000 Palestinians (UN, 2024). This era has revived calls for liberation, not only on Palestinian soil but worldwide, as solidarity protests, boycotts, and student encampments expand across the globe (Gowayed, 2024).

Future research should focus on more contemporary themes of resistance, and how they evolved to incorporate resistance to the Israeli aggression on Gaza, a case of genocide which the ICJ has deemed "plausible" (OHCHR, 2024). Additionally, it should prioritise personal testimonies, gained through interviews, of women from Gaza and the West Bank as a substitute for the musical expression of resistance. Research must focus on narratives advanced by Palestinian women, as active agents of the resistance, rather than passive followers. By centring the voices of Palestinian women, many other often invisible minorities have not been the subject of this thesis. Research should honour the diverse Palestinian subordinate groups, such as Palestinian Christians or queer people, in order to fully grasp the different messages of resistance and their intersection with identity.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to uncover how Palestinian women use music to express resistance to the Israeli occupation in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Subsequently, it aimed to understand why this resistance emerged in the first place. To do so, I have adopted an interdisciplinary approach to examine Israel's International Law violations in the oPt and their impacts on Palestinians and specifically women. The thesis concluded that the conditions of life imposed by the Occupying Power, Israel, on Palestinians in the oPt are considerably dire. Palestinians are denied basic human rights, such as freedom of movement, citizenship, and self-determination as well as most political and legal rights (HRW, 2019). Due to the unavailability of formal channels of political dissent, Palestinians resort to music to express resistance to the occupation.

The most common aspect of resistance underscored throughout the songs is strategic displays of resistance. In the Palestinian context, these are understood as the embodiment of resilience and strength despite hardship. These values, which are honoured by the songs, consist of key components of Palestinian identity. Hope was considered a strategic display of resistance, just as joy, strength, and unity.

The second theme which dominated the lyrics was the politicisation of 'Homeland', which provided the underlying demands of Palestinian resistance, ranging from the right of return to freedom and liberation. This theme demonstrated how music is used as an outlet to globalise the political messages behind the resistance movement. The final theme tied the first two together; attachment to Palestine is mobilized throughout the songs to convey emotional connection to, and love for, the land.

This thesis' interdisciplinarity is a significant asset. It portrays the mechanisms which lead to the emergence of a resistance movement. The Palestinian resistance movement did not arise spontaneously; rather, it is the result of a decades-long occupation built on violence, dispossession, and human rights abuses. Additionally, the thesis suggests that resistance is not monolithic. In this particular case, the use of songs is a demonstration of both peaceful as well as active resistance to an oppressive system. Music is more easily digestible as a means of expressing oneself. Unlike aggressive speeches, it can be welcomed by large audiences with open arms, but also memorised readily. Therefore, the importance of music, and more generally art, cannot be undermined as means of political expression.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgements

I could not have written this thesis without the support and guidance of so many people. Firstly, I want to start by thanking my thesis supervisor, Lucy Hall, who always believed in my potential and pushed me to reach it. Lucy, I am eternally grateful to have had a thesis supervisor with your kindness, empathy, and remarkable knowledge and expertise. You have made these difficult times easier on me, and I could not imagine getting the same support for my topic from any other supervisor. Thank you.

I also want to thank my law supervisor, Narin Idriz, for her commitment to helping me write an interdisciplinary thesis. I will not forget her kindness.

Secondly, I want to dedicate this thesis to my parents, Mohamed and Fatima. Their love and devotion are my raison d'être. They have never, for a second, doubted the importance of my education and always worked so hard to give me this opportunity. I am eternally indebted to them. Without their support, I would be nowhere.

I would also like to thank my sister, Hana, whose open-mind and heart inspire me every day. To the rest of my family, thank you for always believing in me. I am overwhelmed by your unconditional love and support. I value every conversation with any of you, and always learn so much. Thank you for talking to me about Palestine.

Finally, I would like to thank the friends I made these past three years, whose advice and friendship only made me stronger. I am honoured by their contributions to my thesis.

وأخيراً وليس آخراً، أحب أن أهدي هذا المشروع إلى جميع نساء فلسطين. اصراركم على التمسك بالوجود هو أشرف وأنبل أنواع المقاومة.

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Appendix A: Song List

Song Title	Release Date	Artist	Artist's City of Origin
For You, my Homeland	2019	Abeer Sansour	Bethlehem, the West Bank
To Our Homeland	2022	Lina Sleibi	Bethlehem, the West Bank
The Holy City	2018	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Salute to Gaza	2019	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
As Long as I Have	2021	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Gaza	2021	The Daughters of Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Jaffa — Everything has Changed	2021	Nour Freteikh	Nablus, the West Bank
I Love You, Palestine	2013	Lian Bazlamit	Ramallah, the West Bank
Returning	2021	Nai Barghouti	Ramallah, the West Bank
Tell his Mother	n.d.	This is an older folkloric song still performed by women during both weddings and funerals.	Gaza
Where Are the Millions	2022	Rafah Shamaly	Gaza

Appendix B: Codebook

The 3 Analytical Categories	Sub-themes	Textual Evidence
Strategic Displays of Resistance	Cultural symbols Dignity Hope Joy Resilience Strength Unity	"As long as there are Arabic words in my homeland and popular songs" "They bury martyrs every day, resilient in the face of all adversity with determination and pride" "Salute to the people resisting with dignity, offering us a lesson in the science of resilience" "Salute, salute [...] to the farmer of the land of the dawn with steady steps in spite of the soldiers" "We are the victors, stronger than the mountains, more than grains of sand"

'*Al-Watan*': The Politicisation of Homeland	Feminisation of Palestine Freedom Home Land Return Violent Struggle	"Jerusalem! Jerusalem! Lift up your gates, give birth to freedom and justice" "We are returning to build our homeland, returning to open the gates, to cultivate, build and sing in Haifa, Akka and Lydd, in Nablus, Jaffa and Jenin" "The house is my house and the homes are my homes" "Do not worry, mother. Your children are returning" "Oh, home to the generous. A bride in your dress and you are the source of tenderness" "My words will remain: bread and a weapon in the hands of the revolutionaries"

Attachment to Palestine	Holiness Indigeneity Love Memory Natural symbols	“As long as I have the memory of a small library, a photograph of a deceased grandfather” “I would die for you” “I carried you between myself and my eyes” “As long as I have inches from my land, an olive, a lemon, a well and a small cactus tree”

Appendix C: Song Lyrics

1. "Jaffa — Everything has Changed" by Nour Freteikh from Nablus (2021)

A rock sleeping on the city's beach

Waking to the sound of roaming birds

When it saw me with my love it cheered And sent me a quiet breeze from its sea

Even the seagulls in its sky echoed:

Its whispers

Its smiles

Its breeze.

A high lemon blossom

Followed its people barefoot

The wood was running away

Stealing our stories

Our songs, our dances, the Dabkeh and the joy

The Ouja orchard

And our clear sky.

2. "As Long as I Have" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2021)

As long as I have inches from my land

An olive

A lemon

A well

And a small cactus tree

As long as I have the memory

Of a small library

The photograph of a deceased grandfather

And a wall

As long as there are Arabic words in my homeland

And popular songs

As long as I have my eyes

As long as I have my lips

And my hands

As long as I have myself

I declare it in the face of the enemies

I declare it a restless war

In the name of the free and honourable

Workers, students, poets

I declare it

As long as I have myself

And I will have myself

My words will remain

Bread and a weapon

In the hands of the revolutionaries.

3. "Gaza" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2021)

Inside the tin shacks

Near the sand and waves

Over the rocks and thorns

Between the dust and frenzy

The boy appeared, moulded With Henna and waves

Throwing his net into the sea

Bringing in fish and lanterns

Gaza is surrounded

With young men like the light

Throwing defeat behind them

Brother supporting brother

Beckoning your sea in the morning

Evening and night

Throwing over the wound its salt

And a sparrow with its wing

Wipes away its blood

Flutters over its wounds

Flying again

Oh wave within the sea

Bring me a candle

To light on the rocks

And dry away the tears.

4. "Salute to Gaza" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2019)

Salute to Gaza, salute, salute

Salute to all the sad eyes

Her tears overflowing with strength and pride

Salute to the people with wisdom and determination

Harvesting the Khuza'a plain

When repugnant monsters go to war

They bury martyrs everyday

Resilient in the face of all adversity with determination and pride

They learnt the lessons of history, that only iron can withstand iron

Salute to Gaza behind the borders

With patience and determination, erase the shackles

A child died under bombarded buildings

Of a suffering mother and a young man who wades

Fuelling his blood with force

And he presents above the eyes of the sky

And spread a curtain over the rubble

The people of Gaza shall lift the siege.

Salute, salute to the coast of Rafah

To Beit Lahiya and Deir al-Balah

To the orange fields in al-Maghazi

To the farmer of the land of the dawn

With steady steps in spite of the soldiers

To the fisherman who challenged the thunders

Salute to the people resisting with dignity

Offering us a lesson in the science of resilience.

5. "The Holy City" by The Daughters of Jerusalem from Jerusalem (2018)

Last night I had a vision,

A dream so strange and clear

I stood in old Jerusalem,

And heaven felt so near

I heard the children singing,

A song of peace they sang

A choir from every corner of

the world in answer rang

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

Lift up your gates, give birth

To freedom and justice

You, mother of peace on Earth

But then my dream turned sorrowful,

No distant echo rang

Hushed were the words of justice

The little children sang

The gates were closed, between the humble homes

Grey walls grew high

While shadows cast by weapons fell

Like crosses from the sky,

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

Lift up your gates, give birth

To freedom and justice

You, mother of peace on Earth

And once again the scene was changed

So unexpectedly

I saw the Holy City

Where everyone was free

I saw the rainbow's sign of old,

God's silent, peaceful guide

And all who would might enter,

And no one was denied

No need of checkpoints, walls or guards,

No need to flee or hide

It was the new Jerusalem

Where gates were open wide,

Where people from each faith on Earth

In peace lived side by side

Jerusalem! Jerusalem!

Lift up your gates and sing,

To God, Lord of justice!

Receive what peace may bring!

6. "Returning" by Nai Barghouti from Ramallah (2021)

If Jerusalem asks about her children

Tell her they in Sheikh Jarrah

And if Gaza asks about her dawn

Tell her no darkness ever lasted

Do not sleep mother

Your children are wide awake

With open hearts and light in their eyes

Do not worry mother

Your children are returning

Carrying determination and love

Carrying the resilience of the land

A homeland, a girl and a boy

Carrying roses and basil

Gundelia, Jasmine and Gardenia

Joy, wedding veils and gowns

Carrying the forthcoming wedding

And the home that remains

They are shielding, shielding

We are returning to build our homeland

Returning to open the gates

To cultivate, build and sing

In Haifa, Akka and Lydd

In Nablus, Jaffa and Jenin

And to the home that remains

They are returning, returning.

7. "To Our Homeland" by Lina Sleibi from Bethlehem (2022)

For our homeland

And it is the one near the word of God

A ceiling of clouds

And it is the one far from the adjectives of nouns

The map of absence

And it is the one as tiny as a sesame seed

A heavenly horizon

And a hidden identity

And it is the one as poor as a grouse's wings (wild chicken)

Holy books

And an identity wound

And it is the one surrounded with torn hills

The ambush of a new past

And it is a prize of war

The freedom to die

From longing and burning

In its bloodiest night

Is a jewel that glimmers from the far upon the far

Illuminates what's outside of it

As for us

Inside it

We suffocate more

To our homeland.

8. "I Love You, Palestine" by Lian Bazlamit from Ramallah (2013)

I swear on the life of your basil

And your forgotten stones

That I would die for you

And that you live in me

I cry tears of separation

I am yearning for the day of return

I am your longing and I am the one longing

I am the cry of a wounded people

You are a laugh in our stolen time (we live in times where everything is stolen, dark, not ours and you are the light, the laugh in all of this darkness surrounding us)

Smile and say no to tears

Palestine, oh Palestine

You are yesterday and tomorrow

You are the present and the memory

I carried you between myself

And my eyes and that look

I love you, Palestine

I breathe you in with dignity

And lived you with warmth (we live in cold times and Palestine gives us unique warmth)

I wrote you in songs

With letters of loyalty.

9. "For You, my Homeland" by Abeer Sansour from Bethlehem (2019)

For you, my homeland

I sing my song

And my small heart

Flies far away

Asking around, searching for a beautiful homeland

In the Mahdi street [in Bethlehem]

Our small house

Is inhabited by the lilies, the flowers and their fragrance

My childhood dreams are in your arms, dear mother

And my grandmother is telling us the best of stories

Oh Bethlehem, [sending you] my kiss

You are the star of the sky

Peace is born in you

Oh, cradle of prophets

You are the spring of my homeland

Oh, home to the generous

A bride in your dress

And you are the source of tenderness.

10. "Where Are the Millions" by Rahaf Shamaly from Gaza (2022)

Where are the millions?

Where are the Arab people?

Where is the Arab anger?

Where is the Arab blood?

Where is the Arab dignity?

God makes us stronger and greater than the Children of Zion

Who strangle, kill, bury

I will not let my land go

My red blood cultivates the greenery with the flavour of lemons

The fire of revolutions is not priced

We are the victors,

Stronger than the mountains,

More than grains of sand.

11. "Tell his Mother" a folklore song from Gaza (n.d.)

Tell his mother to rejoice and celebrate

To spray the pillows with perfume and Henna

Oh, dear house [*family*] rejoice and built it [*a house, family*]

The wedding is ours and the bride and groom are celebrating.

The house is my house and the homes are my homes

We have been engaged, oh enemy die.

Oh, Mariam's father, do not be grumpy.

Wipe your face and give her the groom

Oh, Mariam's father, do not be greedy.

Money is finite but kin *nasab [marrying into a family*] is fruitful.

Coloniality of Sexuality: Sexuality as a Tool of Oppression

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Abstract

This article sketches the ways in which sexuality has been used from 1918 to the beginning of the twenty-first century as a tool to oppress Palestinians. Specifically, I look at the criminalization of male-to-male sexual acts during the British Mandate period (1920-1948), the sexualization of the land of Palestine during early Zionist colonization during the 1920s and 1930s, and oppression of Palestinians by the State of Israel. To uncover how sexuality was used as a tool of oppression, I use a 'scavenging methodology' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016) drawing on a variety of sources and data and using several approaches, such as legal and historical analysis. My findings suggest that sexuality has played a role as a tool of oppression in all of these differing periods and conditions. However, I argue that a notable inversion has taken place when it comes to how sexuality has been used. During Mandate Palestine, it was the *homosexuality* of Palestinians that was used to Otherize, whereas it is the purported *homophobia* of Palestinians that is used by the contemporary Israeli state. Using McClintock's (1995) concept of anachronistic space, Stoler's (2002) connection between race and gender, and Lugones' (2010) concept of the coloniality of gender, this article argues that we should think of the oppression of Palestinians as working through a coloniality of *sexuality*, where not only embodied sexuality but also purported attitudes towards certain forms of sexuality are used as an Othering tool.

