Breathing Archives: Art and Tacit Knowledge in the Post-Oslo Accords' Palestine

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https://doi.org/10.34737/ww44q

UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER

BREATHING ARCHIVES:

Art and Tacit Knowledge in the Post-Oslo Accords' Palestine

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A Thesis Submitted to the **University of Westminster** in partial fulfilment for the degree of

Doctor in Philosophy

School of Art
Centre for Research and Education in Art and Media (CREAM)

May 2024

To My Parents

ABSTRACT

This doctoral research proposes the Breathing Archive as an ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methodological tool for understanding Palestinian knowledge production and identity in post-Oslo Agreement Palestine (1993 - the present). The objective is to accumulate tacit knowledge emerging from the artistic practices of Palestinians living in and beyond historic Palestine, whose identities have been shaped and maintained by colonial and hegemonic power dynamics.

The Breathing Archive, a practice-based research methodology, critically examines the challenges involved in institutionally producing and disseminating Palestinian narratives within the explicit structure of the Oslo Agreement's state project in the West Bank and Gaza. It then reflects on Palestinian art practices, including my own, as a means of tacit knowledge production, and looks at the limitations of the state and other institutionalised archives (Polanyi, 1966).

The theoretical framework encompasses an analysis of historical paradigms impacting Palestinian knowledge production. It also explores additional power dynamics embedded in the professional field of art, within the post-Oslo Agreement paradigm, as a way to critique and reflect on contemporary Palestinian identity. The practical aspect involves reflecting on Palestinian art practices and introducing the Breathing Archive as a new method for transcending the limitations - conceptual and practical - of both the institutionalised archive and the Palestinian art scene, since the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Structured according to Kurt Lewin's (1997) 'Action Research principles', the research proposes the Breathing Archive, as an intervention, to creatively address some of the challenges associated with producing and disseminating Palestinian knowledge. The Breathing Archive employs ethnographic and participatory dynamics to capture tacit knowledge embedded in Palestinian artistic engagements, positing new ways of understanding and conceptualising Palestinian experiences, beyond the narrow geographical definitions of the Oslo Accords. This questions how Palestinian epistemologies are understood outside of colonially imposed borders and explores the role of art in both imagining and bringing into being concepts of Palestinian selfhood.

The thesis includes a body of artwork emerging from this theoretical and creative process. Within this, I trace the origins of the Breathing Archive, reflecting on how it emerged

from both my own artistic practice and other artists I engaged with during ethnographic fieldwork.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am immensely grateful to the many individuals whose support and encouragement made this project possible. Firstly, I extend my deepest appreciation to my Director of Studies, Uriel Orlow, whose invaluable guidance and unwavering support helped shape my academic journey in ways I could not have anticipated. I am also indebted to my supervisors, Tariq Sabri and Roshini Kempadoo, whose inspiration and insight propelled my project forward.

I am grateful to Lucy Reynolds for her support across various academic and professional dimensions. Special thanks are also due to the University of Westminster and the Quintin Hogg Trust for providing the scholarly and financial resources necessary for the completion of this study. I am deeply appreciative of the belief and endorsement from Michaela Crimmin and Francis McKee, who provided crucial reference letters.

My heartfelt thanks go to my cohort members, Barby Asante, Iram Ghufran, and Jol Thoms, for their companionship and collaboration throughout this journey. I am also indebted to Sarah and Roy Jacobs, Hrair Sarkissian, Eline Van der Vlist, Fereshte and Ali Moosavi, and Anna Santomauro, Vlad Morariu, and Rawan Sharaf for their generosity, hospitality and unwavering support.

I extend my gratitude to my support networks in Jerusalem and Haifa, including Basel Sader, Tariq Zughayar, Rosa Perez, Martha Agosti, Dima Natsheh, Akram Salhab, Thayer Hastings, Wafi Bilal, Khalil Ghara, Ronin Zain, Ward Kayyal, Waleed Al Huseini, Koloud Tannous, Lena Mansour, Adam Haj Yehya, Rabia Salfiti, and Rana Asali, whose love and assistance were instrumental during crucial phases of my research.

Special thanks are due to Liane Al Ghusain for her meticulous copy-editing, and to Samer Shtayyeh and Michael Darlington for their friendship and creative collaboration. I am grateful to my examiners, Bashir Makhoul and Ozlem Koksal, for their insightful feedback and guidance.

I am also thankful to the team at the Mosaic Rooms, including Rachel Jarvis, Angelina Radaković, Najia Bagi, Said, and Siegrun, for their assistance during the viva exhibition and examination process. Aditi Jaganathan, Akram Salhab, and Maya Holteerman provided invaluable support during the editing and proofreading process.

I am also indebted to Myssa Daher for providing endless supporting during the installation of the viva exhibiton.

Lastly, I extend my deepest gratitude to my family: Mama Latifa, Papa Hussam, my brothers Samer and Yazan, sisters-in-law Rawan and Sundos, and my niece and nephews Maryam, Ward, Mina and Omar. Your unwavering support and belief in me sustained me throughout this journey. To all those who supported me, including those I may have inadvertently omitted, I dedicate this thesis with profound gratitude.

Author’s Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1985, I am a member of the first generation whose political consciousness was shaped in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords1. While both my parents regarded the agreement as a major blow to the Palestinian liberation struggle, as individuals, my family initially benefited from these accords. New international aid allocations made to the Palestinian governmental and private sector in order to help Palestinians build a nation-state, boosted my father's acting career. Additionally, my younger brother and I began participating in a number of international projects and exchanges. Nevertheless, the second intifada (2000-2005) saw a return to the heavily policed form of settler-colonial rule that had been the Palestinian political reality before the accords were signed in 1993. This manifested in a commitment to the architecture of colonisation, with new checkpoints and barriers erected and the construction of an eight-metre apartheid wall; a palpable erosion of the West Bank. This rupture generated a scepticism in me towards an understanding of Palestine, grounded in the national container imposed by the Oslo Accords, and towards the international sources and circuits of funding that only became available to Palestinians after they had been contained within this legible and politically unthreatening national framework. It was a tautological bind; to garner resources to thrive required accepting the settler colonial imagination's vision of Palestine and Palestinian subjectivity.

This early experience of political disillusionment, grounded in the tangible experience of Palestinian fragmentation and containment in the post-Oslo era, found powerful echoes in an experience I had while participating in the 2016 Jerusalem Show, 'Before and After Origins', part of the wider cultural programme Qalandiya International.

During the opening, I took part in a tour around the streets of the old city of Jerusalem. Walking between the venues where the various artworks were installed, I could see in the

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[1] The Oslo Accords refers to the declaration of principles on interim self-government agreements signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on September 13th 1993 (Erakat, 2013).

eyes of the city's occupants, who were sitting in front of their shops or just passing through tending to their daily lives, that we were to them a wandering swarm of aliens, disconnected from their quotidian movement through the city. Just another group of tourists or pilgrims. Suddenly, my appearance among them seemed strange to those who knew me. Some were wondering what was going on. I admit that at that moment I felt hurt. This was due to my self-interrogation: what is the value of what I am doing as an artist, if my own people cannot relate to it? Perhaps it is more appropriate to question how I, as a member of a wide international community, can relate to my Palestinian local community and its many urgencies?

That moment and the questions it evoked are recognised as the foundation for this doctoral research as I became conscious of the multiple gazes embodied through my being as a Palestinian individual, part of the Palestinian Jerusalem social fabric and a Palestinian artist, part of a diverse international network of individuals and activities. Questioning how I am seen in these two different social settings allowed this research to pursue improving my engagement through both roles without sacrificing one over the other.

1.1 General Overview

These personal experiences of estrangement and fragmentation form the backdrop to this thesis, which investigates the post-Oslo intersection of art and archives in Palestinian knowledge production.

Firstly, a critical exploration of the period following the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords to the present, drawn from auto-ethnographic and relective research. The Oslo Agreement produced far-reaching legal, political and ontological consequences for Palestinians, in and beyond historic Palestine. This thesis explores the aftermath of the Accords as a period of history that is not only of collective significance, but has profoundly shaped my consciousness and identity as a Palestinian from Jerusalem. Secondly, it looks at my own artistic practice as the primary method through which I navigate and negotiate my Palestinian experience, placing this within the context of a fragmented Palestinian art scene, which exists in historic Palestine and the broader diaspora. The research also looks at the production and dissemination of "Palestinian knowledge", through discursive structures associated with political national entities. Particularly the archive, an epistemic institution involved in the production, preservation and dissemination of national

knowledge that reinforces hegemonic and colonial power dynamics and constitutes a form of structural violence (Stoler, 2002). It explores how Palestinian national consciousness is characterised *more* by loss and fragmentation than accumulation, due to a legacy of archival absence and colonial violence and suggests that alternative research methods are needed which recognise *and* respond creatively to this. The Breathing Archive emerges from the research into different artistic engagements with the question/problem of the archive of Palestinian knowledge, as a unique methodological intervention that involves the interdisciplinary integration of art *and* ethnography/auto-ethnography. Importantly, this exploration seeks to transcend the geographical, epistemological and cultural limitations inherent in the institutional structures of the Oslo Accords, and within the Palestinian art world; to lay the groundwork for reimagining how we might conceptualise Palestine and Palestinians.

1.2 Literature Review

To identify the specific artistic, intellectual and political terrain in which this thesis and my art practice intervene , requires first outlining the specific bodies of historical and theoretical research, and artistic practice, that it is in conversation with. These are 1) Palestinian Knowledge and Epistemology; 2) Post-Oslo in Palestine and its Significance; 3) Politics and Art Practice in Palestine; 4) the Archive and Art in Palestine and 5) Art and Archives of Palestinian Knowledge post-Oslo. As will be clear from these headings, there are significant overlaps and commonalities across these five themes. Bringing these themes together, this literature review concludes by sketching the intellectual parameters of the practice-based research that I describe in this thesis, that is, Art and Archives of Palestinian Knowledge post-Oslo. This synthesis lays the foundation for the research questions and methodology that will be addressed in the following chapter.

1.2.1 Palestinian Knowledge and Epistemology

To discuss Palestinian knowledge and epistemology requires a brief initial conceptual discussion of knowledge and epistemology itself. The simple dictionary definition of knowledge is the information that leads to understanding and awareness of subject matters associated with factual occurrences (Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). Relatedly, understood most broadly, epistemology is defined as the discipline dedicated to studying human knowledge, its nature, origins, and limits. As part of his philosophical project

investigating the relationship between epistemology and the social world, Michael Foucault sought to understand the relationship between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1972). Foucault (1972) elucidates how knowledge is not produced in a void but is instead intimately connected with the power dynamics that shape and reinforce social hierarchies and structures. Thus, knowledge always reflects, holds and mirrors the dominant ideologies of any given historical conjuncture. However, as Foucault explained, knowledge is not solely a means of acquiring and maintaining power. If there is an inseparable unity between knowledge and power, knowledge continually produces and reproduces the social world. Power, is therefore, enacted through institutional structures responsible for producing, refining, storing, and then disseminating knowledge as a form of 'truth' (Foucaut, 1972). Put differently, power can be seen as being held within repositories of knowledge, institutions like archives and museums which authenticate or validate knowledge. Foucault's arguments correspond closely to those of French philosopher Gaston Bachelard. Before Foucault, Bachelard (2002) argued that writing about history involves 'epistemological acts' where the continuous accumulation of knowledge is suspended, and its development is interrupted and severed from its epistemological origin (Foucault, 1972; Bachelard, 2002).

Grounded in a Foucauldian theory of knowledge, Israel's settler-colonial project has been explored as an epistemological project (Pappé, 2020; Barakat, 2017). From its outset, Israel very clearly understood the importance of collecting and policing access to Palestinian knowledge. This was one of the strategies through which the Zionist project fulfilled the foundation of Israel following the events of *Nakba.* The *Nakba* (Arabic: catastrophe) is the term that denotes the violent events of systematic ethnic cleansing that was launched against Palestinian civilians by Zionist paramilitary groups like the Haganah, Stern and Irgun (Masalha, 2012; Sa'di & Abu-Lughod, 2007). During the *Nakba*, Palestinian photographic and textual documents were looted. These documents continue to be stored in Israeli state archives and in Israeli universities, access to which is heavily restricted (Sela, 2018; Sleiman, 2016; Wind, 2024). The traces of Palestinian villages, which could substantiate customary claims to property and thus the right of return, were also systematically destroyed from the 1950s onwards (Khalidi, 1992). By controlling archival materials, as well as who has the power to speak, access and disseminate different types of knowledge, Israel has created epistemological hierarchies that define how ideas of *both* Israel *and* Palestine are circulated, in what ways and by whom (Khalidi, 2007, p.IX-XLII). These hierarchies were compounded by the fact that

while formalised archival practices and land registration were introduced by the Ottomans to Palestine, their uptake by Palestinians, prior to the 1948 Nakba, was partial (Bhandar, 2018).

Israel's methods of epistemological and cultural erasure, structural violence and traumatic rupture have been elucidated by several Palestinian thinkers such as Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi and Salman Abu Sitta. Specifically, they have detailed how the effective dominance of Palestinian knowledge by Israel, as well as the circulation and promotion of Israeli knowledge, results in the suppression of Palestinian perspectives. As much scholarship has shown, the institutional seeds of this domination *over* knowledge and knowledge production were planted before the formation of the nation-state of Israel or the Nakba, with the British government providing support which enabled the Zionists to establish independent institutional networks, exclusively serving Jewish immigrants in Palestine such as the Jewish Agency (Lowrance, 2012). These institutions formed the main structure of the Israeli state which was established after the displacement and expulsion of Palestinians during the Nakba. This recognisable institutional structure contributed to the world accepting the legitimacy of the Israeli state, projecting an image based on Western ideologies and socio-political structures (Lloyd, 2012). Israel's legibility, as a political entity, is significant because it integrated this new state into the international system of states. It therefore extended the parameters of the conflict beyond Israel and Palestine to encompass this international system that legitimises Israel and continually invests in its normative state narrative. Being alienated from the machinations of power, on an international scale, further perpetuated the marginalisation of Palestinians as they could not engage with the same perceived legitimacy as state actors (Mamdani, 2002, pp.19-41; Morris & Spivak, 2010).[2]

The dispossession, erasure, storing and policing of Palestinian documents and ephemera, in conjunction with the legitimisation of Israeli state-building and state narratives by the international community, has had distinct effects on Palestinian knowledge and

[2] The violent mechanics of settler colonialism have rendered Palestinians to the positionality of the dehumanised 'other', in similar ways to such as the Kurds, the Uighurs, and the Saharawi people, all denied and deprived of their right to self-determination and political autonomy.

epistemology. Yet, precisely because of this history, defining 'Palestinian' knowledge and epistemology is challenging and remains contested, as noted by Makhoul and Hon (2013) in *The Origin of Palestinian Art* . For the most part, Palestinian knowledge and epistemology have been understood as marked by physical fragmentation, lack, and loss of Palestine: as land, people and archives (Makhoul, 2022; Landy, 2013). It has also been understood as located outside state-run archives and in objects and ephemera not traditionally considered as archival materials. It therefore also does not correspond to the linear flow of knowledge associated with traditional ideas of epistemology and the accumulation of knowledge. Rather, it has been shaped by colonial power dynamics or what Foucault calls 'incidents of interruption' (Foucault, 1972, p.4). As such, it can be understood through the framework of 'the epistemology of the oppressed', as articulated by Brazilian theorist Paulo Freire (1972). Knowledge thus becomes a key and constantly evolving terrain of the Palestinian political struggle against colonial oppression and hegemonic power dynamics; part and parcel of the wider Palestinian refusal to be uprooted and eliminated. Against the dominant settler-colonial epistemologies and their corresponding archives, Palestinians have had to gather alternative archives and circulate their narrative(s) through entities, structures and communities aligned to anti-colonial and anti-capitalist principles (Stoler, 2022; Massad, 2015). Based on this, Palestinian knowledge and epistemology have been understood, not as a static entity, but as a shifting body of knowledge, distributed across different geographies, and thus containing multitudes (Biancani & Rioli, 2023).

Nevertheless, the post-Oslo phase represents a significant shift or, to use Foucault's language 'incident of interruption,' with regard to Palestinian political life as a whole, and epistemology and knowledge production in particular. Through the structures established by the Oslo Accords, where Palestinians have had access to an institutional network with the power and resources this proffers; they have been able to produce new forms of (explicit) Palestinian knowledge. The second part of this literature review offers an overview of the multifaceted mechanisms that prevailed after the Oslo Accords, delineating their procedures and examining the influence they exerted on concepts of Palestinian sovereignty and cultural autonomy.

1.2.2 Post-Oslo in Palestine and its Significance

Contemporary academic and public discourse remains rooted in a state centrism that dominates how nations and peoples are approached as objects of research. A seemingly

discrete nation-state conceived of as existing within a sovereign border, constitutes the foundation for many studies across the social sciences (Rudolph,2005). Such 'methodological nationalism' has been widely criticised in both its narrow view of the nation, as well as its foregrounding of the state as its unit of analysis (Wimmer & Schiller, 2003; Chernilo, 2011).

Such critiques are particularly pertinent in relation to the Palestinian people, whose initial dispersal, continued fragmentation and longstanding statelessness, renders state centric approaches invalid in describing the key features of Palestinian society. In *The Question of Palestine,* the late Palestinian thinker Edward Said examines how Western imperialism and Zionist settler-colonialism, obstructed Palestinians from evolving their collective 'national consciousness' into an internationally recognised nation-state (Said, 1979; Anderson, 1983,). Yet Western rejection of Palestinian identity has gone even deeper, extending both to the denial of a Palestinian state, as well as the very claim to Palestinian nationhood.

Irrespective of this, there have been key shifts in forms of Palestinian sovereignty, which continue to shape the political reality *of* Palestine, *for* Palestinians . The most significant in recent years is the Oslo Accords of 1993 between the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Israeli state, which aimed to:

"establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority over the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338"

(The Oslo-Agreement, 1993).

The Oslo Accords, alongside the Paris Protocol[3] covering economic arrangements, was to have a profound impact on Palestinian society, culture and politics (Mason,2013). This geographical demarcation of Palestine had a profound effect on how Palestine was both imagined, but also represented within political and cultural spaces.

Consequently, the term 'post-Oslo', has come to denote a distinct shift in Palestinian life characterised *by*, amongst other things, truncated self-rule, growing fragmentation, the marginalisation of Palestinian refugees, NGOisation, and the proliferation of neoliberal-

[3] Paris Protocol: is an economic branch of the Oslo Accords, which has become irrelevant due to the continuous Israeli disengagement and economic policies (Mason,2013).

driven forms of individualism. Thus the cultural as well as the political landscape have drastically shifted. Taken together, these changes represent a distinct shift such that the term 'post-Oslo' now has a range of connotations in Palestinian political, social and cultural life. The term post-Oslo will therefore be used in this thesis as a shorthand to explain both the temporal period after 1993, as well as these attendant changes.

In the introduction to *The Transformations of Palestinian Society Since 1948*, the Palestinian sociologist, Majdi al-Maliki, sets out how the significant shifts following the signing of the Oslo Accords, had permutations in almost every aspect of Palestinian life within the historic borders of Palestine[4]. On a political level, the Oslo Accords represented a major shift in Palestinian political strategy from resistance through revolution to a state-building project over the West Bank and Gaza, occupied in 1967 (al-Maliki and Ladawi, 2018). Yet the impact was felt also beyond the occupied West Bank and Gaza, neighbouring states such as Egypt or Jordan, where Palestinians live either as refugees or naturalised citizens.

Socially, the geographies recognised as 'Palestine', in accordance with the Oslo Accords, reinforced and perpetuated the fragmentation imposed on the Palestinian people by the *Nakba* and the settler colonial project. Politically, the Agreement disavowed Palestinian claims for liberation by forsaking the anti-colonial struggle against the Israeli settler-colonial project, replacing it with a neo-liberal socio-political order, in the shape of a de-facto nation-state, comprising the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Economically, this neo-liberal structure realised new strategies dependent on foreign international 'development' aid as well as Israeli domination (Nakhleh, 2004).

The profound impact on Palestinians is primarily attributed to the Oslo Agreement project's failure over three decades since its initiation. However, one might equally refer to its 'success', from the Western imperialist standpoint, in bringing about sociological changes that radically shift the dominant Palestinian culture. For these reasons, amongst others, several Palestinian thinkers, who also played political roles as part of the PLO such as Mustafa Barghouti and Edward Said regarded the Oslo project as a scam,

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[4] Before the Zionist occupation of the Palestinian land in 1948 and expulsion of more than 750,000 Palestinians in what is known as the *Nakba*, or Catastrophe.

ultimately contributing to the enduring suffering experienced by Palestinians until today (Said, 2003; Barghouti. 2020).

Epistemologically, the Oslo project can be seen as establishing new structures of knowledge production and distribution that contribute to misrepresentations of Palestine and Palestinian life. What one might refer to as 'the Oslo paradigm' gathers and generates knowledge about Palestine that enforces the narratives of the de-facto nation-state and marginalises narratives situated outside it. Most obviously, Palestinian public discourse narrates the state as a project of national fulfilment under construction within Palestine, largely excluding those Palestinians living in exile outside the post Oslo Accords Palestine (Kinani, 2021; Khalili, 2007). Such dynamics mirror changes in other postcolonial contexts whereby statecraft has generated a depoliticising and exclusionary national discourse (Sibley & Osborne, 2016).

These new forms of knowledge production were the creation of a new organisational infrastructure birthed by the Oslo Accords, including, most obviously, media outlets, newspapers and state bodies. This was reflected in the cultural sphere by the establishment of a number of museums, cultural centres, galleries and NGOs involved in artistic output that often rehearsed or repeated the broad contours of the Palestinian statehood narrative, or that were structurally tied to Western institutions materially or otherwise. Overall this set Palestinian artistic production on a trajectory towards more individualistic representations, diminishing of its liberatory role in favour of a hegemonic state-building narrative. Such changes are evidenced, also, in the sphere of art practice which underpinned and drove these changes. (Boullata, 2004; Sharaf-Khatib, 2019)

1.2.3 Politics and Art in Palestine

In the essay *Towards a Revolutionary Arab Art*, the late artist and researcher, Kamal Boullata (1970), discusses how the political conditions Palestinian artists were forced to endure, inspired artistic trajectories that distinguished Palestinian art from artistic practices in neighbouring Arab countries. This is because of the resistance zeitgeist which dominated Palestinian cultural spaces in the 1970s, despite the geographically imposed fragmentation of Israeli settler colonialism (Boullata, 1970. Boullata argues that the plurality of Palestinian ways of life since the Nakba were not rendered intelligible through written or spoken word; this led to the emergence of new forms and modalities of expression, deeply rooted in the richness and complexity of Palestinian personhood. Today, in the post-Oslo era, Palestinian art continues to evolve its unique politicised

characteristics, in conjunction with the changing realities and subjectivities of its makers[5]. Boullata's arguments around Palestinian art and politics have been taken up by other artists such as academic and artist Bashir Makhoul in works such as *Palestinian Video Art* (2013) and *The Origins of Palestinian Art* (2013). Makhoul's series of books on Palestinian art marks persistent efforts to contextualise Palestinian art, not only to make sense of the art itself, but also to unravel the complex political worlds and realities it engages with. Other artists such as Ismail Shamout (1989) and Samia Halabi (2001) have also theoretically and epistemologically contributed to the understanding of Palestinian art and its politicised realities. While the settler-colonial context in which Palestinian art is being produced might make its politicisation seem self-evident, there is nevertheless a wider body of scholarly theory concerning the relationship between art and politics.

According to French philosopher Jacques Rancière, art is inherently political because art plays a role in shaping the perception of the 'sensible' within the realm of politics (Rancière, 2004, p. 8-14). Art possesses the capacity to generate new modes of visibility that challenge existing orders and the 'sensible', beyond merely representing the actual reality aesthetically (ibid, 2004). Meanwhile, American art historian, Grant Kester, emphasises the transformative potential of multi-disciplinary approaches to art-making and its potential in shaping the role and impact of art within social and cultural contexts (Kester, 2011). While it is beyond the scope of this literature review, the theoretical work on art and politics is situated in a wider social theoretical literature on the relationship between politics and the visual (see for example Hall et al., 2013; Mitchell, 1985; Foster, 1988). Based on these theories, knowledge emerges within the realm of aesthetics and in conjunction with the politics surrounding the lives and experiences of its creators. Art does not negate the complex personhood of its makers, but instead, teases out the layered lived experiences of those who breathe life into a work.

1.2.4 The Archive and Art in Palestine

In recent years, the political stakes of defining 'the archive' and its set of associated institutional practices have become the focus of lively academic debate (Stoler, 2009; Azoulay, 2012; Qato, 2019) . It has also become the focus of a significant amount of artistic practice and research (Foster, 2004; Enwezor, 2008; Dawney, 2015). The basic

[5] Kamal Boullata traced these politicised characteristics in a 2004 essay *Art Under Siege*.

thrust of this debate pivots on the recognition that traditional state archives play a significant role in establishing and policing the field of knowledge production (Mbembe, 2012; Stoler, 2008; see also discussion above on Palestinian knowledge). Thus, as an institution, archives play an active role in defining what constitutes legitimate archival material. The traditional archive narrowly defines archival materials as tangible written or printed documents and ephemera, and are very closely connected with national boundaries of the state.

Such a definition of the archive poses an obvious problem for colonial and settler-colonial contexts such as Palestine. Not only does it demand the prescribed version of statehood, which Palestine has long been denied, but it also relies on Western-derived approach to archives and archival material. It should therefore come as no surprise that the limits of this way of defining the archive have received significant critique by scholars, artists and activists engaged with questions of colonialism (Stoler, 2002). From a theoretical perspective, such critiques have explored how these definitions of the archive are related to the object-based scientific epistemology that accompanied the Enlightenment (Trosow, 2001). As such, it represented an epistemological imposition across much of the world, by European and Ottoman colonial governments on colonised people. Empirically, these critiques have traced how the colonial rupture also shattered the archives which did exist, through forced displacement and violent erasure of people and their archives (el-Shakry 2015). They have also traced how archival materials were collected and systematised in the formal archives of colonial governments. New materials generated by colonial governments were also held in these new archives, many of which were located elsewhere in either the regional capitals of colonial administration or in the colonial metropole. As a consequence, critiques of the traditional archive and archival practices have also stressed how they engendered forms of psychological fragmentation for colonised subjects, who were physically cut off from archival materials that could be used to understand and better describe their colonial situation (Bhabha, 1994 ; Stoler, 2002). They were effectively disavowed access to material which contextualised colonial oppression, thus, stifling the potential for resistance.

This critique has been the point of departure for new research and artistic practice. New research has therefore begun expanding what constitutes archival material, focusing on the built environment, heritage and objects and ephemera (Bsheer, 2020; Nassar, 2020). This could be thought of as a form of ‘counter-archiving’, identifying and generating

materials that can challenge the hegemonic narratives produced in state-archives. Art and artists from the Middle East have been centrally involved in this endeavour, as reflected in several monographs exploring how contemporary art has offered aesthetic interrogations of the archive and knowledge production under colonialism (Downey, 2015; Hochberg, 2021). The godfather of this artistic engagement with the archive is Lebanese post-war artist Walid Raad, particularly his project *The Atlas Group*(). Other artists include the French Algerian artist Kader Attia, and British Jordanian artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan. More specifically in Palestine artists like the duo Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abu Rahmeh, Khalil Rabah and Emily Jacir are perfect examples of such engagement. To probe the ruptures and limits of the traditional archive, these artists have created, collected and manipulated materials that could form alternative or supplemental archives, deploying a range of techniques and artistic devices including fictionalisation and dreaming.

1.2.5 Art and Archives of Palestinian Knowledge post-Oslo

These areas of inquiry and theoretical debates form the basis of my research into the question of art and archives of Palestinian knowledge post-Oslo.

As we have seen, Palestinian knowledge production has always existed as a kind of 'counter archive' against Israeli attempts at physical and epistemological erasure (Stoler, 2022). This has included archives in the formal state sense - as organised collations of knowledge. However, for the most part Palestinian knowledge has existed as informal archives contained in the everyday, and that do not follow linear flows of knowledge. Palestinian statelessness, and the fragmentation of Palestine across the Gaza strip, the West Bank, within Israel and across the global Palestinian diaspora, has necessitated informal practices of knowledge production and epistemology. Precisely because of this colonial condition, Palestinian art is almost invariably *explicitly* political. Yet, as has also been identified, based on Rancière's definition of the relationship between art and politics, it can and should also be understood as *implicitly* political.

We have also seen how Palestinian artistic and archival practices underwent a shift in emphasis after the 1993 Oslo Accords, which introduced a more state-centric model of knowledge and artistic production. Yet the forms of knowledge production it introduced tended towards exacerbating the fragmentation of Palestinians and establishing an exclusionary national narrative. The institutions that accompanied this shift took a distinct

turn away from the subversive or subaltern forms traditionally employed by Palesinians, towards what resembles a post-colonial, state-driven narrative.

My research builds on my own experiences as an artist navigating the realities of Palestinian artistic life post-Oslo. It seeks to build a new body of Palestinian knowledge emanating *with* and *from* artistic interventions dispersed across multiple political dimensions, in historic Palestine and beyond. In doing so, the project reimagines the archive from either being located within an institutional state-centric framework or from being confined to tangible ephemera, to being a living and embodied system of knowledge. (Hall, 2001). With reference to the body of artwork emerging from my own theoretical and creative process, this thesis traces what I term a 'Breathing Archive', and will reflect on how it emerged from both my own artistic practice and other artists I engaged with during ethnographic fieldwork.

Having identified the various restrictions and limitations of art practice in Palestine, the central aim of this thesis, is to seek a way through these limits. It does so by looking beyond the formal archive and insisting upon an evolving practice focused on ways of being and knowing that reside outside the legibility of the Oslo state project and the national paradigm that it imposed on Palestine. My project therefore gravitates towards epistemologies which are located either outside or on the periphery of this project, activating ethnographic and creative processes drawn from the epistemological context of my Palestinian social space. By locating the Palestinian archive and knowledge outside its traditional bounds, this thesis and research seeks to reposition the archive in a manner that adequately respects and acknowledges the full breadth of Palestinian experience(s).

To do so, I will elaborate on the distinction - explored in more detail in my methodology - between non-discursive knowledge and institutional knowledge, a distinction which maps onto Michael Polanyi's (1966) distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge that I will also be working with. Whereas, institutional and explicit knowledge is produced through established categorisation and dissemination of understanding; non-discursive, tacit forms of knowledge are produced through personal experiences. In contexts where political avenues prove inadequate or rely too heavily on institutional knowledge, art emerges as a dynamic force capable of generating alternatives—producing, validating, preserving, and disseminating Palestinian narratives.

This approach nevertheless involves a critical reflection on the production of explicit Palestinian knowledge within both political and artistic realms. By examining the role of art in these processes, this thesis will argue for its radical potential to construct and articulate alternative narratives about Palestine in situations where colonial, neo-colonial and hegemonic discourses fall short, or unduly suppress the richness of artistic practice drawn from a more expansive notion of what constitutes the archive. As such, one of my objectives is to not only theoretically inquire about Palestinian art, but to also re-imagine the role of art as a tool in the struggle for liberation; art *as* liberation or a pathway *to* liberation.

Grounded in an exploration of my own artistic practice, as part of the wider Palestinian political and artistic field, this thesis seeks to address two core and inextricably linked questions:

1. What are the limits of existing post-Oslo artistic engagements with Palestinian knowledge production, including my own?

