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To cite this article: Jaafar Alloul (2016) Signs of Visual Resistance in Palestine: Unsettling the Settler-Colonial Matrix, Middle East Critique, 25:1, 23-44, DOI: [10.1080/19436149.2015.1101874](https://doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1101874)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19436149.2015.1101874>



Published online: 02 Nov 2015.



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Signs of Visual Resistance in Palestine: Unsettling the Settler-Colonial Matrix

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ABSTRACT *This article contrasts historical and contemporary discourses and visualizations of the notions of Homeland, the Other and the Self that have been applied in the Zionist/Israeli project to colonize Palestine and displace its indigenous inhabitants. It actively connects theories of visual sociology and cultural studies (postmodern critical theory) with (1) various Israeli and Palestinian political discourses of Belonging (nationhood) while also (2) providing the reader with clear-cut, material examples of both exclusivist Zionist technologies of power and subaltern Palestinian techniques of counter-discourse, ultimately retracing historical continuity and unveiling resonant dialectics of modern nationalist doctrine across the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries throughout both Europe and the Middle East. Critically tracing and decoding the altering semiotic identity of a set of politicized posters highlights the key importance and the ongoing use of abstract power (discourse) within Israeli strategies of occupation and siege while simultaneously disclosing innovative Palestinian forms of visual resistance that advocate 'existence' in an asymmetric configuration of 'conflict'. In order to interpret the selected visuals fully, one needs foremost to be acquainted with the interwoven 'migration' of populations, ideas, and praxes through both time and space.*

KEY WORDS: *Discourse; Floating signifier; Israel; migration; Palestine; Settler-colonialism; Visual resistance*

The land that comprises present-day Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OT) is the site of ideological contestations that are not mere abstractions, but rather are manifestations of the day-to-day reality of both urban and rural spaces, their economies, and their inhabitants.¹ Since the late nineteenth century, the Zionist movement had endeavored to establish a 'Jewish State' in Palestine by encouraging and supporting the immigration and settlement of European Jews in Palestine, which had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire until the end of 1918 and then by the British Empire for the next 30 years. When the British announced in 1947 that they would withdraw from Mandate Palestine in 1948, the nascent United Nations assumed the task of dividing Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state (UN Resolution 181, November 29, 1947). Following Britain's departure, however, the Jewish colonies declared the independent state of Israel, not just in the territory assigned to the

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¹K. Pfeifer (2003) The Material Basis of Palestinian Society: A Long-Term Perspective, *Critique*, 12(2), pp. 103–130.

Jewish state but also in most of the territory that had been assigned to the Arab state, land that had been ‘cleansed’ of Arab residents during the spring of 1948 (on the basis of ‘Plan Dalet’, a project that created an estimated 750,000 Palestinian refugees). These developments prompted several Arab states to intervene, sparking the first Arab-Israeli war, which ended with armistice agreements in 1949. The armistice agreements between Israel and the Arab states of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria left Israel in control of 77.94 percent of pre-1948 Palestine; the remaining territory was comprised of two small non-independent Palestinian entities, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, both of which were overwhelmed with Palestinian refugees from areas that became part of Israel; in addition, thousands of Palestinians had sought refuge in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The Arab countries that had come to the aid of the indigenous Palestinians Arab population read the establishment of a settler-colonial entity in the heart of the Middle East as an engineered obstruction, and thus *casus belli*, to the Arab nationalist project of unifying space and *ethnos* into a single polis.²

This 1948 war is referred to as the ‘War of Independence’ in the Zionist/Israeli narrative and as ‘The Catastrophe’ [*Al-Nakba*] in Palestinian and Arab nationalist discourses.³ Although this article does not intend to enter into a political overview of broader Arab-Israeli affairs, it is nevertheless necessary to highlight briefly certain contextual historical features of both Israeli and Palestinian nationalist ideology (origin), so as to understand fully their implications for my scrutiny of how they continue to represent the land. Thereafter, I will discuss a series of visual practices of national exclusions containing strong ideational projections. These will include both historical and contemporary examples. I will give special attention to the current ‘Visit Palestine’ campaign of Palestinian grassroots actors, while simultaneously contextualizing that slogan historically within early Zionist advocacy strategies. This study applies the analytical paradigm of settler-colonial studies, that remains strikingly undervalued in scholarship dealing with the theme of Israel/Palestine, but which adequately places my case study on visual and discursive contestations in a wider interpretative context.⁴ This prism of enquiry also allows for social science scholarship to proceed beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ while simultaneously discarding the ‘ethnic lens’, both of which continue to distort academic investigation.⁵

Historical Background: Zionist and Palestinian National Mythology

The first substantial initiation of the *aliyah* [Jewish immigration] began in the late nineteenth century with the establishment of agricultural colonies in the Palestine district [Jerusalem *sanjak*] of the Ottoman Empire’s province of Syria. Most of the early Zionists were seeking a safe-haven from anti-Semitic pogroms in the Russian Empire. At the time, Zionism was only one of the ideologies that were circulating among ‘global Jewry’, along with national

² S. Avineri (1981) *The Making of Modern Zionism: Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York: Basic Books), pp. 88–100, 112–124, 139–216; and I. Pappé (2006) *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: Oneworld).