Keywords

Palestine, queerness, coloniality of sexuality, tools of oppression, colonialism

> *if my rights aren't debatable as a Palestinian in the Arab world it's [sic] debatable as a queer and if my rights aren't debatable as a queer in the west it's [sic] debatable as a Palestinian.*

Introduction

The statement in the epigraph was left on the online platform Queering the Map, which seeks to map out LGBTQ2IA+ experiences on a virtual world map (QM n.d.). Posting on Queering the Map is anonymous – we only know the location of this post: north of Nablus in the Occupied West Bank. The post points to a two-fold problem. On one side stands an oppressive homophobic Palestinian society (Atshan, 2020). On the other stands Israel and the West which claim to safeguard queer rights but nevertheless ignores those of Palestinians. This

configuration was not always the case. In nineteenth-century Orientalist thinking Arab sexuality was portrayed as inherently homoerotic (Darr, 2017) which is in direct opposition to how Arabs are portrayed today. In this paper, I investigate this inversion. More concretely, I seek to uncover how sexuality has been used as a tool of oppression and as a justification for this oppression in the context of Palestine from 1918 until the beginning of the twenty-first century.

My analysis starts with the British colonization of Palestine after the end of World War I. I show how the criminalization of 'sodomy' by the British authorities led to the creation of the homosexual Other, who, consequently, could be controlled by the colonial state. The criminalization of sodomy in this period is a potential driver of the internalization of homophobic beliefs, which is why it is important to take this history into account when analyzing contemporary cases where sexuality is used as a means of oppression. Secondly, I focus the Jewish pioneers, or *halutzim*, who came to Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century. Their motivation for settling in the Land of Israel was largely construed through a discourse of sexuality. The land was portrayed as 'feminine' and 'ready to be penetrated' by the masculine *halutzim*, justifying its colonization. This ethos was to set the tone during the later foundation of the State of Israel (Neumann, 2011). Analyzing contemporary Israeli occupation of Palestine therefore requires this background. Lastly, I look at how sexuality is employed as a justification for the subjugation of Palestinians by the State of Israel in the twenty-first century. I argue that although sexuality is still used as a justification for oppression, the relationship between sexuality and oppression has been inversed. Palestinians are no longer portrayed as sodomites but as homophobes. However, the logic, employing sexuality as a tool to Otherize the Palestinians, remained the same.

I primarily draw on Anne McClintock's (1995) concept of anachronistic space and the myth of the virgin/empty land to understand the logic behind these processes. Furthermore, I use Ann Laura Stoler's (2002) connection between race and gender to analyze boundaries created by and through sexuality. María Lugones' (2010) coloniality of gender helped me formulate how certain hierarchies of gender (or sexuality, as I will explain below) permeate over time. Combined, these theories not only enable me to make sense of the way sexuality was used as a tool of oppression in itself, but also to uncover its intersectional character together with racism. As will become clear, the Otherization of Palestinians through notions of sexuality had and has as a primary function to differentiate them *as Palestinians* and not as queers.

This essay contributes to the existing literature by drawing attention to the different ways sexuality can be employed to Otherize and oppress in the context of colonization. Most importantly, it points to the phenomenon that sexuality does not have to be embodied by the colonized themselves for sexuality to be used as a tool of oppression. Instead, as will become clear below, contemporary Israeli practices of Otherizing rely on portraying Palestinians as inherently opposed to homosexuality, i.e. as homophobic. This helps us not only to understand the different ways Otherization happens but, more importantly, provides us with the understanding required to overcome oppression.

A brief discussion of the terms 'homosexuality' and 'queer' is required, as these are not necessarily applicable to various times and cultures. In the preface to *Islamicate Sexualities*, Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (2008) argue that the term "homosexuality" is loaded with cultural markers and is therefore inappropriate to use in historical contexts like the region of Palestine under Ottoman rule in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Instead, they argue that so-called 'Islamicate' sexual practices and discourses should be analyzed in a specific

context to avoid essentializing Islam (Babayan and Najmabadi, 2008). With this in mind, I have opted to adopt terms that were most often used in a particular historical timeframe. For example, when discussing the history of Mandate Palestine, I will primarily be using the morally loaded term "sodomy" and the more neutral term male-to-male sexual acts. When discussing contemporary Israel/Palestine, I have opted to use the term "queer" when discussing the Palestinian context as this is the term queer Palestinians use themselves.

Additionally, I have to note the marked absence of women, and particularly lesbians and other non-male queers, in my essay. The legal framework of Mandate Palestine around sodomy was largely limited to male-to-male sexual acts, and specifically to anal penetration (Darr, 2017). Female sexuality did play a role in the early colonization of Palestine by the *halutzim*, but only by sexualizing the land in a gendered way. The contemporary role of sexuality in the oppression of Palestinians is inversed meaning that it is not the sexuality of Palestinians, but rather their purported hostile attitudes towards homosexuality that is used as a tool for their oppression. Consequently, all Palestinian queers are rendered invisible, because a queer Palestinian can pose a threat to the Israeli narrative that portrays all Palestinians as inherently homophobic.

I am aware that such an omission can contribute to the already evident marginalization of non-male queer stories and voices in scientific literature. Therefore, I want to make explicit that the argument presented here, focusing on male homosexuality, is by far not the only story of homosexuality in Israel/Palestine that can be told. Contemporary organization such as Aswat, Al-Qaws, and Palestinians Queer for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions show that Palestinian queer life is not exclusively limited to men.

I start by discussing the employed method. I use a 'scavenging methodology' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016) drawing on a variety of sources and data and using several approaches, such as legal and historical analysis. The main motivator is the scarcity of resources on sexuality in Palestine and the way it has been used by both the British and Israeli colonizers. Not limiting myself to a single discipline or method allows for a more complete and accurate depiction of the use of sexuality as a tool of oppression. Next, I discuss three periods that saw this tool being employed. Firstly, I look at two court cases in British Mandate Palestine that show that the law criminalizing homosexuality was used to differentiate between Palestinians and non-Palestinian colonizers. Secondly, I examine the *halutzim*, early Zionist 'pioneers' who used the feminization and sexualization of the land of Palestine as a justification for its colonization. Thirdly, I discuss how sexuality has been used by the Israeli state in more contemporary times. I observe a inversion of the role of sexuality in the Otherization of Palestinians. Whereas in Mandate Palestine, the homosexuality of Palestinians was used as a tool to differentiate them, in contemporary Israel it is the purported homophobia of Palestinians that justifies their oppression and legitimizes the State of Israel.

On Method

This essay is supposed to be only *a* history of the oppression Palestinians have faced and are still facing. It is a history that focusses on sexuality in a broad sense, incorporating not only the presupposed sexuality of Palestinians as a nation during the Mandate era but also the sexualization of the land of Palestine during its initial colonization. Moreover, as will become clear sexuality plays a rather different role in Israel's oppression of Palestinians nowadays by marking them as 'homophobic.' What all of them have in common is the application of

sexuality as a tool to create the Palestinian as an Other. My account is therefore deeply intersectional. It is impossible to understand the oppression Palestinians have undergone without understanding the complex ways sexuality and race have been used by the British and the State of Israel together as mutually reinforcing. This essay takes an initial standpoint from the point of sexuality, focusing on its specific application. However, we must understand sexuality not as separate from the racism targeting Palestinians, but rather as mutually constitutive.

Sources on sexuality in Palestine and the way it is employed as a tool of oppression are scarce, especially the further back you go in history. Therefore, I employ what can be characterized as a 'scavenging methodology' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). Coming from Queer Theory, this methodology "uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13). Moreover, it explicitly refuses the "academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 13) to overcome the problem of scarce resources and data (Murphy & Lugg, 2016). I base my analysis primarily on legal cases, historical and social science literature, and queer theory, which is aided by additional snippets from newspapers, personal experience of queer Palestinians, and statements by Israeli colonizers. The totality of different sources and approaches enables me to present a story of sexuality as a tool of oppression in historical and contemporary Palestine.

However, it must be noted that the argument presented here is all but generalizable. As notes earlier, this is a history – not the history – of oppression of Palestinians. Firstly, it is limited in scope of the oppression analyzed. I focus on sexuality, how it is used as a tool of oppression, and how it intersects with racial Othering. Additionally, although sexuality has been used as a means to oppress both in colonial and non-colonial settings throughout history, the argument presented here is specific to the context of Israel/Palestine. Secondly, my argument is limited by the lack of sources and data. Especially for the Mandate period, it is impossible to ascertain whether sexuality was consistently used as a tool of oppression and Othering or that it was limited to a handful of events. Nevertheless, it is still possible to show that some instances did occur and, moreover, that sexuality as a tool of oppression had many different facets throughout the history of Palestine, not only limited to its people but also applied to the land.

The British and Mandate Palestine

Palestine under Ottoman Rule

The British rule over Mandate Palestine from 1918 until 1948 saw fundamental changes to the legal framework surrounding male-to-male sexual acts. Before 1918, the region of Palestine was under the Ottoman Empire and followed the Ottoman Penal Code (OPC) of 1858. This Code did not criminalize male-to-male sexual acts specifically and referred to 'undesirable' sexual acts in gender-neutral terms only. Moreover, as the OCP was based on the Code Napoléon, undesirable sexual acts did not refer to consensual same-sex activity (Darr, 2017).

However, it is incorrect to state that male-to-male sexual activity was entirely decriminalized under Ottoman rule. As Elif Ceylan Ozsoy (2021) observes, the whole concept of decriminalization is inherently Western in origin. Namely, the OPC of 1858 criminalized "the abominable act publicly contrary to modesty and sense of shame", which was to be punished by three months to one year in prison and a monetary fine. Male-to-male sexual acts and male-to-male love were, therefore, only partially decriminalized in Ottoman Palestine. Decriminalization in

this context entails the "legalization of private same-sex activities" (Ozsoy. 2021, p. 1984). To say that the OPC accepted and tolerated male-to-male sexual acts is therefore not entirely true. However, what I will show next is that changes to the penal code in Palestine under British rule created a much harsher environment for people engaged in male-to-male sexual acts.

Mandate Palestine

After World War I, the Ottoman lands in the Levant were divided by the Allied countries. France took mandate over the Syrian region (now Syria and Lebanon), while the region of Palestine was mandated to Great Britain. The much-anticipated national independence among former Ottoman subjects was thereby squashed (Albright et al., 2023). Although Palestine was officially defined as a mandate supervised by the League of Nations, the British maintained *de facto* rule through military, political, legal, and administrative means (Darr, 2017).

The British largely upheld the Ottoman court system. But when it came to what they viewed as "sodomy," sweeping legal changes were made. The first major change was the gendering of sexual offenses in 1927 (Darr, 2017). As noted earlier, the OPC of 1858 did not use any gendered language. However, the British viewed the sexual offense of "rape" as "unlawful sexual intercourse with a female" which required vaginal penetration (Darr, 2017, p. 241). The sexual offense of "sodomy" criminalized anal penetration of any person. The category of rape was, therefore, exclusively limited to nonconsensual acts against women, whereas sodomy targeted, but was not limited to, men.

The second major change was the conflation of consensual and non-consensual male-to-male sexual acts when consensual male-to-male sexual acts were wholly outlawed in 1936 (Darr, 2017). Any male-to-male sex was then deemed illegal, regardless of consent. It was defined as "against the order of nature" and thereby not merely seen as an act but as a "category of personality" (Darr, 2017, p. 242). Men who had sex with men were no longer seen as just that but were classified as "homosexuals" in the eyes of the British colonial legal system. Moreover, by conflating consensual and nonconsensual homosexual acts, people engaged in male-to-male sexual acts were not only 'doing wrong,' they were inherently wrong.

The basis for the depiction of homosexuals as morally deprived went further than the identification of the person with the act. Section 152(2) of the Criminal Code Ordinance (CCO) of 1936 puts sexual acts "against the order of nature" in the same category as bestiality (High Commissioner for Palestine, 1936, p. 329). In this way, homosexuals were reduced to lesser-than-human by being equated to animals. Moreover, the British authority saw "sodomy" as a "prevalent depravity among the local population" (Darr, 2017, p. 247), thereby not only dehumanizing specific Palestinians but dehumanizing the entire population.

This logic follows the wider logic of coloniality of power and coloniality of gender. Introduced by Aníbal Quijano (2000, p. 218), coloniality of power refers to the "new pattern of world power that was based on the idea of 'race'." María Lugones (2010) adds to this by not only including the classification of people in terms of race but also in terms of gender. Moreover, she emphasizes that this classification entails a "process of active reduction of people" (Lugones, 2010, p. 745). Colonized people were subjected to strict European ideas of strict gender binaries, which served as a tool for their dehumanization. Indigenous women were codified as female, but lacked 'European femininity,' whereas men were feminized due to their inability to conform to the ideal of the White European Man.

Combining colonial racial and gender hierarchies, Ann Laura Stoler (2002, p. 75) argues that colonizers distinguished themselves from the colonized "through notions of racial difference constructed in gender terms." By imposing strict but differing gender norms on colonized subjects, on the one hand, and on Europeans in the colonies, on the other, clear boundaries could be drawn between the two. What we see in Mandate Palestine, however, is not just a race-gender distinction between colonizer and colonized but a race-*sexuality* distinction. Insofar as gender and sexuality can be separated ('sodomy' was *de jure* a gender-neutral offense) it would be more accurate to talk of a coloniality of sexuality instead of a coloniality of gender. This distinction becomes even more salient given how sexuality was (and is) used by the contemporary Israeli state. No longer was the sexuality (or gender) of Palestinians themselves a way to differentiate them from the colonizers, but rather it was the purported hostility towards certain forms of sexuality (homosexuality) that became the grounds for their Otherization. In other words, Palestinians under Israeli occupation were (and are) Otherized because of their purported attitudes towards (homo)sexuality, not their own sexuality. More on this below.

The suppression of male-to-male sexual acts in Palestine was also inherently linked to colonial racial hierarchies. In line with more general Orientalist thought, the British saw Palestine as a place of homoerotic degeneracy (Darr, 2017). In their colonial, 'civilizing' mindset, the British saw it necessary to regulate these depravities. Orna Alyagon Darr (2017, p. 247) argues that the British actually "expressly aimed to obliterate sodomy." However, following Stoler's (2002) notion of gender (and sexual) norms as a tool for creating boundaries and Lugones' (2010) conceptualization of coloniality as a dehumanizing process, the criminalization of homosexual acts, which were seen as inherent to Palestine, could also have served as a tool for demarcation and oppression of the colonial subject. I now turn to two court cases that show this logic in action. Namely, that the criminalization of homosexuality was selectively applied to Palestinians only and not to European colonizers.

Two court cases

With regards to social attitudes, it is impossible to fully discuss all the different opinions and views towards male-to-male sexual acts. Risking essentializing Palestinians in the same line they were essentialized by the British, I do not wish to argue for a general view held by all Palestinians under Ottoman or British rule. There was not one view. Instead, I want to counter and bring nuance to the essentializing narrative by giving two examples using court cases in Mandate Palestine.