2. How can the "Breathing Archive" address these limits as an artistic and methodological intervention centred on Palestinian tacit knowledge?

1.3 Chapters Outline

The overall framework of this thesis is formulated in four chapters constructed on a series of interconnected methodological basis. Chapters One and Three involve critically reflecting on key conditions and temporalities, concerning their impact on the production and distribution of Palestinian knowledge through the domains of the archive and art. While Chapters Two and Four reflect on art's engagement with both the domains of archive and art, focusing on my art practice as an essential methodological component of this research project.

The four chapters are sequentially organised to demonstrate the interconnected relationship between theory and artistic practice as orchestrated throughout this thesis. Chapter One establishes the theoretical foundation by examining the archival domain of Palestine considering the context of oppression and marginalisation impacted the Palestinian people throughout shifting moments - with a particular focus on post-Oslo moment. This serves as a groundwork for reflecting on art's interaction with the archive, as a source for generating tacit knowledge in conjunction with the post-Oslo era in Chapter Two. Furthermore, Chapter Three explores the knowledge generated through

Palestinian art within the same shifting context of oppression and marginalisation discussed in Chapter One. Lastly, Chapter Four synthesises insights from the previous chapters, concerning the relationship between art, post-Oslo, and Palestinian knowledge production, to introduce the Breathing Archive as a methodological intervention to address post-Oslo challenges within the realm of art and archives. Chapter Four is particularly grounded in Kurt Lewin's 'Action Research approach', where the thesis benefits from the reflection on my position within the domains of art and archive in this post-Oslo moment on the basis to generate a tangible and epistemological contribution to both fields.

In what follows, the methodological basis of the thesis will be explored, substantiated and interrogated.

Methodology

Introduction:

Answering these research questions, which are grounded in the cultural, historical and political conditions outlined in the sections above, presented me with a range of epistemological and practical challenges. To address these challenges has required the development of a methodology that blends a variety of approaches.

In the first instance, I draw on Michael Polanyi's categorisation of different forms of knowledge to direct my intervention at particular forms of marginalised knowledge, around which my methodological approach was developed. This carries over into my adoption of an ethnographic approach, necessary in order to extract forms of understanding and knowledge production, impossible to access accurately 'from without'.

Over the course of my research, I found it necessary to combine ethnography *and* autoethnography, with the direct intention of action research, explicitly seeking to construct the research project *into* an intervention, through a cycle of reflection and reformulation of the central problem. Thus the research is a fluid entity that is malleable, responding to the insights and ideas developed with and through the research process. These varied methods are encapsulated in what I term the Breathing Archive, the details of which I explain below.

Tacit and Explicit Knowledge

As discussed, my research engages two types of knowledge, institutional and non-discursive. Institutional knowledge is produced through established categorisation and dissemination of understanding, while non-discursive knowledge is produced through personal experience. Polanyi (1997) maps these onto what he terms explicit knowledge, which is articulated and codified, and tacit knowledge, which is subjective and personal. Explicit knowledge is produced through established systems and protocols, while tacit knowledge arises from personal experiences and viewpoints that may not be captured by these systems.

Just as subaltern studies and other fields which make distinctions between forms of *knowing* and *being*, there is, in reality, no simple or clear cut distinction that can be drawn between forms of knowledge. Yet, describing them in discrete terms allows for an investigation of their differing origins and logics, to identify exclusions and elisions and to draw out important analyses from their interactions in various spheres of social and cultural life. Across my chapters I use this dichotomy as a descriptor for two forms of knowledge that I identified in my research.

The research focuses on the examination of explicit knowledge within the Palestinian context of knowledge production, particularly in the fields of the archive and art. It seeks to analyse the conditions and circumstances surrounding the creation and dissemination of explicit Palestinian knowledge through these fields, and how these dynamics were transformed and reshaped by the Oslo Accords. From here, the research moves to highlight the potential for art to produce tacit knowledge that goes beyond the constraints of these systems. The thesis reflects on art *as* a non-discursive space with the capacity to generate new knowledge that may not be captured by institutional protocols.

Ethnography and Autoethnography

My approach to data collection was based on a simultaneous ethnography and autoethnography that took account of my positionality as both a Palestinian subject who, on one hand, wants not only to see the Palestinian conditions of life subverted but also wants to take part of its realisations. On the other hand, I am also an artist located within an internationally-oriented art ecosystem, comprising potential contradictions with the inalienable right to rupture and refuse oppression and hegemony. These two, largely conflicting postures map onto my experience of the division between tacit and explicit knowledge described above, but which also accorded with my own experience of these two arenas: of art and society. Grounded in Hal Foster's (1995) ideas in *The Artist As Ethnographer ,* the approach to employ ethnography and autoethnography seeks to reimagine both domains of art and ethnography, towards new possibilities for producing and distributing Palestinian narratives that are free from the inherent limitations within both disciplines (Foster, 1995; Furani and Rabinowitz, 2011).

This theme of duality recurred throughout my research. On the one hand, I was a Palestinian who came of age as the Oslo Accords began to change Palestinian society in

the ways described. This placed me at an intersection of a Palestinian revolutionary tradition coming out of the First Intifada[6], that was subsumed by the Oslo Accords, but which then reemerged in a new form in the Second Intifada[7]. Living through these starkly different stages of Palestinian life I was able to connect to each new era, understand their unique dynamics and navigate a place for my art practice through the contradictions I was confronted with.

This grounding within a Palestinian community shaped my approach to the Palestinian art scene. I came from a background where stories, oral history, the preservation of seemingly irrelevant objects was the norm, and which contrasted starkly with what I was witnessing as an emerging artist. Here, other, more rarified knowledge was considered valuable, different priorities emerged and the subjectivity and self-perceptions of the role of the artist began to shift. In both instances I was both a participant in these dynamics, but had sufficient experience with the other way of knowing and being to observe these dynamics 'from without'.

Action Research and the Reflective Approach

This inside/outside approach required that I develop an appropriate methodology that could reconcile these contractions, a way both of being immersed in my own environment and the political insights this provides, whilst also accounting for my simultaneous alienation from it.

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[6] The First Intifada was a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The uprising lasted from December 1987 until the Madrid Conference in 1991, though some date its conclusion to 1993, with the signing of the Oslo Accords(Said, 1989).

[7] The Second Intifada (also known: Al-Aqsa Intifada) was un uprising that was ignited by Ariel Sharon's visit to al-Haram al-Sharif on September 28, 2000 and lasted between 2000-2005 (Falk, 2000).

This led me to draw a purpose thread through the research, by building an action-oriented approach that tried to carry the duality of my positionality through these two contradictory positions. Drawing from Donald Schon's (1983) idea of the 'reflective practitioner', I sought to develop a professional practice that grounded me in a self-awareness that could both make space for *and* contain my different positionalities. Thus, there is a symbiotic relationship between my theoretical pathways into the research and my artistic practice. They both bleed into each other, making sense of my multiplicitous identity as a Palestinian cultural worker and academic, rooted in liberation politics. Therefore, the work is not merely aesthetic and the research is not merely theoretical; they both constitute an active practice of resisting the cultural and political reality of Zionist settler colonialism.

As Schon explained, the approach of the reflective practitioner involves an on-going reflection on one's own professional practice and learning from personal experiences on the field. Through embracing this approach the research benefits from reflecting on my art practice by highlighting the knowledge it was able to generate around the processes it activated, both in relation to the Palestinian archive as the main focus of the practice *and* the Palestinian field of art as one of its agents.

The employment of action research contributes to the illustration of this thesis as it unfolds below in the next four chapters. The 'action' that is set to be achieved here concerns reimagining my role as an artist, towards a broader contribution to an understanding of contemporary Palestine, as a context shaped by, with and through a struggle with power. To do so, this research required activating my role as an observer, as a reflector, as a planner and as a maker.

I depart from my observations and experience within my social Palestinian setting. Through those observations, I become aware of the state of dispossession and dislocation enveloping my experience as a Palestinian from Jerusalem. Yet, at the same time, I recognised the necessity of approaching research on Palestine through an anti-colonial lens, both in the theoretical and practical parts of my doctoral studies.

The Breathing Archive

From this approach, I develop what I consider the research's unique methodological contribution: the Breathing Archive. The Breathing Archive is the title of my artistic

engagement with the archive as an epistemological and creative outcome of this doctoral research. It is *both* a method into *and* a product of the research process itself. It denotes a conceptual trajectory in my artistic research-based practice, where the Breathing Archive emerges from the practices, ideas and values of Palestinian artists whose experiences and identities have been intimately bound up in colonial power dynamics present since the establishment of the Israeli state, in 1948.

The Breathing Archive seeks to offer an alternative framework with which to address deficiencies in the production and distribution of the Palestinian contemporary discourse, with a particular emphasis on the impact of the 1993 Oslo Agreement. It does this by employing ethnographic approaches rooted in the lived experience(s) of Palestinians across the various territories of the country.

In the process, the Breathing Archive also challenges conventional archiving mechanisms, through centring marginalised voices and reasserting the value of Palestinian tacit knowledge and experiences within *both* the academic and cultural discourses.

Chapter One: Palestinian Knowledge Through the Lens of the Archive

Introduction

This chapter investigates the significance of the archive in the Palestinian context, where it is entangled in an ongoing struggle with hegemonic forces It delves into the archive's function as an institutionalised practice responsible for the accumulation, preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of Palestinian knowledge (Foucault, 1972, p.126-131). As Foucault (1972) explains, the archive, as an institution, underpins the 'statements' upon which national consciousness and identity are constructed (p. 79-87). Furthermore, Foucault asserts that for the archive to fulfil this role within a specific discourse, it must operate within a framework of systematic organisation, which he refers to as 'discursive formation' (ibid, p. 79-87). He adds that discursive formations produce specific discourses; this refers to how language is employed within a national context to produce and circulate knowledge. In the case of Palestine, after the Zionist occupation in 1948, the Israeli national context was founded on the denial of the Palestinian people (Shlaim, 2014). Israeli identity and national consciousness was predicated on the disavowal of Palestinian self-determination (Friedman, 2016). Based on the examination of Israeli policies towards the Palestinians, the Israeli historian Avi Shlaim (2014) concludes in his book 'The Iron Wall', that the Israeli leaders' point of departure for engaging with Palestinans was not from a place of equanimity or peace-making. Instead, they employed a colonial strategy which Shlaim refers to as the Iron Wall strategy based on the principle that Israel has to protect itself from the 'Arabs' (,ibid, p. xxv-xxxi). Through this contextualisation, this chapter explores the role of the archive as an active agent not only in the production of Palestinian knowledge but also in its abduction and erasure (Stoler, 2002, 9).

In her essay 'Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance' , historian Ann Laura Stoler (2002) argues that researchers in post-colonial contexts should move beyond treating the archive as a source of information. Instead, it should be viewed as a subject implicated in the production and suppression of knowledge. In this way, the veracity of the knowledge held within the archive, as well as its absences may be challenged, examined and leaned

into.Through situating Palestine within the context of the Zionist occupation of Palestinian land and the expulsion of the majority of the Palestinian people, this chapter (re)imagines the role of the archive as an active participant in the occupation of Palestine. Thus, the notion of archive I explore is one whereby occlusions and emissions within Palestinian epistemological ecologies serve as a tool of Israeli governmentality, reinforcing a state of oppression and exclusion of the Palestinian people.

Moreover, this chapter seeks to establish a nuanced understanding of Palestinian knowledge through the lens of the archive. The archive as an institutionalised practice is situated within the troubled Palestinian historical context with the Zionist exclusionary power as having imposed a major impact on the formation and disappearance of Palestinian knowledge. This is done by contextualising Palestinian knowledge within the archive through examining the impact of four epistemological paradigms that affected the Palestinian context. These are 1)Western Imperialism and Orientalism 2)The looting of Palestinian documents during the *Nakba* 3)The rise and fall of the Palestinian anti-colonial archive and 4)the Oslo Accords. The objective is to provide a critical analysis concerning the impact of the Oslo agreement on Palestinian knowledge production. To do so involves tracing crucial dynamics of power, which impacted *both* the collection and the loss of Palestinian knowledge within a landscape of Israeli settler colonialism and foreign intervention. This creates the foundations for a nuanced understanding of the post-Oslo context of Palestinian knowledge, enabling a richer framework, both discursive and creative, for the relationship between the archive and cultural production. This should lead to a nuanced contextualisation of the post Oslo agreement era, which not only illuminates the cumulative effects on Palestinian knowledge, but also lays the groundwork for discussing arts engagement with the archive, which will make up the discussion in the remaining three chapters. The following subsections mirror

1.1 Western Imperialism and Orientalism: Before the *Nakba*

Orientalism, as conceptualised by Edward Said (1979) is *both* a body of knowledge *and* a set of institutions for producing knowledge itself. Thus, the institution is umbilically connected to the knowledge it creates; it is both the creator and carrier of knowledge it determines as knowledge. In this way it establishes concrete limits on what can be known

and understood; what is rendered legible. . It encompasses the employment of a set of assumptions, approaches and representations in Western scholarly portrayals of non-Westerners . Said argues that this paradigm and orientation to the world is ideologically foundational for Western imperialism. The West became symbolic of everything the 'Orient' was not. Thus the polyphony of diverse cultures across the global south were viewed the the prism of Western cultural supremacy. . Each chapter of Said's seminal book 'Orientalism', delves into the granular and multifaceted ways in which knowledge concerning non-Western 'others' was impacted by this paradigm, but also how the West used the 'other', to both define and deify itself. In this section, I am particularly concerned with the Orientalist construction of the uncivilised 'other'. As argued by Said, it was employed to justify Western colonialism of Asia, Africa and South America under the claims that it sought to spread enlightenment of intellect and economy (Said,1979). Through this Said (1992) further examined Orientalism's impact on Palestine in his book 'The Question of Palestine', where it not only served as justification of British colonial rule over Palestine, from 1918-1948, but also paved the way for the Zionist movement to found the state of Israel in 1948. Thus, Zionism finds its roots in Orientalist epistemologies, orientations and positionalities.

Several Palestinian and non-Palestinian scholars followed in the footsteps of Said in contextualising Western Orientalism's impact on Palestinian knowledge. For example, Joseph Massad (2009) in an interview titled, 'The West and the Orientalism of Sexuality', debates how Western discourses on gender and sexuality reinforced the stereotyping of Palestinians as deeply patriarchal , socially conservative and repressive, thus justifying Western imperial intervention. . Consequently, British colonial intervention in Palestine between 1918 and 1948, involved several impositions which negated the complex, diverse and rich histories and culture(s) of Palestine and its people (Ashcroft, 2004,). The establishment of a British education system in Palestine rendered Palestinian cultural history subordinate to colonial interests and the epistemologies which served them) Thus, Orientalist knowledge was incomplete and partial, incubated in the colonial imagination.. The mechanisms of British colonial rule actively surveyed cultural discourses which deviated from the orientalist norm; the presence of any Palestinian nationalist discourse was met with violent security measures and severe censorship restricting freedom of speech and limiting the dissemination of Palestinian narratives.

Drawing on the above it is possible to imagine how this colonial capture of knowledge in Palestine has created a landscape where Palestine is rendered legible through an Orientalist prism for the colonial gaze. This has not only created the conditions for an epistemological rupture in the realms of Palestinian knowledge-making but has also radically altered the genealogy of Palestinian self-determination and collective autonomy, creating an ideological justification for the Zionist settler colonial project in Palestine.

By following in the footsteps of Western imperialism, the Zionist movement employed the same 'Orientalist' view of the Palestinians as inferior, devoid of history, culture and intellectual ecologies, to justify the actualisation of the state of Israel on Palestinian land (Ashcroft, 2004). The dehumanisation of the Arab as inherently violent, uncivilised and primitive serves to justify the capture of a land and its people by Western imperialism and later by the Zionist settler-colonial project. In this way, the latter becomes an insidious extension of the former.

1.2 The looting of Palestinian documents during the *Nakba*

Before the 1948 Nakba took place The British authorities permitted and facilitated an organised Jewish migration to Palestine (Al-Atnah, 2021). More importantly, the British authorities in Palestine aided the empowerment of the new Jewish migrants through allowing them to establish and expand a wide range of organisations and institutions to serve the primary Zionist tenet: establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine (al-Maliki, 2018).

While evidence shows the palestinian people The methodology of the Zionist settler colonialism was rooted in strategic violence; a violence that was granular in its research and methodical in its execution. During the Nakba, the Zionist militias destroyed over five hundred Palestinian villages and expelled more than seven hundred thousand Palestinians (Khaldi, 1992). What was once recognised as a heterogenous but unified Palestinian society, became fragmented and violently broken into several geographically estranged, isolated and disconnected communities, each struggling for political representation under different forms of governance (Manna, 2022). The fabric of Palestinian society was effectively ruptured by and through the zionist colonial imagination; Palestinians had a zionist reality violently imposed on them. The historical reality of loss, expulsion and dispossession doomed Palestinians to socio-

political cultural and economic hardships, paving the way for the Zionnist to have control of the narrative of the land and its righteous people (al-Maliki and Ladawi, 2018). Thus, imposing a new national narrative, predicated on the erasure of Palestine and the birth of Israel.

1948 marks the year that Palestinian people physically lost connection with their land *and* with each other. It was the last memory Palestinians shared collectively as a people before they became fragmented across multiple geographies and several narratives; narratives of dispossession, exile and occupation following the events of *Nakba.* Even those who avoided being estranged as refugees in neighbouring countries, could not avoid dislocation from their native land after the systematic operation of destruction and expulsion carried out by Zionist militias (Pappé, 2006). This dance of violence radically altered the cultural topography of Palestine, becoming a trace located outside hegemonic settler colonial realities. Thus, the *Nakba* is the last monolithic moment of Palestinian history. It is the last residue of Palestine as a living reality within the topography of the land, as well as within the collective Palestinian imaginary. In the introduction of *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, two historians, Avi Shlaim and Eugene Rogan (2007), state how history plays an essential role in the process of state formation. History provides a steady and constant mooring site for the architecture of state-building, legitimising its origin and reinforcing the political system. Transposing this paradigm onto the Israeli state, it becomes apparent why the events of the *Nakba* in 1948 did not only attempt to expel the Palestinian people from their land, but also sought to uproot the very connection that links those who survived the atrocity with their stolen land and cultural heritage. By doing so, Israel wanted to guarantee an untainted history. Palestine thus became a blank state for Israel to impose their zionist imagination of history and origin story, border building and hegemonic institutions. Within this capture and control of narrative, the memory of Palestinian history was suppressed to the depth of begin rendered obsolete.

The Israeli historian Ilan Pappé was amongst the first of historians to rupture the narrative monopoly. He revised the history of 1948 in a way that acknowledges the Israeli crimes as much as it condemns them. For instance, Pappé (2006) constitutes the Nakba as an act of ethnic cleansing, where Israeli forces displaced 800,000 Palestinians and led them into a permanent exile. Although the events of the Nakba were utterly barbaric they were not arbitrary, according to historians and 'new historians' on both sides of the conflict

(Palestinian Encyclopedia,1984). The Zionist state understood the role of historical narrative in *both* legitimising its genesis *and* its continued existence Palestinian cultural artefacts holding histories which preceded this moment of settler-colonisation were also subject to zionist capture and/or erasure. Therefore, the destruction inflicted on Palestinians by the *Nakba*, not only targeted their personhood, land and property, but also written documents; those that Palestinians left behind (Khalidi, 1992; Yazbek, 2011). Examples of such looted written materials include photographs, land and property registrations; books from private and public libraries, hospital and school records; archives related to journals, political parties and cultural centres among more documents and objects. (Abdel Gawad, 2005). All these documents were carefully selected and deliberately collected by the Israeli forces and then transported to several Israeli archives. Today, those archives mark the resting place of a significant fraction of Palestinian literature before 1948. The young Zionist state understood that keeping this body of Palestinian writing was of extreme importance when it came to studying and understanding their 'enemy', thus developing the requisite knowledge and strategies to defeat them and usurp their sovereignty (Abdel Gawad, 2005). But, what was more crucial than collecting, cataloguing, and analysing looted Palestinian history, was the Israeli pursuit to disavow Palestinian *Nakba* survivors the inalienable right to claim a land that once used to be theirs. As a result of this tactic, Israel wrote its history through the prism of victory, with a discourse of legitimate independence and sovereignty. Seventy-five years onwards, Israel is internationally regarded f as the legitimate state actor of a legitimate nation station; whilst for Palestiniane, national sovereignty and self determination is a yearning desire, yet to be actualised, with Palestinians remaining largely deprived of ways to make sense of their ongoing trauma of colonial violence, loss and separation (Manna, 2013).

Not all Palestinian documents were systematically targeted by the Zionist settlers. Some documents were lost by accident because of fear, surprise, and confusion while many Palestinians found themselves being pushed into exile. One example is Mustafa Al Dabagh (1964) who narrates in his book 'Biladona Falastin' (Palestine Our Homeland, 1964), that he had lost a manuscript of six-thousand pages, which had fallen in the sea while he was trying to escape Jaffa on a boat after it was shelled by the Zionist militia. It took Al Dabagh decades to delicately suture what he had lost back together. This became the main source material for 'The Palestinian Encyclopaedia', issued for the first time in 1984 (Abdel Gawad, 2005). This text archives elements of Palestinian history,

through trace, memory, text. Documents which could be both saved and salvaged, were relocated to the territories which had not fallen under the Zionist settler colonial occupation, now known as the West Bank & Gaza. The West Bank remained under Jordanian rule, while Gaza remained under Egyptian rule, until they were both occupied by the Israeli military forces in 1967. In tandem with the Eastern part of Jerusalem, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights, Israeli occupation pushed its borders outwards, eroding the post-48 boundaries of a Palestinian homeland According to Palestinian researcher Mahmoud Yazbik (2011), more documents were looted during this period. Before the 1967 occupation took place, some sensitive documents were confiscated by the new authorities in charge. For example, Dr Saleh Abdel Gawad (2005) mentions in his study published in the Journal of Palestine Studies, that Jordanian soldiers raided the headquarters of Al Jihad Al Muqadas, and confiscated all of its content. No information was found regarding whether these documents still exist or not (ibid, 2005,). Abdel Gawad further argues that the fate of many documents which had fallen under the authority of the neighbouring Arab countries remains uncertain. He suggests that this could be due to the nature of the information contained in those documents, potentially implicating Arab regimes with what happened during the events of 1948 and 1967. Today, all these countries are still run by regimes descended from the same royal or military backgrounds which reigned in the post-Nakba temporality. . This could mean that the fate of these documents is even more uncertain; no regime is likely to support the revelation of information that could shake its very foundation. Here, the Arab approach towards the control of 'knowledge' is no different than the aforementioned Israeli approach, which sought to write its appropriative history by suppressing Palestinian history. Palestinians who were active in some resistance bodies and political parties could understand the risks that sensitive documents posed if they had fallen into the hands of either Arab or Israeli authorities during the events of 1948 and 1967. Therefore, they had to burn them all by hand to protect particular individuals and groups (Abdel Gawad, 2005).

1.3 The rise and fall of the Palestinian anti-colonial archive

An emerging and burgeoning Palestinian resistance movement in the 1950s and 60s embodied the dialectic of revolution, against an oppressive and violent Israeli settler colonial state. The Palestinian revolutionary movement understood the intimate

relationship between the dispossession of their land and the dispossession of their archives, and other key repositories of knowledge production. They teased out and reinforced the umbilical connection between self-determination, state-formation and knowledge-production. As described above, Palestinians had lost the majority of their lands, their written legacy documents, and a vast amount of personal materials via the exodus that constituted the Nakba. However, this legacy of loss and marginalisation did not stop the Palestinian liberation movement from working to gain power of different forms of political representation and thus reigniting the flow of Palestinian knowledge production from Palestinians themselves. The period between the 50s and the late 70s marks the peak of the armed Palestinian struggle against the Zionist state (Sayigh, 1986). The struggling political parties, which nascently emerged in exiled communities and refugee camps, finally coalesced and combined, to form the body of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) as a representative of all Palestinian people. The PLO drove a concerted political effort to build alternative narratives and histories to counter those distributed by Israel. This culminated in the establishment of the Palestine Research Centre in 1965, by the direct order of Yasser Arafat, head of the PLO at that time. The Palestine Research Centre was based in the Lebanese capital of Beirut; this was the central base of the Palestinian revolutionary movement and became its main archival headquarters. The PLO archive operated as what Ann Laura Stoler (2002) in her book 'Colonial Archives and the Art of Governance' calls an "institution of validating knowledge" (Stoler, 2002, p. 95). The role of the Palestinian Research Centre was to study and generate nuanced and layered knowledge about the history and afterlives of Zionist settler colonialism To do so, the Centre collected various kinds of documents connected to the Palestinian cause, such as testimonies and material evidence of what happened to Palestinians in 1948, and its implication on the future of the Palestinian people (Shabib, 2005). This process of revolutionary archival practices was linked to the wider internationalist anti-colonial outlook, which found its home in the liberation movements of the 50s and 60s, but, was crystallised at the Bandung Conference of 1955 and was formalised in the non-aligned movement (Prashad, 2022). These global horizons gave the Palestinian Revolution a reverberating echo and a form of power; the Palestinian struggle is associated with a different global 'discourse' concerning those who are fighting against colonialism, imperialism and inequality all over the world (Fanon, 1961).

Palestinian awareness of the power of research and documentation allowed the Palestinian leadership to form a global network of solidarity as well as revolutionary collaboration. This served to (un)consciously rupture Israeli hegemony. When the Israeli forces invaded Lebanon in 1982, as an attempt to *unequivocally* wipe out the Palestinian revolution. One of its most focused attacks during that invasion was against the Palestine Research Centre and its core employees (Sleiman, 2016). This was not the only archive under attack; several private libraries belonging to significant Palestinian figures were also raided by the Israeli military forces. Further, the archives of other political parties, journals, and cultural institutions were also targeted. All were systematically looted and transferred to archives located in Israel, with a logical and predetermined outcome reminiscent of the 1948 *Nakba*.

The Palestinian Liberation Movement insisted on including the contents of the looted archive of the Palestine Research Centre as part of a prisoner exchange deal with Israel, which took place in March 1986 through the International Red Cross as intermediary Nevertheless, since its delivery to the city of Algeria, the returned archive was kept in a flimsy box, which kept being transferred to different locations over different periods, until most of its contents were deteriorated or lost. The late Sameh Shabib (2005), principal of the centre's library and documentation unit between 1980-1994, published a testimony of his time at the research centre. The text comprises a palpable sense of frustration when Shabib narrates the 'unjustified' complexities when being challenged by both the Algerian and Palestinian authorities in his quest to return the archive to its original state as a hub for Palestinian knowledge production *and* distribution (Shabib, 2005). The former and latter are irrevocably connected; it is through the latter that the life of the archive lives on in the collective consciousness of Palestinains within Palestine and across the diaspora. Shabib could not hide his tone of surprise when he wrote about the irresponsibility with which the Palestinian leadership had treated this returned archive. The discourse around this irresponsibility was even used as a weapon by some Palestinian opposition figures such as Naji Aloosh. Aloosh was an activist, thinker, and a member of the Fatah Party; he considered these actions as a conspiracy aiming to 'cancel the Palestinian memory. Although Shabib decided to quit working for the centre in 1994, he never ceased attempting to raise awareness around the gravity of the knowledge Palestinians had lost.

A more analytical look at Samih Shabib's testimony shows that it is not a didactic monologue about an array of information, which he contributed to collecting and maintaining. The testimony simply uses his working experience in that specific field to elaborate on the idea of research as a strategic approach. According to Shabib, during the anti-colonial period that followed the Nakba, this approach allowed Palestinians to have control over producing knowledge that could speak to *and* for them, supporting their liberation struggle. However, the signing of the Oslo Accords by the Palestinian political leadership marked a shift in their strategies.

1.4 The Oslo Accords: the dawn of anti-colonial struggle

Signing the Oslo Accords marked a profound shift in the ways in which the Palestinian resistance struggle was constituted, in terms of its methods and means *of* and *for* revolution. In signing the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian leadership gave up its right to use armed struggle against the Israeli occupation. Instead, they agreed to accept the West Bank and Gaza as "liberated territories", where they will build their Palestinian State in peace, harmony and cooperation with their 'neighbour', Israel. This ideological state-building apparatus is predicated on the myth that Israel is not a settler colonial state; that it has always already been present as a Zionist homeland. When assessing the history of Palestinian knowledge production, what is important to note is that this agreement established bilateral parameters for negotiations, thereby excluding, from the Palestinian national envelope, all those Palestinians who did not reside within the West Bank and Gaza. This, in effect, obfuscated the reality of the Israeli settler project, diverting attention from processes of archival documentation and dissemination of Palestinian subjectivities and histories. The ontologies of Palestinians outside the WEst Bank and Gaza were deliberately occluded, to acquiesce to the hegemonic power dynamics of Israel. After the return of many key figures of the Palestinian leadership, with Yasser Arafat as their figurehead, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was formed. Shabib noted that the main focus of this authority was to establish a political entity on the ground as soon as possible. The Oslo Accords thereby produced new knowledge *about* Palestine: that of the state born in 1993. The Palestinian Authority became the main representative of the Palestinian people in mainstream political and cultural affairs. Replacing the role that the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) had occupied for decades. This meant that dominant bodies of knowledge distributed *about* Palestine through mainstream platforms, solely

represented Palestine in accordance with the limitations of the Oslo Accords; Palestine *as* the West Bank and Gaza.

Moreover, several key intellectuals such as Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu Lughod and the historian Anis Sayegh quit working for PLO due to their opposition to the Oslo Accords and the state-building project which ensued. In his testimony Sameh Shabib writes about "the return', which refers to the time following the signing of the Oslo Accords; he expresses feelings of shock, saying there was a general absence of thoughtful, considered and context-based research approaches. Shabib adds that post-return, "researchers found themselves stuck between working for international agencies or thinking about leaving Palestine. Those who remained did not have the right environment to develop their research skills" (Abdel Gawad, 2005). The construction of the Palestinian narrative was being outsourced to individuals and institutions not invested in the liberation of Palestine.

Following the signing of the Oslo Accords, the international community essentially helped to build a neo-colonial situation in the West Bank and Gaza. This reality ceased to actualise itself in Gaza simply because Hamas refused to submit and hand over their weapons. They wanted to retain their right to resist as occupied subjects, while no one else wanted to talk about the occupation. It should also be noted that Hamas was not truly leading a pure project to liberate Palestine; because Hamas, like any political formation, has made its own mistakes and is pursuing its interests in other international political fields (Ḥarūb, 2010). The political changes which resulted in the terms of the Oslo Accords were followed by multiple shifts across the disparate and fragmented Palestinian societies. For example, the Palestinian entrepreneur Khalid Sabawi explains in an interview which appeared in a documentary called 'Donor's Opium'(2011), how the growing number of NGOs following the return after 1993 affected the West Bank, as well as Gaza, before it fell under the separate authority of Hamas in 2007. He elaborates that the NGO landscape of Palestine mainly comprised international agencies, which allowed them to offer inflated salaries in comparison with the governmental and private sectors. According to Sabawi, this explains why the educated sector of Palestine was more drawn to working with NGOs. This has converted Ramallah into the economic capital of the Palestinian State because most NGOs are based there.