³ E. Rogan (2009) *The Arabs: A History*, pp. 245–259, 338–340 (London: Penguin Books).

⁴ O. Jabary Salamanca, M. Qato, K. Rabie & S. Samour (2012) Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine, *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2(1), pp. 1–8.

⁵ N. Glick-Schiller, A. Çağlar & T. Guldbrandsen (2006) Beyond the Ethnic Lens: Locality, Globality, and Born-Again Incorporation, *American Ethnologist* 33(4), pp. 612–633; and A. Wimmer & N. Glick-Schiller (2003) Methodological Nationalism, the Social Sciences, and the Study of Migration: An Essay in Historical Epistemology, *International Migration Review*, 37(3), pp. 576–610.

assimilation in Europe (e.g., Stefan Zweig, Alfred Dreyfus, etc.⁶) and international socialism. The Hebrew word *aliyah* refers to a migratory movement of often persecuted people who identified themselves as Jews and decided to move to a land that was dubbed as *Erez Israel* at a World Zionist Conference in Europe. This Hebrew term strategically was introduced to pinpoint a particular geography with a sacred and mythological connotation for wider Jewish publics. Subsequently, the British government embraced the idea of creating a 'homeland' for Jews in Palestine and incorporated this as policy when it created the Mandate of Palestine in the former Ottoman territory after World War I. By 1920, the Zionist movement identified with the British Mandate for Palestine and fervently propagated it as a geography for 'return' of what it saw as a global Jewish Diaspora, said to date all the way back to the sixth century BCE Babylonian Exile. As such, the Zionist movement started propagating a historical, national and religious (biblical) 'continuum' that linked the 'Jewish nation' with a particular geographical space and strengthened it by a mythological vision that had an active political dimension.⁷

Zionism clearly combines notions of 'landscape' (cognitive topography) and 'nation' into an exclusivist nationalist ideology, with ultimate roots in the nineteenth century European tradition of Romantic nationalism.⁸ When Britain issued the Balfour Declaration in November 1917, it effectively promised British support toward the creation of a 'homeland' for the Jewish population in Palestine. Consequently, Britain not only won favor among Zionists whose aspirations suddenly became more feasible, but concurrently it also staked its own imperialist claim to the territory that its World War I allies, France and Russia, also coveted. After World War I, in which the Ottoman Empire was defeated and subsequently partitioned into eight new states, Britain obtained League of Nations mandates⁹ to govern Palestine,

⁶ One Jewish intellectual about whom there is debate concerning the extent to which he appreciated the aims or value of Zionism is Franz Kafka (1883–1924). He certainly could be considered as a Jewish man who was well integrated into the intellectual and socio-economic fabric of his heterogeneous native city, Prague. Zionist discourse, in an *a-posteriori* fashion, has tried to recuperate his intellectual persona in their nationalist continuum; see further J. Butler (2011) Who Owns Kafka, *London Review of Books*, 33(5), pp. 3–8.

⁷ Material for this paragraph is based on the following sources: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin (2007) *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library), pp. 210–212; S. Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, pp. 88–100, 112–124, 139–216; R. Dolphin (2006) *The West Bank Wall: Unmaking Palestine*, p. 3 (London: Pluto Press); R. Khalidi (1997) *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, p. 94 (New York: Columbia University Press); W. Laqueur (1972) *A History of Zionism: From the French Revolution to Establishment of the State of Israel* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), p. 591; I. Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, pp. 10–11; idem (1992) *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: I. B. Tauris), p. 47; E. Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 311–312; A. Shlaim (2001) *The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), pp. 5–14; and O. Yiftachel & H. Tacobi (2003) Urban Ethnocracy: Ethnicization and the Production of Space in an Israeli 'Mixed' City, in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21(6), p. 679.

⁸ Theodor Herzl resided in nineteenth-century Europe (Budapest, Paris, Vienna) and was influenced by the gradual re-emergence of anti-Semitism and narrow notions of nationalism in Europe, symbolized by the Dreyfus affair in France, for instance. He advocated in his key 1896 work, *Der Judenstaat*, that Jews create their own state; see S. Avineri, *Modern Zionism*, pp. 92–94; and C. Schindler (2008) *A History of Modern Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press), pp. 10–37.

⁹ The mandates were approved in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres. The partition of the Ottoman Empire, however, already had been decided in the secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement among Britain, France and Russia. Subsequent to the 1917 Revolution in Russia, the Bolsheviks revealed this and other secret agreements to the public, although this revelation did not dissuade Britain and France from dividing the former Ottoman territories among themselves.