In chapter two of *Plausible Crime Stories. The Legal History of Sexual Offences in Mandate Palestine*, Darr (2018) discusses the 'confession' of Mustafa Naif who was suspected of having had sex with another man in June 1943. Naif stated quite openly the love he felt for his "friend and mate" and how they had "sexual intercourse […] with […] consent and free will" (Darr, 2018, p. 30). It seems that, initially, Naif must have felt comfortable sharing his love and affection for another man without fearing repercussions, whether those be from the court or from society.

However, Naif quickly realized that being candid with the Mandate court could lead to severe punishment of him and his friend. Such "unnatural offences" could lead to a ten-year prison sentence (Darr, 2018, p. 30). Consequently, he retracted his initial statement and denied ever having sexual relations with another man. Darr (2018) interprets this as another act of love as both Naif and his friend were acquitted of having committed "unnatural offences" due to their contradictory accounts.

A similar story concerns Carlo Rykante, a sergeant from the Italian division, and Mohammad, who were caught having sexual intercourse. Again, Rykante was quite candid about their attraction to each other (Darr, 2018). But during the trial, Rykante learned of the British position towards male-to-male sexual acts and had retracted his initial statement. What is even more interesting in this case is that only Mohammad was charged, with Rykante merely testifying as a witness (Darr, 2018). Drawing on Stoler (2002) discussed above, it can be argued that the British Mandate authorities made a very clear distinction between Palestinian and non-Palestinian based on perceived racial differences. The result of this distinction was a very strict imposition of sexual norms on the colonized subject but not on the colonizer.

Jewish settlements and Israeli Occupation

Heteronormative conquest

Sexuality was also tied to some of the early Jewish settlements in Mandate Palestine. In *Land and Desire in Early Zionism*, Boaz Neumann (2011, p. 1) focuses on the *halutzim* ('pioneers') and their "basic *desire* for the Land [of Israel]." The *halutzim*, in the context of Zionism, was a term first coined in 1919 to describe a specific type of settler who 'conquers;' not by appropriation or killing, but through working the land itself. During the 1920s, notions of defense were also added to its description (Neumann, 2011).

However, in the mid-1930s, the ethos of the *halutzim* became more aggressive. Not only were they thought of as guarding and defending the land that they worked on and therefore had made their own, but they were also perceived as warriors defending their nation (Neumann, 2011). Fighting for the land became as important as developing it. Moreover, Neumann (2011, p. 40) argues that the *halutzim* not merely needed the land, they felt a "desire for the Land [of Israel] as a desire for the Land's desire for them." "Pioneers came on aliya [settlement in the Land of Israel] because it "awaited" them" (Neumann, 2011, p. 41). This desire could also culminate in physical or erotic expressions towards the land. Some *halutzim* would kiss the land or penetrate it with their fingers trying to hold it (Neumann, 2011). A reoccurring Zionist narrative is exactly this falling in love with the land, romantically and sometimes sexually. Writing about the land, pioneers would always describe the Land of Israel in female terms, such as 'virgin' (Neumann, 2011), which is a reoccurring colonial trope linking (hetero)sexuality to oppression and conquest.

Zionist Jews, of course, had religious reasons for their desire for the Land of Israel. However, the desire for and, especially, the feminization of land has a longer history rooted in colonialism. Anne McClintock (1995, p. 30) connects this feminization, or "myth of the virgin land", to the "myth of the empty land." She argues that in patriarchal narratives, "to be virgin is to be empty of desire and void of sexual agency" (McClintock, 1995, p. 30). So, if a land is designated as "virgin" it is also empty, which means it is open for penetration and appropriation.

However, the Land of Israel was not empty. Palestinians and other peoples had been living there for millennia. A colonial 'solution' to this problem was to place the indigenous population into, what McClintock (1995) calls, anachronistic space. This trope places colonized people outside of history in a "permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans" (McClintock, 1995, p. 30). In the context of Palestine, the indigenous population was put in this anterior space where time had stood still, whilst the *halutzim* pioneers would fulfil the Land's desire to be developed and to be penetrated (Neumann, 2011).

This othering can clearly be distinguished in David Ben-Gurion's writing, who would later be the primary founder of the state of Israel. In 1915, he wrote: "*The Land of Israel is now a desolate and half-ruined land – and the small Arab element is incapable of reviving it and rebuilding its ruins*" (quoted in Neumann, 2011, p. 84; italics original). The creation of a Jewish nation, on the other hand, was, according to Ben-Gurion, a "*human cultural enterprise of great value,* a civilizing enterprise" (quoted in Neumann, 2011, p. 84; italics original). In this view, Palestinians lived in their own, static time from where they were incapable of building on and improving the land whilst the Jewish settlers were bringers of progress.

The othering of the Palestinian population also went further than merely the accusation of primitivism. The *halutzim* saw the Land of Israel as a virgin. The Palestinians, however, refused to penetrate it and therefore, in the eyes of the *halutzim*, did not love it. This perceived apathy towards the land, in turn, intensified *halutzim* desire (Neumann, p. 2011). The sexualization and feminization of the land served as a justification to settle the land and disregard the Arab population.

Although the *halutzim* were a relatively small minority of all Jewish settlers that emigrated to Palestine, they "set the tone for the Jewish community in Palestine and thus for the future state of Israel" (Neumann, 2011, p. 7). Neumann (2011, p. 7) further states that "[w]hen we Israeli Jews of today gaze at the Land of Israel, we see it largely through the eyes of the *halutzim*. When we feel it with our bodies and souls, we sense it largely through their sensibilities." These "hetero-conquest foundations of the Zionist project in Palestine" form the groundwork of Israel's contemporary homonationalism and the framing of Israel as a "gay haven" (Alqaisiya, 2020, p. 98). Therefore, it is essential to keep the *halutzim* ethos in mind when analyzing these processes and concepts.

Homonationalism

With the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, the aggressive *halutzim* rhetoric was put into practice. It is estimated that between December 1947 and January 1949, more than 600,000 of the total 1.4 million indigenous Palestinians were displaced as a consequence of war (Albright et al., 2023). Most refugees fled to the West Bank, while others moved to Gaza. Around 150,000 Palestinians remained in Israel and by 1952 they represented roughly the same proportion of the Jewish Israeli population (Albright et al., 2023).

In the early 1990s, the start of the Oslo peace process was cause for optimism that there would finally come a resolution to the so-called 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict'. However, the 1993 Oslo Accords only further entrenched and created a legal framework facilitating segregated living and working zones, surveillance systems and overall contact between Israelis and Palestinians (Puar, 2011). At the same time, the 1990s were also a period of expansion of gay rights in Israel, for example greater protection against workplace discrimination and inclusion in the Israeli Defense Forces.

Jasbir Puar (2017, p. 2) argues that the "national recognition and inclusion" of gay and queer people in Israel was "contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary." This relationship between queer rights on the one hand and discriminatory policies on the other is what she called "homonationalism" (Puar, 2011, p. 136). Homonationalism plays a big role in Israel's public relations campaign, called "Brand Israel", that seeks to transform Israel's image on the international stage from a settler-colonial nation to a beacon of democratic liberalism (Puar, 2011).

Pinkwashing

The Brand Israel campaign was launched in 2005 with the explicit aim to rebrand Israel as "relevant and modern rather than only as a place of fighting and religion" (Popper, 2005). Israel's international image was among one of the world's worst in this period, with the survey of the Nation Brand Index from 2006 describing Israel as "the worst brand in the world" (Crilley and Manor, 2020, p. 143). Rebranding Israel would require enormous efforts.

The early stages of the campaign involved portraying Israel "as a productive, vibrant and cutting-edge culture" (Rosenblatt, 2005). However, in 2006, sexuality also became "part of [Israel's Foreign Ministry's] campaigns to break apart the negative stereotypes many liberal Americans and Europeans have of Israel" (Lazaroff, 2006). This campaign continued and in 2009 Israel announced the goal of promoting itself as a "world gay destination" (Schulman, 2012, p. 181). In 2010, around 88 million dollars was spent on branding Tel Aviv as a gay vacation destination and in April of the same year, the Brand Israel campaign organized Israeli Pride Month in San Francisco. In 2011, another 94 million dollars was spent to promote gay tourism to Tel Aviv (Schulman, 2012).

But, as alluded to earlier, this promotion of Israel as a gay haven does not stand on its own. Israel's progressive gay rights always stand in contrast to the Arab countries surrounding it (Alqaisiya, p. 2020). Moreover, the promotion of Israel's tolerance of and openness to gay rights diverts attention away from violations of Palestinian human rights, a practice known as "pinkwashing" (Atshan, 2020, p. 3).

Sa'ed Atshan (2020) has conceptualized the logic of Israel's pinkwashing as constitutive of four elements. First, it emphasizes queer Israeli agency whilst ignoring Israeli homophobia. Second, it emphasizes Palestinian homophobia whilst ignoring queer Palestinian agency. Third, it frames this contrast as a "civilizational discourse aimed at highlighting the superior humanity of [Israelis] and the subhumanity of [Palestinians]" (Atshan, 2020, p. 72). Fourth, Israeli pinkwashing represents Israel as a "gay haven" to attract tourism and solidarity.

What we can observe here, in terms of coloniality of sexuality, is that an inversion has taken place. Palestinians are no longer Otherized because of their homosexuality. Instead, they are Otherized because they are purported to be ultimately opposed to homosexuality. Sexuality is still used as a tool to differentiate, but the content of this sexuality has been changed. Ultimately, what does remain the same is the colonial logic that "Israel is civilised, Palestinians are barbaric" (Puar, 2011, p. 138). This barbarism is then used as a tool to rationalize the oppression of Palestinians (Atshan, 2020). The image of the Palestinian is still based on (sexual) backwardness, but what this backwardness entails has been changed to fulfil what is most important: the continuation of an Other and its subjugation.

Ultimately, the subjugation of Palestinians is not based on perceived sexual, but 'racial' differences. Going back to Stoler (2002), sexuality is again used to mark a boundary between 'races', or more concretely between Israelis and Palestinians. These differences are constructed through the Othering that emerges when the State of Israel designates itself as a guarding of gay rights whilst depicting Palestinians as the antithesis to these rights. That Israel's strategy is ultimately a way of differentiating itself is also supported by how inconsistently it fulfils this guardian role.

An example of this inconsistency is Israel's self-portrayal as a "gay haven," which is part of Israel's branding campaign (Alqaisiya, 2018). However, there have been numerous instances where gay Palestinian men from the

West Bank managed to flee from their abusive families to Israel, but, after having arrived there, did not receive asylum or any other promise for security (Atshan, 2020). Queer Palestinian activists joke that there is no "pink gate" through the Israeli wall, nor a "pink line" at Israeli checkpoints (Atshan, 2020, pp. 37-38). If Israel was truly a "gay haven" all gay people should have been welcomed. But in the end, queer Palestinians are treated the same as straight Palestinians, as colonial subjects.

Between hetero- and homonormative

The ones most marginalized by the occupation of Palestine by the State of Israel are the queer Palestinians. On the one hand, they face oppression under the Israeli regime. On the other, they face homophobia internal to Palestinian society. Atshan (2020, p. 10) calls this dual system of oppression "ethnoheteronormativity." This system erases both the experience and struggles of being queer in a heteronormative society and the difficulties faced by the Israeli occupation.

On one side, queer Zionist activists acknowledge (often problematically, as shown above) the homophobia in Palestinian society but refuse to recognize Israeli oppression. On the other side, the terms used by queer Palestinians to critique homophobia (like "gay" and "lesbian") are largely seen as 'Western colonial imports' in heteronormative Palestinian society (Atshan, 2020). Echoing Spivak (1998), their oppression in a heteronormative society is articulated by queer activists in Israel and the West; their oppression under Israeli occupation and genocide is articulated by Palestinian nationalists. Queer Palestinians themselves cannot speak.

This does not mean that queer Palestinian activists have not tried and succeeded to get their voices heard entirely. In 2010, two major queer Palestinian organizations Aswat (Palestinian Gay Women) and Al-Qaws (Rainbow) launched the initiative Palestinians Queers for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (PQBDS). This initiative sought to make queer Palestinian voices heard globally and challenged the homophobic stereotypes in Palestine (Atshan, 2020). One year later, the initiative Pinkwatching Israel was launching, which aimed to debunk Israel's pinkwashing activities.

Conclusion

To conclude, it has become clear that sexuality has been used as a tool of oppression throughout the history of Palestine and Palestinians from the British Mandate to contemporary Israel. During British colonization, the Palestinian population was seen as sodomites. The criminalization of sodomy served to demarcate a boundary between colonizers and colonized, between the British and the Palestinians. Consequently, (perceived) sexuality was used as a tool of colonial oppression. The *halutzim* employed sexuality in a different way. Their sexualization of the land gave them the licence to penetrate and appropriate this land. At the same time, the perceived "impotence" of the indigenous Palestinian population served, again, as a tool to differentiate them from the Jewish settlers. Moreover, it justified and legitimized the *halutzim* settlements to themselves and the colonial West. In contemporary times, sexual stereotypes of Palestinians have been inverted. Instead of being viewed as sodomites, Palestinians are now blanketly portrayed as homophobic. But although the content of sexuality has changed, the oppressive logic has remained the same. Perceived differences in sexuality and attitudes towards sexuality serve

to differentiate and to justify violence. And as long as this logic is in place, it does not matter what the Palestinian does.

I have shied away from discussing actual homophobia in Palestinian society as I wanted to focus on the British and the State of Israel and how these actors in dominant positions of power use sexuality to create an Other in order to justify their oppression. Apart from the racist rhetoric employed by Israel, homophobia in Palestinian society is a real problem, with 95 percent of the population of the Palestinian Territories not finding homosexuality "acceptable" in 2019 (Atshan, 2020). In 2014, 'only' 43 percent of Israelis found homosexuality "morally unacceptable" (Atshan, 2020).

As I argue in this paper that neither homoeroticism nor homophobia is inherent to Palestine society (or any society for that matter), it would be interesting to have more research on the origins of homophobia in the Arab world. In the first section, I insinuated that the criminalization of sodomy by the British might have a role in this, as it is the exact same penal code from the British occupation that is still in force today in Gaza. I also showed that there was at least some tolerance toward (private) male-to-male sexual acts.

What is clear is that Israeli pinkwashing campaigns and its occupation of Palestine are not going to help queer Palestinians overcome homophobic oppression in their own society. In Sa'ed Atshan's (2020, p. 110) words: "[t]o help minimize the entrenchment of homophobia in Palestinian society, activists can simultaneously engage in naming homophobia, correcting stereotypes about LGBTQ people, challenging pinkwashing, openly identifying themselves as queer and their movement as a queer struggle, and introducing more positive representations of queer subjectivities into the public sphere."

Conflict of Interests

There are no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Saskia Bonjour and Atharv Dimann for sharing their insights on the politics of gender and sexuality in (post)colonial history, without which this paper would not have existed.