Furthermore, Palestinians who did not become refugees during the 1948 occupation, were forced to become "Arab citizens of Israel" (Smooha, 1982). Accordingly, part of the active political leadership inside the Green Line responded to the Oslo Accords by joining

the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, to represent the Palestinian people in those territories where Palestinians were configured as an Arab minority in the Israeli State. Many Palestinians opposed this move as it would normalise engaging and being in relationship with Israel, as though it were a normal state as opposed to a colonial force. Nevertheless, 44.6% of the Palestinians who have the right to vote, did so in the Israeli election on March 23rd, 2021, according to the Israel Democracy Institute (Rudnitzky, 2021).

The last examples are two of many related to how the priorities of the Palestinian collective struggle have been broken into micro-political activities that concern only the economic and cultural matters of those who fall under its jurisdiction. The result of this is several fragmented Palestinian societies struggling to enhance the conditions of their daily lives, while the machine of occupation continues to erase what remains of Palestinian culture and its rich and diverse narratives. In other words, collective Palestinian knowledge is torn between multiple Palestinian groups. Each of these groups produces its own version of narrative, stemming from the conditions connected to their geo-political environment and individual self-interested gains. Only one thread woven in this tapestry of narratives gets distributed widely through the structure of knowledge connected to a limited idea of the Palestinian State, as the main global representative of the Palestinian discourse; while the rest of these discourses reside on the periphery, still waiting for their recognition outside the dominant narrative.

Conclusion

This chapter contextualises Palestinian knowledge within the archive by navigating four epistemological paradigms: Western Imperialism and Orientalism, looting Palestinian documents during the Nakba, the rise and fall of the Palestinian anti-colonial archive, and the Oslo Accords. Through this critical analysis, this chapter examines Palestinian knowledge production and loss through the conditions involved in each of the latter paradigms. Building on Ann Laura Stoler's argument, this chapter reframes the archive as an active agent in producing and suppressing knowledge (Stoler, 2002). It also highlights how occlusions and emissions within Palestinian epistemological ecologies post-Oslo serve the interests of Israeli governmentality, perpetuating oppression and exclusion.

Throughout the four sections of the chapter, we could underscore several epistemological consequences that impacted the context of Palestine. These include erasure, essentialisations, legitimation of violence, and imposed fragmentation (Mamdani, 2004; Abunimah, 2006; Said, 1992; Khalidi, 2020; Massad, 2006). First, the epistemologies produced within the Western Imperialist discourse have reduced the Palestinian people to negative stereotypes, leading to ignoring their experiences and claims to self-determination (Said, 1992). The negative impact of that was shortly followed by the systematic Zionist collection of Palestinian textual and photographic documents during the events of Nakba. These documents remain saved within highly restricted Israeli archives such as The National Library of Israel and The 'Israel Defense Force' Archives (Yazbak, 2011). Then, the Palestinian revolutionary movement that emerged in the 60s played a pivotal role in the awareness of the necessity for (re)constructing an archive that could produce Palestinian knowledge. This awareness culminated in the foundation of the Palestine Research Centre in Beirut in 1964 to function as the central archive for the Palestinian revolution (Slieman, 2016; Shabib, 2005). The crucial role this archive played in communicating Palestinian knowledge produced within the context of the revolution ended when the Israeli military forces invaded Beirute in 1982 and launched a special operation to evacuate the contents of the Palestine Research Centre (Abdel Gawad, 2005). Finally, the arrival of the Oslo Accords in 1993 ended the revolutionary strategies practised in the past, leading to the generation of new Palestinian knowledge aligned with the Accord's new state-building strategies (Shabib, 2005). Despite the fulfilment of institutional structures for knowledge generation, part of the nation-state framework, the grave impact on the production and dissemination of Palestinian knowledge within this post-Oslo context resides in the Accords' geo-political limitations, which reduces Palestine to the West Bank and Gaza only.

To conclude, this chapter ultimately provides a nuanced reasoning for critically reflecting on the understanding of Palestinians through the archival limitations of post-Oslo. By recognising the post-Oslo contribution to the continuity of the Palestinian social dismembering and fragmentation, I lay the groundwork for examining my art's engagement with the archive driven by influences emerging from my Palestinian experience as an individual from Jerusalem: located outside the borders of the Palestinian nation-state of the Oslo Accords. The discussion about this is in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Palestinian *Tacit* Knowledge within Art Practice

Introduction

Following the previous contextualisation of the archive in Palestine, by considering key socio-political conditions that impacted the production and dissemination of Palestinian knowledge, this chapter explores art's engagement with historical information, through the physical and conceptual dimensions of the archive.

Grounded in an exploration of my own work, this chapter situates artistic engagement with the archive *within* the Palestinian socio-political context of the post-Oslo Accords, to underscore how the knowledge generated within the practice – both in the phase of research and the final exhibition – acts as a generator of tacit knowledge. Crucially, this knowledge offers alternative Palestinian narratives to those that prevailed in the post-Oslo era through the structures of the Palestinian quasi-nation-state (Polanyi, 1997). The Hungarian thinker Michael Polanyi (1997), conceived of tacit knowledge *as* a kind of knowledge that is difficult to grasp or communicate verbally or literally, because it is embedded in people's experiences and practices. By recognising practising art as a generator of 'tacit' knowledge, this chapter seeks to explore the 'epistemic agency' involved in producing and distributing Palestinian knowledge through art, particularly when it challenges the 'explicit' knowledge created through the structure of the Oslo Agreement as well as other imported or imposed structures (Reider, 2016, p. vii-xv). Following the argument of Patrick Reider in *Social Epistemology and Epistemic Agency,* this chapter departs from the assumption that traditional epistemology often misrepresents and miss-communicates Palestinian narratives in ways that conflict with the social and political aspiration of the Palestinian people who experience oppression (Reider, 2016). Therefore, art as a generator of 'tacit' knowledge is situated here as a contribution to Palestinian epistemology, where the Palestinian social experience is not only paramount to Palestinian knowledge, but also allows for questioning prevailing or hegemonic narratives about Palestine and Palestinians in the post-Oslo era.

Thus, this chapter explores challenges surrounding knowing *about* Palestine in the post-Oslo cultural terrain. It recognises that the art is impacted by the structuring power of the Oslo Accords as a political and cultural device, affecting Palestinian knowledge

production and distribution. It aims to highlight how other forms of knowledge are embedded in the practice of art while it engages with 'the archive'. Art's particular engagement with the archive has been examined within the discourse of contemporary art since the late years of the 20th century (Callahan, 2022). For example, the American art historian Hal Foster (2004) explores in his seminal essay *An Archival Impulse* how artists engage innovatively with the archive not only to take a role in interpreting or preserving history but also to reimage the archive itself both as a physical and a conceptual space. Foster further argues that through rethinking the archive, art is able to question its role in preserving the past and how that impacts our present. In *Becoming Palestine* (2021), cultural theorist and comparative literature scholar Gil Hochberg, explores how Palestinian artists engage with the curious case of the Palestinian archive, as a nascent institution, in the precipice of existence. According to Hochberg, the archive within several Palestinian art engagements becomes a site for re-imaging a new Palestine, as a radical break from the current state of affairs resulting from colonial violence (Hochberg, 2021). Hochberg's discussion about several Palestinian artists' engagement with the archive makes an apparent reflection on how art can expose the gaps produced by a history of political and archival fragmentation.

As a Palestinian from Jerusalem, I am automatically located outside the geographical territories designated as 'Palestine', following the post-Oslo political landscape. Yet, what makes my art Palestinian is inextricably tethered to exploration of Palestine outside the settler colonial imaginary, as embodied in my art practice. There is an umbilical connection between my role as an artist and the context within which it is crafted. This resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualisation of 'habitus'; the constitutional dispositions and values that shape one's actions and perceptions within a social setting, which in itself is shaped by their social, cultural and economic background (p. 78-87). Accordingly, the connection between my Palestinian identity in a colonised Jerusalem, and my art practice render it possible to treat art as a *social* practice, where its potency and spirit should not merely reside in the realm of the professional, but also the social. In this way, art transcends the parameters imposed upon it by the industry of art, moving into a terrain of transformative potential, where the matter of art can generate tangible and perceptible shifts within the fabric of society. Hence, in what follows, the autobiographical examination of my habitus , illuminates a nuanced and rich understanding of how my art practice relates to the Palestinian social space and contributes to its epistemology.

1.1 Auto- Biograpical exploration of my 'Habitus'

The fact that I was born in 1985, makes me a member of the first generation whose consciousness was shaped in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords8. I remember the time before only vaguely, as a child. Both of my parents regarded the agreement as a major blow, a sellout, unbefitting the many years of their individual, as well as the Palestinian collective struggle. Simultaneously, as a boy in his adolescence, the time that followed the signing of the Oslo Accords did not seem bad at all after the images of fear and uncertainty which have engraved in my little memory from the time of the First Intifada (1987-93) and the First Gulf War (1990-91).

Post-Oslo, my father's career, as an actor, started to prosper due to the increase in international projects and opportunities brought about by new aid allocations made to the Palestinian governmental and private sector in order to help Palestinians build a nation-state9. My younger brother and I began participating in a number of international projects and exchanges, and later, partying late in Ramallah10 without my parents' worry about us or the threat of checkpoints or walls. Israeli Jews and Palestinians were visiting each other's cities for tourism and economic reasons.

This period witnessed tension between Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement), who entirely rejected the Oslo agreement and the Israeli state11, which never ceased building

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[8] : is the declaration of principles on interim self-government agreements signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on September 13th 1993 (Erakat, 2013).

[9] On October 1, 1993, the international donor community met in Washington to mobilize support for the peace process and pledged to provide approximately $2.4 billion to the Palestinians over the course of the next five years (Birzeit University Development Studies Programme, 2004).

[10] Ramallah: 13km North of Jerusalem.

[11] Hamas started launching a series of suicide bombings as a sign of opposing Israeli policies after Oslo (Zuhur, 2008).

or expanding settlements. Nevertheless, the Palestinian territories post-1993 were a relatively peaceful time on both sides, or at least this is how it seemed to me as a Palestinian teenager. These good times lasted until the Second Intifada broke out after Ariel Sharon's provocative visit, in September 2000, to Al Aqsa Mosque.

The violence that erupted between the Israeli state and the Palestinian people marked the end of the Palestinian dream of an independent state. Checkpoints were installed, and the wall was constructed to isolate the West Bank and Gaza from the territories under full Israeli control. The biggest blow to Palestinian aspirations was when Israel re-invaded the West Bank in 2003. This was the moment I began to wonder about the seemingly unmitigated failure of the peace project. Like most Palestinians, this rapid shift from peace to war struck me badly. The promises of peace and economic stability turned out to be nothing but an illusion. When I saw my father's career, as a theatre artist, shaking under the precarity of the new reality that replaced the 'peaceful times', I started thinking of a new reality away from the 'intellectual' world of my father. In an attempt to secure a mainstream future for myself, I gave up my dreams of studying cinema and theatre and, instead, I travelled to Egypt where I accomplished my BA degree in information systems at the October 6 University in Cairo between 2002-2006. When I finally decided to become an artist in 2008 it became very apparent to me that I had finally found the tool to help me answer the questions occupying my mind as well as expressing my accumulated feelings and emotions. What fascinated me about art is the amount of knowledge one can derive from a single artwork. The moment I began to realise how seeing like an artist was educating me, I started to understand my eagerness to deal with information. This is how the relationship between art and research became integral to me.

A more self-reflexive look at my personal experience living under circumstances the Oslo agreement had brought, evokes many questions about how that past influenced who I have become. I grew up in a family opposing the Oslo agreement, after all, they were like all leftist believers who have fallen into a world of mainstream politics and corruption where their voices are not heard. My parents raised me within their noble belief in freedom and liberty while the world changed around us. In this upbringing, freedom and liberty were an unexchangeable currency in a world that speaks economics. Only when I became independent from my family, did I become more aware of my environment. That was the first time that I understood the Palestine that I grow up dreaming about no longer existed. It was as if I had realised that I was living a fictional identity. An identity that has

no match in the real world. These new realisations struck me badly due to the fact that I couldn't see a way out. The four years, I spent studying in Egypt gave me some space to try resolving my identity crises through different social and cultural experiences that I had gone through. The problem was that when I returned home the situation in Palestine was even worst. I returned to find an eight meters segregation wall[12] changing the whole reality of the place physically and socially. On a personal level, I ended up trapped in deformed geography. Walls, barriers, and checkpoints became the anchor points of a new reality for all Palestinians in place. Having observed this has accumulated me with a persistent feeling of defeat, which turned me, subsequently, into an aimless person. I was working in a money-changing company 6 days a week, with very limited time to reflect on what have I become. Only art could pull me out of that. Art has activated my imagination, which later became my antidote to the toxic reality I was trapped in. This turned me from an angry subject into an observer. Then, observation was followed by questions. Questions that I started to pursue in order to unpack my environment. In the beginning, art became a medium where I could unload so many questions off my shoulder and load them into the body of my artworks. Quickly art turned into the vehicle that I drove while navigating my questions. One stop led me to the next until I embarked on this practice-based research.

Now, the way I see the above-mentioned personal narrative goes beyond its autobiographical nature. In the very examination of my own experience, I am able to pinpoint that my habitus, as well as my consciousness, were shaped by unsettling situations; deeply rooted in the continuous occupation of Palestine and the conditions it incubates. This is based on the realisation that all the fields in which I grew up were, and still are, subordinate to the colonial rules of the Israeli state, as the gatekeepers of the field of power in my social space: The very thing that weakened my position as a subject trying to navigate the fields in my Palestinain social space . It is only when I entered the field of art, that I felt empowered in comparison with my previous position as a Palestinian from

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[12] In 2002 Israel began setting up a 440 miles wall separating the West Bank and Gaza from the rest of the map. The Wall was built inside those territories and not around them (Barghouthi, na).

Jerusalem. By reflecting on my experience growing up in that situation in Jerusalem, I was able to spot a few things that played a major role in shaping my consciousness and defining my habitus. First, is the Israeli occupation. As a kid born to a couple of Palestinians, I can't help but think how all my childhood was filtered through the situation created for us as Palestinians by the Israeli occupation. Therefore, I can assume that I have a colonised habitus. A habitus that was largely constituted by Israeli colonial rule as the gatekeeper of the supreme field of power. Nevertheless, that was not the only thing that shaped my position. According to Bourdieu, the individual's position is also shaped by the forms of capital they possess or look after. The following indicate the forms of capital that inform my privilege in comparison with other fellow agents. First, I was born to a couple of educated parents from the Old City of Jerusalem. My parents taught me the necessary knowledge, for example that I still could find my way after getting lost in a realm of despair and precarity. Second, at this stage, it is clear to me how becoming an agent in the field of art gave me a better position than the one I could have had if I chose another direction. At least to my understanding, I am estimating my judgement based on evaluating the capital I managed to accumulate. It is with no doubt that becoming an artist has given me some independence and stability in my life, but I wouldn't discuss that as a matter of major influence. It is rather a means of support, as I would like to think about it. However, it is the Knowledge capital that I am keen about putting under scrutiny. When I became more aware of the knowledge, I am accumulating through involvement in different local and international art projects, I also became aware of the gap in my previous knowledge in comparison to the new one. This is the first realisation I can draw on based on the examination of my personal narrative: Where questioning my own knowledge requires also questioning how knowledge is constructed. The aspect which is central to this PhD investigation.

The following subsections aim to discuss my art practice as a sum of evolving creative methods that cannot be separated from the context of my life as a Palestinian individual. In the first chapter, the discussion on the archive, i.e., existing evidence of Palestinian legacy, makes it possible to elaborate on the accumulation and loss of Palestinian knowledge. Thus, in this chapter, the archive is recognised at the centre of my art practice. The idea is to draw parallels between the knowledge I inherited as a Palestinian individual from Jerusalem, and the approaches I am employing in my art practice. By doing so, I seek to establish a scientific understanding of art which is independent of the rules of the art field where I share my artistic output. Rather, it discusses its relevance to the

Palestinian culture as a creative practice; that must come up with novel and useful outcomes.

1.2 Before the Archive

Back in 2008 when I started practising art, I wasn't aware of where that would bring me, as an artist and a researcher. I can't deny that practising art made me feel empowered, which is particularly loaded for me as a Palestinian individual who lives under military occupation in Jerusalem. The idea of empowerment is simply connected with the fact that art has activated my imagination. Practicing art has turned me from an angry and confused subject, who is trapped in a colonised reality, into a doer, who is able to engage with his reality. This is because art introduced me to different forms of representation through experimenting with video art and performance. Both mediums allowed me to express several ideas and emotions that I have been accumulating throughout the previous unstable years. As much as it was fundamental

for me to feel liberated, I do admit that at that earlier stage, I lacked the criticality that allowed me to fathom the potentials connected with practising art. It was a stage where I was practising art in a retrospective manner, as I would like to call it. This early approach was about translating situations that I had been experiencing or observing while I was growing up in Palestine, into materials that I could unpack in relation to my present moment, via creating artworks in the form of video and public performances. For example, the work titled *Victoryland* (2008) is a three-minute video where I appear through a mirror, talking about the notion of victory in Palestine. While the setup within the frame does not change throughout the video, the flow of the video is interrupted by fading cuts. The cuts aim to divide what I am saying into segments. The footage is arranged as a set of references to different Palestinian historical moments which caused major shifts in the Palestinian collective consciousness. As the video goes on, the level of crises that I am talking about increases, whilst my speaking tone when talking about victory at the end of each segment remains steady and confident. By doing so, I am suggesting a disconnection between what is truly happening in our Palestinian reality and the way we think about victory (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Screenshot, Victoryland, Video, 3'', 2008

After all, what the work intends to do as an art piece is to question what kind of victory we seek as people continuously subjected to multiple forms of colonisation and political failures. More importantly, the retrospective approach which led me to the production of *Victoryland* involved reflecting on the critical realities surrounding my life. I now recognise this was the beginning of my discovery that practising art is not only about creating artworks. The process I had gone through to produce this artwork made me realise an abundance of rabid and major shifts that had been taking place around me at those times when I had neither the consciousness nor the tools that could help me reflect on such harrowing events. Between the ages of five and twenty-three, I lived through the first Intifada, the Oslo Accords agreement, the tension between Hamas (Islamic resistance movement) and Israel, the second Intifada, the Israeli military re-invasion of the West Bank and the division between the West Bank and Gaza. Add to that the Israeli siege on Gaza, which Israel has maintained since 2007 through using advanced military arms and surveillance technology to this day. The effects of those major shifts on my psyche helped put into perspective the absence of a Palestinian archival structure which would have allowed individuals like myself to understand who they are and how they ended up prey

for multiple colonial projects. The work of studying this archival absence in Chapter One signifies an intentional exploration that would mark a shift in my artistic practice. Of course, realising these aspects is something, and being able to do something in relation to that realisation is something completely different.

1.3 Visualising Loss

1.3.1 Context

It was not until I was introduced to the notion of research-based art as a student at the International Academy of Art in Ramallah back in 2008/2009 that the whole notion of practising art took another direction for me. During a lecture at the Academy of Art in Ramallah, I came across a work by the English artist Michael Landy called *Break Down* (2001). In this artwork, Landy publicly destroys all his belongings in a performative action that took place at a warehouse in Oxford Street in London. Following the public performance, Landy also produced a 300-page volume publication as a full inventory of the destroyed objects later in 2002. Aside from the performance's critical gesture towards society's fetishist accumulation of commodities, what truly inspired me was the 300-page volume *Break Down Inventory.* The idea that things had to disappear to make it possible for such an 'artwork' to exist totally fascinated me. Parallel to my fascination with Landy's action, my understanding took a deeper turn as I was going through Michael Foucault's ideas on archives in his book *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Between this book and *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault discusses different approaches for understanding the archive depending on the context he is writing about. Particularly, what I found relevant in connection with the absence of the Palestinian archive, is the difference Foucault draws between the archive as "an analytical systematic concept" and the archive as "historically embedded institutions" (Eliassen, 2013) such as the museum and the library. Having understood that difference made it easier to view Landy's artwork under the first category. Therefore, I viewed it as a form of archive due to the 'analytical systematic concept' embedded in the process that created it.

To understand Foucault's analysis for the concept of the archive first one must understand how that came into being for the French thinker. Foucault grounds the differentiation between the latter two concepts of archive in discussing the role archive plays, as "historically embedded institutions", in that they establish statements upon which nations are founded. In other words, the institution of the archive safeguards history because it

upholds the statements that produce and reproduce an understanding of a nation's history. Those statements convey a discourse of common sense that gives relative meaning to practices and objects emerging from the societies of nations. Foucault elaborates that the power archives possess stems from their capability to establish the legitimacy of a nation's discourses, 'not on a condition of validity for judgements, but a condition of reality for statements'. (Foucault, 1969, p. 127). He writes of something he calls a historical *a priori,* which the archive assumes of its contents simply for the fact that it is there. His argument does not leave room for questioning why those documents (statements) are there and what the position is of the 'men' and the systems that instigated its accumulation. This link allows for the question: what about other statements? It is not sensible to think that the archive has the capacity to accumulate endlessly. It is logical to assume that within those systems that produce and maintain linked statements to create certain discourses, there are statements that were opted out due to their nonconformity with the constructed discourse itself. From there, one can understand that discourses are made in relation to a given time and place. Therefore, it is necessary to determine an approach that can include statements that do not align with "the sensible reality". It is interesting to learn to distinguish between dynamic systems that produce statements; parallel to those produced by the archive as a 'historically embedded institution'. On that, Foucault writes:

'Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate in visible characters thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have in the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call *archive* (Archaeology of Knowledge, 1969, p.128).

Drawing on this, one can view art as one of those dynamic systems because it has the potential to produce events and statements capable of disrupting the ones produced by our established discursive systems, like what Landy did in *Break Down.* Landy's action can be seen as a strong statement where the artist chooses to destroy all his belongings in an environment driven by consumption such as Oxford Street in Central London. The work can also be viewed as a rejection to the mainstream culture of shopping and accumulation because he does the total opposite of that. On the other hand, the book operates on a different level because it testifies to that statement made by Landy at that

time and place. This is the very thing which gives it the value of the archive, according to Foucault, because although it is produced in a non-discursive way —outside the historically established institution of the archive — it can produce a statement that can stand in relation to those produced discursively—- according to the rules that activate those systems.

The inspiration I received through studying Landy's artwork generated the first shift in my artistic approaches, going from the retrospective manner I explained in the previous section, towards a more ambitious approach cantered on alternative forms of the archive that I could come up with as an artist. The idea behind that is rooted in the understanding that art has the potential to redefine what could be viewed as an archive, particularly when considering the absence of Palestinian institutional archives. Hence, it made sense for my artistic practice to employ approaches that aim to understand the archive as a systematic analytical concept instead of an institutional body of knowledge. This seemed like an essential necessity as an artist who seeks to engage creatively with the realities that shape my consciousness. An engagement that I believe is rooted in a refusal to surrender to realities rife with loss and defeat, by instead choosing to employ art to produce different statements within those realities.

Between Landy and Foucault, one of the significant aspects that influenced my artistic approach concerned the possibility to imagine that loss can be turned into value. This value stems from the understanding that loss does not signify a state of total invisibility. Instead, loss becomes a statement which interrogates its own absence to suggest new discourses, giving it a unique visibility in intersection with the discourses shaping the status quo. The value that came out of employing loss in Lady's project i.e., losing all his belongings, was something created by the artist himself and then employed in the creation of the artwork. As far as I could experience, loss is a daily aspect of Palestinian life that can be spotted, for example, in the demolishing of Palestinian houses, which is part of the Israeli colonial urban strategies in Jerusalem (Margalit, 2014, 9), in the murder and imprisonment of several Palestinians by the Israeli military machine or the Israeli prison system (Database on fatalities and house demolitions, 2022) (Statistics on Palestinians in the custody of the Israeli security forces, 2022) as well as in the confiscation of Palestinian lands by the various Israeli settler colonial projects (Shomali and al-Orzza, 2017). In conjunction with these occurrences, the question that arose at that time is how as an artist could I turn the already existing aspect of loss into something of value, like the one

realised by Landy? Or more specifically, how can I, as an artist, produce a productive statement amid the Palestinian experience of loss?

The statements of the Israeli state are produced and maintained by a strong body of institutions, which construct a discourse that is sensible to the state narrative itself and how it projects itself, encompassing bodies such as The National Library of Israel, the Central Zionist Archives and The Israel Museum (Cohen-Hattab & Heilbronner, 2022) (Kopelyanskaya, 2023). On the Palestinian side, the Palestinian archive post the Oslo Agreement is limited to two forms of archives. The first can be seen in individual or grassroots initiatives such as The Abu Jihad Museum for Prisoner Movement Affairs. The issue with archives in this form is that they are mainly melancholic. It lacks the analytical capacity to produce counter statements to those produced by the Israeli side. The second form can be seen within the body of non-governmental organisations who 'make it possible to record and preserve those discourses that one wishes to remember and keep in circulation' (Foucault, 1969, 129). Such bodies work on recording and producing data and statistics related to the different Israeli human rights violations against Palestinians. The work such archives play in documenting what the Palestinians are going through under Israeli colonisation can be seen as a logical way to produce statements that could aid the Palestinian cause. Nevertheless, beside its lack of capacity to adequately challenge the powerful Israeli institution of statements, the issue with the statements produced by such archives lies in the way they represent an image of Palestinian victimhood. It worth mentioning that up until that moment in 2008 there was not yet a big institution that could potentially operate as an archive, which began to emerge in the following years such as the Mahmoud Darwish Museum (2014), Yasser Arafat Museum (2016) and the Palestinian Museum (2018). Moreover, the first Palestinian National Library, the establishment of which was announced by the former Palestinian minister of culture Ihab Bseiso in August 2017, should have been the first Palestinian national archive to be established since the Israeli attack on the centre of Palestine Studies in Beirut in 1982 and the confiscation of all its contents. Nevertheless, to the date of writing this thesis, there is no clear news about when this archive is going to begin its duties or open to the public.

1.3.2 Artistic process

At that stage, driven by the need for new statements, I began to take interest in a particular aspect of loss that I could discover within the statements produced by what can be

considered Palestinian discursive archives, which concerned a big number of home demolitions taking place in the eastern part of Jerusalem. These cases take place in communities that I am part of and play a role in the Israeli colonial urban plans. Israel "expand[s], connect[s] and invest[s] in Jewish spaces while dividing, shrinking, and destroying Palestinian spaces. Urban planning is an inherent part of this endeavour, designing density, vulnerability, separation, and displacement into the very fabric of Palestinian urban areas" (Katz and Yacobi, 2021). The process unfolded in a conventional manner whereby I began to collect data around the disappearing Palestinian houses through conducting interviews with victims of those demolition plans, visiting online human rights archives,[13] as well as documenting actual locations where demolition took place in Jerusalem. It was not until I started collecting objects from those demolished houses that the work took another dimension. On a day that I was filming in Beit Hanina, one of the northern Palestinian suburbs of Jerusalem, I stumbled upon a broken piece of a bathtub that was left after the demolition was cleaned up. At the beginning, the reason behind taking that piece was simply because I found it aesthetically interesting, which made me think that I could do something artistic with it. Later, I began to visit several demolished locations in various parts of Jerusalem for the main purpose of collecting demolition leftovers. The materials I collected ranged from objects of daily and personal life, such as pieces of clothing, kitchen utensils, and CDs, to parts of the architecture, such as granite, wood, and pipes. Parallel to collecting those various objects I have also begun to match these objects with data that I retrieve from some online sources such as Al-Maqdese for Society Development and The Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'tselem). The data included names of the true Palestinian owners of the properties, the actual date of demolition, the location in Jerusalem and the number of inhabitants displaced following the demolition. Matching the actual objects with the demolished houses from which they came from felt like I was validating the data I found. Just like in archaeology, where archaeologists test their findings in accordance with the historical discourse, the objects I collected played as proof that not only validates the event of the homes' disappearance but also questions why it happened. The installation I created at the end of that process titled *Playing House* (2008-2011) features several glass vitrines holding a selection of the objects I collected from

[13] Such as B'Tselem and Al-Maqdese.

various neighbourhoods in Jerusalem. Each of the objects were matched with a caption document indicating what the object is, the name of the owner of the property where the object came from, the date of the demolition and the number of individuals displaced. Also, each of the objects were matched with a pin that points to the location where they were collected (Figure 2).

The statement I eventually produced in the outlined artistic process lies in the artwork's ability to transform cold numbers and information about loss into a tangible form. I also understood this outcome as an attempt to construct a preliminary concept of a 'non-discursive' archive which I refer to as 'visualising loss'. The objects of *Playing House* were not the only indicators mirroring the state of the Palestinian archive through transforming the knowledge on loss from one form into another. The more artistic aspects of *Playing House* proposed the possibility of experimenting with the potential of 'non-

Figure 2 Playing House at Les Prairies | Les Ateliers de Rennes 2012, Rennes, France.

discursive archives,' through employing them creatively. In, the case of the objects, I was aware that what I had achieved artistically was only a matter of matching and arrangement. Additionally, another archival component, which also was part of the artwork, was a segment of a video that I found on YouTube employed to suggest an atmosphere for the installation. The video was a documentation of a three-story building

being demolished by Israeli forces using dynamite in the Beit Hanina neighbourhood of Jerusalem on the 28th of June 2008. The video was shot by one of the neighbours and then uploaded on the internet. At that stage, through a gaze that considers YouTube as a form of archive, that video also became an archival extraction I made. Then, I used an eleven-second excerpt from the video starting from the moment of the explosion until the dust covers the entire view. The way I edited my final video was established by looping the eleven seconds with an interruption of 2 minutes where the footage fades into a black screen. The two-minute divide between the explosions' footage was employed to give a long period of quietness before the explosion appeared again. The reason for this is to recreate a tension that mimics the one Palestinians feel, in relation to events like the demolition that keeps repeating even when you have the illusion it will not, due to some 'quiet' times. The way the video is played produces an event in relation to the time and place of the show — the context of the installation — which could be seen as a statement in the Foucauldian scope. Therefore, what the video proposes within the artwork is not as much a statement as it is an attempt to nuance the archive and test what it could say within an artistic form.

1.3.3 Remarks

The ability to come up with a statement was of a great importance within art's potential in the field of archive. Nevertheless, there were some observations that emerged at the end of that previous artistic process. The first observation is that the form of archive I was able to present through my artwork was limited to specific times and places where I could share it with an audience. Whereas the form Landy produced in *Break Down Inventory, i.e.,* a book, has a longer lifespan. Therefore, the statement it holds can be distributed on a different scale outside the format of exhibition. The second observation concerns the issue of the victimhood surrounding the Palestinian image. Where I succeeded to turn loss into a meaning that has the value of the archive, I failed to escape the image of victimhood, which motivates me towards the next approach to re-thinking the Palestinian archive.

1.4 Spontaneous Archives

1.4.1 Context

At that stage, my artistic research began to develop a particular emphasis on the issue of the representation of Palestine as a matter that calls for pity. Although my practice was driven by the desire to unpack and reveal what underpins the realities surrounding my identity, the image of victimhood was an aspect approached with caution in the later investigations I have conducted. The victimhood aspect, as I understand it, relates to the way art empowered me as an individual through arming me with the creative tools to take an active role when dealing with the realities I experience and observe. This made me question my own position as an artist, as I was aware that I did not want my art to flourish through reproducing images of weakness and perpetuating my people's victimhood. Instead, I was hoping to take a critical role as an artist in fulfilling my idea about constructive activity. Hence, what I mean by taking an active role here is regarding the ability to contribute to the matters I am investigating on a wider scale besides benefiting as I could from my art on an individual level.