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A Psychoanalytic and Historical Account of the Zionist Psyche

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Abstract

This paper investigates how Zionist political commitment remains affectively compelling and morally resilient despite sustained exposure to Palestinian dispossession and mass violence. Rather than approaching Zionism only as a geopolitical strategy or settler-colonial formation, the analysis foregrounds its psychic and moral economy: the ways in which historical trauma, redemptive imaginaries, and defensive attachments shape political judgment. Drawing on psychoanalytic theory and critical political thought, the paper conceptualizes the "Zionist psyche" as a historically constituted mode of political self-understanding. It argues that unresolved legacies of Jewish persecution are mobilized to stabilize national identity while simultaneously narrowing the space for moral responsiveness. Within this configuration, Palestinian presence becomes intelligible primarily through threat, and violence is repeatedly authorized as a means of preserving coherence, sovereignty, and historical meaning. By situating this dynamic alongside settler-colonial analysis, the paper shows how psychoanalysis clarifies the affective and justificatory conditions that allow domination to persist even when its consequences are widely visible. The contribution lies in explaining not how violence is produced, but how it is continuously lived with, defended, and reaffirmed.

Keywords

Zionism, Palestine, psychoanalysis, violence, political identity

Introduction

Zionism is widely regarded as one of the most consequential nationalist movements of the twentieth century, achieving the establishment of a Jewish homeland after centuries of diaspora and persecution. This achievement, however, has unfolded alongside the sustained displacement and oppression of Palestinians, a reality whose urgency and visibility have intensified markedly since 2023.

This duality—the triumph of Zionism and the suffering of Palestinians—raises a perplexing question: how do Zionists remain so passionately blind to the moral and ethical wrongdoings of their movement? To critically examine Zionism, this paper posits that it is essential to engage with its internal logic and imaginative framework, understanding why it commands such passionate and seemingly unwavering allegiance. As Jacqueline Rose argues in *The Question of Zion* (2005, p. 13), dismissing Zionism outright is counterproductive and undermines the very critique it seeks to advance. This holds true on three levels: *politically*, dismissing Zionism's strengths risks

overlooking the sources of its enduring influence; *historically*, rejection without engagement fails to grapple with the complexities of Zionism's origins, development, and contemporary relevance; and *psychoanalytically*, direct attacks on Zionist identity often reinforce its psychological defenses, deepening resistance to critique.

In an era defined by the rise of digital media and globalization, where, for the first time in history, war crimes and genocides are broadcast live, Zionists continue to secure substantial support for their cause. That such support persists despite extensive documentation of genocide and war crimes (UNISPAL, 2025; UNOHCHR, 2025), and despite the apparent inability of the international community to meaningfully intervene, warrants sustained academic inquiry into the dynamics of power, narrative authority, and legitimacy in international relations. However, what is particularly intriguing here is the question of how Zionists justify Israel and its actions, even in the context of ongoing, overt genocidal violence in Gaza and the occupied territories beyond. Given the persistent failure of international relations frameworks to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this paper advances a psycho-political analysis of Zionism. Conventional approaches such as realism and liberalism tend to prioritize material power, security dilemmas, and institutional arrangements, while largely neglecting the emotional and unconscious dimensions of political attachment. Constructivist approaches have broadened attention to identity and norms, yet they often treat identity as a discursive product without fully addressing the psychic mechanisms through which identities are defended, stabilized, and rendered resistant to ethical challenge. As Mira Sucharov argues, psychoanalysis offers a valuable lens to complement these approaches, focusing on the role of unconscious desires, emotional legacies, and internal contradictions in driving both individual and collective behavior (Sucharov, 2005, p. 18).

Central to this analysis is the concept of the "Zionist psyche," used here in a strictly analytic and non-essentialist sense. The term does not refer to the psychology of individual Jews, Israelis, or Zionists, nor does it imply a timeless collective character. Rather, it names a historically produced and politically organized structure of subjectivity, constituted through shared narratives, affects, and defensive orientations. This psyche is reproduced through discourse, education, commemoration, and state practice, and becomes particularly salient in moments of perceived threat or moral accusation. It is within this terrain that justification operates.

The guiding research question of this paper is therefore deceptively simple: how does the Zionist psyche justify Israel's actions? To address this question, the paper explores several interrelated issues. How does Zionism repurpose messianic redemption, a concept deeply rooted in religious tradition, to legitimize its project as a secular nationalist movement? In what ways do unresolved Jewish traumas, particularly those stemming from exile, persecution, and the Holocaust, shape Zionist identity and contribute to moral blind spots? Finally, what material consequences follow from these contradictions, especially in Zionism's treatment of Palestinians and the perpetuation of cycles of violence?

The analysis proceeds in four sections. The first situates Zionism within the historical and theological context of Jewish trauma, examining how exile, persecution, and the Holocaust shaped the affective urgency of political Zionism. The second analyzes the emergence of political Zionism and its internal contradictions, with particular attention to the secular reinterpretation and militarization of messianic redemption. The third section employs psychoanalytic concepts, especially splitting and the divided subject, to examine how Zionism manages these contradictions and sustains moral certainty while disavowing violence. The final section considers the political

consequences of these mechanisms, showing how the externalization of threat and dependence on violence entrench instability and foreclose ethical reckoning.

This paper seeks to engage two key audiences. For readers who are broadly uncritical of Israel and Zionism, the analysis aims to expose the injustices and systemic violence produced through the justificatory mechanisms examined here, thereby challenging dominant narratives of moral righteousness. In developing this critique, I drew inspiration from a psychoanalytic insight articulated by Rose, namely that "the path to transformation lies first and foremost in knowing yourself" (Rose, 2005, p. xx). As Sucharov similarly argues, this approach is not merely diagnostic but also carries transformative potential. By confronting its internal contradictions and unacknowledged traumas, Zionism may open the possibility for ethical reckoning and renewal (Sucharov, 2005, p. 20).

At the same time, for readers who are already critical of Zionism, the paper offers an account of *how* and *why* Zionist justifications persist, illuminating the internal logic and affective investments that sustain them. This task is neither simple nor politically neutral. As Michael Rustin observes in relation to contemporary debates on Gaza, even the act of calling for contextual understanding has become grounds for denunciation, such that "the idea of seeking understanding was being attacked" (Rustin, 2024, p. 402). In highly polarized contexts, identities often internalize what Rustin calls "beliefs in the unqualified virtue of the collectives to which they belong," rendering ethical questioning "deeply threatening" rather than reflective (2024, p. 403). Therefore, I do not wish to underestimate the difficulty of holding critique and understanding together, as I insist on its necessity. As Rustin cautions, "to achieve a place for a psychoanalytic dimension in thinking about political issues calls for great patience and determination" (2024, p. 403). Yet without some capacity to understand how moral certainty is defended and sustained, critique risks hardening polarization rather than opening the conditions for ethical reckoning. Thus, in this paper, I proceed from the conviction that without such reckoning, no durable prospect of peace is conceivable.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is concerned with the problem of justification rather than the structure of domination itself. More specifically, it addresses how political identities sustain moral coherence and affective attachment in contexts where violence is visible, contested, and extensively documented. The analytic focus is not on explaining the operation of power or the mechanics of political violence, but on understanding the conditions under which such violence remains ethically intelligible and resistant to disruption for those who support or identify with it.

Psychoanalysis is employed here as an interpretive framework because it addresses dimensions of political behavior that remain largely invisible in conventional approaches to international relations. As Mira Sucharov argues, introducing psychoanalysis into IR can be understood as "the next logical step for a relatively young discipline that seeks to understand why political actors behave the way they do" (Sucharov, 2005, p.17). What psychoanalysis offers, she notes, is "a coherent theory of behavior incorporating three elements that have mostly been invisible in international relations theory: emotion, the unconscious, and the possibility for actors' own cognitive and emotional insight to be a source of behavior change" (Sucharov, 2005, p. 18). Rather than assuming that political identities are internally coherent, this framework foregrounds the persistence of dissonance between

action and self-understanding. As Sucharov (2005, p.19) explains, “the concept of the unconscious… can illuminate the question of why an individual experiences a sense of dissonance when her actions do not conform to her identity”. The analytic focus of this paper is therefore not on the resolution of ethical contradiction, but on the ways in which such contradiction generates an ongoing internal crisis that must be defensively managed in order to preserve moral self-certainty and political allegiance.

The psychoanalytic framework adopted in this paper draws on a limited set of concepts selected for their relevance to the management of ethical contradiction within political identities. These concepts are not introduced as exhaustive explanations, but as analytic tools that provide a vocabulary for examining how instability, guilt, and moral tension are organized and contained at the level of political subjectivity. Taken together, they enable an analysis of how violence can be both enacted and disavowed, and why ethical challenge is frequently experienced as existential threat rather than as grounds for reflection.

First, the paper draws on Melanie Klein’s concept of splitting, understood as a basic psychic strategy for coping with contradiction and anxiety (Klein, 1946). Klein theorized that the ego tends to fragment experience into “good” and “bad” objects as a way of managing anxiety, a configuration she described as the *paranoid–schizoid position*. This anxiety functions defensively, protecting the ego from what Klein conceptualized as the destructive force of the death drive (Walker & Loughran, 2020, p. 10). At its most elementary level, splitting thus describes the tendency to divide the world into morally “good” and “bad” parts in order to preserve psychic stability. For example, an individual may sustain a self-image of care or innocence by locating blame, danger, or wrongdoing exclusively in an external other, rather than confronting incompatible qualities within the self. When applied to collective or political identity, splitting refers to the organization of moral perception into rigid binaries that allow incompatible evaluations to coexist without being reconciled. In this paper, splitting serves as an analytic tool for examining how ethical conflict is contained rather than resolved, and how moral coherence is preserved even when actions generate profound contradiction.

Second, the analysis is informed by Jacques Lacan’s notion of the divided subject[1], which conceptualizes subjectivity as fundamentally non-coherent rather than internally unified (Lacan, 1964 [1998]). As Dylan Evans summarizes, for Lacan “the subject is fundamentally split, alienated from himself, and there is no escape from this division, no possibility of ‘wholeness’ or synthesis” (Evans, 1996, p. 9). In simple terms, the divided subject describes the condition in which a person can sincerely articulate a coherent story about who they are, what they value, or why they act, while remaining shaped by unresolved anxieties, losses, or desires that do not fit neatly into that narrative. Lacan explicitly rejects what Evans calls “the most cherished illusion of psychology,” namely “the unity of the subject,” insisting instead that the subject is “irremediably split or ‘barred’” (Evans, 1996, p. 156). As Lacan argues, “the relation of the subject to the Other is entirely produced in a process of gap,” such that the subject itself is constituted through division (Evans, 1996, p. 72; Lacan, Seminar XI). Applied at the level of political identity, this concept allows for an understanding of how stable narratives of moral purpose and legitimacy can be sustained alongside persistent unease, guilt, or tension. Political identities, from this perspective, are not internally consistent wholes but formations that depend on the ongoing management of contradiction. For the

[1] The prevalent term in the literature is "split subject," but to avoid potential confusion with the concept of "splitting," I will use the term "divided subject" for clarity.

purposes of this paper, the divided subject provides a framework for analyzing how political identities are actively maintained through defensive practices that hold contradiction in place, rather than resolving it.

Importantly, the psychoanalytic framework is introduced to engage an analytic problem that remains under-theorized within structural accounts of domination. Settler-colonial theory has been indispensable in explaining the material and demographic logics through which domination is produced and sustained, capturing how dispossession is normalized and how political projects orient themselves toward elimination and replacement (Veracini, 2015; Wolfe, 2006). Yet while such frameworks explain how domination operates and persists, they are less equipped to explain how it remains morally intelligible and affectively defensible for those who enact or support it, particularly under conditions of extensive visibility and critique. The psychoanalytic framework intervenes at this justificatory level, complementing structural diagnosis by examining the moral and affective labor through which domination is rendered livable.

The analytic focus of this paper is therefore not the structure of domination itself, but the resilience of its justification. This case is also analytically distinctive from many settler-colonial formations insofar as Zionist political identity is centrally structured by collective memories of persecution and genocide, rather than merely accompanied by narratives of vulnerability. Historical Jewish victimhood, culminating in the Holocaust, functions not as a secondary legitimating discourse but as a constitutive moral foundation of political self-understanding. This produces a distinctive paradox: a political project that enacts displacement and dehumanization while understanding itself as a necessary defense against precisely such forms of violence (against itself). Explaining how past victimhood becomes a resource for present justification requires an analytic lens attuned to contradiction, defense, and moral self-preservation, which is why a psychoanalytic framework is particularly valuable here.

Analysis

1. Historical Formation of the Zionist Psyche

1.1 Exodus, Redemption, and Theology of Exile

The story of Exodus and exile has deeply shaped Jewish cultural and spiritual identity, embedding itself into the collective memory and theological worldview of the Jewish people over millennia. More than a historical account, the Exodus serves as a spiritual archetype of redemption, resilience, and divine intervention. It reflects a central theme in Jewish theology—the recurring cycle of suffering, exile, and eventual deliverance through divine will. This narrative has profoundly influenced the Jewish perception of exile as both a punishment for sin and a divine test, with redemption symbolizing the ultimate restoration of the covenant with God (Shimon, 2019).

In Jewish religious thought, exile is understood not just as a historical experience but as a deeply rooted theological reality. The destruction of the First and Second Temples, followed by centuries of diaspora, solidified the concept of *galut* (exile) as a recurring, divinely ordained chapter in Jewish history. Rabbinic interpretations frame exile as a form of divine discipline—a process intended to purify the Jewish people and prepare them for ultimate redemption (Elior, 2004). This framing imbues the concept of return to Israel with a deeply spiritual significance. The land of Israel is not just a geographical homeland but a sacred space where divine promises are fulfilled, making the return a metaphysical act of restoring order to a fractured relationship with God.

At the heart of Jewish theology lies the belief in *messianic redemption*—a vision where a divinely chosen Messiah will guide the Jewish people back to Israel, restore their sovereignty, and bring about an era of universal peace and justice. This ideal is deeply intertwined with *apocalyptic thinking*. Apocalyptic thinking frames history as a cosmic struggle between good and evil, culminating in divine resolution. In Jewish tradition, this vision often includes the ingathering of exiles, the rebuilding of the Temple, and the establishment of divine justice (Marx, 2013). The apocalyptic framework provided a sense of hope amid suffering, casting historical traumas as preludes to an eventual divine fulfillment.

1.2 Pogroms, Anti-Semitism, and Political Urgency

As Rose puts it, "Zionism arises on the back of European anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and the pogroms of Eastern Europe on the other. As well as being fueled by the birth of nineteenth-century nationalism, the drive to Jewish self-determination must be understood as the response to that history" (Rose, 2005, p. 127). The trauma of pogroms in 19th century Eastern Europe left an indelible mark on Jewish communities and played a pivotal role in shaping early Zionist thought. In addition to the devastation of Jewish lives, the tenuous hope that assimilation or coexistence in the diaspora could provide lasting security was shattered by waves of anti-Semitic violence, particularly in the Russian Empire. Early Zionist leaders drew directly from the experience of these pogroms to articulate the urgency of their movement. Writers like Leo Pinsker, in his influential pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation* (1821-1891), described anti-semitism as a deep-seated, almost pathological condition in European societies, positing that the only remedy was the establishment of a Jewish homeland where Jews could take control of their destiny. Similarly, the advocacy of Theodor Herzl emerged against the backdrop of such violence, with Herzl seeing the pogroms as evidence of the failure of emancipation and the need for a national solution.