In 2011, I re-discovered an array of documents that was carefully kept at my family house in Jerusalem. The cache consists of letters and photographs that my father, Husam Abu Eisheh, exchanged with family members and friends between the years 1980 and 1984. It was the time when he was serving a three-year sentence at an Israeli prison, as a punishment for his political involvement with a Palestinian communist party. Most of the letters are addressed to my mother, Latifa Idris, with whom he shared a romantic relationship while they were both students in Beirut, Lebanon in 1980. As I began to closely read the letters and analyse the details of the photographs, it felt like I had opened a window towards an unfamiliar past. Particularly when thinking about this personal archive in relation to the absence of the Palestinian institution of the archive, discussed in the previous sections, did it gain significance. Moreover, the array I have found appeared more interesting when I began to retrieve narratives reflecting a spirit of determination and pride and a belief in liberty and freedom, that I feel is absent in my generation. From an early stage I was able to view the knowledge I was extracting from the letters and photographs beyond the personal history of my parents. This is due to what the documents revealed about the political language, the social values, the circumstances, and the ideologies surrounding my parents' reality at that time and place, which I could not help comparing with my generation who lives in the same place but at a different

time. Having learned about the past generation's undefeated spirit, in conjunction with the challenge I was dealing with in my previous approach towards the archive, concerning the Palestinian images of victimhood, my parents' array of letters seemed like a great opportunity to challenge that. I recognise a shift in my practice from the stage of visualising loss towards a new stage which I refer to as the spontaneous archive. Spontaneous archiving is an approach that is interconnected with the preceding one, where my artistic research seeks to reinvent non-discursive concepts of the archive. The idea behind calling it 'spontaneous' stems from the awareness that my parents kept those documents due to their sentimental value. I did not want the contents of the array to be mistaken with the type of familial archives connected with some social classes. Also, my approach is related to the awareness that such collections of documents were not special to my family only, as there are plenty of families who keep such materials for their sentimental value. This understanding is recognised as an emerging aspect of my art practice which calls for considering such non-discursive archives as a body of knowledge that could potentially fill some gaps in relation to what the Palestinians have lost in their ongoing struggle with the Israeli occupation.

1.4.2 Artistic process

At the early stage of this approach, it was difficult to overcome the emotional connection I have developed towards the narratives I have been extracting from my family's spontaneous archive. I believe this had to do with the romantic nature of the letters exchanged between two individuals very close to me i.e., my parents. But also, it had to do with the way my parents saw their love as a socio-political project, where they believed that their love is not only a way to practice their social and political values collectively but also, they regarded it as a contribution to their society through the family they sought to create. For example, in one of the letters my father wrote to my mother he says:

"I want to stop here at the word 'Love'. Which love was/still our love? Is it the love of the superficial meaning of this world? If it was love in its superficial bourgeois meaning, then it is a love for possession and hegemony … But our love was never like this and never will be. Our love is a proletarian love as Lenin described it: endless faithfulness, honesty and giving. Giving without expecting anything in return. A love as an insurgence on all the old rotten social notions … An insurgence against the past social vision … yes, that is love ... that is how our love was and that is how it will be. Oh, how it is great for

he who struggles to celebrate under the toughest conditions … and how great it is to celebrate his loved one." (Abu Eisheh, 1981) (Figure 3)

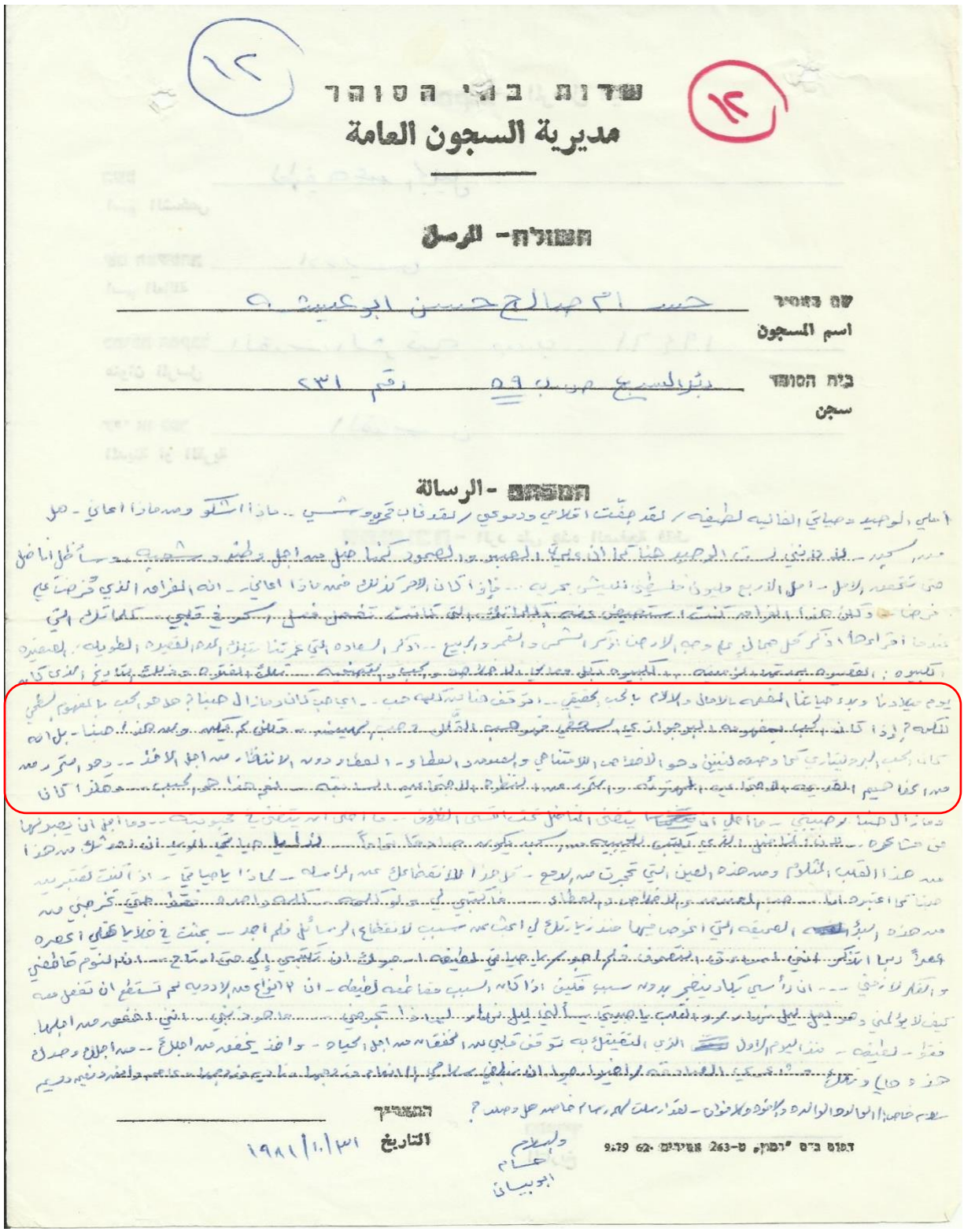

Figure 3 Letter from Hussam Abu Eisheh to Latifa Idris written on the date 31-10-1981, Beir Al Sabe' Prison, Occupied Palestine.

When analysing narratives like the one above, one can notice that Husam Abu Eisheh wrote about his relationship with Latifa Idris in relation to his other responsibilities as a member of a troubled society. This reflects how he regarded his romantic relationship to implement the liberatory ideas he was fighting for at that time. It makes me proud to think that I am one of the results of that relationship and that I have already been involved in those documents even before they became a topic for my artistic investigation.

Furthermore, the opportunity that my parents' spontaneous archive offered to learn about the social and political aspects of my past made me wonder about the lack of such possibilities amongst my generation. My artistic approaches are keen to question the present reality, where I see myself acting as a mediator between two different times. In his seminal book on the topic of archive, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida argues that "Archive is not a question of the past. It is a question of the future, … the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow" *(Derrida*, 1995, page 27). Through understanding that and seeing the contents of the array as a form of archive, emerged an art practice that relies on bringing past narratives that I was extracting from my parents' collection into the body of my artworks, to interrogate the present moment. I aim to take responsibility towards the future of my society, which could be realised through the statements I was able to produce during the process. As the research kept evolving, I learned more details about the past that kept leading to questioning the present reality. I was perhaps driven by feelings of longing for an era that I did not live in. An era that fascinated me because acts of resistance were central to many aspects of my parents' life and the lives of the people surrounding them because it was at the basis of their existence. Whereas today, the idea of resistance is reduced to fighting directly against the Israeli state instead of being a wider societal approach reflected in practices other than fighting with arms.

From there, the narratives I was extracting from my parents' letters provided me with new knowledge regarding resistance as a way of living under the same occupation I live under today. Such knowledge became at the centre of the artworks I was able to create through this research. The desire to communicate this idea stems from the belief that resistance is something that can be practiced in almost every aspect of people's daily lives, which is a viewpoint that kept building as I explored the spontaneous archive of my parents. Exploring the documents of my parents influenced the creation of a series of artworks comprised of installations, video installations and a sound piece based on narratives like

my parents' struggle on a familial level to get acceptance of their relationship as a mixed-race couple[14]. I was also influenced by the cases of political prisoners who smuggled radios into their cells to help them break their isolation, as well as the times when Palestine was part of a global international discourse of those resisting different forms of injustice. The artworks I created seek to establish conversations with our present time in relation to the past narratives I was extracting. In the following subsection I discuss one of those artworks and the methods I employed to create it.

1.4.2.1 Love Speech (2014)

Love Speech is an installation consisting of two five-minute videos hanging opposite each other. The piece was conceived during one of my visits to Palestine after moving to the UK. It was springtime there, which coincided with the anniversary of Nakba on the 15th of May. It happened that I needed to be in Ramallah that day for research purposes. In conjunction with that, there was an official commemoration taking place at Al-Manara Square, the main square at the city centre of Ramallah. The term "official" refers to the fact that the event is organised by Palestinian Authority through their coordination divisions, which takes care of such activities annually. After stopping and watching thousands of people gathering and chanting slogans supporting the Palestinian right to return and self-determination, I noted an awkward thing, which was the atmosphere of celebration around that event. Street vendors selling snacks. Some folks dancing Dabkeh[15] here and there on the sounds of national songs coming out of huge loudspeakers. The whole scene evoked several confusing, negative feelings in me. I was not able to grasp how the memory of the day we lost everything became a day for celebration. Also, I have failed to make sense of many political speeches promising the

[14] My father is a white Palestinian, and my mother is a Black Palestinian, born to a mixed parents, as her father comes originally from Chad.

[15] The name of the Palestinian folklore dance.

crowd a free Palestine 'from the river to the sea'[16], whilst reality indicates that there is a total absence of any liberation project.

That moment drew my attention towards the gap between the socio-political atmosphere in Ramallah in 2014 vs the energy one could grasp from reading the letters my parents exchanged. When considering the kind of political speeches being read in juxtaposition with the reality of most Palestinians living there, it renders the said speeches shallow and empty of any meaningful content. How did the memory of the day we lost our land and freedom become a day for 'peaceful' celebration? Clearly, this has a lot to do with the political agenda of the Palestinian Authority, where they spend most of their annual budget on promoting 'peace' and maintaining security with no clear vision how that achieves liberation (Tartir, 2017).

Moreover, at that stage of research, my parents' spontaneous archive became something like a filter through which I began to take a different look at reality, seeing new possibilities. This discursive archive of which I am a part, influenced a shift in my critical awareness of what is taking place before my eyes instead of taking it for granted. On an artistic level, *Love Speech* responds exactly to that empty content of political speeches by trying to replace it with more worthy content, that I extracted out of my parents' narratives. For this video installation I collaborated with my father, who is a professional actor, asking him to dress as a politician and read one of the letters which he wrote to my mother over thirty years ago as if it were a political speech. The film is based on one of four letters which I carefully chose with my father based on its relevance to what I wanted the artwork to communicate. Simultaneously, I filmed the other side of the auditorium where we were shooting, showing lines of empty seats.

The first thing one encounters when approaching the installation is one monitor out of two hanging opposite to each other, back-to-back. On the first monitor appears the video of my father dressed as a politician. He appears behind a podium reading a speech full of gestures mimicking the ones I observed at Al Manara Square in Ramallah or other local events. The video of my father appears intentionally with no subtitles. A walk behind the first monitor reveals the other video showing a long steady shot of an empty auditorium,

[16] A Palestinian saying referring to the liberation of all Palestine between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea.

where the subtitles of what my father is saying in the first video appears simultaneously with my father's audio. Only then does it become possible to understand the meaning of what he is saying in the speech (Figure 3). The statement *Love Speech* communicates is based on deconstructing the elements that make the political speech what it is between the aspects of seeing, hearing, and understanding. Building on that notion, the artwork aims to present those elements separated from each other; when one can see the speech they are not be able to understand it, as it comes with no subtitles, whilst when one shifts their position towards the other monitor, where they are not be able to see the speech but are able to understand it, as it still can be heard from the back of the monitor. The deconstruction in this setup is employed to make a statement about the way one should approach political speeches to truly understand them, where one must always look at them from more than one angle to fathom what they are truly about. Of course, this setup relies on the fact that the viewer likely does not understand Arabic, which is the language spoken in my father's video, to achieve the idea of deconstructing the political speech. On the other hand, when the viewer can understand Arabic, the statement of the work changes from being about how to understand a political speech, to love as a political statement. This is based on the understanding that the letter my father wrote and then read in the video holds more political statements than in the political speeches concerning resisting injustice that are normally heard in Palestine today. Therefore, *Love Speech* as a piece of art disseminates political statements from the letter it features as much as it criticises the present moment, where the understanding of resistance is reduced to fighting with arms.

Figure 4 Love Speech (2014) at CIC, Cairo, Egypt, 2015.

The methods embedded in the process that created *Love Speech* allowed me to realise an artistic role that is congruent with the realities surrounding the process. Through the

employment of my father's letter in the artwork, I was able to achieve two important aspects. First, I was able to perform an act of extraction based on treating the letter as a form of archive. Second, I was able to treat this extraction artistically, through recording, performing, and installing the letter, in a setup that can communicate statements. I recognise those statements as an individual opinion about the notion of resistance and how it can be socially achieved in relation to life under unjust occupation. Interestingly, what I thought of as a personal individual statement turned to be a national matter when several waves of anger began to emerge in different Palestinian cities, calling for change and resisting the continuity of status quo. One example is what happened in Gaza between March 2018 and December 2019. Gazan Palestinians are living the worst repercussions of the continuous political Palestinian failures, as well as suffering from ongoing Israeli brutality. The social demonstrations and activities that erupted there became known as the Great Return March. The movement was based on a popular grassroots movement that rejects Palestinian socio-political shortcomings as much as it rejects the Israeli occupation. The largest wave of anger took place in almost every location where Palestinians live today, after the Israeli Supreme Court decided to evict eight families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in Jerusalem in April 2021. The eviction order is part of the Israeli settler colonial plans where a new group of Israeli settlers were supposed to replace the eight Palestinian families (Soliman, 2021). This escalation was followed by a series of demonstrations and actions which became known as the Unity Uprising due to its dispersal all over the historical map of Palestinian and beyond, to put pressure on the Israeli state and expose its colonial nature.

When thinking deeper about the latter events in intersection with *Love Speech,* the voice of political speeches has been muffled to be replaced with the voice of the people. On a more archival aspect, the voice of the people also becomes an archive itself due to its ability to produce an alternative statement within the Palestinian subsystems that exist under the Israeli colonial system and the Palestinian failed systems (The Archaeology of Knowledge, 1969, p.128). Furthermore, even when looking at those phenomena as symbolic occurrences that will not lead to a real change in the status quo, one cannot deny that these symbolic reactions created a corrected map of Palestine that will remain as an archive. An archive that holds a unified statement of those who were calling for justice from every spot where the demonstrations and activities took place. Eventually, they draw with their resisting bodies a new picture of Palestine as they see it, despite what politics had been telling them. Through reflecting on those occurrences in conjunction with my

artistic practice, I establish a connection between the conditions that inspired the production of *Love Speech* and the conditions that made my people revolt against injustice. This connection allows me to see relevance to the art I am creating regardless of its position within the fabric of art at large.

1.4.3 Remarks

In the same manner my artistic practice has been developing throughout the production process of the artworks discussed in this chapter, the process which led to the production of *Love Speech* also paved the way for other approaches to artistically treating my parents' 'archive'. That way, the different approaches applied in the artistic research, concerning the spontaneous archive, influenced the creation of several artworks in the form of audio-visual installations. The statements I was able to produce through those artworks concerned different phenomena. Nevertheless, despite their differences, the common factor between the works is the decision to look at a family array of documents beyond its sentimental value. Inviting the viewer to view it as a body of knowledge which I am speaking through and as a platform for sharing my own statements about both history and the present.

A deeper analysis of the artworks produced via spontaneous archive reveals that the driver behind their creation is rooted in criticism of the present moment and the way it is shaped by coloniality and social division. Hence, one can deduct that the artworks allow me to employ my parents' historical objects as tools to dig in an 'archaeological' site where I look through the past hoping to retrieve knowledge that could interrogate the present (Foucault, 1975). Nevertheless, despite all the statements I was able to produce, I have never wavered my attention from the limitations surrounding its distribution within the format of the exhibition, a consideration I keep in mind as I continue to practise art.

Conclusion

The approaches and methods that led to the creation of the previously discussed artworks show a connection between art and the political, social and cultural conditions within which their maker is located. The unpacking of these methods relied on my life experience(s) as a Palestinian and infers a new understanding of my art practice, in relation to my personal journey and how it has shaped my consciousness. The artworks discussed in this chapter contribute towards a personal (re)imagining of the role of the

archive and the vernacular of loss which may be articulated aesthetically. The archive eschews its rigid and stifling parameters to function as a living entity, a spontaneous archive of sorts, facilitating the realisation of art *as* a means of knowledge production and distribution. In this way, art does not exist outside of society but is enmeshed in its layered and nuanced dynamics of *both* hegemonic power reinforcement and/or its disruption. Accordingly, the above analysis succeeds in (re)presenting my art practice as a practice built on ways of knowing and how we come to know; in this sense I challenge points of entry *into* knowledge, *through* examining the way it is connected to the notion of the archive, as a site *of* and container *for* knowledge, thus reinforcing, complicating and challenging its meaning.

Nevertheless, the terrain of knowledge-distribution is one which I kept coming back to, a terrain whose paths I (re)navigated and (re)oriented myself towards, to better grasp its utility and limitation. This connects to the existential fact of my ontological world as a Palestinian artist, how does my work as an artist connect to the struggle of my people? How does the work permeate into the cultural discourse of liberation epistemologies? How does this have a potent and perceptible impact on the lived realities of Palestinians across the post-Oslo demarcations of Palestine? These questions emerge from observations of the restrictions and constraints of the exhibition format in and of itself, as an event which has a very clear beginning and end. Like Michael Landy's (2001) approach in B*reakdown Inventory,* I wanted my artwork to move beyond traditional art-distribution approaches, to guarantee that the statements it holds can have a longer life span and a wider reach. After navigating through the stage of the 'spontaneous archive', I was able to produce a song based on a few letters that my parents exchanged. The work created a life outside of the boundaries of the work itself. Albeit, this helped in developing the way my artwork moves, it did not necessarily *fully* answer questions concerning the limitations of the exhibition format, as the *main* platform for sharing my work and the statements they generate. And through this I was able to ascertain the distinction between knowledge produced within the epistemological framework of a post-Oslo Palestine *and* the tacit-knowledge I produced through an active process of self-reflection and malleability between the Palestinian self, and the artwork which emerges through a self in direct conversation with their changing political, cultural and social context, irrespective of how it is *explicitly* framed by cultural institutions.

This issue of limitation, within the context of the professional art domain, elicited some concerns about the nature of art *as* a political project; what it can and cannot achieve in terms of resisting oppressive political (infra)structures. The embedded criticality of my art practice allowed me to be in constant conversation with the socio-political realms tethered to *and* located in the artwork itself. In this way the artwork was not a static entity but a living cultural form, subject to the shifting realities of the cultural space within which it was located. In this way and through this conscious process of critical reflexivity, the artworks generated statements located within a specific social and cultural reality, but they failed to provide adequate solutions to these spatio-temporal problems. I am not suggesting that art must find solutions, but this does not prevent me from asking the question, what if art could propose a solution? What if art creates the space to pave the way for otherwise possibilities and their potential materialisation? The reason for asking these questions emanate from a growing feeling of responsibility that emerges from understanding art as a means for producing knowledge, particularly in relation to the Palestinian legacy of loss. Art *as* meaning-making; art *as* world building, within the context of absence and loss. Besides the surface-level aesthetic knowledge which could be shared through the artworks I have created, there is a realm of knowledge that each artwork was able to produce within the work and its cultural inheritance. This *tacit* knowledge is what I recognise as the main factor keeping my practice fluid and in a constant state of evolution, keeping the methods *into* knowledge open and always already shifting and expanding. Within the consciousness I have gained through examining my artistic methods and the way they shift lies the question: what if there are methods that I could employ to propose solutions? This can be also seen as an invitation to view art as "a question of response and of responsibility for tomorrow" *(Derrida*, 1995, p. 27). Thus, art has a role to play in the call for a revolutionary consciousness.

Moreover, the examination of my artistic methods were also able to reveal a pattern concerning the meaning of the archive. Through shifting the meaning of archive within my practice, I have implemented Foucault's concept of archive as an 'analytical concept', with regards to the weakness of the Palestinian archive as a 'historically embedded institution', that can *explicitly* generate Palestinian knowledge. Nevertheless, the notion of the archive I was able to defend through the objects from *Playing House* and the documents from my parents, positioned the archive within the past. This is due to the realisation that both the objects and documents were materials that came from a place of the past, surviving times of erasure and loss. Their location within the present is testament

to their refusal to be rendered obsolete by colonial logic and its execution by the settler-colonialism state. Nevertheless, this leads to the same question concerning the present and how the concept of archive embedded in my practice could respond to tomorrow. How is the complex personhood of Palestinians in the present preserved so that it can commune *with* and reside *in* future temporalities?

The answer to these questions require a deep interrogation of the relationship between art and knowledge, to further understand the possible role(s) art could play, with respect to generating knowledge, which runs against the grain of the settler colonial logic. In what follows, I expand on possible answers to these propositions.

Chapter Three: Palestinian knowledge production within the Palestinian Domain of Art.

Introduction

This chapter aims to identify the Palestinian art landscape, as it is the terrain I navigate as an artist and also is where the outcomes of my practice are presented and distributed. The questions which I initially introduced at the very beginning of this thesis (see Introduction p. 2) , concerning how, as a Palestinian artist, my practice can relate to Palestinian social challenges which form the basis of this research project. They also inform this chapter of the thesis, which explores the production of knowledge and meaning-making within the domain of art. The observation which stays with me is one disconnection, between the artistic 'community' I was part of *and* the social community around it. This chapter seeks to answer the previous question by examining the relationship between art *and* the social space itself, to figure out art's potential in producing Palestinian knowledge *within* the context of struggling Palestinian social spaces. This explored through, firstly, departing from the awareness of the struggling political realities surrounding Palestinian social spaces, to examining art *as* a politicised practice. Secondly, I examine the condition(s) which make Palestinian art seen *as* politicised, through a historical survey that traces Palestinian art practice within the genealogy of violence explored in Chapter One. Finally, the chapter will establish an understanding of the possibilities for the practice of art in Palestine under a continuous state of occupation. These explorations seek to figure out a way to position my art practice in relation to the post-Oslo present, shaped by the afterlives of settler-colonisation. 7

3.1 Politicised Art

It is truly remarkable how many meanings the word 'art' can entail. Perhaps, it was no more than a form of documentation or storytelling for the prehistoric human being. Maybe a manifestation of power, glory, and triumph for the many consecutive dynasties of pharaohs and kings. Maybe an expression of belief and moral preaching to other cultures and civilisations. Whatever the reason and however the form, art has always been a tool of 'the present', revealing the circumstances of its creation. It often illuminates something

about people: how they live, what they care about, what they protest against and much more (Stokstad and Cothren, 2011). Like art, 'politics' is a term that has multiple definitions. Treating politics as a social and public activity of the everyday offers a wider understanding of the term, as opposed to the narrow definition that reduces politics to direct political affiliation with systems of power or governance (The Open University, 2016).

Based on the above, one can comprehend the ever-interconnected relationship between art and politics simply because they both concern social and public activity. In his book *Politics* (2007), Andrew Heywood argues that politics is a 'social activity' i.e., an activity we engage in together with others, or one through which we engage others. This is also true for art. Does this mean that all art is political (Berlatsky, 2015)? Do both politics and art accurately function in a way where they simultaneously engage with and engage the public? The answer to these questions lies in understanding the multiple ways in which art and politics are intertwined. According to French philosopher Jacques Rancière, there are two kinds of 'politics' that can be found nowadays: 'poser' politics and 'real' politics (Rancière, 2010). Rancière explained that the term 'politics' should not be reduced to the 'politics of the police', which identifies as a poser kind of politics. 'Real' politics for Rancière is that of 'dissensus', which is about the "re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (*ibid.*, pp. 27-44). He defines both art and politics as acts of 'dissensus', whereby practitioners of both fields disrupt the politics of the police, which defines their 'real' nature.

The connection between art and politics has been a concern for different philosophers and art critics across different periods of time and in different contexts. In relation to the context of this Ph.D. —about art in the Palestinian context, which is embedded in politics—I am interested in Walter Benjamin's definition of this connection which he explored in his essay *Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936). Benjamin makes it clear that art became 'political' when human life became so (Benjamin, 1936).[17] Conversely in ancient Greece, Plato regarded art as an imitation of reality (Plato, n/a). He

[17] "[T]he instant the criterion of genuineness in art production failed the entire social function of art underwent an upheaval. Rather than being underpinned by ritual, it came to be underpinned by a different practice: politics." (Benjamin, 1936, p. 12)

was aware that art can potentially influence people's behaviours and characters; therefore, he called for censoring it in his ideal Republic. Benjamin's conceptualisation of 'aestheticising politics' encompasses an analysis of how mid-20th century fascism understood the influence of art, which in turn can be viewed as a more intensified version of Plato's ideas. According to Benjamin, fascists viewed their politics artistically and pushed for utilising art as a tool for making fascist politics appear aesthetically pleasing. Similarly, the communists of Soviet Russia used art as a key ingredient for their political propaganda but in a different way which Benjamin described as 'Politicising Aesthetics'. Benjamin posited the idea of 'Politicising Aesthetics' as an opposite to the previous notion of 'Aestheticising Politics', where he understood that communism dealt with art as a subordinate to their politics and an outcome of it. In the context of French colonialism in Algeria, Frantz Fanon identified art practices as the art of the oppressed, under three different categories: Art that speaks the language of the Western coloniser; art of "borrowed aestheticism", which understands the language of the Westerner but speaks its native language; and, finally, 'fighting art', where the artist turns himself into "an awakener of the people" (Fanon, 1963, pp. 222-223). Writing in the context of colonialism situated in Palestine, during the age of armed resistance between 1960s and 1980s, the late Palestinian artist and art critic Kamal Boullata followed in the footsteps of Fanon in his analysis of Arab and Palestinian art in his essay *Towards a Revolutionary Arab Art* (1970). Boullata positioned Palestinian art in relation to the overall art context of the Arab world, where he argued that most contemporary Arab studio art falls under Fanon's first category of art that speaks the language of the West. Alternatively, he highlighted the revolutionary nature of Palestinian art practices at the time, where artists did not become only "an awakener of the people' but also awakeners for other art practitioners in the Arab region, modelling how art can be a revolutionary tool against oppression. By investigating more contemporary views by philosophers as diverse as Edward Said (1994), Stuart Hall (1996), Homi K. Bhabha (1994), among others, one realises that notion of postcolonialism is nothing more than a colonial hangover (Hall, 1996, pp. 242–260) that replaces direct Western colonial rule with new structures that are still subordinate to Western rule. In this sense, there is no surprise that, for example, Edward Said's views on politics and culture drew from Fanon's anti-colonial and Antonio Gramsci's anti-fascist foundations. In Said's views, any cultural or artistic outcome that 'spoke the language of the west' or lacked any responsibility towards the people's causes is seen as an act of treason (Said, 1994).

In a more contemporary context, particularly Trump's USA, Max Harris has beautifully summarised art practices within the context of politics under five different categories: 1) art that is a representation of a political injustice; 2) art as complicit in political injustice; 3) art as a builder of a political community; 4) art as escape of politics, and 5) art as a seed of political alternatives (Harris, 2017).

In a similar way to Harris, several Palestinian studies focused on characterising the 'political' within Palestinian art practices (Makhoul, 1995; Halaby, 2001; Boullata, 2004). The socio-political circumstances surrounding the life of most Palestinians, many of which have been previously discussed in this thesis, make it possible to imagine why art history, as a discipline on its own, has not appropriately evolved in Palestine. The Western model for producing an art history based on chronological and linear narratives cannot be applied to Palestine due to the histories of displacement and fragmentation impacting Palestinian life and culture (Makhoul, 1995). The mission to reflect on Palestinian engagement with art, and establish an epistemology for Palestinian art, is an intellectual endeavour which Palestinian artists have actively engaged in. Artists like Ismail Shammout, Kamal Boullata, Samia Halaby, Tina Sherwell and Bashir Makhoul are examples of Palestinian artists who have activated their roles as researchers, to contextualise, document and critique Palestinian art practices, within their respective cultural realms.

3.2 Politicised Art in Practice in the 'Global' Context

Drawing on the above, one can say that art which has a "meaning" and is used as a "way to communicate between people" can be considered art with a politicised strategy (Berlatsky, 2015). This is not to say that politicisation in art is measured equally in all art practices. Also, strategies with which art is politicised vary according to the context in which it is produced. The five categorisations summarising the relationship between art and politics, mentioned in Max Harris's essay (Harris, 2017) —art as a representation of politics, art building a political community, art complicit in politics, art escaping politics and art as an alternative to politics—are specific to the context of the US; however, by zooming out, one can see how the same assessments can be applied in other contexts and during different times around the globe. While one must be aware that the politicisation

of art cannot be bound only to these five strategies, I focus on Harris's categories to identify how art is politicised in different contexts around the world.

The first category on Harris's list is art which is a representation of a political injustice (or politics, in general terms). Practices that fall under this category mostly function as a reflection of what artists experience. Regardless of the way these kinds of works are made, they often work as a tool to communicate the politics of the context that has influenced their creation. They might take the shape of criticism or opposition, as in the case of representing a political injustice in the graphic works of the Black American artist Emory Douglas (Figure 5). Douglas's artworks were not only considered highly critical of the politics of white supremacy towards Black Americans in 1960s and 1970s America but were also utilised as a tool to distribute narratives about the Black American struggles for liberty and equality;[18] therefore, they can be seen to fall into Harris's second category of art as propaganda (Figure 6)[19]

[18] Emory Douglas worked as a minister of culture for the Black Panter Party between 1967 and 1980.

[19] Both sides listed under this category of representation fall under Benjamin's theorisation of 'politicising politics' in 'Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction'.

Figure 5 Emory Douglas - The Black Panther, July 26, 1969

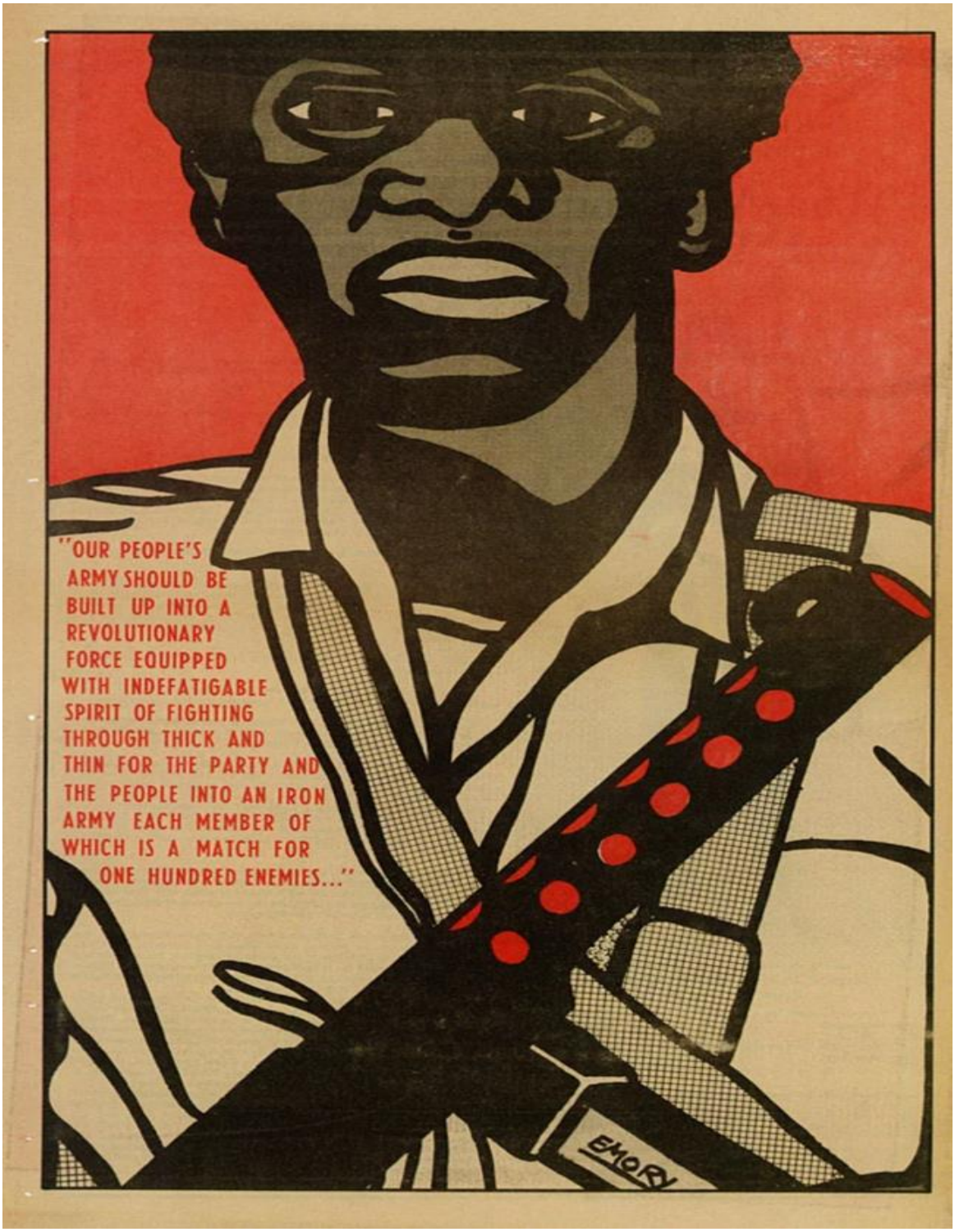

Figure 6 Douglas Black Panther newspaper, August 18, 1970. © 2008 Emory Douglas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

While many artists viewed their art as a tool for advancing radical ideas, other artists have been complicit with established politics both consciously and unconsciously. Examples of such practices vary as, in general terms, we all live in an age of a "rampant capitalisation of the mind" as addressed by artist Liam Gillick in his e-flux essay *The*

Good of Work, which refers to the idea that capital has become the main motive for artists to make art (Gillick, 2013). Gillick is highly critical of contemporary artistic practices that do not address what is happening around us politically. This critique can be applied to artists who simply become complicit in the politics of art structures (e.g., art market, museums and art institutions) in an "individualistic" manner rather than proposing alternatives, representing issues at stake or even highlighting what we have failed to achieve.[20] An example of an artwork that falls under Benjamin's definition of art that aesthetics politics (Benjamin, 1936) is *Obama's Hope* — a poster designed by the artist Shepard Fairey, where president Obama's portrait appears in the colours of the American flag (Figure 7). Similar works are also subject to criticism under the previous categorisations of Gillick.

[20] Art is a history of doing nothing and a long tale of useful action. It is a fetishisation of decision and indecision—with each mark, structure and engagement. What is the good of this work? The question contains a challenge to contemporary practitioners—or "current artists," a term I use as "contemporary art" no longer accounts for what is being made—that is connected more to what we have all become than to what we might propose, represent, or fail to achieve. The challenge is the supposition that artists today—whether they like it or not—fall into a trap that is predetermined by their existence within a regime that is centred on a rampant "capitalisation of the mind" (Gillick, 2010).

Figure 7 Hope - Shepard Fairey 2008

Despite all the various political structures that govern our very existence, some artists insist on distancing their art practices from any relationship with politics or using their art as an escape from political realities. Strategies of escape from a never-ending affiliation with politics can be observed either in the case of artists who approach art as a "space that needs to be apart from politics" and those who approach art "as speaking a different language" (Harris, 2017). In the first situation, artistic practice could be seen as a "safe haven" from certain politics like Claude Monet's reaction to WWI. Monet refused to escape the physical site of war; rather, he escaped to his art, where he painted many of his placid scenes surrounded by the sound of explosions. In a letter sent from his home just outside of Paris in 1914, he wrote: "I shall stay here regardless, ... and if those barbarians wish to kill me, I shall die among my canvases, in front of my life's work" (King, 2017). The second strategy can be seen to fall under the 'Art for Art's Sake' category, where art is considered totally removed from any political context surrounding it, as in the performative works of the English artist Marvin Gaye Chetwynd, which she describes as "boosting moral", in which she always "prioritise[s] various forms of mayhem and irresponsibility", and which is supposed to make the audience just feel good without any strain around the performance (Chetwynd, 2015). In her performance, *Uptight Upright Upside Down,* which took place at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow (CCA), Chetwynd used the CCA's gallery space as a film set where both the audience and trained performers were part of an ongoing filming process. The overall performance drew on film references such as David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* and Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo* and involved covering all the gallery's walls with scaled-up prints of drawings from the Japanese 17th-century Shunga erotic art tradition—all, according to the artist, with the aim to have viewers get lost within the elements of the performance (Chetwynd, 2017).

I would like to explore the last two strategies of Harris's that can be addressed as a radical stance in relation to politics: art as a builder of a political community and art as a seed for political alternatives. Although they can be differentiated from each other, in some cases both strategies can be interrelated. They are radical strategies because they often tend to go beyond mere criticism or representing discontent. Artists whose practices and work fall under these categories often feel responsible for responding to prevailing political injustices. They tend to utilise their art practices as a strategic tool to potentially stand against forms of injustice such as colonisation, neoliberalism and/or capitalism. Collectivism is one of the most influential aspects of these artistic strategies. For example,

in *The Silent University,* an artistic initiative conceived by the Turkish artist Ahmet Ögüt, refugees and asylum seekers meet as a 'community' and can exchange their various forms of knowledge. This artwork not only functions in an oppositional manner to the prevailing politics of knowledge production and distribution, but it also attempts to give a voice to those who are 'silenced' by these politics via utilising the institution of the museum as a host for various activities run by refugees and asylum-seekers themselves, coordinated by the artist. Similarly, numerous artists and institutions create hubs that gather a 'community' around them, often trying to take meaningful action in fighting back against political hegemony and indicating an 'alternative'. For instance, Jonas Staal describes his ongoing *New World Summit* as an "artistic and political organisation that develops parliaments with and for stateless states, autonomist groups, and blacklisted political organizations" (Staal, 2015). Here, Staal's artistic idea goes beyond the notion of highlighting a political injustice — about communities, organisations or even states which are ignored and marginalised — and puts the solution in practice by helping to form democratic spaces (parliaments) "as a concrete space where its ideals are practiced on a day-to-day basis" (Staal, 2015).

3.3 Contextualising Palestinian Politicised Art

Tracing the history of Palestinian art is not the focus of this Ph.D. research. Nevertheless, I believe that one cannot investigate Palestinian art without understanding the main historical events that played a major role in shaping its characteristics, particularly the *Nakba*[21] of 1948. I do not agree with existing arguments which suggest that Palestinian art was not developed before the occupation of Palestine in 1948 (Zaru, 1989; for a recent study that disproves this theory, (see Al Araj, 2018, pp. 94-97). Instead, I propose that the occupation in 1948 did not lead to the founding of Palestinian art, but rather that it led to its *politicisation*.

[21] Al-Nakba: Pronunciation: /alˈnakbə/*noun,* The Palestinian term for the events of 1948, when many Palestinians were displaced by the creation of the new state of Israel. Origin: Arabic, literally 'the disaster' (Allen and Fowler et al., 1990).

My study views Palestinian art as art produced by artists who identify as Palestinian (Hutchinson and Smith, 1994), regardless of the geographical location of where the artist lives and produces their work. The colonisation of Palestine alongside the continuous scattering of Palestinians in different 'host countries' has prevented the construction of a single, monolithic narrative of Palestinian art (Ankori, 2006). Nevertheless, several Palestinian artists have opted to research and document artistic practices that have taken place around them — including their own — in a completely 'amateuristic' manner (Said, 1994). Ismail Shammout, Samia Halabi, Samia Taktak-Zaru, Ghassan Kanafani and Abed Abidi are only some of the many artists who have made personal attempts to document Palestinian artistic practices across different generations. For instance, in his book *Al-Fan Al-Tashkily Fi Filasteen* (Fine Art in Palestine) (1989), Ismail Shammout, drawing on his active position as the Secretary General of the Union of Palestinian Artists (1969-n/a), put together a comprehensive study of Palestinian art. His book, which classifies artists and their practices according to genres, time of production in relation to Palestinian history, and geography of displacement, serves as an important reference for the history and development of Palestinian art. Similarly, other Palestinian artists have published essays that attempt to locate and investigate the characteristics of Palestinian art in different moments of history, as well as reveal its revolutionary role. Examples of such articles include Samia Taktak-Zaru's article on art from Palestine (1989) published in *Contemporary Art from the Islamic World* (Bisharat and Ali, 1989). *The Palestinian Resistance to Israeli Occupation,* a book where the late Kamal Boullata wrote an article titled *Towards a Revolutionary Arab Art* (1970). Boullata's life work, which culminated in the book *Palestinian Art,* published in 2008, is one of the most prominent examples of Palestinian artists who have devoted significant time to study and contextualise Palestinian art. This dedicated effort and research of these individuals — which has survived looting, displacement, and erasure over different periods of Palestinian history — helps to shed light on the development and role of the arts in Palestine today.

A deep look at Boullata's *Palestinian Art* reveals how characteristics, styles and motivations of Palestinian art practices have changed over time depending on the political context surrounding the different periods of Palestinian history from 1948 to our current time. The book takes its reader into a journey across different realms which, I am going to summarise under four different characteristics that highlight the different transitions that occurred within Palestinian art practices from 1948 until the post-Oslo stage, whose impact is still present until this very moment. The four categories are: 1) documentation

and reflection art 2) armed resistance art 3) grassroots art and 4) institutionalised art. Nevertheless, these categorisations don't mean that these were the only features of Palestinian art, rather, they are just a representation of the reigning spirit of artistic productions which prevailed at the mentioned periods.

The events of *Nakba* in 1948 took Palestinians by surprise. The reality of loss, defeat and deprivation swept over the lives of every Palestinian who witnessed or even heard about that catastrophe. Shortly thereafter, artworks that fall under the documentation and reflection category began to appear in the 1940s and 1950s. Artworks from this period can be divided under two main characteristics: documentation and reflection upon displacement and grief. In the first case, artists opted to create paintings and drawings depicting their experiences fleeing from Palestine[22] with their families and country members. In such artworks, one can see images of tears, fear and humiliation which accompanied these people as they were being kicked out of their homeland (Figure 8). A few years later, another type of painting appeared, which depicts their situation at the refugee camps where they ended up. This was no less humiliating than the journey to exile itself (Figure 10). The most iconic painter of this category is Ismail Shammout (1930-2006). Many of his paintings are even considered by some Arab historians as live evidence of the events of the *Nakba*, at a time when there was no readily available documentation technology (Shammout, 1989). Some years after the *Nakba* took place, Palestinians who ended up in diaspora (mainly in miserable refugee camps) started to develop a new tendency in painting based on recalling the daily life of a lost homeland. Examples of such paintings can be seen in the works of Ibrahim Ghannam (1930-1984). Ghannam's paintings were loaded with scenes of wheat harvest, olive-picking, weddings, and circumcision ceremonies, which beautifully represented images of the village culture of Palestine (Figure 9). These images were highly promoted in the Arab world as a representation of the regret of losing this paradise (Ankori, 2006).

[22] Either by force because of several systematic attacks and massacres that took place in many Palestinian villages or for fear of such atrocities (Šādī and Abu-Lughod, 2007).

Figure 8 Ismail Shammout - Beginning of the Tragedy 1953 - oil on canvass

Figure 10 Ismail Shammout - Palestinian Refugees 1998 - oil on canvas

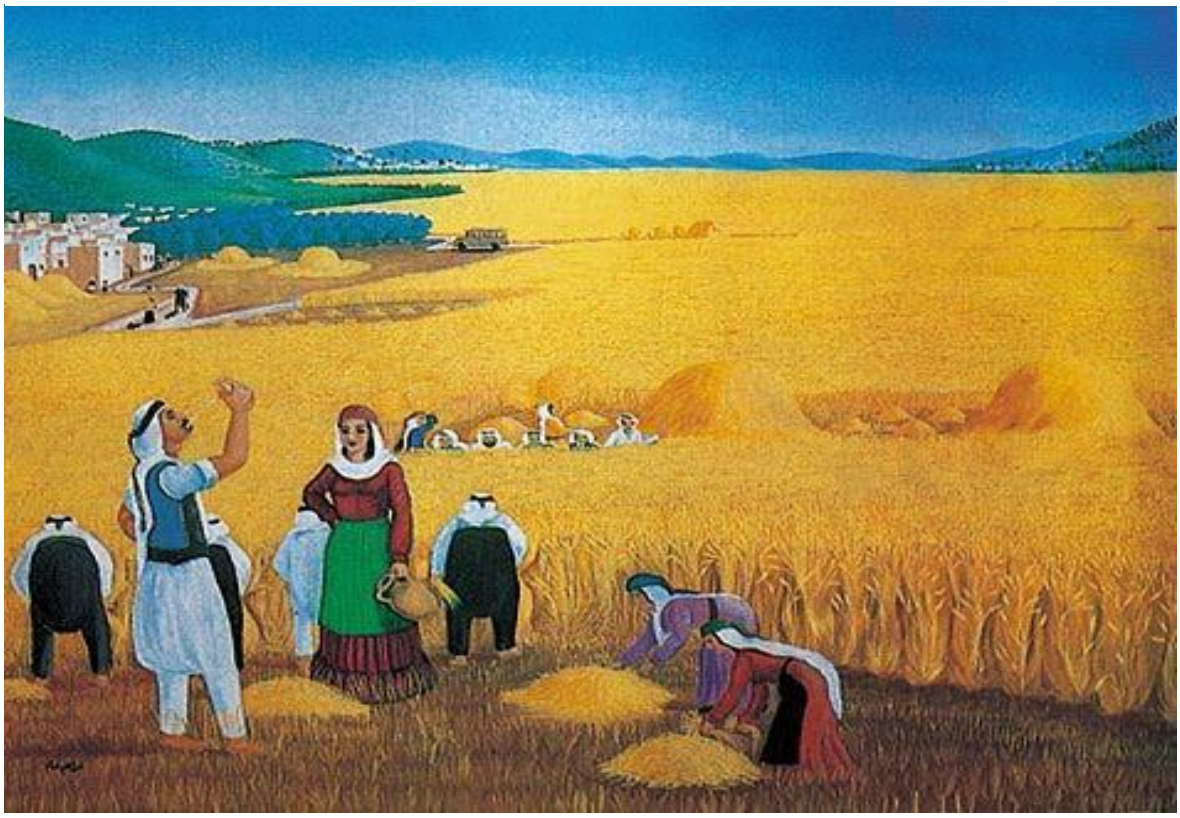

Figure 9 Ibrahim Ghannam - The Harvest 1979

It was not very long after the occupation in 1948 that Palestinian refugees realised no solutions were being given soon, as Israel got recognition and support from powerful

countries around the world while Arab leaders didn't take any practical stance to help the Palestinians. This led to the emergence of the armed resistance against the Israeli occupation. Several political parties began to form in neighbouring countries where Palestinian refugees ended up (e.g., Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, etc). Particularly in 1964 the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization)[23] is founded as a representative of the Palestinian People wherever they existed. As many of its members were also intellectuals, writers and artists, art became a tool that celebrated and promoted the armed resistance against the Zionist occupation. Armed resistance and art were practiced in tandem, contributing to the representation of the Palestinian people in a more humane way, which is addressed in Edward Said's argument about speaking truth to power (Said, 1994). Paintings, posters, and films became vehicles for communicating the Palestinian resistance's aims and aspirations for freedom to the rest of the world (Figures 11 & 12). One of the most powerful bodies that contributed to the cause was the cinematic institution *Aflam Filasteen* (Palestine Films), which was founded in 1968 by a group of Palestinian filmmakers who were also freedom fighters and members of different factions operating under the umbrella of the PLO (Gertz & Khleifi, 2008, p59-73). *Aflam Filasteen* (Palestine Films) managed to communicate the Palestinian narrative all over different continents and their film productions circulated in many international festivals around the world. They even got the attention of other international experts in filmmaking, who

[23] PLO: Palestinian Liberation Organization, which was established by the Arab League in 1964 as an effort to control Palestinian nationalism while appearing to champion the cause. The PLO includes different political and armed groups with varying ideological orientations. Yasser Arafat was the leader of Fatah, the largest group, and has been PLO chairman since 1968. The other major groups are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and, in the occupied territories, the Palestine People's Party (PPP, formerly the Communist Party). Despite factional differences, the majority of Palestinians regard the PLO as their representative government.

collaborated, shared expertise and even made films about the Palestinian struggle such as the Dziga Vertov group[24], which the French filmmaker Jean-luc Goddard[25] was part of.

[24] The Dziga Vertov Group (French: Groupe Dziga Vertov) was formed in 1968 by politically active filmmakers including Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin. Their films are defined primarily for Brechtian forms, Marxist ideology, and a lack of personal authorship. The group, named after 1920s-30s Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), was dissolved soon after the completion of 1972's *Letter to Jane*.

[25] In 1970, together with Jean-Pierre Gorin, they made a film titled *Jusqu'à la victoire* (Until Victory/Palestine Will Win) that was filmed in Jordan. Also, in 1976, together with Anne-Marie Miéville, they made another film using footage from the first one under the title *Ici et Ailleurs* (Here and Elsewhere).

Figure 11 1000 Arms - Circa 1968 © Palestine Poster Project

Figure 12 Jamil Shammout – 1948-1965 © Palestine Poster Project

The earlier movements in art took place in exile. Soon after Israel invaded the West Bank, Gaza, the Syrian Golan Heights, and the Egyptian Sinai desert in 1967, creative people in the West Bank and Gaza — as well as Palestinians in other sectors — felt the need to take a responsible role in the Palestinian conflict. This was the moment when artists started to self-organise artistic and cultural initiatives using a collective strategy. The zenith of these movements was in the late seventies and the eighties, when artists used their own houses and studios as gallery spaces, rehearsal rooms, and meeting points where the rest of their peers could work, meet, and exhibit. Gallery 79 (Figure 13) was the first art gallery in the West Bank. It got its name after the year of its establishment and was shut down by the Israeli military forces on the day of its opening. Later, the gallery served

Figure 13 Gallery 79 © Gallery 79

as an unofficial artist space and residence for many years. Similarly, the artist Isam Bader (1948-2003) started a gallery in his own house in Ramallah in the early eighties.

The rise of violence against Palestinians, especially with the First Intifada[26] in 1987, didn't stop Palestinian artists from using their art as a tool for peaceful resistance against the occupation. Paintings from this period were full of images praising the struggle of the Palestinian people and their sacrifices in the camp for freedom and liberty. Also, many of these paintings were reproduced as posters, which circulated in different areas of occupied Palestine and the rest of the world. Some strategies used by Palestinian artists from that generation exceeded the mere notion of representation. During the First Intifada artists Sliman Mansour, Tayseer Barakat, Vera Tamari, and Nabil Anani came up with a boycott strategy towards Israeli art supplies and materials to protest the occupation's brutality. This strategy culminated through their collective *New Visions*, where the artists turned to use materials from the Palestinian native environment (e.g., mud, straws, rust, henna, and actual objects) as an alternative for colours, canvas, and other materials (Sharaf, 2019, p. 170-171).

The earlier spirit of artistic initiatives and collectivism vanished shortly after Palestine entered the Oslo era. The Oslo Agreement was a major shift in Palestinian contemporary history. It marked the moment when the Palestinian cause transformed from a liberal movement struggling under occupation into a bureaucratic entity like the ones in the neighbouring countries (Nakhleh, 2011). Oslo's effect on the arts and culture sector is still under debate. Newly established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) made a noticeable impact on the arts in Palestine through international funding bodies. One can summarize the positive impacts of this development by saying it led to:

- The rise of international Palestinian art visibility due to international partnerships and projects inside and outside of Palestine.
- The increase of opportunities for artists to travel for exhibition and study purposes led to new styles in art making.
- The emergence of new mediums in art which were less popular before, such as video art and performance art.

[26] The First Intifada was a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The uprising lasted from December 1987 until the Madrid Conference in 1991, though some date its conclusion to 1993, with the signing of the Oslo Accords.

Despite these developments, this period also witnessed the transformation of many artistic initiatives into NGOs so they could benefit from the funds, which were allocated to helping the Palestinians upon the signing of the Oslo Accords. This was shortly followed by the rise of individualism over collectivism because of 'globalised' values, embraced by cultural and artistic institutions which took the responsibility for financing and marketing Palestinian art, mainly, in the West Bank and Gaza (Darrag, 1996). These shifts are an integral part of far bigger shifts that reshaped the totality of Palestinian society on economic, social, and political levels (Samara, 2012). Some years later, many critical voices started to call attention to the negative impacts of the post-Oslo strategies on every sector of Palestinian society. Although, resources specifically addressed to discussing these issues in the art sector are limited and brief, some recently published books mark a new critical perspective on the state of culture in Palestine nowadays, such as Ismail Nashif's book *Mi'mariyat al-fiqdan* (The Architecture of Loss) and Faisal Darrag's book *Buʾs al-thaqāfah fī al-muʾassasah al-Filasṭīnīyah* (The Misery of Culture in the Palestinian Institution). Both books dealt with the art and culture context from a post-colonial perspective, where international funding was, in most cases, aimed at creating a state of dependency rather than a supportive one.

I believe that looking deeply into these attempts and investigations can very much help this Ph.D. research understand the exact current situation of the arts and where its roles, benefits, gaps, and alternatives can be potentially identified. There remains a lack of studies dedicated to the post-Oslo conditions of Palestine in relation to the arts. Nevertheless, the post-Oslo effect on the arts appears in some literature that emerged since 1993. One can't ignore the benefits that the post-Oslo period brought to the art scene. Artists, art institutions and art schools were sponsored, and new forms of art that had not been popularly practiced started to appear, such as video, performance, and multi-media art practices (Boullata, 2009). The younger generation of artists continue to benefit from opportunities for learning, international exchanges, artist residences and exhibit their work globally. These phenomena were facilitated by NGOs operating in the field of culture, such as the A.M. Al Qattan Foundation (established in Palestine in 1998) and the International Academy of Art Palestine (2006-2017). On the other hand, many have criticised what the Oslo Accords have brought to the arts, including Boullata himself who stressed his discontent about the rise of what he called 'post-Oslo clientelism' on behalf of collectivism (Boullata, 2009).

In addition to this, many Palestinian artists and curators tried to scrutinise the post-Oslo Agreement conditions, reflected in the number of questions which emerge *from* and *through* a post-Oslo cultural topography. This can be seen in the essays that the artist Steve Sabella produced in 2010 and 2011, where he analysed the journey of Palestinian art to the market. Additionally, Palestinian curator Rawan Sharaf wrote a Ph.D. thesis where she questioned the institutionalisation of the Palestinian art field in the post-Oslo period. Other investigations took the form of conversations, such as the one that appeared in the one-day symposium organised by Yazid Anani and Alia Rayyan, part of the Qalandiya International Palestinian Biennial, where the role of the arts was discussed in relation to the current political situation that Palestinians live in.

I believe that looking deeply into some of these cultural interventions and investigations, help to situate this research within the nuanced and layered landscape of art-making in Palestine. Therefore, this helps to deepen our understanding of the current situation of the arts, and where its roles, benefits, gaps, and alternatives can be potentially identified. As argued by the Palestinian curator Rawan Sharaf (2019), the major shift that impacted the production of art in Palestine can be located in the spatio-temporal coordinates of transformation of the artistic domain, from an artist-led domain to an institutional-led one, centred in the city of Ramallah in the West Bank. This positioned it as a cultural capital for Palestinians. Thus, the main framework activating the production and distribution of Palestinian art can be summarised as follows:

"NGOs contributed to contemporising the art production and engendering new conventions for the field, based on international references and creating an inter-dependent relationship between the artists and the institution, but where the institution remains the element in power, managing, and influencing, much of the artists' actual production as well as their access to exhibition opportunities and establishing an international presence." (Sharaf, 2019, p.314)

This framework, which applied to the West Bank and partially Gaza, until 2008 [27], played a major role in inspiring a new political language predicated on institutionalisation of the arts and its internationalist cultural dimensions. It also influenced characteristics within

[27] The reality for Gaza changed after the Political separation with the West Bank as a result of the disagreement between Fatah and Hamas in 2008.

the practice of Palestinian artists, whether they lived within the borders of the Palestinian quasi-nation state or outside it. With cultural power residing within the institution, artists are compelled to perform to and for the institutional gaze, eroding the expansive critical and creative terrains of their practice. The next subsection contemplates some of these major characteristics through an examination of Kamal Boullata's (2004) text, *Art Under Siege.*

3.4 Palestinian Contemporary Art: The 'Political' in the Post-Oslo Accords.

In our contemporary times, Palestinian art is ostensibly thriving. This is evident in the proliferation of institutions, art galleries, international events and festivals which have been taking place in Palestine over the past few years. Additionally, Palestinian artists such as Emily Jacir, Khaled Hourani, the duo Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abu Rahmeh, Jummana Manna, Jummana Abboud and others, enjoy great international visibility. Most of these Palestinian artists address Palestinian politics in their work, each in their own way and according to their beliefs. There is no claim here that Palestinian artists are any different from the assemblage of artists I curate using Harris' (2017) ideas. On the contrary, I am aware that the state of the arts in Palestine is a microcosm of the international conditions governing art institutions globally. As art institutions in Palestine are mainly financed by international agencies, they are, through osmosis, influenced by their imported agendas (Haddad, 2016). Nevertheless, this does not mean that we can holistically evaluate Palestinian art the same way we evaluate art in other national contexts, due the particularities of the Palestinian situation: the displacement and fragmentation enveloping both its history and contemporary predicament. What defines Palestinian art today is the result of an unstable Palestinian environment, between a continuous Israeli colonialism, on one hand, and a neoliberal postcolonial state-building project on the other hand (Boullata, 2004; Haddad, 2016). Art is no longer associated with a regime founded on revolutionary principles. The adoption of open market strategies, dissociating art and culture from the expenditure of the post-Oslo Agreement Palestinian political regime, has left the artistic field to the Palestinian private sector, which is dominated by internationally funded NGOs. This, without mentioning diasporic

artistic production, which is being conceived of and constructed in a variety of geographies.

A few years before Harris's (2017) essay, Kamal Boullata wrote a seminal essay where he mapped out the general politicised characteristics embedded in Palestinian art practices, based on an analysis that he had conducted on a selection of Palestinian Artists who participated in the Young Artist of the Year Award (YAYA) in 2002. The essay which is titled *Art Under Siege,* intersects with many of the ideas discussed later by Max Harris. However, Boullata's essay introduces more context-specific characteristics than the general thematics in Harris's essay.

According to Boullata, representation manifests itself within contemporary Palestinian art practices in different forms and styles such as the representation of Palestinian memory and trauma, Palestinian narratives of displacement, Palestinian national identity and Palestinian international solidarity and awareness. Besides representation, Boullata noted two additional characteristics: activism and critique of power structures. Representing Palestinian memory and trauma within Palestinian art practices is tightly connected to addressing narratives connected with historical events such as the Nakba and its continuing effect on the Palestinian present (Sen, 2015; Boullata, 2004). In the case of representing Palestinian displacement, artists reflect on the experiences of living in the diaspora condition, away from the centre of Palestinian cultural life in the West Bank. Artworks under this category address the ongoing challenges faced by the perpetual state of exile, refuge and fragmentation surrounding Palestinian life. Another dominant aspect, entangled with contemporary Palestinian art works, involves the visual representation of symbols, traditions and narratives which affirm the resilience and continuity of Palestinian culture regardless of the multifaceted challenges Palestinians continue to face (Boullata, 2004). Finally, the representation of international solidarity has appeared as a politicised characteristic in several Palestinian art practices since the pre-Oslo era, which began in the 60s. According to Boullata, artworks under this category seek to foster awareness about the rights of Palestinians, as well as crafting radical political ecologies with other oppressed communities around the world (Boullata, 2004, p. 72).

Representation, as a dominant characteristic within the domain of contemporary Palestinian art, has been always thought about through Said's approach: speaking truth to power. Boullata asserts that the representation of Palestine and the injustice(s) facing the Palestinian people has dominated the subject, context and subtext Palestinians work with,

in and through. This approach flourished under the Palestinian revolutionary movement, between the 1960s and the time of the signing of the Oslo Accords, which marked the end of the Palestinian armed resistance. What is unique about the post-Oslo moment, is the perceptible shift in the politics represented within the body of Palestinian art practices. Through the political context explored in Chapter one, it is apparent that the moment before the political project installed by the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian cause had a clearer political direction anchored in the self-determination of the Palestinians, the right of return of the Palestinian refugees of the 1948 and 1967 occupations; and the liberation of the Palestinians from Israeli control and subjugation. Whilst in this contemporary political moment, the official Palestinian discourse and trajectory, as represented by the Palestinian Authority, is more focused on socio-economic aspects of Palestinian life within the West Bank and Gaza, there are other political narratives and realities which emerge, such as the Islamic Militant approach adopted by Hamas (Daher and Bargouthi, 2018) .These different political directions also affect the characteristics of contemporary art practices in Palestine.

For example, the representation and celebration of Palestinian culture and heritage have been an apparent characteristic discussed within Palestinian art discourse since the onset of the Israeli occupation in 1948 (Boullata, 2009). However, the shift towards the state-building project engendered new cultural characteristics disassociated from the project of revolution, becoming more involved in aspects concerning civil society and human rights (Slitine, 2016; Awad, 2007). This shift in political and cultural ideology may generate cultural sentiments which perceive the revolutionary cultural engagement of the past as a cliché, rendered anachronistic, in comparison with the contemporary political direction. Some artists are still trapped in the aesthetic representation of Palestine in an overly romanticised manner. This can be noticed in many works by the Jerusalemite painter Taleb Dweik. Most of Dweik's paintings depict portraits, holy shrines, and political Palestinian symbols in an embellished aesthetic gesture, full of strong colours and dynamism, disassociated from any criticality towards the changing cultural and political climate (Figure 14).