1.3 The Holocaust and the Demand for a "New Jew"

The Holocaust, as the most devastating chapter of Jewish suffering in modern history, holds a profoundly complex and emotional place in the Zionist psyche. It heightened the urgency for establishing a Jewish homeland, redefining Zionism as a moral imperative for survival. The collective grief of the Holocaust was intensified by feelings of shame and helplessness, as many saw the Holocaust as a grim symbol of Jewish vulnerability and passivity in the face of persecution. It was perceived by the Yishuv (the Jewish community in pre-state Palestine) as a profound affront, much like the pogroms that came before it (Rose, 2005, p. 137).

Jewish writers such as David Grossman and Sara Roy suggest that it is not solely the Holocaust itself but the shame surrounding it that profoundly distorts the nation's psyche (Rose 2005: 139). Grossman writes about the "*cruelty*" the Yishuv displayed toward Holocaust survivors, as though both the event and their survival were sources of collective shame (Grossman, 2003, p. 13). This discomfort was echoed decades earlier by Ben-Gurion, who, just before the outbreak of World War II, stated: "We are choking with shame about what is happening… We do not belong to that Jewish people. We do not want to be such Jews." (as cited in Segev, 2000, p. 395). The sentiment reflects a deeper historical pattern, as Bernard Lazare wrote to Theodor Herzl in 1899: "[W]e die from hiding our shames" (as cited in Wilson, 1978, p. 245). Sara Roy also poignantly reflects on her childhood in Israel, writing, "Most painful to me was the denigration of the Holocaust and prestate Jewish life by many of my Israeli friends. For them, these were times of shame, when Jews were weak and passive, inferior and unworthy, deserving not of our respect but of our disdain" (Roy, 2003, p. 206) The internal shame and pain associated with victimhood

fueled an unrelenting drive for sovereignty and survival, where acts of ruthlessness reflected the depth of this underlying trauma (Rose, 2005, p. 137).

As Jewish thinker David Hartman writes, “Many dreamed of a new Jew, a transformation of the Jewish psyche. The return to the land was envisioned not only in terms of physical safety but also as a healing process that would liberate Jews from the negative self-image they internalized during centuries of oppression and powerlessness” (Hartman, 2008). My analysis, therefore, focuses on the feelings of shame and guilt, particularly how the shame tied to Jewish persecution in Europe influenced the repurposing of messianic redemption narratives within political Zionism. In the next section, I explore how these narratives gave rise to contradictions in the Zionist psyche, leading to the construction of defense mechanisms that Zionism uses to justify itself.

2. Emergence of Political Zionism and Its Contradictions

2.1 Messianism and Political Zionism

Hartman explains, “The Exodus story served as a key paradigm of Jewish historical hope by emphasizing that despite the utter helplessness of the community, the Jewish people could rely on the redemptive power of God. Zionism taught that only if Jews were to take responsibility for their future would history change. This stood in sharp contrast to the Biblical belief that Jews were not the masters of their own history. (Hartman, 2008). For many ultra-Orthodox communities, this shift represented a break from traditional Jewish law and a form of sacrilege, as the state of Israel was established without divine intervention. To understand the ideological tensions within Zionism, it is crucial to examine the role of messianic redemption narratives and how their reinterpretation embeds contradictions into the Zionist project.

2.2 Religious Zionism and Divine Mediation

Messianism has consistently shaped and inspired the development of Zionism, casting its influence over the founding of the state of Israel (Rose, 2005, p. 8). Religious Zionism views the return to the Land of Israel as a fulfillment of divine prophecy and a step toward messianic redemption. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, a key figure, believed that even secular efforts to build the state were part of God’s plan for redemption (National Library of Israel, 2019). Within this strain of Zionism, The Messiah remained a key figure, and human actions were understood as being guided by divine intervention. Although Rabbi Kook's interpretation of messianism caused controversy within ultra-Orthodox groups and exposed yet another aspect of Zionism's contradictions, my analysis will concentrate on the contradictions found in secular Zionism, particularly in its rethinking of the messianic redemptive narrative.

2.3 Secular Zionism and the Militarization of Redemption

Secular Zionism reimagined messianic redemption by replacing divine intervention with human agency. The collective efforts of the Jewish people to establish a state became the ultimate redemptive act, aligning with modern nationalist ideals of self-determination and sovereignty. In this reinterpretation, nationalism became the "*new messiah*," with the state of Israel assuming the “*sacred aura*” once reserved for divine fulfillment (Rose, 2005, p. 8). Furthermore, this led to the militarization of redemption, where the strength of the Jewish state—demonstrated through military power and territorial expansion—became central to ensuring survival and achieving its

redemptive mission. During pivotal instances, often triggered by generational and political upheavals concerning the Arabs, Zionism abandoned the prospect of coexistence. Instead, it adopted a defensive posture that evolved into a more "*belligerent identity*", further entrenching militarization as part of its vision of redemption[2] (Rose, 2005, p. 147). Hartman argues that embedding messianism within the nation's political framework poses a significant threat to Israel (Hartman, 2000, p. xi). To ensure its survival, he argues, Israel must move away from redemptive messianic aspirations and adopt the pragmatic, incremental approach of political negotiation and compromise (Rose, 2005, p. 8).

Thus, redemption took on the character of historical revenge, aiming to reverse centuries of Jewish suffering and persecution. As Dan Bar-On draws on the writings of Yosef Brenner, Zionist thinkers reimagined Jewish identity by envisioning a "*new Jew*" with "*strong hands,*" to be a stark contrast to the "*weak hands*" they associated with the vulnerability of diaspora life (Bar-On, 2006, pp. 102–103). However, this shift created a paradox: the "strong hands of the new Jew" were now breaking the bones of Palestinians, who became stand-ins for the European persecutors of the Jewish past. The very mechanism (redemption) intended to heal its psyche, perpetuated the trauma it sought to resolve.

This dynamic left Zionism's future haunted by the unresolved traumas of its history. Jewish pain and humiliation, instead of being reconciled, were sublimated into the nation-building project (Rose, 2005, p. 130) and, as I will argue later, projected onto Palestinians. The secularization of messianic ideals created spiritual and cultural tensions within Zionism. Historically, Jewish thought emphasized humility, moral responsibility, and reliance on divine justice. As Rose (2005, p.70) draws from Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's suggestion, this created an identity crisis within the Zionist psyche, where the inability to integrate one's actions with one's moral identity mirrors the psychoanalytic failure to reconcile the self.

3. Psychoanalytic Interpretation

Thus far, I have argued that Jewish suffering was sublimated into the project of nation-building. I have also demonstrated how internal contradictions—reflecting anxieties which are rooted in feelings of fear, shame, and guilt—have made this psyche inherently unstable. The question that follows these assertions is, then: how has the Zionist project, despite these contradictions, remained so successful and attracted such strong support? To answer this question, which is key to my central research question, I will deploy the psychoanalytic concepts of splitting and the divided subject.

It is essential first, to conceptualize the psychoanalytic frameworks of splitting and the divided subject. Splitting, as described by Melanie Klein (1946) is a defense mechanism through which the psyche manages internal contradictions by dividing experiences or perceptions into binary opposites—good versus bad, self versus other. The divided subject, a central concept in Lacanian psychoanalysis, refers to the inherent tension within an

[2] One clear example of this is Plan Dalet, implemented by the Haganah in March 1948. Framed as a defensive strategy, its execution involved the occupation of villages, forced expulsions, and acts of violence such as the Deir Yassin massacre, contributing to the mass displacement of approximately 700,000 Palestinians during the Nakba. For more discussion on other instances, see (Khalidi, 1988; Morris, 2004; Pappé, 2006).

individual or collective identity that arises from unresolved conflicts between the conscious and unconscious mind (Lacan 1964 [1998]).

3.1 Splitting as a Defense Mechanism

Zionism's contradictions, particularly those that came about with the nationalist framing of redemption, introduced a profound split within its psyche. This split, as Edward Said notes[3] in *Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims*, manifests as "extraordinary unevenness between care for the Jews and almost total disregard for non-Jews" (Said, 1979a, p. 29). Said (1979a, pp. 30; 32) explains that the Zionist movement, while serving as an emancipatory project for Jews, has relied on a bifurcated design that prioritizes Jewish welfare at the expense of Palestinian existence. On one side lies Jewish self-love and joy, articulated in the devotion to the redemptive mission of building a Jewish homeland. On the other is the subjugation and colonization of Palestinians, framed as necessary for survival.

Rose expands on Said by describing splitting as delving into the "most resistant and self-sabotaging psychic territory," where a people can simultaneously exhibit "love and lethality" (Rose, 2007, p. 197) Splitting functions as a mechanism of validation for Zionism. By emphasizing the division between Jews and non-Jews, Zionism fortifies Jewish identity, elevating its achievements as acts of redemption and survival. However, this same process also justifies the exclusion and displacement of Palestinians, framing their resistance as a threat to the Jewish redemptive mission.

3.2 Fragile Certainty and the Work of Moral Self-Preservation

The final point I want to emphasize here is that the conscious defense mechanism of splitting is a response to the unconscious anxieties and contradictions in the Zionist psyche. What makes splitting particularly robust is its self-reinforcing nature. Each instance of opposition or resistance, whether from Palestinians or external critics, strengthens the binary framework. Instead of prompting introspection, these challenges are absorbed into the narrative of survival, further entrenching the division between self and other. It is my contention that the conscious narrative of liberation and survival in Zionism is deeply intertwined with an unconscious awareness of guilt and the recognition of violence against Palestinians. This unconscious guilt stems from Zionism's suppressed acknowledgment of its own historical traumas and anxieties, creating an internal dissonance. On the conscious level, the Zionist psyche emphasizes liberation and survival, cultivating a self-image of moral purpose and legitimacy. Yet, beneath this idealized perception, on the unconscious level, lies unresolved trauma and guilt that challenge the coherence of this narrative.

To manage this dissonance, the Zionist psyche externalizes its anxieties, framing Palestinians as existential threats and rationalizing violence against them as necessary for survival and redemption. This process not only preserves the narrative of moral righteousness but also deepens the psychological split between the "good" Jewish self and the "threatening" Palestinian other. The resulting divided subject, split both within its conscious self-image and by the tension between its conscious and unconscious dimensions, encapsulates Zionism's internal struggle to reconcile its redemptive mission with the ethical and psychological costs of its actions. To illustrate this claim, consider the use of humiliation as a deliberate weapon of war against Palestinians—a tactic that, while pervasive

[3] He uses the term "bifurcation", which Rose then advances into the psychoanalytic concept of splitting

throughout the history of the occupation, has reached unprecedented levels since Israel's intensified genocidal campaign began in 2023[4]. Humiliation has long been a defining feature of Palestinian existence under Israeli occupation, evident in daily indignities like invasive military checkpoints, land confiscations, and home demolitions (Lacey, 2011). In this way, the violence inflicted on Palestinians becomes both a reflection of unresolved internal tensions and an attempt to suppress the recognition of these suppressed feelings. In dialogue with Said, Rose writes, "[Zionists'] most exultant acts towards –and triumph over– indigenous people expose them to the dangers they most fear" (Rose, 2007, p. 197).

3.3 Avoidance of Self-Reflection

Thus, in its attempt to manage the dissonance within its divided subjectivity, splitting allows the Zionist psyche to sustain internal contradiction while foreclosing the possibility of self-reflection. This foreclosure is not incidental but necessary. As I have argued, the Zionist project emerges as a response to historical trauma saturated with anxiety, shame, and guilt, yet the political realization of its reparative fantasy –sovereignty and redemption secured through force– generates new ethical contradictions that threaten the coherence of Zionist identity itself. To reflect upon these contradictions would be to acknowledge not only political violence but the failure of the very project meant to restore moral dignity. Self-reflection thus becomes psychically intolerable, insofar as confronting moral contradiction would dissolve the justificatory ground that sustains Israel's capacity to frame its genocidal violence as necessary, defensive, and morally coherent.

In *Towards a new psychoanalysis of violence in Israel–Palestine* (2025), Khan and Orang clarify why this impasse produces hardening in lieu of ethical reckoning. They argue that Israel's colonial formation generates a crisis that cannot be acknowledged without destabilizing the political subject, such that "the suicidal impulse begets a social order that ensures that opposition is directed against an externalised other rather than against itself" (Bronstein, 2016, cited in Khan & Orang, 2025, p. 11). Here, the "suicidal impulse" does not refer to literal self-destruction, but to the psychic danger posed by self-recognition. In this account, anxiety, guilt, and fear do not lead inward toward reflection but are structurally redirected outward. Taken together, this suggests that the Zionist psyche is not merely unstable, but unstable in a specific way: its political identity depends on the sustained erosion of its own ethical capacities. Because Zionism's coherence hinges on the refusal to recognize Palestinian humanity, it must also foreclose the forms of empathy, moral reflexivity, and ethical responsiveness that would make such recognition possible. The erosion of the Zionist psyche's humanity is therefore not a tragic by-product of crisis but a functional requirement of political coherence. These capacities – empathy, moral reflexivity, ethical responsiveness– must be progressively sacrificed precisely because they would enable self-implication.

Avoidance of self-reflection is further consolidated through the projection of internal contradiction onto Palestinians. As Khan and Orang argue, "both the Israeli repression and the internal punitive response to that repression are projected upon the Palestinians through extreme violence as a way to silence the screaming of the lack" (2025, p. 11). Violence thus functions not only as domination but as psychic anaesthesia, muting the conditions under which ethical awareness could emerge. It is in this sense that humanity—understood here as the capacity to recognize the other as morally significant—is not lost despite the crisis, but through the attempt to survive it. As Rose incisively observes, "So fervently has it nourished the discrimination between Jew and non-

[4] For more recent and escalated evidences on this, see (Abdu 2023; Arnout 2024)

Jew, the rationale of its dispossession of the Palestinian, that, while it may have seized the earth, it has also snatched the grounds for understanding from beneath its own feet" (Rose, 2007, p. 196). This psychic displacement prepares the ground for the political logic examined in the following section, where the externalization of internal contradiction is organized as security discourse, threat perception, and sustained violence against Palestinians.

4. Dependence on Violence and Its Political Consequences

4.1 Externalization of Threat

I have explained extensively that the redemptive mission of Zionism was framed as an act of historical revenge, seeking to transform the historical vulnerability of the Jewish people into strength and sovereignty. Netanyahu himself recognizes the tension inherent in this mission. In his chapter titled *The Question of Jewish Power*, he explicitly addresses this issue, writing: "for the Jews even reimplanting an understanding of the elementary need for military power entailed a bitter battle to overcome the entrenched view that Jews ought to have nothing to do with armies" (Netanyahu, 1993, p. 371). This transformation, as I have shown, was rooted in the belief that survival necessitated cruelty, and this cruelty would be enacted on the land of Palestine. In the words of the Zionist Organization in 1922[5], "We owe it to ourselves to be cruel… Let us once master the situation and we will be able to say: let the massacres happen, but we, we save the Yishuv before all else, we uphold its future because today it is in the Yishuv, and only there, that the destiny of our people is alive" (Bensoussan, 2002, p. 781).