Despite the decline of the Palestinian revolution in the early 90s, some artists are successful in harnessing and carrying the revolutionary spirit in their artistic output. The graphically designed posters of Hafez Omar are regularly seen by thousands around the world, facilitated through social media networks. Many of his designs have also been

reproduced on prints, T-shirts, and signs, which are used in political contexts, aligned with the militant content of these posters (Figure 15). Omar's designs represent views embraced by those who oppose the politics of the Palestinian Authority, thus disrupting the political legitimacy of the Oslo project. This approach aligns with Boullata's observation concerning the representation of resistance towards contemporary political challenges as an activist approach (Boullata, 2004). Contrary to art practices laden with symbols of resistance, other Palestinian artists have fallen into representing the ideas which assert the picture of Palestine through the nation-state's lens and its state-building mechanisms. An example of a similar practice is the ongoing project of Khaled Jarrar's State of Palestine, where he produces missing elements of the Palestinian state such as postage stamps or the border stamp (Figures 16 & 17.). Jarrar sees this work as a gesture opposing the non-existence of the Palestinian state. Despite that, the work is clearly campaigning for a political dream which is mainly celebrated by the Palestinian Authority and those who are supporting its state-building politics, whether the artist is conscious of this or not.

Moreover, under the activist approaches discussed by Boullata, there are art practices situated around the artist's personal experience with politics, as a mechanism, to expose elements of Palestinian life under different situations of injustice and postcolonial absurdity. Emily Jacir's (2002) Crossing Surda, is an example of this. Jacir's video recorded an eight-day commute to work at the Birzeit University, north of Ramallah, through Surda's Flying Checkpoint28 (Figure 18). This artwork is a clear witness to some of the anxiety and humiliation which thousands of Palestinians experience daily, including the artist herself.

Additionally, where some Palestinian artists take an activist position against the status quo maintained by the Israeli occupation, other Palestinian artists focus their criticality on the Palestinian domain. In this domain, the mechanisms engendered through the formation and maintenance of the Palestinian state-building project inspire politicised

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[28] 'Flying checkpoint' is a term used by Palestinians to describe a kind of temporary checkpoints, which are installed arbitrary between Palestinian cities and villages, where the Israeli military forces have the authority to interrupt any Palestinian movement for inspection or any other reason.

artistic characteristics that clash with this project. One approach to do so can be noticed in artworks that deconstruct nationally recognized symbols, which are mostly understood as taboos that no one should mess with. The gesture behind this kind of practice invites the viewer to look at things from a different perspective. Several of Amer Shomali's artworks fall easily under this category in a highly critical sense, hidden behind a fine aesthetic outcome such as his piece The Icon. The Icon depicts a famous photograph of the leftist revolutionary freedom fighter Laila Khaled, made of putting a sum of 3500 multi-coloured lipsticks next to each other (Figure 19). The Icon is the artist's critical response to consumerism in Palestinian society where advertisement signs are overwhelmingly taking over the city landscape and intoxicating our brains.

The last example, concerning the politicised characteristics embedded in Palestinian contemporary art practices, can be also listed under approaches that clash with the contemporary Palestinian status quo. In such art practices, artists have a more committed approach towards the political possibilities within their artistic production. This category of artists has the most varied strategies of all the ones mentioned before. It ranges from investigating archives to institutional critique, and social interventions. The work of the Palestinian duo, Sandy Hilal and Alessandro Petti, is a perfect example of this category particularly their project Campus in Camps. This project is an ongoing initiative which looks at refugee camps as a hub for learning, especially within the context where refugee camps are merely seen as a subject of inquiry as opposed to a site of knowledge-making and active learning through potentially radical pedagogical interventions. (Figure 20).

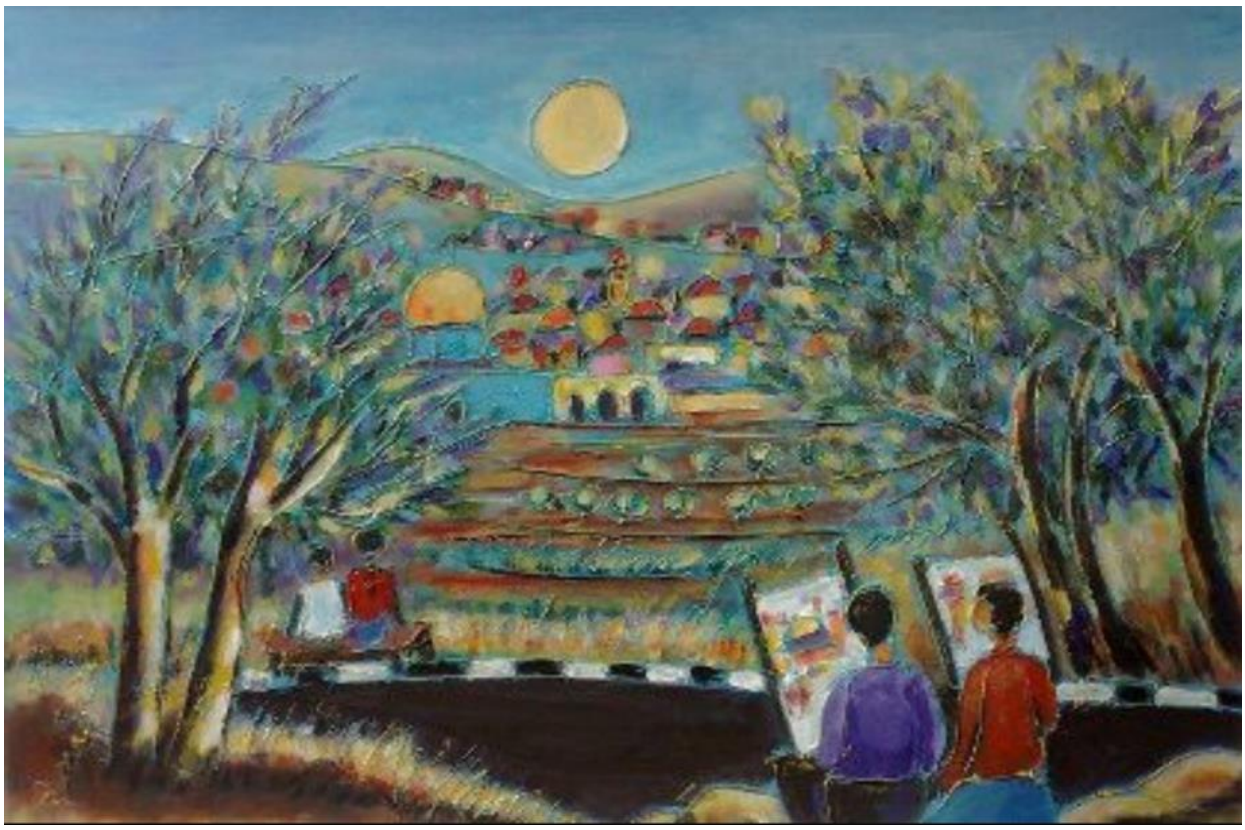

Figure 14 Taleb Dweik - Unknown title Circa 2012

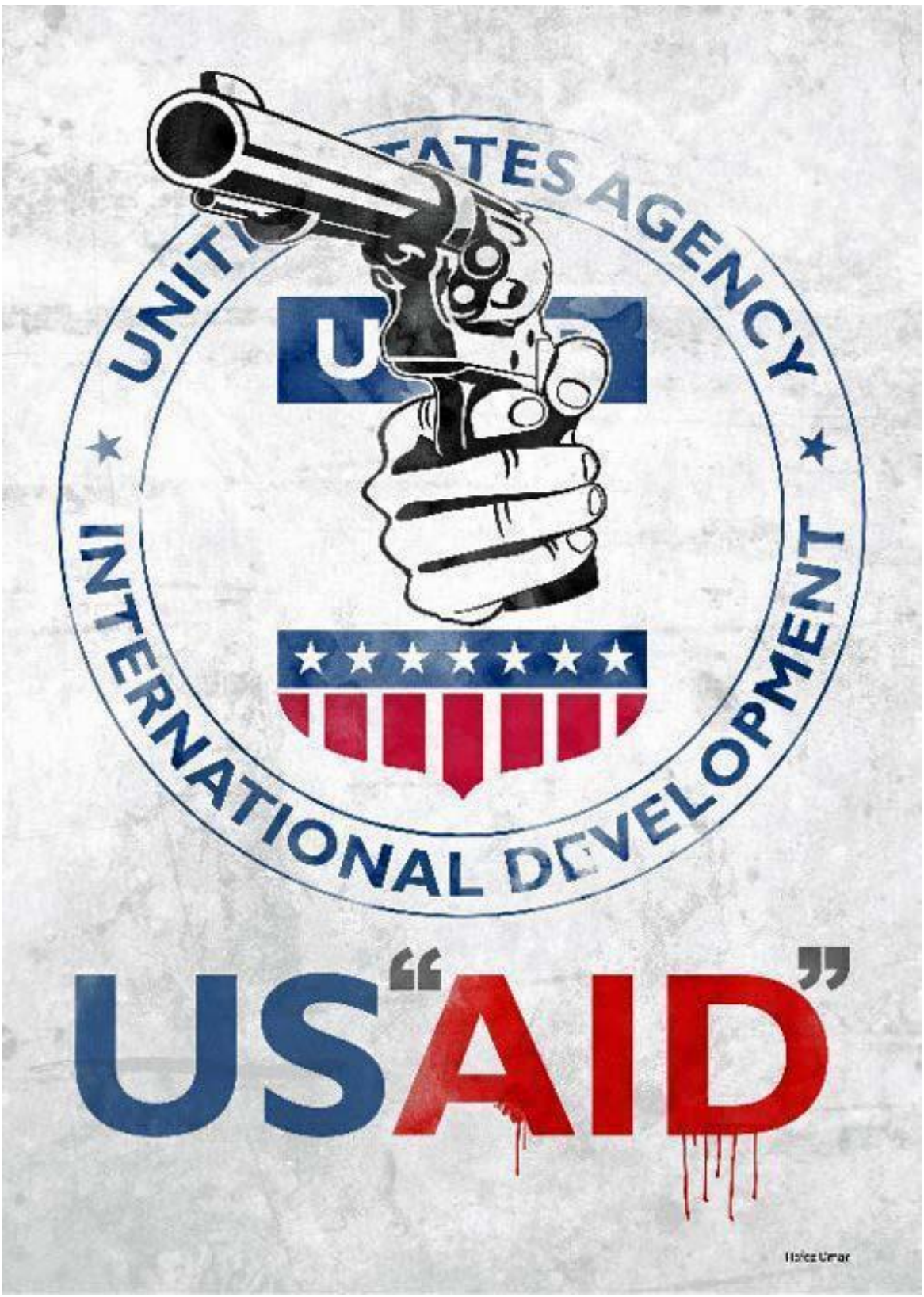

Figure 15 Hafez Omar - USA - Graphic design - 2012

Figure 16 Khaled Jarrar –-State of Palestine - Berlin Biennale 2012

Figure 17 Kahled Jarrar State of Palestine Post stamp -Berlin Biennale 2012

Figure 18 Emily Jacir - Crossing Surda 2008

Figure 19 Amer Shomali - The Icon 2011

Figure 20 Campus in Camps - The concrete tent - Dheisheh Refugee Camp 2015

Conclusion

This chapter reviews a variety of theoretical and practical creative concepts to identify art's presence in connection with everchanging politics in Palestine today. Having done that, evokes many questions concerning the disconnection between art and the surrounding socio-political Palestinian space discussed at the beginning of this chapter. A closer look at all the above ideas reflects a practical outlook on the Palestinian 'social space (national)' through examining the 'art field' as an unbreakable entity of the different Palestinian realities (Bourdieu, 1996/1992). 'Field' as discussed by the French Philosopher Pierre Bourdieu denotes a 'structured space of positions … determined by the distribution of different resources or "capital"' (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 212; Thomson, 1991, p. 14). Hence, the previous analysis of the field of art at different moments of Palestinian national history illustrates the multiple and different intersections with the surrounding systems of power, both internal and external. However, what concerns me here is the state of the Palestinian art field nowadays when compared with the past. As noted in the examination of Palestinian art that emerged around the revolutionary times. The realisation which leads to the fact that the socio-political changes following the sign of the Oslo Accords also brought a shift to the field of art. Through that realisation, the next chapter will examine the creative practice developed part of this study to respond to the realities highlighted in this chapter concerning the art field as a field of an industry that produces outcomes upon its rules, conditions and limitations..

Chapter Four: Breathing Archives and the Accumulation of Palestinian *Tacit* Knowledge

Introduction

This chapter aims to benefit from the examination discussed in the previous three chapters to rethink my role as an agent in the field of art in relation to the challenges surrounding the production and dissemination of Palestinian knowledge in the post-Oslo Accords Era. The term field here still draws on Bourdieu's classification of social spaces into fields of different operations. By doing so, this chapter is positioned as a documentation of the creative process accompanied by the theoretical side of the investigation examined in Chapters One and Three, as a practice that seeks to engage with the Palestinian social space via my position within the field of Palestinian art. Both Chapters Two and Four are positioned as a discussion of my creative practice as a practice that must produce novel and useful outcomes in relation to the time and place where it is conducted. The idea that centres the discussion around the methods I employ lead to creative processes that allows me to engage with my time and place and produce novel and/or useful outcomes. This mechanism implies activating my position as a participant-observer where my own experiences and observations inspire the selection of the methods within the process. Participant observation is a familiar approach in several research disciplines especially anthropology and sociology, where the researcher is not external to the field of research under scrutiny, but rather, an active part of it (Bernard and Gravlee, 2015,). The approach which defines the practice-based nature of my research as a series of interdisciplinary processes based on a combination between data collection and creative engagement. The collected data emerges from daily observations and experiences that informs creative methods able to generate creative outcomes in the form of artworks.

Since the source of inspiration driving my art practice is constantly shifting, therefore the methods within the practice also keep shifting. This keeps the practice dynamic and evolving. A few cycles of shifting methods are discussed in depth in Chapter Two, where I examine the way my art practice allows me to engage with the conditions behind the observations and experiences that I live through. This led Chapter Two to identify the knowledge generated within the practice as a 'tacit' knowledge, aligning with the ideas

forwarded by Michael Polanyi (1997). On the same approach, this chapter sits as an examination of the methods previously employed to engage with observations situated in the field of my career as an attempt to discuss the possibilities for art to contribute effectively in relation to the realities surrounding the Palestinian social space. Through doing so, the examination also reflects the way in which 'participant observation' allows me to position my art practice in relation to my personal experience as a creator through employing the practice of art as an approach to engage effectively with the conditions behind my experiences and observations.

This chapter sets out to achieve that through two fundamental interconnected methodological interventions. First, the employment of participant observation principles constituted the examination of autobiographical narrative to unpack my experience as an agent in the field of art and critically reflect on the domain of my practice and its relevance to the surrounding challenges (Bernard and Gravlee, 2015). This approach allows for identifying the challenges embedded in the structural domain of Palestinian art in the post-Oslo era to determine the appropriate way to address them, such as the rise of individualism over collectivism and its impact on Palestinian knowledge production. Second, the challenges concerning art and knowledge production in the post-Oslo era will be addressed by introducing the Breathing Archive as the central methodological intervention of this doctoral research. The Breathing Archive (or Breathing Archives) methodologically intervenes by extending the approaches of my art practice towards ethnographic research aimed at collecting 'tacit' knowledge embedded in the practices of Palestinian artists beyond the Oslo Accords landscape (Polanyi, 1997). In doing so, the Breathing Archive ultimately seeks to address the epistemological deficiencies embedded in the 'explicit' Palestinian structures in the domains of art and the archive examined earlier in this thesis (see Chapter One, section 1.4 and Chapter Three, section 3.4).

The idea of being a 'responsible' artist is the driver behind the nature of the art practice I am leading because the ability to produce an effective outcome within the practice is one of the reasons that kept the practice shifting until the idea of effectivity became the subject under scrutiny. Effectivity in the sense of having the ability to produce tangible contributions not merely making gestures. Considering the challenging conditions surrounding the space where I produce and distribute my artworks, it makes sense to wonder whether art can contribute to the Palestinian context as a practice revolving around knowledge production and distribution. The apparent absence of an anti-colonial

epistemological project in the art field in the post-Oslo Accords era should not discourage the search for new methods that could allow art practice to disrupt the existing order through creative mechanisms. The contribution I can recognise in my art practice concerns itself with the potential to propose new meanings for the Palestinian archive in ways that can lead to re-thinking the discourse of Palestine. During the journey that includes visualising Palestinian loss and working with family documents I was able to put into practice Foucault's analysis on archive as an analytical concept, through performing archival extractions from non-discursive forms of archive. When considering this approach and the statements it was able to produce in conjunction with the Palestinian legacy of loss, the practice's contribution can be viewed through its ability to come up with methods that helps overtaking the limitations of the archive, as a historically embedded institution, towards proposing other possibilities. Nevertheless, the disappearance of the anti-colonial infrastructure within the internatioally recognised governing structure in Palestine threatens the accumulation of such Palestinian knowledge that can contribute effectively to inspiring a liberatory culture as part of the desire to live and practise different aspects of life while free from colonial injustice. According to this fact, the idea of art's contribution becomes a matter for questioning when considering the forces within the field of art, as my main field of operation, where I could spot an absence of an effective epistemological project that contributes to the Palestinian production and distribution of knowledge in the midst of the challenges posed by the continious Israeli occupation and the failure of the Oslo Accords' nation state project in the West Bank and Gaza. The forces of the field of art refers to the industrial mechanisms driving the production and distribution of art as a product for art markets (Sharaf, 2019). The art industry's reality is an extension to the absence of an effective epistemological project within the Palestinian field of power (political), which itself, is dominated by the Israeli field of power, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Shifting the angle of observation from the social space, that I am part of as a citizen, to the field of art within that social space, that I am part of as an artist, occurs as the result to a new awareness concerning the difference between the practice of art as a work of creativity and the practice of art as part of an industry with its politics and rules. The difference between the two understandings lies in the fact that art as a creative practice depends on perceiving the outcome of this practice as novel and/or useful. The perception always stands on a familiarity with the (old) or an existing problem to be able to see the outcome as novel or useful. The alternative understanding of art's effectivity depends on

the rules that govern the perception of art and facilitates its production as a commercial product, as discussed by Pierre Bourdieu in his essay *The Production of Belief*. Bourdieu adds, "Producers and vendors of cultural goods who 'go commercial' condemn themselves, and not only from an ethical or aesthetic point of view, because they deprive themselves of the opportunities open to those who can recognize the specific demands of this universe and who, by concealing from themselves and others the interests at stake in their practice, obtain the means of deriving profits from disinterestedness." (Bourdieu, 1980, p262). This understanding clarifies the reliance on participant observation as an integral approach within the practice because it allows me to commit to some of the 'demands of the universe' that I am part of instead of focusing on profiting, considering the commercial ideology activating most of the processes in the art field. The questions that emerged from activating my position as a participant observer in the Palestinian field of art inspired new methods for conducting the practice as an adaptation to the conditions inspired by such questions. The mechanism which allows me to rethink my position as a Palestinian artist is the examination of some of the mechanisms within the field of my operation and adjusting them in accordance with my understanding of the Palestinian status quo. Therefore, in the following sections of this chapter the participant observer approach unfolds through examining several observations within the field of art and the methods I employed to engage with the context of said observations, in accordance with my intimate knowledge of the art field as an artist. By doing so, I seek to depart from my personal experience as an agent in the field of Palestinian art to elaborate on my practice's position between the aspects of its contribution and its complacency.

4.1 Reflections on Complacency

The term 'complacency' is not an unfamiliar accusation in the world of art, particularly when art is practised within spaces of struggle. In a few essays from the year 1993, Edward Said discusses what it means to be intellectual, which also applies for a great deal of artists. The essays were assembled in a book called *The Representation of The Intellectuals*, where Said discusses the ways in which an intellectual/artist can serve society (Said, 1994). He argues that the intellectual is responsible for contributing to the public without being co-opted by any form of power. Otherwise, they would be committing a betrayal to their society, particularly when it is under oppression. More radically, Frantz Fanon also argues that those artists who do not speak for their struggling

people are speaking for the coloniser (Fanon, 1963, pp. 222-223). I tend to agree with both thinkers, although I am not very keen about using the term ‘betrayal’ comfortably.

Based on my experience as an artist, I have had several conversations with other artists about how we are all complicit in mechanisms that mean many of us make no actual contribution to the Palestinian struggle beyond our individual achievements. Also, we discuss how it is difficult to disrupt those mechanisms when most artists expect to survive from art as their main profession. Having said that, I do not necessarily mean to represent artists as victims instead of traitors. Rather, these personal observations suggest the existence of other statements located within the mainstream statements of the Palestinian field of art. Such statements indicate a state of inefficiency in the practice of art, where the outcome of these practices have no impact on the Palestinian discourse. Departing from those personal observations, I can take a position in this Ph.D. investigation, where I am drawing on Said’s and Fanon’s ideas to re-think the possibility for art practice to take a responsible role in relation to the realities surrounding its making. The term ‘complacency’ is consciously employed to denote a state of un-criticality, that which refers to art as an impactless practice, considering the politics surrounding its production and distribution, regardless of how it is perceived in the field of art. The continuous state of coloniality entangling every aspect of Palestinians’ lives is the reason behind the expectation that art, as a practice emerging in such conditions, must play a responsible role in relation to those conditions. Therefore, questioning the impact of art in relation to the Palestinian social struggles with colonisation becomes a primary necessity to figure out ways for switching art’s position from complacency to responsibility.

Back in the seventies and the eighties, Palestinian artists were considered more responsible in conjunction with Said’s view because several forms of art were able to contribute to the making of a de-colonising Palestinian culture integral to the anti-colonial political project at that time. The Palestinian liberation movements functioned as the Palestinian field of power and inspired anti-colonial strategies among several Palestinian fields. Whereas today, anti-colonial strategies must operate without the inspiration or the support of a Palestinian field of power that could challenge the colonial field of power surrounding it. The absence of an anti-colonial project to liberate any of the Palestinian divided spaces affected by expansive Israeli colonial project does not necessarily mean the absence of an anti-colonialthinking that which aligns with Foucault’s idea of the sub-systems that produce events and statements within the dominant system. The question is

not whether such sub-systems exist but not rather, how the statements it produces can contribute effectively to the Palestinain discourse within the domination of colonial "biopower"[29] (Foucault, 1976, p140)? This question also applies to the practice of art and the subsystems that lie within it. This question, which emerged from observations accumulated through my position as an agent in the field of art, marks the point of departure to a journey where I employ my creative practice to investigate the field of art, and not only produce within it. Having said that, implies that my role as a participant observer does not only mean using my own position as a means for data collection, but also to critically examine my position as an artist who is involved in the field under scrutiny. The journey to do so is twofold: first, a preliminary stage where I employ mapping and mind mapping to rearrange already existing knowledge concerning the Palestinian field of art and second, fieldwork where I employ ethnographic mechanisms as proposed advancement to the notion of the archive within my art practice, to push for a shift in the nature of the practice and its outcomes. I recognise these approaches as a commitment to generating an effective contribution through my art practice to the social conditions surrounding my life.

4.2 Mapping and Mind Mapping

When paying attention to art as a profession that has its own politics of production and distribution, art's contribution becomes debatable because its impact on the social context in which it is produced does not depend solely on the artist's intentions. It also depends on the politics of the production and distribution, and whether they employ the outcomes of the practice of art in an impactful way or not. As discussed by Michal Polanyi (1997), the politics embedded in the 'explicit' structures of knowledge production may overlook and exclude narratives within the social fabric because they do not align with the political agenda. By looking at the Palestinian domain of art through Polanyi's lens, it is possible

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[29] "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality* Vol. 1 p. 140 (1976)

to imagine how it excludes Palestinian narratives by influencing the production of Palestinian knowledge, reinforcing the discourse of the Palestinian nation-state and overlooking alternative narratives. Through examining the politics embedded in the domain of Palestinian art, I aim to identify the challenges that prevent the practice of art from having a social impact in relation to the colonial realities surrounding its production. By doing so, I distinguish between the work of art as a creative practice that produces novel and useful outcomes in relation to the known (old) art industry and the rules that organise its processes. Accordingly, regardless of the contents and the statements produced by creative producers, most of whom are still influenced, to varying degrees,by the different states of coloniality, one cannot expect art to have an impact without the existence of a system or subsystem to uphold it as a movement, like the ones that existed back in the seventies and eighties as discussed in Chapter Three.

In accordance with the Palestinian reality today that is divided because of settler-colonialism and the resulting Palestinian political failures, I have realised that the past years of my career have been only situated within a limited Palestinian art field: that of the city of Ramallah as well as the little field in eastern part of Jerusalem. Despite the presence of different Palestinian backgrounds in those fields, art often occur on an individual basis without a clear structure for bridging several groups of divided Palestinians who still share the same culture. This is not only unique to the field of art; it is a post-Oslo-agreement reality which was discussed by the likes of Edward Said, Sameeh Shabib, and Saleh Abdel Gawad, where Palestinian social spaces remain hugely disconnected on a long-term principle. Hence, the disconnected Palestinian realities make all of us complacent, in a way, because we remain trapped in mechanisms that accentuate our division more than uniting us, as examined in chapter one, particularly in relation to the Israeli settler-colonial project. Art is one of the fields implicated in such a divided reality. Then, as a member of the Palestinian field of art, I can consequently realise that I am involved in the continuity of the Palestinian division, because my art practice does not contribute to resolving that division.

On a more unifying note, the positive aspect of realising this limitation is related to the attention it brings to other Palestinian fields of art that I never had the chance to explore, such as Gaza and Haifa, which are inside the territories occupied in 1948. Addressing this situation gives me the first direction towards reversing my complacency. The divided Palestinian reality does not only mean that Palestinians today are severely disconnected

from each other's lives and destinies, but also that they are shaped as Palestinians in diverse ways, as discussed earlier, which indicates that their practices and the outcomes they produce are different. This awareness inspired the reliance on mapping as a versatile data collection strategy with a strong visual aspect. The visual aspect of mapping allows for arranging divided Palestinian artists, from different geographies in occupied Palestine and abroad, into new orders that can reveal hidden aspects at times, as well as generate questions, at other times. The creation of the maps relies on information that I already have, but the biggest part of them consists of information that I could find online concerning any living artist labelled as Palestinian. The idea was to depart from the reality that we are divided in different geographies under varying conditions, and to take the opportunity to examine how such differences are understood as Palestinian knowledge. The first map I created in this process arranges the names of several living Palestinian artists based on the geographies where they live and practice nowadays, as well as the periods for their activity between the 40s-60s, 60s-80s and 80s-2000. This map became the main foundation for the ones that followed, in a way that allows for tracing how the times when they practiced art and the geography where they did so affect what one can learn about Palestinian works of art in relation to the mediums artists use, the visibility they possess in the art industry, and the characteristics of their practices, for example (Figure 21). While developing those maps, I took interest in the whole approach of mapping, because it allows for establishing relationships between separated but related elements in connection with the Palestinian subjects in my investigation who are divided between different colonial realities but are still part of the same culture. The biggest inspiration on this approach comes from the practice of the late American artist Mark Lombardi, which mainly involved the creation of aesthetically intriguing maps. In those maps, Lombardi 'illustrated the interplay between international agents and their fiscal manoeuvres, tracing the complex paths of shadowy financial transactions between members of the world's political elite', through the creation of said maps (Palmer, 2015). He referred to such maps as 'structure narratives' due to their ability to stand as an intriguing visual structure while still maintaining the ability to narrate different stories. In conjunction with Lombardi's approach the 'structures' I created revealed invaluable realisations concerning the conditions surrounding the production and distribution of Palestinian art.

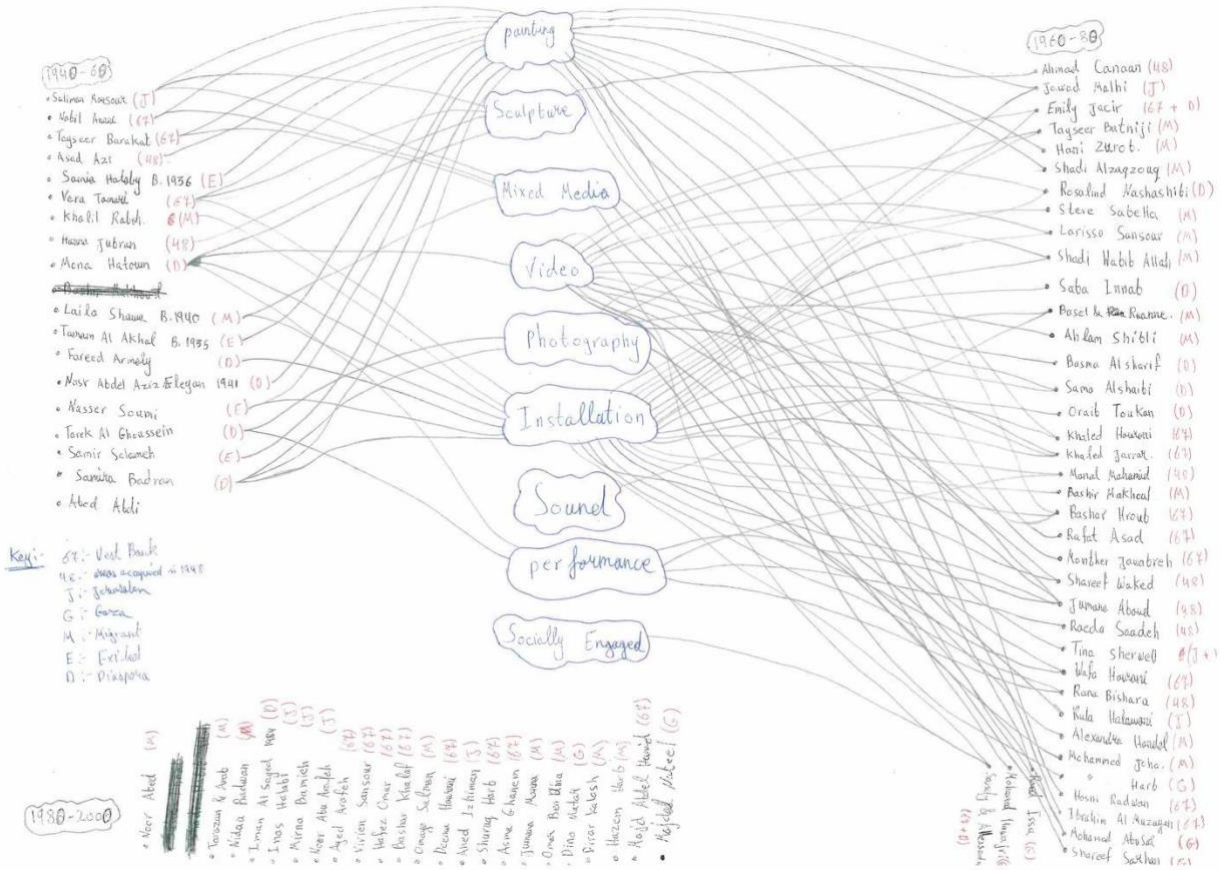

Figure 21 Map on the mediums used by Palestinian artists-Bisan Abu Eisheh-2018

Unlike Lombardi, I did not invest in the aesthetic aspect of the maps but the stories they were able to tell, which proved useful for inspiring the next stages of the research. For example, one of the map series traces the educational backgrounds of the Palestinian artists on my list (Figure 22). Having done that allowed for tracing the different destinations where Palestinian artists study, as well as the subjects and degrees they pursued, in connection with different periods of Palestinian history. The knowledge I was able to glean from assembling this series of maps on education shows that most Palestinian artists on my list have accomplished their education in western countries such as the United Kingdom, the USA, and Central Europe. Of course, this made me wonder: what is Palestinian art if most of its creators get their education in the west and learn western tools? To answer such questions, which emerge within every process of the maps I am creating, I need to filter the data through appropriate theories that can help in understanding the information within the maps. Particularly in the case of the maps concerning the artist's education, processing that information led me to questions that resulted from the radical ideas of the political theorist and the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. He argues in the introduction of his 1964 book *Consciencism* that western education entails a risk for those who arrive from the colony because of the way

formal western education is confined to the 'systems of the coloniser' (Nkrumah, 1964, p1-2). Although in the case of Palestine, the western countries are not the direct colonisers, they are the allies of the coloniser of Palestine. Then, according to Nkrumah, the problem with that aspect of education is the fact that the "colonial student does not belong to the intellectual history" of that part of the world (Nkrumah, 1964, p3). This idea could lead to students losing sight of the fundamental fact that they are colonised subjects, as argued by Nkrumah because the systems where they get their education "aim at providing a philosophical account of the world in the circumstances and conditions of their time". Nkrumah's ideas are not alone in this liberatory discourse where similar ideas concerning the western centrism of philosophy were put forth by the Indian scholar Gayatri Spivak in her book *Can the Subaltern Speak?* This kind of thinking began to shift the way I see my role as an artist and researcher living between Palestine and the 'West'.

The previous example explains the approach I have been following with almost all the maps I have created. The processes within that larger process make the creation of the maps a dynamic process — the more data I collect and assemble, the more understanding I can generate within my practice concerning the field of my profession. These matters seemed like putting a puzzle together, a puzzle that I am part of. Therefore, part of the maps also concerned tracing aspects related to my own practice and involvement in the field that I am researching. For example, following the ideas and questions I came up with in the previous process inspired a mind map examining the relationship between my art education and my appearances in the field of art (Figure 23). On one side the mind map is a list of the institutions where I got my art education and on the other side, the most important art events where I have exhibited my artworks locally and internationally. Beside each of the institutions and the events there is a flag of each of the countries that supported either my education or participation. Adding the flags made me pay attention to the complexity of countries involved in my practice. At that stage, I began to think, what if each of the artists on my list made a similar mind map in connection with their practice? Then, we might be able to tell who funds the making of Palestinian art and where that leads it.

Eventually, most of the maps and mind maps I created led to more questions than answers. The knowledge I could assemble in the maps revealed complex relationships throughout the practice of art in Palestine and reconfirmed the fragmentation I had observed and experienced across Palestinian art and society. At the midpoint of my research, the

extensive mapping exercise brought more insight to what I do as an artist and employed those insights for proposing new appropriate methods to conduct my creative practice in the future. Hence, through reflecting on the mapping work as a data collection mechanism, I can compare the previous approaches I employed in chapter two. The previous approaches relied on projecting Foucault's non-discursive archive, on elements that survived the past, to perform data extractions from those elements. While the process involved the creation of the maps, the archive becomes something that I have created through assembling scattered data into formations that are able to tell stories in and of themselves. I recognise this as a transformational shift in the approach of my art practice from dealing with objects that survived the past, towards connecting fragments in the present.

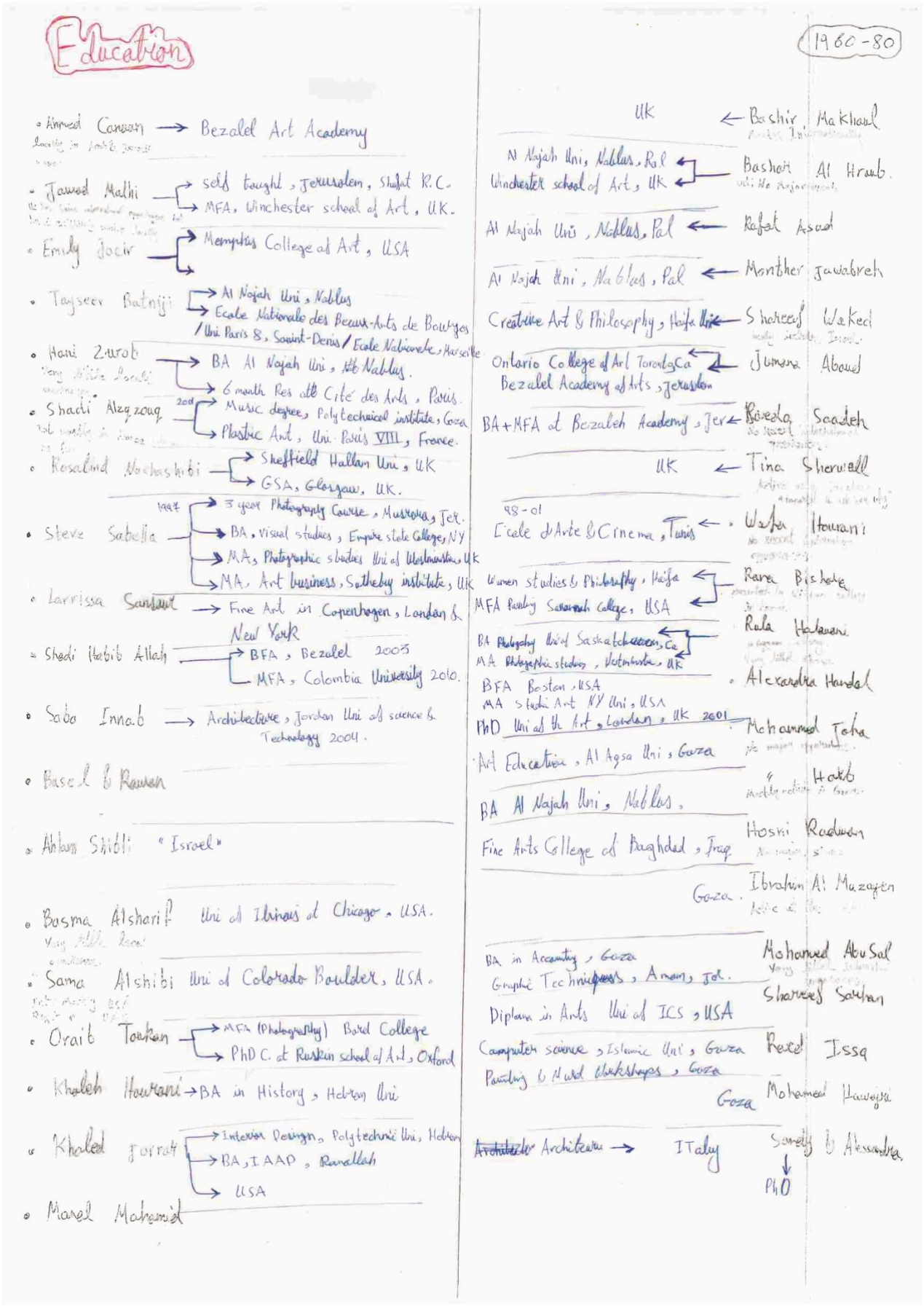

Figure 22 Map on Artist's education— Bisan Abu Eisheh 2018

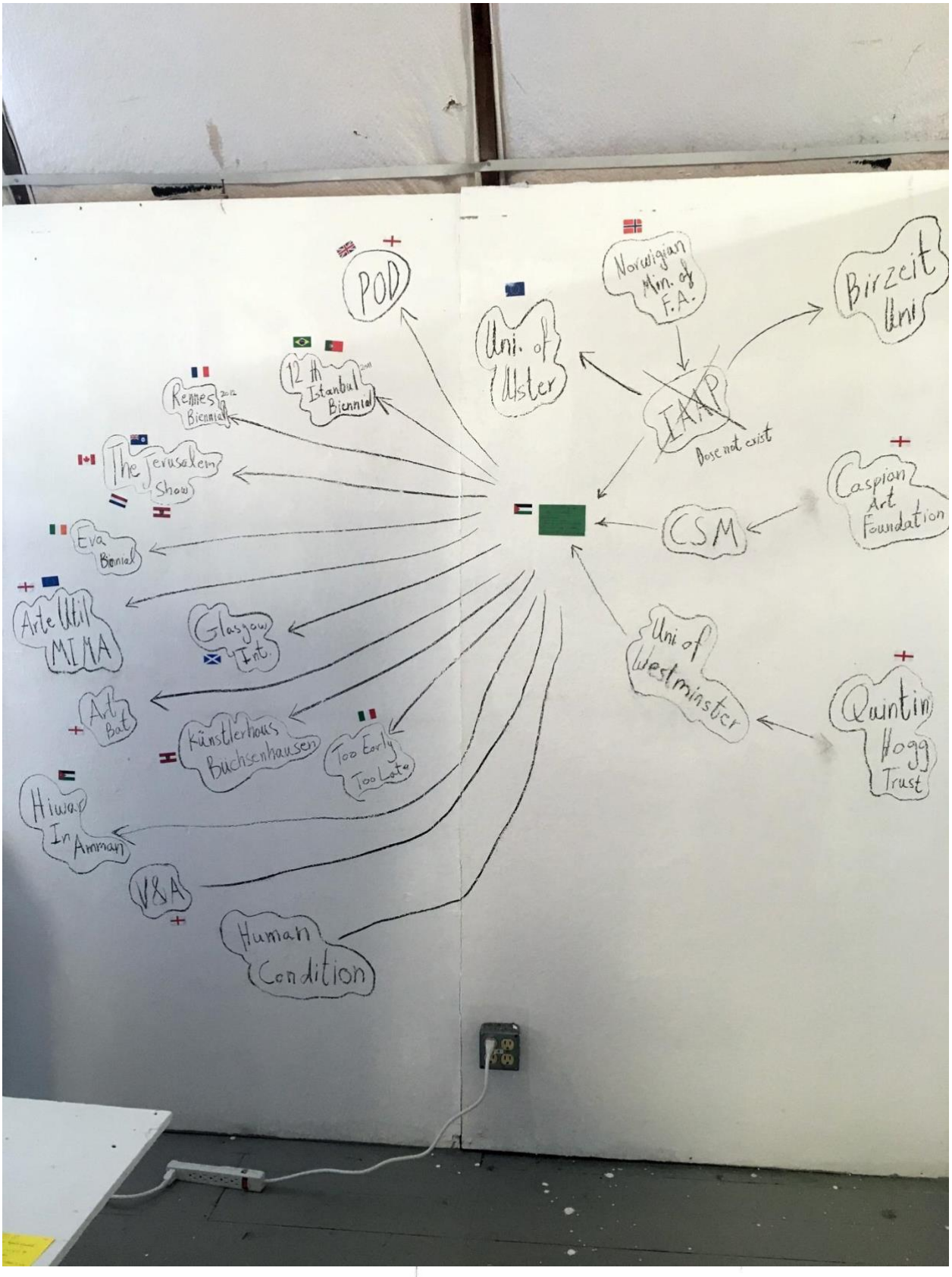

Figure 23 Map on my education and artistic trajectory -Bisan Abu Eisheh-2018

When juxtaposing mapping as a newly emerging method within my creative practice with the methods that I have discussed in chapter two, I notice a few differences that are key in determining the next stages of the project. The previous methods allowed my art practice to engage with the politics surrounding my life, which is located within realities shaped by colonialism and the absence of an effective anti-colonial project. Mapping as a creative method allowed my practice to engage with the politics surrounding my profession, which is located within the aforementioned political realities. Also, regarding the role the methods play within my practice, the previous ones were activated due to coincidently encountering objects (i.e., my parents' cache and the rubble from home demolitions) that encapsulate loss, which led to treating those objects as past evidence of that can help make sense of the troubled present. On the other hand, mapping was activated through a 'search and find' mechanism to put together evidence that can help make sense of the present. Accordingly, I can argue that the archive in the previous stages of the practice was found coincidently, then creative methods were employed to engage with it. While in the stage of mapping, the archive was created through re-collecting as a newly employed creative method. Having paid attention to re-collection as a creative practice, I see a paradigm shift in my approach and what I can potentially achieve in connection with the conditions surrounding my life and art. However, collecting within the stage of mapping relied on data that I mostly found while using the internet as my primary source of data collection. Initially, the internet allowed me to put together important information concerning the public online records of Palestinian artists. Nevertheless, one of the drivers of my practice is to explore the pictures behind what is visible; I realised that I cannot achieve that without talking with the artists directly. The examination I presented in chapter two is positioned in this thesis as a documentation to the practice in a fashion that understands art as a work of creativity (involving novel and useful outcomes). Therefore, if I want to understand the work of Palestinian artists in a similar fashion, I must approach them directly to learn about their practice in relation to the different conditions of their lives instead of learning about it from online sources. This shift in the approach marks a major shift in the approach of my practice towards ethnography as a data collection method. The work of ethnography entails collecting narratives directly from the point view of the subjects of the study, whom I am part of. This turn in the practice means that for the very first time I am going to perform my data extraction from living beings unlike the previous stages of extraction from objects, discussed in chapter two. Therefore, the stage that I call 'Breathing Archives' is

considered a further development to the notion of archive within my practice to rectify the effects of loss in the Palestinian culture that I am part of.

4.3 Breathing Archives and the Collection of *Tacit* Knowledge: Fieldwork in Haifa

What follows is a reflection on the process that occurred with the realisation of Breathing Archives following the identification of my art practice as a generator of 'tacit' knowledge (see Chapter Two, Conclusion). The Breathing Archive (or Breathing Archives) aims to extend that identification to other Palestinian art practises towards collecting alternative narratives within the Palestinian discourse.Having previously not paid attention to the overarching divided dynamics of the Palestinian art field leads to the question: why I have not been able to realise this before, as I was growing my career as an artist? No matter what the accurate answer is, the question certainly suggests a state of distraction that blinded me. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben says, "The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity" (Agamben, 2009, p45)[30]. The adjective 'blinded' used by Agamben has an interesting connotation in conjunction with the idea of being contemporary when engaging with present matters. Considering Agamben's view in conjunction with my art practice, as part of the art industry in Palestine and beyond, I realise that I was blinded because I believed that staying in the light (and out of the shadows) is the way to be contemporary. I thought that visibility, in the sense of becoming a more powerful agent in the field, is the key to achieving a viable contribution because that is supposedly what would allow me to distribute the statements, I generate in my art practice. Having thought so prevented me from paying attention to the competitive approach driving the entire exchange between the agents of the field, allowing me to re-evaluate the worth of the energy I spend to compete with other agents, meaning that my

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[30] AGAMBEN, G. (2009). *What is an apparatus? and other essays*. Stanford, Calif, Stanford University Press.

visibility could have meant the invisibility of other agents as also discussed by the Palestinian curator Lara Khaldi in a conversation that was published in September 2020 (Khaldi, Khalili, Arsanios, 2020, p4). By putting the idea of competition under the spotlight here, one must not forget that it is one of the fundamental characteristics of the capitalist mode of production. In conjunction with capitalism, as the main system running the processes of Palestinian affairs, the French thinker Pierre Bourdieu argues that the value of the work of contemporary art follows an ideology that he refers to as the 'charisma ideology' (Bourdieu, 1980, p263). The 'charisma ideology' means directing the gaze of the viewer towards the artist with little attention to the knowledge embedded in their practice, such as the conditions that created their works and inspired what they do. Through understanding Bourdieu's 'charisma ideology' and Agamben's 'light', in connection with my research subjects, one learns that most of them, including myself, are trapped in artistic professional dynamics that involve division more than unity.

Subsequently, to engage with the conditions surrounding the practices of Palestinian artists, 'Breathing Archives' is a process that aims to activate a parallel mechanism outside the main frameworks of our practices to collect new stories that lurk between the shadows of our realities. The ethnographic approach behind 'Breathing Archives' departs from a variety of questions that emerged during the mapping process, discussed in the previous section. I began to examine During one-on-one meetings with fellow Palestinian artists, both in Palestine and abroad, we began to answer these questions. Those meetings which were audio recorded occurred with Palestinian artists that I had a personal familiarity with across different generations, genders, and backgrounds. Through that process I was exposed to multiple accounts reflecting an undeniable discomfort concerning the conditions to practice art in nowadays. Through one of the conversations with the Jerusalem-based artist Sleiman Mansour on July 27th, 2019, he makes it clear that Palestinian artists had much more involvement in the Palestinian social space prior to the cultural shift following the 1993 Oslo Accords, as discussed in chapter one. In 1980 Mansour and many of his contemporaries produced their creative outcomes through collaborative cultural initiatives or communal cultural clubs that sought to respond to that present moment creatively. Mansour himself was part of founding one of such initiatives called 'The New Visions' together with the artists Vera Tamari, Nabil Anani and Tayser Barakat. One of those 'visions' was to inspire Palestinian art practices that are not activated through the economy of the Israeli occupation as the main supplier for artists' goods at that time. During that period, the four artists produced a range of artworks where

they used mud, ashes, henna, rust, leather, wood, and other materials that they could find in their native surroundings as substitutes to paints, brushes, and other artistic tools. A decade earlier, particularly in the year 1973 the artists Sliman Mansur (b. 1948), Vera Tamari (b. 1945), Taysir Barakat (b. 1959), Karim Dabbah (1937–2021), Taysir Sharaf (1937–2001), Nabil Anani (b. 1943), Kamil Mughanni (b. 1944), Fathi Ghabin (b. 1947), Isam Badr (1948–2003), Fatin Tubasi (b. 1959), Samira Badran (b. 1959), and Yusif Duwayk (b. 1963) established the League For Palestinian Artists to organise their creative activities. According to Mansour, the league included active artists from different parts of occupied Palestine. Parallel to their exhibitions which were one of the first recorded "group manifestation of Palestinian art on native soil." (Mattar, 2005) the League was able to develop activities with most Palestinian organisations such as the Red Crescent in Gaza as well as most social clubs and leagues operating in other fields (Mansour, 2022).

In comparison with the present moment as an artist who did not live and practice around that time, the concept of the initiative is not something that I am familiar with. In the years I practiced art since 2008 I cannot recall being part of a mechanism that allowed me to respond to the socio-political situation around me. According to Lara Khaldi, this is due to the mechanisms embedded in the artistic institutional network that followed the Palestinian state-project, which induced a shift from collective interests towards individual ones, where artists reflect on their individual experiences in disconnection with the experiences of other members in the same Palestinian space. One of the major reasons behind such a shift relates to fundraising at the centre of the network that activates art (Khaldi, Khalili, Arsanios, 2020, p4). Most art activities that I have been part of were activated through projects that are part of a network of local institutions of art mainly in Jerusalem and Ramallah. The network consists of a group of NGOs and international organisations that operate through receiving foreign money to run their artistic activities. Just the simple fact that most art activities are funded in this way means that whoever is part of such a reality is implicated in a system of foreign agendas. This fact affected the position of the Palestinian artist by making it possible for them to be part of "larger humanitarian, universal project, and thus become global subjects", instead of being part of a local political one, as in the case of the seventies and eighties, a situation which applies to me as a member within this network.

The discussion which I was able to generate through 'Breathing Archive' as a data collection approach is situated among several other discussions concerning the art industry in the Palestinian territories within the borders of the Oslo Accords. Particularly, the artists from older generations than mine stressed that before the accords, they had more connection with their fellow artists across the divided parts of Palestine, which was a matter they collectively addressed. The lack of similar initiatives in the Palestinian field of art that I am familiar with directed my 'Breathing Archive' towards Haifa, a city in the northwest coast of occupied Palestine, where I spent a few different months[31] on an ethnographic fieldwork mission to engage with Palestinian artists based there. During those months, I arranged a series of recorded meetings with a variety of Palestinian artists who live and practice in and around the Haifa territories occupied in 1948. Although Palestinians in Haifa make up no more than 16% of the city's population, Haifa is considered a Palestinian cultural hub that attracts a big number of Palestinians from the nearby villages and cities. My familiarity with Haifa is specifically connected with its Palestinian cultural scene, which kept bringing me to the city on a regular basis in the past years. My case does not mean that I was familiar with the dynamics of the Haifa Palestinian art scene because my familiarity with it was on a consumer basis where I was simply enjoying what the city offers. In the past ten years, the Palestinian cultural sector has shown a huge tendency for DIY culture and grassroots movements (Kelly, 2018). This culture spread around to diverse cultural scenes from music to theatre and visual arts. A culture that is not as much developed in Ramallah despite the emergence of a few communal projects i.e., Om Sleiman Farm near Ramallah and Al-Mustawda3 community organisation. Moreover, the nature of the Palestinian Haifa scene was not the only reason behind my decision to go there for research. The decision to go to Haifa developed through several interconnected reasons that emerged within the process of the mapping research. Through this I learned about the limitation of the field of art I am involved in to develop mechanisms that can unite Palestinian artists towards collective goals instead of making them compete with each other. This situation left most the Palestinian artists in Haifa isolated from what is happening in the Ramallah field of art. Having said that does not mean that I am unaware of the presence of Palestinian artists from Gaza, Haifa, and outside of the Ramallah art field. What I am truly pointing out is the lack of long-term

[31] Until the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

unified projects like in the seventies and eighties. One reason for that is connected to the fundraising behind Palestinian cultural production and distribution, where we end up as artists producing outside of our native culture. On this financial matter, Lara Khaldi says that the newly established system post 1993, with fundraising at its centre, led to the production of a culture that "desires to be outside of politics, even its own politics of production. But its main subject matter is politics" (Khaldi, Khalili, Arsanios, 2020, p4). Then, because of all the above realities concerning the political reality of division and the lack of unifying projects or initiatives I chose Haifa as the location for my fieldwork.

Besides what I learned through the conversations I conducted with the artists in Haifa, the real culmination for 'Breathing Archives' as a data collection method was during the collective setting which I arranged with a group of Palestinian artists based in Haifa, which took place at the flat I rented there on the 23rd of August 2019. The creatives who attended the meeting were Lena Mansour (film critic), Adam Haj Yehia (artist), Kholoud Tannous (artist and actress) and Rabia Salfiti (artist), in addition to my friend Samer Shtayyeh who works in the strategic planning and evaluation sector as a freelancer (figures 24 & 25). The common factor between the four creatives was that each of them is involved in cultural initiatives that they helped establish. The initiatives include collaborative approaches, like the case of Salfiti's Manjam, which was a space rented and shared by a group of artists for studio work as well as exhibition purposes. Another example is the Haifa Independent Film Festival (HIIF) of which Mansour is a founder. Such initiatives, among others, are a response to the colonial realities those artists face within the Israeli apartheid system (Amnesty International, 2022), where they used their personal networks of artists and friends to activate their initiatives either through donation, communal participation and/or other means. These are alternatives to relying on the Israeli funding system to activate their cultural life. Therefore, the interest I took in their creative engagements was the key inspiration because I wanted to employ them as 'Breathing Archives'. The session started with a lengthy introduction where I introduced to myself as an individual, as well as my practice as an artist; I highlighted my motives and intentions as well as my interests in collectively unpacking what we all as artists are doing. Following that, the four creatives including my friend Shtayyeh took turns giving lengthy accounts of their backgrounds and what drives their practices. From an ethnographic point of view, I was interested in how their creative practices come into being. For example: who funds their work, who buys it, where they study, where they have travelled, what politics they believe in, etc. In other words, I was interested in

capturing how they navigate their lives as Palestinians within that geography that is not called ‘Palestine’ nowadays. Henceforth, after the experience in Haifa, I started to realise the strength of ‘Breathing Archives’ as a data collection method in a way that appears to me as a lifelong research journey, where Haifa is only the beginning.

Figure 24 'Breathing Archives' workshop in Haifa. from left to right Adam Haj Yehya, Samer Shtayyeh and Kholoud Tannous

Figure 25 'Breathing Archives' workshop in Haifa. Rabia Salfiti.

Besides all I was able to learn in the previous experience on a personal level and all the comparisons I could establish between Haifa, Jerusalem, and Ramallah, the real advantage I recognise in 'Breathing Archives' is the potential embedded in it to accumulate different Palestinian knowledge if it keeps growing in the future. What makes this knowledge different lies in its tacit form which allows to include wider narratives through its processes, beyond the post-Oslo landscape. Through that, I recognise a new role that I am taking as an artist researcher, which generates dynamics for discussing, recording, and arranging several aspects of our life and practice as Palestinians who are divided and shaped through different colonial conditions. The difference between this approach and the previous approaches that I examine in chapter two makes 'Breathing Archives' appear as a further development of my practice and relates to the realities of my life as a cultural producer. The previous data collecting methods helped me make sense of the present time through sampling data sources from the past. By the time I succeed to make sense of the present around me, it is already shifting somewhere else. Opposite to that, 'Breathing Archives' as an ethnographic approach keeps my attention to the present time. There is no doubt that without the previous journey I wouldn't have come up with the 'Breathing Archives'. However, being able to engage with the present

and accumulate Palestinian knowledge for the future, instead of looking at the past while stuck in the present is recognised as a paradigm shift in my position as a Palestinian artist, pushing me towards more effective engagement with the context of my life. In an interview at Radio Monti Carlo, the Haifa-based Palestinian writer Majd Kayyal warns against misunderstanding the work of art as an act of resistance or activism; rather, it should be understood as a contribution to that (Kayyal, 2019). This statement aligns with the ideas explained by Dr Andrea Phillips in one of her online lectures for the CuratorLab at Konstfack University, where she stresses the fact that, as cultural producers, we are all playing a role as though we are in a performance. Like Kayyal, Phillips also warns against getting too comfortable with our artistic gestures, which mostly take place within safe environments. Alternatively, Phillips suggest that we should take the practice of art as a 'rehearsal space' (Phillips, 2020), in the sense that through the practice of art we must rehearse the ideas and concepts that can be applied to the social space. In conjunction with this, I can see 'Breathing Archives' as a Palestinian 'rehearsal space' where I am not only seeking to accumulate different knowledge about Palestine but also suggesting a potential shift in our Palestinian practices according to that knowledge. Beside the invaluable realisations one could draw from 'Breathing Archives' and the knowledge it accumulated, the process inspired the creation of a couple of artworks, one in the form of video-installation and the second marks the very first time that a lecture-performance emerges from my body of work as a form of distribution.

4.3.1 Artistic process: Mama (2019) Ethnographic research as art

The previous comparisons between Breathing Archives and the previous methods concerning the notion of archive in my practice are key to recognising the shift towards ethnography as a development within my creative practice. Artistically, the realisation of this development lies in the relationship between the *tacit* knowledge I can accumulate in the process and what kind of inspiration it brings to the artwork I am creating. In this sense, when the nature of the input changes, subsequently, the outcome must change. Hence, the new knowledge I accumulated drew my attention to a critical limitation connected to the previous approach, particularly the stage of Spontaneous Archives, where I was presenting my data collection through performing my parents' letters (discussed in Chapter Two). The mechanisms I activated within that stage allowed me to fill some gaps in our present time by calling upon the past of my parents; but apparently,

they did not prevent me from overlooking my mother as a co-author of the letters I was researching. Although I have included my mother in many conversations as part of the process of the research, I must admit that my focus was my father, his narratives about prison, and being a member of the Palestinian Revolution. Discovering that prejudice in myself made me disappointed in myself, given the liberal way my parents raised me and my brothers through familial dynamics founded on equality, liberty, and freedom from an ethical standpoint. Then, how was it that I overlooked my mother? Was it just an innocent mistake? Or it is more connected with how the set of my knowledge was constructed in the post-Oslo agreement reality that I grew up with? To answer this question, I decided to turn to my mother directly, as a 'Breathing Archive'. Hence, 'Breathing Archives' which helped me detect this issue within my practice is the one going to help me rectify this issue.

Mama (2019) is a video installation consisting of two videos. The two videos were recorded separately on two cameras during a conversation that I initiated with my mother in our family house in Jerusalem on August 29, 2019. Dividing the conversation into two separate videos running at the same time suggests a divide between my mother and I although we are physically in the same space (Figure 26). The intention behind the artwork was not based on the attitude that I have overlooked my mother in the past and I want to make that up by simply making a video with her. The presence of my father in the previous process was through employing him as an actor in an idea that I have planned and due to my interest in his revolutionary past. While the appearance of my mother in my artwork occurs through employing her as a 'Breathing Archive' to examine my own set of knowledge alongside the knowledge, I can get from her. The conversation was initiated by admitting that I had overlooked her while I had been examining the letters that she co-authored. It is as though I took her for granted, that I did not feel that there was anything new to learn about her in comparison to my father and his mysterious revolutionary days. Surely, my intention was to get answers from her about how I have overlooked her and whether it is connected to familial dynamics, social dynamics, or political dynamics. Eventually, it turns out that it is all the latter together. The matter becomes clearer as the conversation evolves between the two of us. The sequence of the final artwork runs like a spiral, departing from one point where I stand in the centre and keeps going, and then stretching out in a circular manner that links my story with the story of my family then the story of my society and eventually the political story that envelops all of us.

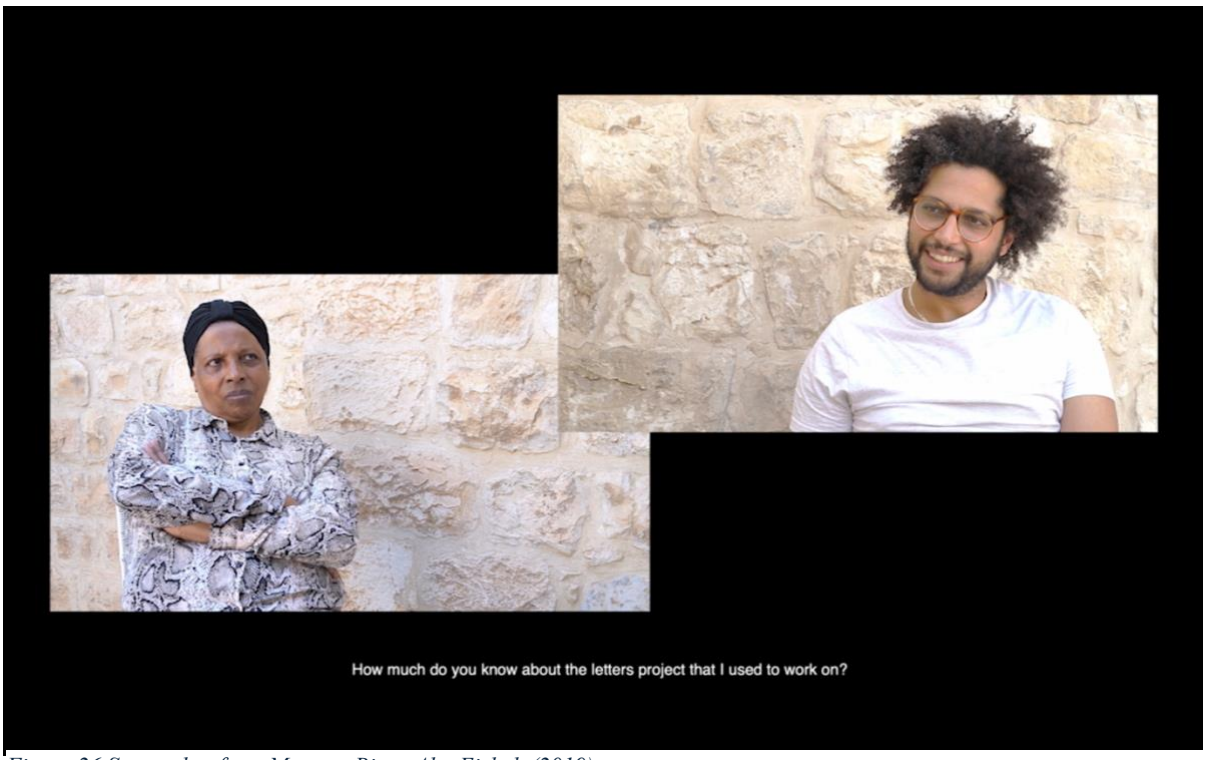

Figure 26 Screenshot from Mama – Bisan Abu Eisheh (2019).