Thus, the establishment of Israel as the embodiment of the redemptive mission created a dynamic where any resistance from the native Palestinian population was perceived as an existential threat—precisely the kind of threat from which Zionism drew its legitimacy. Buber anticipated this paradox in 1948, warning in *Zionism and 'Zionism'* that "unruliness directed outwards inevitably brings on unruliness directed inwards" (as cited in Rose, 2005, p. 71). Buber argued that injustice directed outward toward the Arab population would not only harm Israel—asking pointedly, "What nation will allow itself to be demoted from the position of majority to that of minority without a fight?"—but would also destabilize the internal cohesion of the Zionist project (Buber, 1944, as cited in Rose, 2005, p.71). Instead of ensuring its future, Israel's reliance on outward aggression, he warned, would sow the seeds of internal turmoil, ultimately eroding its ethical and moral foundations. His insight underscores an important point: criticizing Israel does not mean denying its genuine threats. However, violence, once directed outward, inevitably returns to haunt its source. In psychoanalytic terms, this reflects a failure of projection; by seeing its adversaries exclusively as external, Israel was inadvertently cultivating deep internal harm. As Edward Said writes in *The Question of Palestine*, "Everything that did stay to challenge Israel… was viewed not as something there, but as something outside Israel and Zionism bent on its destruction—from the outside" (Said, 1979b, p. 89).

4.2 Palestinians as the Constitutive "Other"

[5] Bensoussan references the *Minutes of the Zionist Organization, May 8, 1922*, held at the Zionist Central Archives in Jerusalem

What followed Buber's assertion, was of course, the casting of the Palestinians as the existential "Other" within their own lands. This dynamic was shaped by the splitting within the Zionist psyche, which prioritized "care for the Jew and a total disregard for the non-Jew" (Said ,1979a, p. 29). As Buber first predicted, and as Said later observed, this division rendered Israel's image overwhelmingly negative in the eyes of the Arab world, where it was seen as an entity designed primarily to exclude or dominate Palestinians (Said, 1979a, pp. 32–33). Consequently, once Palestinians were framed as existential threats to the Zionist project, acts of cruelty against them could be rationalized as historical necessities—indispensable to securing Jewish survival and fulfilling the redemptive vision embedded in Zionism.

Khan and Orang offer a psychoanalytic account that clarifies why this externalization becomes structurally necessary. Drawing on Sheehi, they argue that "the Palestinian object has been ingested into the Zionist self in order for it to be expelled in the service of creating the 'new Jew'" (Sheehi, 2018, p. 309, cited in Khan & Orang, 2025, p. 11). Here, "ingestion" refers to the way Palestinian presence –historical, material, and symbolic– is taken up internally as a reference point against which Zionist identity defines itself. Palestinians are thus not external from the outset; they are constitutive of the Zionist self-understanding, but only insofar as they can later be expelled.

This expulsion is central to the production of the "new Jew": sovereign, militarized, and no longer marked by the vulnerability associated with diasporic Jewish life. Yet, as Khan and Orang note, this figure is inherently unstable. The logic of the "new Jew" does not resolve historical trauma but intensifies it, such that "it is now Israel that lives in terror of the persecutory reality it has created, a reality that designates all possible forms of danger and harm as originating in the narrative of the single enemy– the Palestinian" (Khan & Orang, 2025, p. 11). In this configuration, diverse sources of anxiety– political, moral, and historical– are collapsed into a single external figure. Palestinians come to embody threat itself.

To further clarify the psychoanalytic dimension at work here, Khan and Orang cite Saketopolou, who draws on a tradition shaped by Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly as developed through Laplanche's account of constitutive incompleteness, alongside Glissant's notion of opacity (Khan & Orang, 2025, p. 12) Within this framework, what they describe as "lack" refers to the impossibility of complete coherence, mastery, or moral certainty (Saketopolou, 2023, p. 135). Psychoanalysis understands subjectivity as necessarily marked by such incompleteness, while Glissant emphasizes the ethical necessity of accepting what cannot be fully known or mastered. For Israel, however, this lack is not only the general human condition of vulnerability, but the specific historical and political fragility of its claim to coherent ethno-national identity—particularly in light of Palestinian indigeneity (Khan & Orang, 2025, p. 12).

Rather than confronting this fragility, the Zionist psyche externalizes it. As Khan and Orang argue, the defensive structure that emerges "is not only bound to expel every perceived threat or form of 'difference' but is also psychically compelled to create the purported threat and difference" (2025, p. 11). Threat is thus not simply perceived or reacted to, but actively produced. This helps explain why Palestinian resistance is interpreted not as a response to dispossession, but as confirmation of an ever-present danger, and why violence persists even when it undermines security or stability. In this way, the Palestinian "Other" becomes indispensable to the maintenance of Zionist identity, setting the conditions under which violence itself can be framed as necessary, defensive, and ultimately redemptive.

4.3 Violence as Redemptive Necessity

The externalization of threat analyzed in the preceding sections culminates in a political condition in which violence becomes the primary means through which Zionism sustains its redemptive promise. Once Palestinian presence is fixed as an existential danger and Zionist identity is stabilized through opposition to that danger, violence assumes a constitutive role. Redemption, which had historically been understood as a divine or spiritual horizon, is reconfigured as something that must be continually enacted through territorial expansion, military strength, and domination. Violence thus comes to function as proof of sovereignty, moral legitimacy, and historical survival.

In this configuration, violence is no longer oriented toward resolution. Rather than securing peace or eliminating threat, it operates as a repetitive political practice that temporarily reassures the Zionist subject of its coherence. Each assertion of force confirms the narrative of survival and necessity, even as it generates new conditions of instability and resistance. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle in which violence validates the conditions that make further violence appear unavoidable. What is sustained through this cycle is a fragile sense of moral and political certainty. Rose aptly points out in *The Question of Zion*, "when suffering becomes an identity, it has to turn cruel in order to be able to bear, or live with, itself (the cruel ironies of history take on another sense)" (Rose, 2005, p. 115).

Limitations, Discussion, and Future Directions

This paper has advanced a psycho-political analysis of Zionism by examining how historical trauma, redemptive narratives, and defensive psychic mechanisms converge to sustain moral certainty amid ongoing violence. While this framework yields important insights, it also raises theoretical and political limitations that warrant clarification.

A first potential objection is that this analysis risks re-centering the perpetrator by focusing on the Zionist psyche rather than foregrounding Palestinian suffering and resistance. This concern is especially salient given a long tradition of colonial critique that has privileged the subjectivity of the colonizer (Khan & Orang, 2025, p.2). The present focus, however, is not intended to displace Palestinian perspectives, but to interrogate the justificatory mechanisms through which their dispossession is rendered politically sustainable. Domination persists not only through force, but through moral narratives and affective investments that neutralize ethical challenge. Examining these mechanisms is therefore a necessary complement to, rather than a substitute for, centering Palestinian experiences.

This concern also intersects with Khan and Orang's critique of Jacqueline Rose (Khan & Orang, 2025, p.3). While Rose emphasizes contradiction, ambivalence, and self-sabotage within Zionist identity, Khan and Orang caution that such an emphasis risks framing the erosion of humanity as an inward psychic tragedy, rather than as a process materially enacted upon Palestinians. This paper seeks to mitigate that risk by showing that the foreclosure of empathy and ethical reflexivity within the Zionist psyche is inseparable from its outward realization in dispossession, dehumanization, and violence.

A second objection may hold that settler-colonial theory already accounts for Zionism's legitimacy and persistence, rendering psychoanalytic analysis unnecessary. This paper does not dispute the explanatory power of settler-colonial frameworks in identifying logics of elimination, replacement, and territorial permanence. Rather than revisiting those claims, the present analysis takes them as given and asks a subsequent question: why these logics continue to command moral allegiance and emotional investment among those who enact or support them, even when their consequences are widely documented and contested. Psychoanalysis is mobilized here not to replace structural accounts, but to clarify how ethical contradiction is lived with– how guilt, anxiety, and ambivalence are organized, displaced, and neutralized such that domination remains politically sustainable.

Relatedly, a third objection concerns the risk of psychologizing violence that is structurally produced by colonialism, militarism, and imperial power. Following Khan and Orang (2025, p.3), this paper treats psychic dynamics as socially overdetermined rather than individually produced. The "Zionist psyche" refers not to individual psychology, but to a historically constituted structure of political subjectivity shaped by institutions, narratives, and state practices. Psychoanalysis helps clarify the affective and moral conditions under which structural violence becomes necessary, legitimate, and self-reproducing.

Even if the analytic value of psycho-political interpretation is granted, a more troubling question remains. Rustin asks, "How, for example, might any interpretative intervention now be made in the context of the war in Gaza or Ukraine that any of the conflicting parties might listen to?" (Rustin, 2024, p. 403). The analysis advanced here suggests a sobering response: where political identity is sustained through the foreclosure of self-reflection and the externalization of contradiction, interpretative interventions are likely to be experienced not as invitations to understanding, but as existential threats. In such contexts, critique does not fail because it is incorrect, but because it collides with psychic and political structures that cannot accommodate ethical implication without destabilization.

This does not render interpretative work futile. Rather, it clarifies its limits. Psycho-political analysis may function less as a tool of immediate persuasion than as a diagnostic intervention. The analysis here aims to illuminate why appeals to law, evidence, or shared humanity so often fail, and why cycles of violence persist despite overwhelming critique.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the interpretive nature of psychoanalytic analysis. While this paper does not offer causal proof, it provides a framework for understanding patterns of justification and moral stabilization. Future research could empirically examine how these mechanisms manifest in political rhetoric, education, media discourse, and institutional practice. Such work would refine, challenge, or substantiate the claims advanced here.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper set out to examine why Zionist political identity remains so steadfast, even as the world bears witness to the devastation carried out under the banner of Jewish sovereignty. Inspired by the work of Said (1979a; 1979b) and Rose (2005), I approached Zionism not simply as a historically formed structure of attachment—one that must be understood from within if its justificatory power is to be meaningfully challenged.

Through a historical analysis informed by psychoanalytic insight, I traced Zionism from its roots in Jewish trauma to its contemporary political expression. I showed how theological narratives of exile and redemption, intensified by pogroms and the Holocaust, shaped Zionism's affective urgency and moral self-understanding. These histories were sublimated into the nation-building project, casting sovereignty as both survival and redemption. As the analysis demonstrated, this transformation embedded a profound paradox at the heart of Zionism: a project that seeks to heal historical vulnerability through force inevitably generates new ethical contradictions that threaten its own moral coherence.

The psychoanalytic framework developed in this paper clarified how these contradictions are managed rather than resolved. Drawing on concepts such as splitting and the divided subject, I argued that Zionism sustains moral certainty by externalizing threat and foreclosing self-reflection. Ethical challenge is repeatedly experienced not as an existential danger to political identity itself. In this sense, the persistence of justification rests on defensive mechanisms that render moral implication psychically intolerable. This deadlock results in rigidity rather than ethical reckoning, as Khan and Orang's intervention (2025) makes clearer: violence becomes a means of stabilizing coherence in the face of contradiction, even when it undermines the conditions of peace and survival.

The political consequence of this dynamic is the fixation of Palestinians as the constitutive "Other" through whom Zionist identity is secured. Acts of domination are thus continually reframed as defensive necessity, and violence comes to function not merely as an instrument of control but as a recurring reassurance of moral and political legitimacy. Far from resolving insecurity, this logic entrenches cycles of aggression and resistance, deepening both internal instability and external devastation.

I want to conclude where I began: with the insistence that critique requires understanding, even– and especially– where understanding is resisted. As Said writes in *Bases for Coexistence*, "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 co-exist as two communities of detached and uncommunicatingly separate suffering" (Said, 1997).

Conflict of Interests

The author discloses that they are a member of the editorial team of the *Amsterdam Journal of Social Sciences* (AJSS), which may constitute a potential conflict of interest in the publication process. To mitigate any risk of undue influence or power imbalance, the author fully complied with all journal policies and submission criteria. The manuscript was handled independently and subjected to AJSS's standard double-blind peer review procedure, with all editorial and evaluative decisions made without the author's involvement.

To ensure transparency, readers with concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest may contact the journal directly. Upon request, the journal can provide documentation of the peer review process associated with this submission. Inquiries may be directed to Luka Verhovnik at luka.verhovnik@student.uva.nl.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Adrian Kreutz, my instructor during the final year of my Bachelor's degree in Political Science at the University of Amsterdam, whose course on psychoanalytic political theory introduced me to a range of critical thought that fundamentally reshaped how I think about politics. It was through this course that I first encountered the work of Jacqueline Rose, which has remained central to my thinking ever since. The core argument of this paper was first developed in that course and has since been refined through sustained reflection. This article is the result of that ongoing intellectual engagement.

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Depoliticisation of Women's Violence in Armed Resistance: The Pathologisation, Eroticisation, and Aestheticisation of Leila Khaled in Contemporary Media

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Abstract

This paper explores how media depictions of women in armed resistance undermines women's political agency, specifically that of Leila Khaled, a Palestinian militant. Through engagement with various media platforms, and by situating the analysis within postcolonial and feminist international relations (IR) theory, the analysis highlights how representations of Leila Khaled alienate her from her political context. Rather than being recognised as a rational political actor engaged in anticolonial struggle, Khaled is consistently portrayed as a gendered aberration, reducing her to symbolic and consumable imagery, which reflects patriarchal and orientalist understandings of women's political violence. The paper contributes to the discipline by emphasising the role of media aesthetics in regard to political visibility, agency, and legitimacy; it argues for the importance of a decolonial feminist framework to adequately recognise women's roles in armed resistance as legitimate political actors rather than mere subjects of fascination.

Keywords

Palestine, Postcolonial feminism, Political agency, Political violence, Media representation, Resistance

Introduction

Political violence enacted by women[1] in armed resistance is often situated and understood beyond the confines of the gender binary, as their participation disrupts traditional rules of gender. Their active participation is perceived as an anomaly, even though, historically women have always partaken during conflict or war, be it the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Loken, 2021; Loken and Matfess, 2024). Despite this, women are still reduced to narratives that either villainise or sexualise them, disregarding them as political agents driven by ideological purpose.

This is exemplified through the media representations of Palestinian militant and member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, (PFLP) Leila Khaled (Makboul, 2005). She was involved in the hijackings of two planes and is also referred to as 'the poster girl of Palestinian militancy' (Makboul, 2005; Irving, n.d.). Born in April 1944, in Haifa, Palestine, she was forced to become a refugee at the mere age of four [alongside her family] (Makboul, 2005). Israeli settlers killed hundreds of Palestinians in her village of Deir Yassin on her fourth birthday, April 9, in what is known as the Nakba (Makboul, 2005). Her family, with the exception of her father, was forced to seek refuge in Lebanon, as did millions of Palestinians (Makboul, 2005). Today, she lives with her husband and two sons in Amman, Jordan, and remains one of the most recognisable revolutionaries in armed resistance (Makboul, 2005).

In this paper, I argue that media portrayals of Leila Khaled depoliticise her and her contributions to the liberation struggle by aestheticising, villainising, and sexualising her, which undermines women's political agency within armed resistance. The research discusses how such representations function discursively to decontextualise Leila Khaled's actions and reconfigure her violence within Orientalist and patriarchal frameworks. These depictions are fuelled by pathologising and paternalistic conceptions of what it is to 'be a woman'. This enables us to understand why women commit acts of violence in the context of security and women's violence. Hence, the guiding research question of this paper is: How do media portrayals of Leila Khaled distort understandings of women's political agency in armed resistance movements?

This research adopts a theoretical and interpretive approach by utilising a postcolonial feminist framework to analyse three artefacts across various mediums. These artefacts were selected as they are aesthetically and analytically relevant, serving as a symbolic intersection of visual art and society. To address the research question, I will first situate this study within postcolonial feminist theory in International Relations in order to contextualise media representations of Leila Khaled. Then, I conceptualise gender by utilising Judith Butler's (1988) notion that gender is not an essential, biological category, rather it is culturally and socially enforced; it is a performance. Further, I draw on several theorists to illustrate three dominant narratives surrounding women's political violence. In my methodology, I will focus on three such cases of media: the artwork, 'The Icon', by Amer Shomali, the song, 'Like Leila Khaled Said', written by Julian Cope, and an image of her wearing a keffiyeh over her head and holding a Kalashnikov, photographed by Eddie Adams. These media depictions will then be analysed through a feminist perspective by utilising theories and concepts, most notably by Loken (2021), Sjoberg and Gentry (2008; 2015),

[1] To clarify, I recognise gender is a social construct and upheld by presupposed patriarchal conventions of 'womanhood'. However, the nuance in existing literature regarding the binary confines and armed resistance/conflict is understudied and very limited. Therefore, I will be using the term, 'woman', for the sake of theoretical argumentation.

and Hiergeist and Schäfer (2024), amongst others. These frameworks are applied through an interpretive analysis to portray how women, such as Leila Khaled, are stripped of their political agency because their violence in armed resistance is pathologised due to patriarchal and orientalist pre-conceived notions of femininity and terrorism.

Literature Review

In the case of Leila Khaled, a Palestinian militant and symbol of resistance, this paper seeks to examine how media representations of her reproduce orientalist, patriarchal, and imperial regimes, which inadvertently distort perception and understanding of women's agency in armed conflict and resistance. This paper discusses how dominant (Western and Eurocentric) epistemologies in IR have historically obscured the political agency of non-Western women, especially those involved in armed resistance, and considers how media portrayals reinforce this marginalisation (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2023). The primary focus of this paper is to acknowledge and encourage how postcolonial feminist frameworks challenge Eurocentric narratives by prioritising the voices and experiences of non-Western women, rather than homogenising them.

For many decades, International Relations (IR) has privileged and reproduced rationalist, masculinist, state-centric and Eurocentric conceptions of the global order. Feminist IR theory emerged in response, seeking to expose and deconstruct these biases. However, feminist IR often reflects liberal Western values, thereby failing to adequately assess the [historical] material conditions of non-Western women (Agathangelou, 2017). Mainstream IR treats culture as static and distinct from imperialism, ignoring the inextricably linked histories of the West and the non-West, and its ramifications for contemporary cultural and political identities. This further marginalises non-Western women as either 'victims' or 'backward' and treating them as a monolith. Postcolonial feminist theory challenges both mainstream IR and Western feminist IR by highlighting the racialised, gendered, and colonial basis of imperial hierarchies and epistemics in the field; it seeks to portray how racialised 'subaltern' groups are feminised in opposition to a masculinised European identity.

Edward Said's (1978) seminal view of Orientalism provides a critique of how knowledge and power function in/under imperialism. He reveals how European imperialism established the 'Orient' as an ontologically and epistemologically different 'Other', to ensure occidental dominance by naturalising or essentialising the West's racial and cultural superiority over the 'Oriental' other (Said, 1978). This rationale has manifested in academic, cultural, and political discourses and has been critical in sustaining European imperial enterprises. This, in turn, has contributed to cultural symbols such as the veil becoming synonymous with "oppression" in Western discourse, reinforcing Orientalist biases. In contemporary media, these Orientalist epistemologies are reproduced through recurring tropes of dangerous threats, exoticism and fetishisation, and [moral] deviance. Said's (1978) work demonstrates how the production of information about non-Western people is intrinsically related to racialised and hierarchical power dynamics, an insight that continues to guide postcolonial critiques of IR, which offers a space to not only criticise hegemonic narratives, but also allows for resistance through counter-narratives and alternative knowledges by recognising the agency of marginalised people. This framework emphasises a dialectical relationship between academic theorising and politics to avoid reductive contradictions.

Postcolonial feminist theory builds upon these ideas to critique Western feminists' interactions and depictions of the 'Third World woman'; feminist theory is not a neutral endeavour, but rather a response to challenge

hegemonic discourses. Nonetheless, it is also rooted in power dynamics that can both resist and perpetuate dominant ideologies (Chowdhry and Nair, 2002; Mohanty, 1984). Western feminist writing on 'Third World women' often unintentionally reproduce imperial logics by universalising women's experiences and imposing Eurocentric standards on them (Mohanty, 2002). This disregards variations based on class, race, and locale, and homogenises them into a single category of 'Third World woman' in contrast to the 'liberated' Western woman. Mohanty (1984) criticises the 'Third World difference' as a paternalistic and essentialist frame that portrays 'Third World women' as backward, traditional, and lacking agency, which reiterates colonial notions of 'underdevelopment' and cultural inferiority. This limitation within Western feminist IR attempts to incorporate 'Third World women's' issues into otherwise Eurocentric feminist narratives. This reaffirms hierarchical binaries between the 'local' as the normative Western 'Self' and the 'global' as the non-Western 'Other' by reproducing Orientalist and colonial divisions (Chowdhry and Nair, 2002; Mohanty, 1984; Mohanty, 2002). This undermines the diverse nature of women's experiences in varying cultural and political circumstances, which allows for Western feminism to continue serving as the normative standard.

Postcolonial feminist IR academics, such as Chowdhry and Nair (2002) and Mohanty (1984; 2002), have challenged traditional IR theories for failing to adequately contextualise cultural practices or understand the differences in Western and non-Western histories. While postcolonial feminist IR has extensively critiqued representation, there is fewer contribution on how media aesthetics construct and reproduce perceptions of women's political violence and agency. Literature within postcolonial feminism on visual aesthetics and media representation highlights how political violence is not only enacted, but also reproduced and perpetuated by overwhelmingly gendered and racialised regimes of visibility. Bleiker and Hutchison's (2023) challenge the discipline's traditional approach by demonstrating how images and aesthetics play a role in shaping political meaning and public perception. They claim that there is no neutral depiction of global politics, as images and media narratives are inherently endowed with power, which actively impacts how agency, violence, resistance, and legitimacy are perceived (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2023). Likewise, Naaman (2007) depicts terrorism as a performative and mediated act, as the media is a participant in creating meaning. Female soldiers are typically portrayed through aestheticised tropes of sexuality, monstrosity, or moral and cultural deviance, rather than political ideology.

Gentry and Sjoberg (2008; 2015) indicate that these accounts use gendered archetypes of mothers, monsters, and whores to individualise and depoliticise women's violence. These depictions become more prevalent in contemporary mass media, where violence is made consumable through fetishisation and entertainment (Hiergeist and Schäfer, 2024). Visual aesthetics consequently function as a regulatory mechanism, controlling which forms of political violence are digestible and which are cast aside as aberrant and inconceivable. Representation, therefore, acts as a means for normalising gendered hierarchies and certain identities through repeated and controlled narratives, and tropes to foreclose recognition of women's agency. This provides an analytical bridge between feminist security studies and media studies, acknowledging representation as a site where power, gender, race, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated. This interdisciplinary lens is essential for understanding how figures, such as Leila Khaled, are rendered visible in ways that distort their political significance and revolutionary meaning. This research, therefore, contributes to postcolonial feminist international relations theory by emphasising the importance of media aesthetics in producing and exacerbating orientalist and patriarchal notions.

I argue for a renewed understanding of these frameworks in order to recognise representation as essential to political autonomy, power, and resistance.

Theoretical Framework

This research examines how women's political violence is constructed, particularly that of Leila Khaled. The paper adopts an interpretive approach to consider how representations operate discursively as it impedes on women's political agency, undermining their political violence. This theoretical framework utilises the works of Judith Butler (1988), Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry (2008; 2015; 2023), Morrissey (2003), Malver and Koureas (2014), and Dorit Naaman (2007) to critically engage with such narratives regarding the essentialist construction of gender, the notion of a 'double transgression' in relation to women's political agency in armed conflict, and the racialised eroticisation of non-Western women under the orientalist gaze. These frameworks are utilised to comprehend the intersecting dynamics between gender, race, power, and the racialised processes of media representation.

Judith Butler's (1988) theory of gender performativity serves as a conceptual foundation for understanding how women's political violence challenges normative gender norms. Butler (1988) argues that gender is a socially regulated performance rather than an innate, biologically determined characteristic; it is an identity that is constantly generated and established through repeated behaviours within a social context (Butler, 1988). This perspective challenges essentialist conceptions of femininity, which have historically represented women as submissive, nurturing, and fundamentally nonviolent. In terms of political violence and security, such assumptions render women's involvement in armed resistance invisible or unfathomable. Acts of violence committed by women, specifically in politics, are viewed not just as risks to national or global security, but also as transgressions of gender norms (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008). As a result, their participation in political violence is often erased, dismissed, or misunderstood; rather than seeing such actions as political, hegemonic narratives tend to portray them as anomalies, moral failings, or psychologically and sexually deviant (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008). Butler's (1988) work allows us to reframe women's violence not as a betrayal of femininity, but as a political intervention, one that disrupts patriarchal binaries and reinforces female agency.

Building on Butler's (1988) notion of gender, Sjoberg and Gentry (2008; 2015) theorise the "double transgression". According to them, women who engage in political violence challenge not only legal or moral norms, but they also violate deeply rooted ideas regarding femininity (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008, 2015, 2023). This double transgression often produces discomfort in the public eye, which is then understood through reductive narratives that pathologise the women involved. The media, in particular, tends to cast them in extreme terms, either as psychologically unstable or sexually deviant. Their political motivations are obscured and dismissed, regardless of whether they are portrayed as emotionally damaged, unfeminine, erotically obsessed and irrational, ultimately, the underlying effect is the same (Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008, 2015, 2023). These representations reduce these women to simplistic and patriarchal archetypes, which not only undermines their agency, but also disregards broader political issues, such as structural violence, occupation, and displacement.

Political agency is integral to feminist analyses of women's political violence, although it is often disregarded through gendered and racialised representational practices. According to Gentry and Sjoberg (2015), women who

commit violence are rarely regarded as political actors; instead, they are portrayed as women terrorists whose actions are rationalised and misrepresented through femininity rather than ideology. This denial of agency, according to Morrissey (2003), is enforced by repeated discursive methods which include vilification or monsterisation, mythification, and victimisation; this detaches women from their rational political subjectivity and agency, which misrepresents their true intent and renders their use of violence pathological or involuntary. While contemporary popular culture continually capitalises on the image of the armed woman as a symbol of empowerment, this visibility is conditional and depoliticised. Hiergeist and Schäfer (2024) depict how the "gunwoman" is absorbed by neoliberal feminist narratives that commend individual 'resistance' while dismissing structural inequality and collective struggle.

This aestheticisation of violent women emphasises how visual and cultural representations in media tend to render violence visible yet devoid of political meaning (Hiergeist and Schäfer, 2024; Bleiker and Hutchison, 2023). Aestheticisation refers to representational practices that prioritise notions of beauty, [heteronormative] desirability, and performativity and spectacle over political content, which risks alienating militant figures from their ideological intent and responsibility. The gun serves an ambivalent purpose; it indicates modernity and opposition while allowing for misogynistic and eroticised images of violent women as "occult" spectacles rather than political agents in their own regard (Morrissey, 2003; Hiergeist and Schäfer, 2024; Malver and Koureas 2014). This framework does not assume that aestheticisation is inherently depoliticisation; rather, it allows for a focus on the implications of aesthetic-driven framing, including its ambivalence.

This is further complicated when these women are racialised, especially within the Global South. Dorit Naaman (2007), in her analysis of images of Palestinian women fighters, illustrates how Arab or Muslim women are subjected to a particular kind of orientalist framing. Unlike Western female combatants, these women are simultaneously exoticised, hypersexualised, and dehumanised (Naaman, 2007). Their actions are rarely understood as rational or political, instead, they are often framed as manifestations of cultural backwardness or religious extremism (Naaman, 2007). These various forms of erasure through gendered essentialism, sexualised tropes, and racialisation and orientalism do not operate in isolation, rather, they work together to pathologise women, such as Leila Khaled (Naaman, 2007). When a woman from the Global South takes up arms, she not only transgresses gendered expectations but also disrupts political narratives on modernity, civilisation, and who is 'allowed' to resist (Naaman, 2007). In this way, Khaled becomes more than just a historical figure, she becomes a site of ideological struggle.

Methods[2]

This research paper adopts an interpretivist approach, grounded in postcolonial feminist perspectives. It is neither my aim nor my intention to provide an empirical assessment of media representations of Leila Khaled, but rather to examine the discourses that produce dominant assumptions on political violence perpetuated by women. This research offers an understanding of how women's political agency in visual and representational politics is constructed and contested in the public sphere through the depiction of Leila Khaled. Thereby, I analyse three

[2] The artefacts analysed in this research are provided in the Appendices for reference.

distinct artefacts: The Icon, a digital artwork by Amer Shomali; the 1980 song, "Like Leila Khaled Said" by The Teardrop Explodes; and a widely circulated photograph taken by Eddie Adams in 1970 after Khaled's participation in the hijacking of TWA Flight 840 (Shomali, 2011; Cope, 1981; The Guardian, 2017). These artefacts were selected due to their diversity in media forms, popularity and [historical] relevance, and the different ways they contribute to the construction or the distortion of Khaled's public image. Together, they allow for a rich analysis of how representation not only normalises gendered and racialised power structures, but also is an active participant in constructing narratives that render women's violence intelligible within popular culture, mass and news media, and visual art.

I. Visual: *The Icon* by Amer Shomali

Shomali's portrait of Khaled, composed entirely of 3,500 lipstick tubes, offers a striking juxtaposition between the aesthetics of femininity and the figure of a revolutionary woman (Shomali, 2011). On one hand, it challenges gender norms by using a traditionally feminine object to depict someone engaged in armed resistance. However, it also raises questions about whether such visual tactic may inadvertently aestheticise and depoliticise Khaled's politics; the aestheticisation of militant women often reproduces the same gender binaries it seeks to destabilise.

II. Music: *Like Leila Khaled Said* by The Teardrop Explodes (written by Julian Cope)

Popular music functions as a powerful form of cultural storytelling, and this 1980 track brought Khaled into the Western pop-cultural consciousness through romanticised and eroticised tropes (Cope, 1981). The analysis focuses on the song's lyrics and narrative framing to portray how the song reconstructs her image into one of danger and allure by minimising her political violence and revolutionary struggle, especially given the historical and material conditions that produced her violence.