The accounts my mother provided during the conversation reflect her experience as a Palestinian woman from Jerusalem who lived and practised through shifting times. Through that experience, she was able to give me the same conclusions I was able to draw from my research. For example, in one part of the conversation she told me that in the time of the First Intifada when I was around five years old, she used to take me and my younger brother to demonstrations to learn how to participate in our collective causes while nowadays she fears more for us if we try to take part of any political actions. She relates this to the disappointment connected with the absence of an anti-colonial project that we all can be part of. Hence, I consider the ability to extract such information from my mother as an opportunity to validate the statements I draw from theory with the narratives from her life experience. On that matter, her life experience is valuable because it is talked about in connection with the narratives of the people around her, like me for example. Hence, part of the information embedded in Mama as a whole installation also illuminates the Palestinian movement for women's liberation which was an integral part of the political movement prior to the situations that prevailed following the Oslo Agreement. I would not dare to call that a feminist shift in my practice to prevent addressing that as a core contribution that I am providing by creating this artwork. This is based on the awareness that the driver behind creating the video Installation Mama is

concerning me and the gaps my presence represents in my generation and my present time. Therefore, the presence of my mother as a Palestinian ‘Breathing Archive’ in the artwork is not about giving her voice through my practice rather it is to rectify my practice and exposed what it had missed in the past.

4.3.2 Artistic process: 'Breathing Archives' Lecture-Performance (2019-ongoing)

Art project as ethnographic research

The previous artistic process examines the way in which 'Breathing Archives' inspired a critical examination of my artistic practice which culminates in the creation of the video-installation Mama as a response to that examination. Additionally, ‘Breathing Archive’ inspired the creation of another artwork part of the process within this Ph.D. investigation in the format of a lecture-performance that carries the same title 'Breathing Archives'. Lecture-performance as a format is a type of presentation that combines academic and non-academic elements in the process of sharing knowledge (presentation).

As an artist-researcher, I have always had the issue of generating more knowledge than I can encapsulate in the artworks I have created in the form of installation or video installation. That is why I have many pending projects as part of the previous creative processes that I have led. On the other hand, lecture-performance as a medium for distribution bears more data than the ones I have been working with. The point is not to undermine those mediums or claim I will not employ them again. The idea instead is highly related to the process in Haifa as my first 'Breathing Archives' attempt, where I needed to include the motives behind my art project as part of the artistic outcome, in the sense that I wanted to combine elements from the research process behind ‘Breathing Archives’ and the process itself to come up with artistic outcomes. In a conversation with the Palestinian artist Noor Abu Arafeh, she asserts that lecture-performance as a form is ideal for long-term types of creative research because it allows the artist to take the audience through the multiple dimensions of the research including the personal ones (Abu Arafeh, 2022). Hence, the 'Breathing Archives' lecture-performance combines academic data, personal narratives, and artistic elements to create a summary of the journey behind 'Breathing Archives'. The presentation spans for approximately forty minutes and is constructed around a background featuring the Palestinian map and a

timeline. Through the arrangement that combines parts of this very thesis, particularly elements from chapter one, it covers the academic side of the lecture-performance while the visual side consists of excerpts from previous artworks[32], excerpts from documentary videos and a steady background. The steady background which appears for most of the duration of the lecture-performance consists of two main visual elements within the artwork: the map of Palestine and a timeline (Figure 27). Both elements are employed to position my research in relation to Palestinian events, both the ones I have personally experienced as well as the aftermath of events that happened before I was born. The narrative of the artwork evolves around gradually problematising the Palestinian status quo in connection with the continuity of the Israeli colonisation and the absence of an effective political anti-colonial project, to propose 'Breathing Archives' as an artistic concept that seeks to respond to those problems within its creative capacity (Figure 28). Eventually, the lecture-performance seeks to uphold the ethnographic participatory concepts behind Breathing as an artistic example of how my art practice seeks, within its creative capacity, to respond to the dividing and marginalising effects of coloniality. This body of work is an invitation to understand Palestine differently, beyond what history and politics dictate; instead, its present Palestine according to our different experiences as Palestinians, most of whom lurk in the shadows of political subjugation. An approach that is based on the belief that creative work can still point us in the right direction when politics fails to do so.

[32] Excerpts from the video Mama (2019) were used as part of the lecture performance.

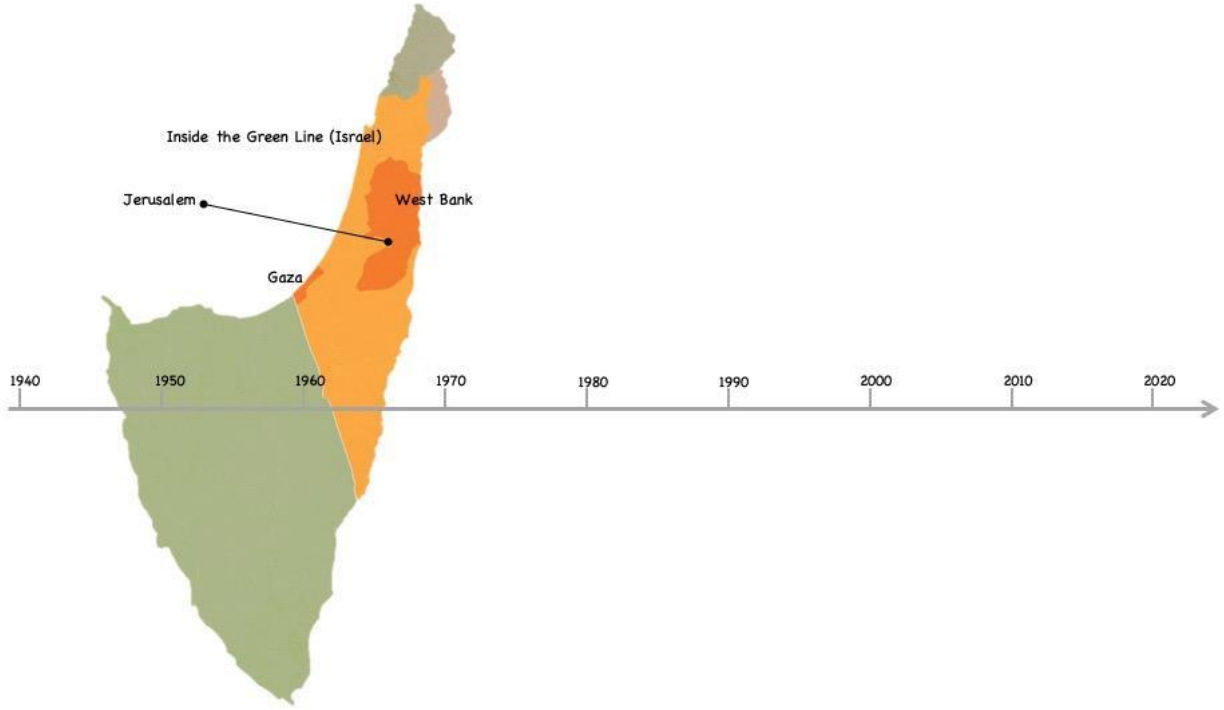

Figure 27 Screenshot from 'Breathing Archives', lecture-performance – Bisan Abu Eisheh 2019.

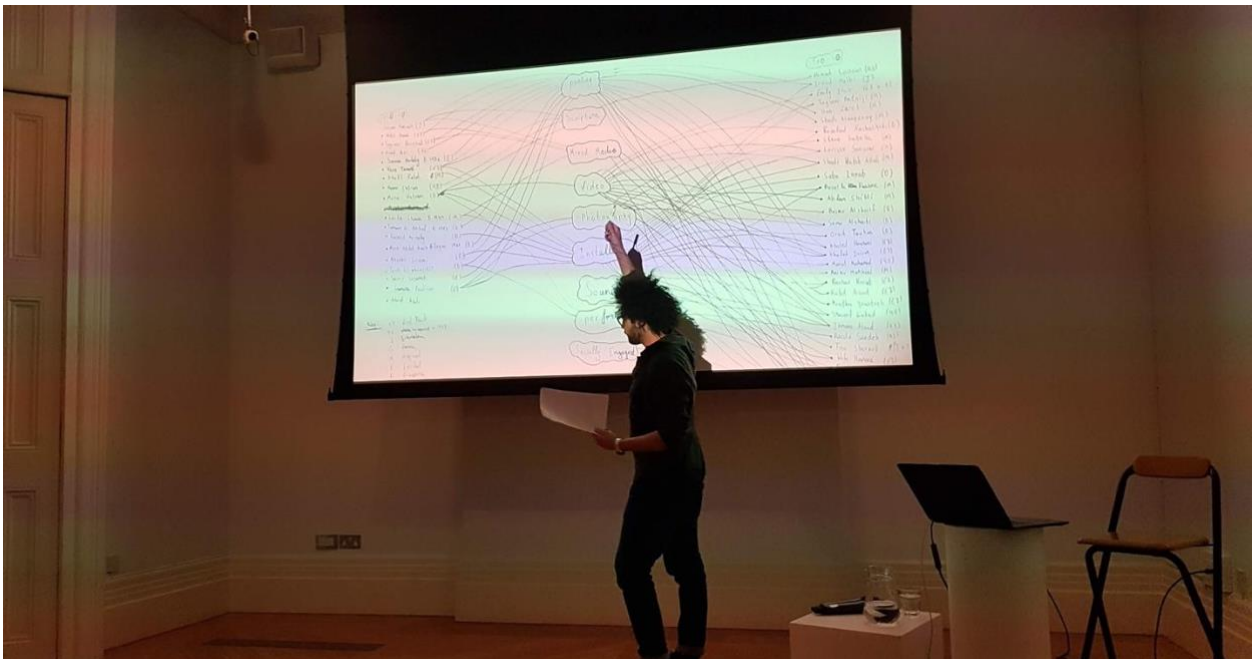

Figure 28 'Breathing Archives' lecture-performance at the Mosaic Rooms, London, 2019. Photo by Davide Deriu.

Additionally, to the aspects of research, I can share through the inclusion of lecture performance in my practice, its nature as an artistic medium makes it more flexible to bear changes in the future as I run more ethnographic cycles with Palestinian artists in

other cities after Haifa. The idea which makes the lecture-performance produced part of this research is the first stage of many to come. It has even the potential to evolve into a collective presentation involving other artists as part of the process. The idea, shall it be realised, could be seen as a response to the divisions imposed on our destines as Palestinians because it would reflect an example of a dynamic unity in connection with the Palestinian society. A trajectory which the project is looking for towards contributing to an alternativeunderstanding of Palestine that is rooted in the right to freedom and self-determination . Moreover, one of the challenges that kept emerging around the examination of my previous artworks in chapter two concerns the distribution of my artworks through the exhibition format because that limits the distribution to the location and the timeframe of the exhibition. Therefore, in respect of that my understanding of the lecture-performance turns it into a solution to the challenge I noted concerning the exhibition format. Because Lecture-performance as a medium can be done live in different setups including the exhibition one and can be recorded for distribution via more outreach forms of sharing knowledge. it is through those shifting realisations that I understand the lecture performance as an outcome of a process of an artistic transformation, which itself positioned to call for a social and political transformation in relation to colonial realities.

Conclusion

This chapter synthesises the three preceding chapters, to answer the main question behind my research concerning the ability of art to contribute to the production and distribution of Palestinian knowledge in the face of an apparent lack of an effective explicit structure for Palestinian knowledge production, both in the archival and the artistic realms. The answer to this Ph.D. question is reflected in the creative engagement I led to achieving an intervention through employing creative methods. The process to do so departs from the reflection on my position in the field of art as complacent in dynamics that distracts my art practice from what it potentially could achieve in connection with the present discourse. I rely on unpacking the factors that make me complacent to inspire new approaches in my practice that can rectify my complacency. The study above presents the concept of ‘Breathing Archives’ via an ethnographic approach, in order to take an additional societal role besides the creation of artworks, due to the epistemological accumulation the process generates by centralising *tacit* knowledge. In this shift from

participant observation to participant 'intervener', I managed to fulfil my alignment with Kurt Lewin's 'Action Research' principles (1946) by finding a way to engage practically rather than just observing as in previous stages of my artistic career. The shift also involves a turn from individualism where I developed my practice mainly alone, departing from my personal observations towards dealing with my observations collectively, as I did in the session I initiated with a group of artists in Haifa. At this stage, I am aware that the culmination of my intervention is yet to come as I undertake further discussion circles in the future, with Palestinian artists wherever they are based. This understanding makes this Ph.D. a proposal for a growing project that joins art and ethnography to accumulate narratives centred on *tacit* knowledge. While the ethnographic collection feeds my art with the necessary data to produce new artworks, the accumulation of the data remains an important ongoing outcome that could stand as a contribution to a wider understanding of Palestinian discourse and contemporary culture in ways that the contemporary 'explicit' Palestinian national structures failed to achieve. The aspect which I recognise as this process' most potentially impactful component is its capacity to expand inclusive epistemological awareness of Palestine, beyond the knowledge available through the incomplete nation-state of the post-Oslo Accords.

Furthermore, on the artistic side of the project, the process which I examine in this chapter inspired the creation of two artworks which I recognise as the outcome of the artistic transformation that occurred in my art practice parallel to this investigation. The process I led in the 'Breathing Archives' generated a critical awareness of aspects that I have missed in the previous processes, which is examined in subsection Mama. Also, the process inspired the reliance on lecture-performance as a form of artistic distribution, for the first time in my art practice, which is examined in the subsection 'Breathing Archives' lecture-performance. Despite the different content embedded within each of the artworks, both are connected to ethnographic fieldwork which turns to human experiences to engage with the realities of the present life. In that sense, 'Breathing Archives' both in its data collection phases and artistic sharing phases seeks to suggest ethnographic processes as a solution to colonial implications, within my creative capacity. This approach is founded on the belief that art can operate as a 'rehearsal space' where radical concepts can be tested in hope that it will inspire real change in social and political spaces.

Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis sought to address two core and inextricably linked questions:

1. What are the limits of existing post-Oslo artistic engagements with Palestinian knowledge production, including my own?

2. How can the “Breathing Archive” address these limits as an artistic and methodological intervention centred on Palestinian tacit knowledge?

To answer these questions, this thesis drew on a methodology that blends various approaches, including the framework of *tacit* and *explicit* knowledge, ethnography and autoethnography, reflective action research and the Breathing Archive. The first three methodological approaches within the study are utlised throughout this thesis’s first three chapters. In an accumulative manner, the first three chapters combine theory and practice to identify the limitations embedded in the post-Oslo Agreement mechanisms of knowledge production through the domains of art and the archive. Furthermore, the thesis considers the Breathing Archive (also Breathing Archives) introduced in Chapter Four as the research’s unique methodological contribution to address the challenges identified in the earlier chapters. In doing so, the thesis contributes to the field of theory and practice as explained in the following section.

How this study contributes to the field of theory and practice

The key conclusions of this research are derived from a practice-based study reflected across the four chapters of this thesis. Firstly, it critiques the institutionalised mechanisms of Palestinian knowledge production within the framework of the Oslo Accords' state-building project, emphasising the deficiencies of '*explicit'* archival and artistic approaches in capturing the full breadth of Palestinian experiences (Polanyi, 1997). Secondly, it identifies the '*tacit'* knowledge emerging from Palestinian artistic practices, mainly focusing on my practise, to challenge prevailing narratives and power structures imposed by the continuous Israeli Occupation and the Oslo Accords paradigms (Polanyi, 1997). This includes an exploration of 'non-discursive' archives and alternative forms of knowledge production through Palestinian art practise (Foucault, 1972). Thirdly, the

study examines power dynamics impacting the field of art in post-Oslo Palestine, highlighting the role of artistic practices in critiquing contemporary Palestinian culture and politics. Lastly, it introduces the Breathing Archive as an innovative ethnographic and autoethnographic methodological intervention aiming to augment understanding of the Palestinian context and its multifaceted identities.

Theoretically, this thesis offers insights into the complex interplay between art, archive, and hegemonic power within Palestinian societies. It challenges conventional knowledge production and distribution understandings, particularly in contexts marked by the Israeli Occupation and post-Oslo state-building mechanisms in the West Bank and Gaza. Moreover, it utilises theoretical frameworks such as Michael Polanyi's conception of tacit knowledge (1997) and Kurt Lewin's action research (1946) to contextualise its findings within broader socio-political dynamics beyond the Oslo Accords landscape.

Practically, the study introduces new methodologies for artistic inquiry and cultural documentation, exemplified by the Breathing Archive artistic approach. By centering marginalised voices and experiences by turning to *tacit* forms of knowledge, it seeks to disrupt dominant narratives and reimagine Palestinian knowledge within academic and cultural discourses. Ultimately, this thesis offers a nuanced understanding of the post-Oslo Accords Palestinian context while providing innovative avenues for future research and artistic practice.

The allocation of key findings in the thesis:

This study has fulfilled the above findings through a range of approaches that I summarise below in these four key points:

1. The critique of institutionalised methods of producing and disseminating Palestinian narratives within the framework of the Oslo Accords state project, particularly focusing on the limitations of state and other institutionalised mechanisms for producing Palestinian knowledge that is relatable to the contemporary challenges facing the Palestinian experience. This required examining traces and different forms of documentation in Chapters One and Three of this thesis. The examination in Chapter One highlights the challenges facing the production and dissemination of Palestinian narratives through the body of the archive as an institutionalised repository of national

knowledge. Chapter Two examines the challenges facing the production and dissemination of Palestinian narratives through the body of art.

2. The identification of *tacit* knowledge emerging from Palestinian artistic practices, with my practice at the forefront, which provides alternative narratives to those prevailing in the post-Oslo Agreement era, challenges the structures of the Palestinian quasi-nation-state. Particularly concerning the state of archives as a device for producing and disseminating Palestinian knowledge. The identification of tacit knowledge within the practice of art is grounded in Michael Polanyi's conception of knowledge and Michael Foucault's conception of non-discursive archives (Polanyi, 1966; Foucault, 1972). Through Polanyi's lens, Chapter Two of this thesis discusses the art practice I am leading as a generator of knowledge that is embedded in my Palestinian experience and subjectivity (Polanyi, 1966). On the other hand, Foucault's approach towards the validity of knowledge emerging within subsystems outside the physical body of the archive allows the same chapter to examine my engagement with Palestinian archives through 'non-discursive' forms such as the family letters of my parents from the early 1980s (See Chapter Two, section 1.4).

3. The exploration of power dynamics embedded in the professional field of art within the post-Oslo Agreement paradigm in Chapter Four of this thesis highlights the role of art in critiquing and reflecting on contemporary Palestinian culture. Following in the footsteps of Donald Schon in *The Reflective Practitioner (1983)* Chapter Four re-examines my art practice and its engagement with the archive as a conceptual space to identify the limitations within the domain of art which I had not paid attention to before this doctoral research.

4. The development and application of the Breathing Archive as an innovative ethnographic and auto-ethnographic methodological tool for understanding Palestinian knowledge production and identity in post-Oslo Agreement Palestine. The Breathing Archive is the title of my artistic engagement with the archive as an epistemological and creative outcome of this doctoral research. It denotes a conceptual trajectory in my artistic research-based practice, where the Breathing Archive emerges from the practices, ideas and values of Palestinian artists whose experiences and identities have been intimately

bound up in colonial power dynamics since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. By doing so the Breathing Archive seeks to offer an alternative framework with which to address deficiencies in the production and distribution of the Palestinian contemporary discourse, with particular emphasis on the impact of the 1993 Oslo Agreement. It also challenges conventional archiving mechanisms by centring marginalised voices and reasserts the value of Palestinian tacit knowledge and experiences within both the academic and cultural discourses. The Breathing Archive materialised through the application of 'Action Research' principles as introduced by Kurt Lewin (1997), where the trajectory of practice is situated towards contributing to the Palestinian social setting beyond the value of what I produce as an artist within the domain of contemporary art. Finally, the introduction of the Breathing Archive as a method transcends the conceptual and practical limitations of institutionalised archives and the Palestinian art scene, promoting new ways of understanding Palestinian experiences and selfhood.

Research process: How this study achieved its research aim

The following expands on the manner through which this thesis communicated its approaches and achieved its aims.

The primary aim of this study was to explore practical ways to practise art in accordance with the conditions surrounding this process, within the Palestinian social space, and its production and distribution in the field of the Palestinian art industry. The idea to do so stems from the awareness of the multiple colonial realities surrounding our lives and practices as Palestinians, where art, as a practice, is also part of those realities. This practice-based study achieves its aim by drawing upon the activation of my position as a participant observer in relation to the subject of this study. Academically, the participant observer position allows me to rely on my observations when generating questions around the matter that I am observing, which is, in the case of this investigation, situated in the fields of art and archive as generators of Palestinian knowledge in the post-Oslo Accords era. The notion of 'field' draws on Pierre Bourdieu's (1993) field theory, where he divides the social space into fields of activities that have their own rules of conduct and are all subordinate to a superior field of power. Through that scope, I understand that as a Palestinian and as an artist, I am active in fields of operation located within more extensive fields of political forces.

Therefore, Chapters One and Three examine the fields of art and archives to identify their deficiencies concerning the production of Palestinian knowledge due to the continuous struggle with the Israeli Occupation, on the one hand, and the nation-state mechanisms of the post-Oslo Accords era, on the other hand. Both chapters employed theoretical surveys that draw upon Michael Polanyi's identification of explicit knowledge to arrive at their conclusions. Chapter One examined Palestinian knowledge by tracing its accumulation and loss over those key historical moments. The conclusion this chapter drew is that the Palestinian cultural legacy of which I am a part is shaped more by loss than accumulation. Chapter One also discussed how loss partly relates to the political approaches adopted by the Palestinian political leadership following the signing of the Oslo Accords, which shifted the discourse of Palestine from the context of revolution to a neo-liberal context represented by the state-building project over the West Bank and Gaza. This matter left Palestinians located outside those borders facing political destinies outside the mechanisms of the Palestinian national state, such as the Palestinians in Jerusalem or inside the territories occupied in 1948.

What resulted is a grave epistemological reality concerning Palestine and the Palestinians, as Chapter One examined. In connection with the field of my operation as an artist, Chapter Two examines the relationship between art and the realities surrounding its creation. Chapter Two juxtaposes the same key historical moments discussed in Chapter One with a survey of Palestinian art practices in conjunction with those historical moments. The conclusion drawn from this chapter is that the field that activates my practice engages with global issues more than local ones, like the fact that we still live under the Israeli Occupation's control, for example. Similar to the Palestinian domain of the archive, these challenges prevent the domain of art from effectively contributing to the production of Palestinian knowledge as it continues to generate practices that reinforce the context of the Oslo Accords nation-state. This reality is part of the neo-liberal politics implicating the Palestinian field of art following the signing of the Oslo Accords (Haddad, 2016).

Parallel to the process that generated the previous two conclusions, I underwent a creative process which I understand as an essential part of this practice-based study. The creative process discussed in Chapters Two and Four of this thesis is twofold: first, a process where I employ reflection as a method to examine my art practice before this study, as a creative practice producing novel and useful outcomes in relation to the cultural space I

examined in Chapter One, and second, a process that includes mapping and ethnographic fieldwork to engage with the conclusions I drew in the previous three chapters. Chapter Two examines my art practice before this PhD as a dynamic creative practice that keeps revolving around the notion of loss as an embedded factor in the Palestinian culture where my art is situated. The chapter revolves around the methods I employed in several stages in my practice, where I have been developing artworks based on creative research that engages with the Palestinian reality of loss through inventing new concepts for Palestinian archives as a historical concept instead of a historically embedded institution (Foucault, 1969).

Before the archive, 'Visualising Loss' and 'Spontaneous Archives' are the three stages examined in Chapter Two as a documentation for the processes in which my art practice has been trying to relate to the realities surrounding its making. The approach led to the identification of my art practice as a generator of tacit knowledge, according to the ideas of Polanyi (1997). Finally, Chapter Four synthesises the three previous chapters, where I benefit from the knowledge I gained from examining the field of archive and the field of art in Palestine to shift the direction of my art practice towards more effective engagement with the realities surrounding its production. This approach eventually led to the conceiving of the Breathing Archive (or Breathing Archives) as a further advancement to my previous artistic approach in connection with Palestinian archives, discussed in Chapter Two.

'Breathing Archives' refers to the adoption of ethnographic research that seeks to capture Palestinian experiences through creative mechanisms that include interviews, discussions, and workshops with Palestinian artists, as examined in the sub-section 'Breathing Archives: Fieldwork in Haifa'. The approach recognises those Palestinian experiences as tacit knowledge and worthy of exploration and documentation. Eventually, through the inclusion of 'Breathing Archives' as a new approach within my practice, I emerged with an additional role for my practice as an artist-researcher: that of an ethnographer where I not only research and produce for the field of art but also, where I research the field of art itself then produce the artworks examined in the last chapter.

Through this shift, I can conclude that I have found in ethnography the answer to my main question concerning addressing the limitations embedded in the Palestinian contemporary experience in the post-Oslo Accords era. The contribution aspect concerning 'Breathing Archives' is found in its ability to overtake the colonial and state-building realities that

divide us into micro-political spaces and create new understandings of Palestine based on documenting different Palestinian life experiences. I recognise this as a more effective way to contribute to the context of Palestinian knowledge, i.e., as a researcher and an artist, because, unlike the previous stages of practice, 'Breathing Archives' allows me to benefit from the ethnographic process behind the practice to document alternative Palestinian narratives that can, and ought to be, included in artistic and academic contexts in the future, and which I consider to be the most valuable finding of this Ph.D. study.

Study limitations

Despite the conclusions of my thesis, there are of course a number of limitations in the scope and findings of the research. Firstly, my research was largely confined to my own experience and thus cannot be generalised to all Palestinians. Those living in Gaza, Syria, or Lebanon, for example, might engage with the idea of a 'Breathing Archive' quite differently. Wheres I develop the idea as an subversive method against the hegemonising narrative of the post-Oslo era, in other Palestinian contexts characterised by institutional neglect (as opposed to the overdevelopment of cultural institutions in the West Bank), a Breathing Archive may take on a different form altogether, and engage different methods and approaches.

Although software like Zoom and other video conference software - which became very popular following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic - could help in the process of data collection across borders, it did not allow for the deeper engagement that would be necessary to inform this work. However, to overcome these limitations is something to be realised collectively in the future as the conversations with the artists continue and evolve into additional forms yet to be collectively realised, with new academic and artistic outcomes, as well as providing practical solutions in the Palestinian social and political spaces.

Recommendation for future research

To conclude, this thesis documents the theoretical and creative journey of this Ph.D. study, and offers the 'Breathing Archives' as a tentative answer to the question of

a method Palestinian knowledge production. To do so it has engaged with ethnography and *tacit* knowledge as a solution for achieving a more effective contribution within my artistic practice. However, the ethnographic turn which I tested in my fieldwork in Haifa, where I collaborated with local Palestinian artists to document conversations about practising art, is the first step in what appears to be a lifelong project. For 'Breathing Archives' to achieve its effective contribution to Palestinian knowledge , it must continue its cycles where I move to other cities to expand my conversations and documentation processes. The potential to do so lies in the understanding that these ethnographic processes also allow me to create artworks as discussed in Chapter Four. Therefore, between my capacity in the field of art and in the field of academia I can seek to find opportunities to run other cycles, like the one in Haifa, through benefiting from opportunities like art residencies as well as benefiting from other opportunities that I can find in the field of academia or other related fields that share the same decolonial interests behind my project.

Closing Statement

By the end of this 4-year experience, I had attempted to understand how I could become a responsible artist sensitive to the socio-political conditions surrounding my life as a Palestinian and an artist. The idea of responsibility draws on refusing the socio-political injustice caused by the Israeli colonisation within the capacity of my art practice. The desire to do so led me to 'Breathing Archives', as an ethnographic concept that I can apply within my art practice allowing me to challenge one of the unjust repercussions of colonisation, represented by the imposed fragmentation of the Palestinian social spaces. During this journey, the collective dynamics within 'Breathing Archives' revealed Palestinian narratives that lurk in the shadows of the Palestinian national project post-Oslo. When juxtaposing this finding to the events of Documenta Fifteen (2022), I am reassured that there are other artists asking questions similar to those I entertained in my journey, displaying various models attempting to engage, through creative processes, the socio-political conditions shaped by systems of hegemonic powers. This last edition of the contemporary art exhibition held in Kassel is built on principles of collectivity, with a community-oriented model of sustainability in which both resources and knowledge are shared through social participation. The findings of, and the intentions behind, 'Breathing Archives' intersect with the structure of and intentions behind artworks displayed in

Documenta Fifteen (2022). Considering the above, I argue that art may have the answer that responds to our struggles with the systems of hegemony through collective, communal and interdisciplinary forms of sharing knowledge in creative ways.

Appendix A

Online links for all video artworks discussed in chapter two of this thesis

Victoryland (2008) https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/47928541

Password: Jerusalem

Playing House – Explosion video (2011) https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/32778777

Password: Jerusalem

Love Speech (2014) https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/106366742

Password: Jerusalem

Love Speech – Installation View (2015) https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/184032467

Password: Jerusalem

Appendix B

Online links for the artworks produced part of this practice-based study

Mama (2019)

https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/363596499

Password: Jerusalem

Breathing Archives Lecture-Performance

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Q2qipMwGqYIALya4rGX-HSta4BSqC74D?usp=sharing

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Breathing Archives-Lecture performance at Mosaic Rooms - part 1_Nov 2019

Breathing Archives-Lecture performance at Mosaic Rooms - part 2_Nov 2019

Breathing Archives-Lecture performance at Mosaic Rooms - part 3_Nov 2019

Appendix C

Archival materials from the fieldwork in Haifa

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ftoYfkSs2zpk2996SUDIu3zEYbnMjbJd?usp=sharing

List of videos

Videos Set One (Canon)

Breathing Archives 1_ Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2_ Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 3_ Rabia Salfiti_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 4_ Lena and Adam_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 5_ Adam and Samer_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 6_ Koloud Tannous_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 7_ Koloud Tannous_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 8_ Samer Shtayyeh_ Haifa Aug 2019

Videos Set Two (Nikon)

Breathing Archives 2.1_ Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.2_ Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.3_ Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.4_ Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.5_ Lena, Adam, Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.6_ Lena, Adam, Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.7_ Lena, Adam, Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.8_ Lena, Adam, Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.9_ Lena, Adam, Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.10_ Lena, Adam, Samer and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.11_ Lena, Adam, Samer, Kholoud and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.12_ Lena, Adam, Samer, Kholoud and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Breathing Archives 2.13_ Lena, Adam, Samer, Kholoud and Rabia_ Haifa Aug 2019

Appendix D

Documentation for the Viva Exhibition at the Mosaic Roams, London, UK

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1955Iug9h2jjfTlZ7a462APqUdpf5-T0V?usp=share_link

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Breathing Archives_Full Exhibition Documentation

Breathing Archives_Full Exhibition Plan

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