III. Photojournalism: Eddie Adams' Photograph

This iconic image of Khaled, captured shortly after the TWA hijacking, has become one of the most enduring and contested depictions of a female militant (The Guardian, 2017). This explores how framing, distribution, and interpretation across media platforms contribute to how visual representations of femininity in relation to militancy shape public perception, and ascribe Khaled to gendered and racialised narratives of violence.

In culmination these artefacts offer a rich, multifaceted perspective into the representation of women's political violence and agency, such as Leila Khaled. The inclusion of different media sources allows for a wide range for the analysis, and avoids privileging any one epistemological lens, whilst remaining grounded in feminist and postcolonial literature. Ultimately, this research argues that the representations of Khaled are not passive reflections of her identity, but active constructions that shape how we understand women's agency, violence, and resistance, especially in regard to race. By critically engaging with these portrayals, this research contributes to broader discourse in IR concerning gender and race, human security, and the politics of visibility; representation is not secondary to politics rather it is constitutive of it.

Analysis

The three media portrayals of Leila Khaled analysed in this research, visual art, music, and photojournalism, highlight different mediums of media through which women's political violence is rendered intelligible through patterns of depoliticisation, eroticisisation, and aestheticisation. The analysis proceeds by employing a critical discourse analysis within an interpretive framework to portray how gendered, racialised, and orientalist representations continually shape dominant narratives, disregarding women's agency in political violence.

Amer Shomali's, The Icon, reimagines the image of Khaled through the medium of 3,500 lipstick tubes, an overt symbol of femininity and consumerist beauty ideals (Shomali, 2011). This aesthetic choice creates a striking visual dissonance between the militant and the feminine, compelling the viewer to confront ingrained assumptions about the mutual exclusivity of womanhood and political violence. Shomali unsettles normative gender binaries, by employing a stereotypically feminine object to depict a woman defined by her participation in armed resistance. This juxtaposition exhibits gender as a performative, socially legible script rather than innate nature (Butler 1988); the artwork becomes a pointed subversion of gender. The lipstick is reconfigured in this context; it is no longer merely decorative or cosmetic, but rather an integral aspect through which femininity is recontextualised into a reflection and representation of a revolutionary figure. In re-envisioning Khaled's image through a symbol of femininity, Shomali urges reflection on the patriarchal expectations imposed upon women's bodies and behaviours, and on how violence is differently interpreted when enacted by those cast in traditionally passive or nurturing roles.

However, this representation is not without ambiguity; Shomali himself claims revolutionary imagery is increasingly incorporated in commercial marketing strategies, by “transforming a political poster into a shelf and a revolution into a product” (Shomali, n.d.). This shift highlights the political power of aesthetics and visual representations, as described by Bleiker and Hutchison (2023); meaning is not embedded within the image itself but produced through its interpretation and circulation. While the artwork can be understood as both a critique of neoliberal appropriation, and a testament to Palestinian resistance and Leila Khaled herself, the aestheticisation of militant women risks reproducing the very gendered structures it seeks to critique, as the image is subject to detached neoliberal consumption (Hiergeist and Schäfer, 2024; Malver and Koureas, 2014). The Icon's relevance, therefore, does not lie within its definite subversion or depoliticising intent, but rather in its acknowledgment of how women's political violence remains structurally unstable under our current and commodified conditions.

Julian Cope's, "Like Leila Khaled Said", transforms Khaled into a cultural symbol, departing from her historical and political context. The lyrics romanticise and mystify her, invoking her name metaphorically rather than engaging with the specificities of her political struggle. In doing so, the song exemplifies what Sjoberg and Gentry (2008) describe as the "double transgression"; violent women are either eroticised as enigmatic femme fatales or dismissed as psychologically unstable. This is exemplified by the lyric, "You can always be the mistress of my schemes", which depicts how Khaled is transformed into an archetype, the radical woman as a muse, rather than represented as a historical subject with agency (Cope, 1981). By portraying her as a “mistress” rather than a militant, the song reinforces heteronormative desirability and relations, while also stripping her of any reference to the Palestinian liberation movement or her involvement in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine; she functions as a poetic motif rather than a depiction of revolutionary intent.

Cope's later account of the song as "just a love song to her" because he believed, "she was really one of the most beautiful girls in the whole world" further suggests eroticisation and fetishisation of Leila Khaled (Internet Archive: Wayback Machine, n.d.). Naaman's (2007) critique is particularly relevant here, as Arab women's political violence is eroticised within Western cultural production; haled is characterised as enigmatic and alluring, framed as "bad news" rather than a political actor engaged in anti-colonial struggle (Internet Archive: Wayback Machine, n.d.; Cope, 1981). Depoliticisation, therefore, can be understood here through omitting any mention of Palestinian liberation and anti-colonial struggle, and reducing Khaled to a romantic and sexual muse. These depictions of her are deeply gendered and racialised, as they deprive her of political agency and reinforce orientalist stereotypes of [Western] civilisation and [Eastern] barbarism (Naaman, 2007)). In doing so, the song, therefore, contributes to a broader pattern of symbolic and cultural appropriation, wherein Khaled's image is reimagined not as an agent of resistance, but as a vague figure of [sexual] deviancy and rebellion.

Lastly, Eddie Adams' 1970 photograph of Khaled, taken after the TWA 840 hijacking, remains one of the most widely circulated images of her (The Guardian, 2017). The photograph shows her as composed and politically defiant, as she is wearing a keffiyeh, a symbol of Palestinian resistance, while holding a *Kalashnikov* (The Guardian, 2017). The photograph challenges gendered assumptions by presenting a woman whose portrayal of militancy disrupts normative understandings of femininity and passivity. However, the photograph's meaning does not inherently lie within, but rather is produced through its circulation and subsequent discourse. In the documentary, *Leila Khaled: Hijacker* (Makboul, 2005), she describes how journalists often ignored her political role and instead asked personal, invasive questions, "One asked me how long I usually stood in front of the mirror… One of them wondered if I was in love," she recounts. These moments portray how the media's questioning functioned to reposition her within familiar gender roles, despite her clear refusal to conform. Her rejection of questions regarding beauty and romance led to her being labelled "unfeminine" or "cold", which reiterates how women are pathologised, as any deviation from normative femininity is perceived and reframed as a failure (Makboul, 2005; Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). Instead of engaging with her political actions, the media situates her within conventional romantic or psychological narratives. In this sense, her keffiyeh and Kalashnikov, both being symbols of resistance, are transformed into markers of danger; and Adams' photo functions as a discursive tool through which depoliticisation operates by steering attention away from her anti-colonial struggle, and towards beauty and intimacy (Bleiker and Hutchison, 2023; Sjoberg and Gentry, 2008; Morrissey, 2003).

Leila Khaled directly challenges gendered prescriptions by refusing to fall into either category through her active involvement in armed resistance and her everlasting symbolic influence. However, instead of being commended for her political agency, she is depoliticised by a system that pathologises her resistance and fetishises her. Her representation serves as a means for broader discourse regarding knowledge production and resistance, as her identity is filtered through both gendered and racialised lenses, making it even more difficult for her to be recognised as the legitimate political actor she is.

Conclusion

This research has explored how women's political violence, particularly that of Leila Khaled's, is portrayed and perceived through a gendered and racialised/orientalist lens, which reflects how such hierarchies continue to dictate knowledge production in both international relations and popular culture. A similar rationale is observed in all three of the media artefacts examined. Shomali's The Icon challenges conventional notions of femininity and political violence by modelling Khaled's image through the aesthetics of beauty and consumerism. While this approach highlights the construction of gendered expectations, it also demonstrates its limitations because her political intent risks being transformed into a spectacle. Similarly, the song 'Like Leila Khaled Said' alienates Khaled from her context by representing her as an embellished metaphor rather than a revolutionary. This reflects orientalist tendencies that romanticise resistance, devoid of political meaning. Finally, while Adams' image is often regarded as a symbol of defiance, it serves as a means to undermine Khaled's agency due to the media's obsession with her attractiveness, femininity, and personal life; an attempt to discipline her by redirecting attention away from her political violence.

The implications of this analysis are significant, as women who engage in political violence are reduced to such tropes, which not only disregards their political motivations and agency, but also reinforces patriarchal and colonial narratives regarding resistance and liberation movements. Moreover, it is also significant due to its contribution to postcolonial feminist IR, which criticises both liberal and traditional feminist methodologies. The research expands upon existing literature on women's political violence and emphasises the need for adequate representations regarding visibility, legitimacy and interpretation, and autonomy and erasure. In this sense, representation becomes a site for struggle, requiring for more reflexivity in how women in resistance are portrayed and analysed. To combat these narratives, we must engage with women as political agents in their own right, not as symbols, spectacles, anomalies, or transgressions.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests in relation to this paper. This research was conducted independently.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my tutor, Dr. Lucy Hall, for their consistent encouragement, guidance, and support. I am also especially grateful to my friends for always challenging me through our incredibly insightful conversations. Lastly, I would like to show my appreciation and acknowledge the broader academic community of postcolonial feminist scholars whose critical engagements with resistance and anti-colonial struggle continue to inspire many young academics, including myself.

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Appendix I - The Icon by Amer Shomali



Shomali, A. (2011). *The Icon*. [3500 Lipsticks]. Dalloul Art Foundation, Beirut.

Appendix II - Like Leila Khaled Said by The Teardrop Explodes [written by Julian Cope]

"You can smother me with kisses

You can smother me with dreams

You can always be the mistress of my schemes

But the sad is a very special thing

It can leave you at the start

It can see you standing naked

In a jar

But another ship could find you

And now's your chance, and now's your chance

Another ship could find you

And now's your chance, and now's your chance

Just like Leila Khaled said

Just like Leila Khaled said

Meeting people round the table

Trying hard to get excited for your brand new name

Bringing friends all round for dinner

Shown an empty crazed pack that said "Crystal was here"

Just like Leila Khaled said

Just like Leila Khaled said

Hey, how does he do those things?

They never really get the chance

And before this we wake

We'll forget the things that drive affection

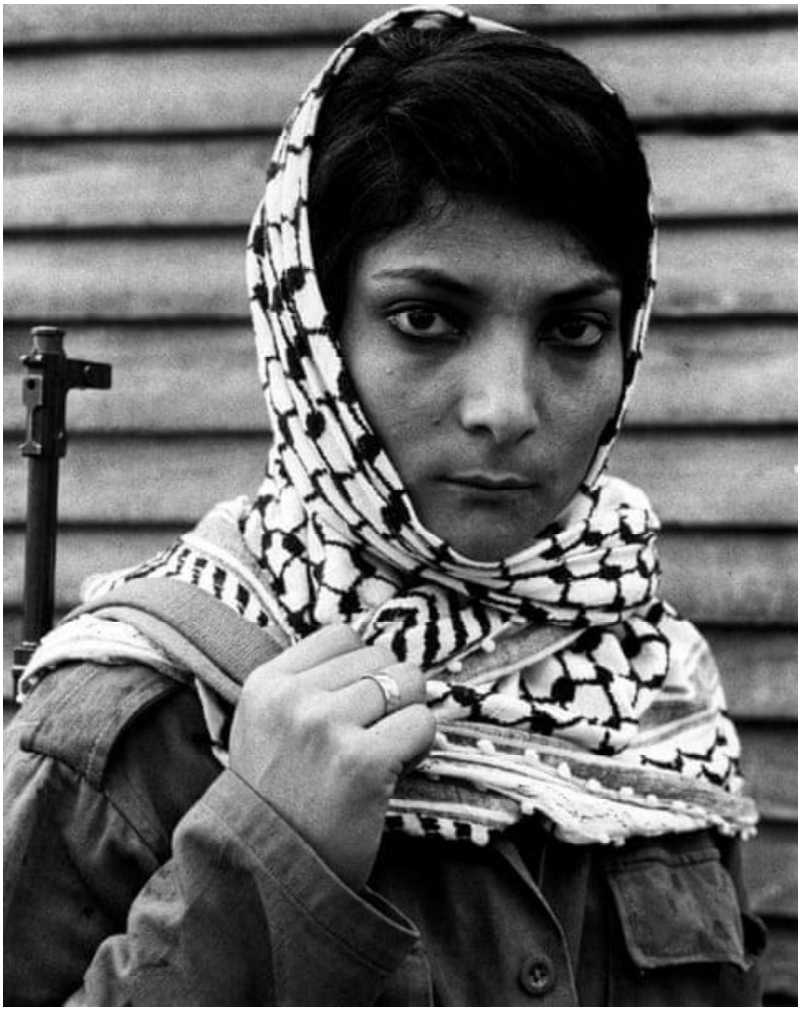
Put aside these old reflections

Just like Leila Khaled said

Just like Leila Khaled said"

Cope, J. (1981). *Like Leila Khaled Said*. Chicago: Mercury and Fontana Records.

Appendix III - Photograph by Eddie Adams after her first hijacking of Flight TWA 840 from Rome to Tel Aviv [but landed in Damascus, Syria]



The Guardian. (2017, April 10). *The photojournalism of Eddie Adams – in pictures*. Retrieved May 16, 2025, from https://www.theguardian.com/culture/gallery/2017/apr/10/eddie-adam-photojournalism-saigon-execution-pictures

Closing Statement

The contributions in this special issue approach the question of Palestine through distinct analytical lenses, yet together they reveal the many terrains on which domination and resistance unfold. Read collectively, the articles show that the struggle extends beyond the visible arenas of conflict, taking shape through narratives, cultural practices, historical memory, and the formation of political identities.

Across the issue, particular attention is given to how meaning is produced around violence and resistance. One article shows how media portrayals of Leila Khaled aestheticize and pathologize her actions, displacing her political agency. Another examines the affective and historical narratives that sustain Zionist political commitment, revealing how violence is rendered morally intelligible within these frameworks.

Other contributions foreground the cultural and historical dimensions of both resistance and domination. An analysis of Palestinian women's music highlights how artistic expression sustains attachment to homeland and collective resilience, while a historical account of the colonial politics of sexuality demonstrates how Palestinians have been constructed as a civilizational "other" through shifting moral discourses.

The issue also turns to the institutional spaces in which these struggles resonate today. An examination of contemporary student activism situates university protests within broader debates on institutional complicity and the limits of dissent, showing how global conflicts increasingly reshape academic life.

Taken together, the contributions in this issue illuminate the many layers through which the question of Palestine is lived, narrated, and contested. Constantly resurfacing in many forms across time, space, culture, history, politics, and institutions, they serve as a sobering reminder that conflicts persist not just because of physical force but also because of the meanings ascribed to them. To study such a reality is inevitably to encounter its contradictions: the coexistence of suffering and justification, resistance and erasure, memory and denial. If this collection leaves us with anything, it is the recognition that understanding these tensions requires patience, attentiveness, and a willingness to confront complexity without retreating into certainty.

In that sense, the function of critical inquiry is more about opening up space for the examination of difficult truths than achieving definitive conclusions; an endeavor emphasizing the intellectual responsibility that speaks directly to the role of academic institutions in moments such as these.


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