Transjordan¹⁰ and Iraq for an indefinite period until each of these ‘states’ was deemed sufficiently ‘mature’ for independence. The Balfour Declaration officially was incorporated as part of the Palestine mandate, and Britain encouraged Jewish immigration there, despite protests from the indigenous Arab population. Jewish immigration increased over time, especially after the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933 and began implementing anti-Jewish policies that culminated in the Holocaust during World War II. After 1945, the Holocaust altered European public opinion in favor of ‘Jewish’ self-determination and revived Zionism from its rather intellectually marginalized position on the ideological periphery. Although the influx of European Jews related also to Palestine’s geographical proximity to Europe and the US reluctance to accept large numbers of immigrants between 1924 and 1968, it was also the ideological attraction of a Jewish nation-state that led European Jewry, traumatized by a lack of protection in their previous states, to migrate to British mandate Palestine and join the Zionist movement.¹¹

Similar to other nationalist mythologies, Zionism propagates an imagined *Golden Age* (i.e., the rule of Kings David and Solomon, and the building of the first Temple in Jerusalem), a *National Tragedy* (i.e., final destruction of the Temple and the Diaspora of Jews), and a projected future of glorious *National Resurrection* (i.e., Israel). This nationalist ideology mainly was linked to Palestine due to its biblical connotations and thus mobilizing potential. Yet, the early Zionists, who were predominantly secular,¹² in their pragmatism, also considered Uganda, for instance. Their ultimate geographical choice of Palestine, however, clearly has had its consequences since that territory already was inhabited, leaving the possibility for an imperial doctrine of *Terra Nullius* void. This was nevertheless a discursive strategy that consciously was applied, which eventually became untenable over time, as also was the case in North America. Today, Zionism still determinedly is embodied by the state of Israel and as a state it continues to exert active colonization strategies through its network of subsidized settlements in the West Bank, its policy of land and resource¹³ grabbing and its endorsement of the racial ‘Law of Return’ (since July 5, 1950).¹⁴

Despite serious condemnation by the International Court of Justice and various UN organizations (i.e., UNOCHA, UNRWA, UNESCO), over 400,000 Israeli settlers currently are living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon engineered

¹⁰ Transjordan was entirely to the east of the Jordan River, which divided it from Palestine. After the 1948 War, the Transjordanian army occupied southeastern Palestine, including the Old City of Jerusalem, and this area eventually became known as the West Bank (of the Jordan River); it was annexed in 1949, and Transjordan officially changed its name to Jordan. Israel occupied the West Bank during the 1967 War, and still continues to do so.

¹¹ R. Dolphin, *The West Bank Wall*, p. 2; A. Handel (2009) Where, Where to, and when in the Occupied Territories: An Introduction to Geography of Disaster, in A. Ophir, M. Givoni & S. Hanafi (eds) *The Power of Inclusive Exclusion: Anatomy of Israeli Rule in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (New York: Zone Books), pp. 179–222; I. Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing*, pp. 10–11; idem, *Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 47; E. Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 245–259, 311–320; A. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, pp. 5–14; O. Yiftachel & H. Tacobi (2003) Urban Ethnocracy, pp. 677–680.

¹² The early Zionist movement wanted to secularize, nationalize and empower ‘Judaism.’

¹³ E.g., water wells, fertile plains & strategic hilltops; see further R. Dolphin, *The West Bank Wall*, pp. 74–78.

¹⁴ The law stipulates that anyone able to ‘prove’ Jewish ancestry (along with their spouses and converts to Orthodox Judaism) has a right to Israeli citizenship and to settle permanently in Israel and (by design) its military-controlled OT (West Bank). Many critics have dubbed this policy as a ‘herrenvolk law,’ which deliberately aims at ethnic discrimination and engineering demographic (‘racial’) supremacy on the ground, i.e., securing Israel as a ‘Jewish state’ as a key Zionist principle; see further: R. Dolphin, *The West Bank Wall*, pp. 17, 20, 23; O. Yiftachel & H. Tacobi (2003) Urban Ethnocracy, pp. 673–676.

the construction of the Israeli separation ‘barrier,’ which detours beyond the 1949 armistice border—the Green Line, along with a complementary settlement network as dual structures to rid Israel of its ensuing ‘native problem.’¹⁵ As a consequence, the Palestinian population in the OT since the early 2000s has been confined in a minimum amount of space with a minimum of resources. It is also worthy to mention that these ideological and territorial objectives generally are shared across the Israeli political spectrum, from the left of center Labor Party to the right-wing Likud Party. Furthermore, this continuing policy systematically has undermined Palestinian prospects for a mediated solution (UN Partition Resolution, Oslo Agreements, Road Map) toward Palestinian sovereignty and territorial continuity. Today, one already can speak of the *fait accompli* of what is dubbed as the ‘Bantustanization,’ or confined fragmentation, of the West Bank. Although its historical constellation differs from other colonization processes, e.g., South Africa and French Algeria, where asymmetric labor exploitation ultimately provided labor masses with a large degree of leverage, Israel remains one of the last of such physically active, colonial-oriented states.¹⁶

Although regional Arab nationalism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—in a dialectic relation to early Turkish nationalism (Young Turks) within the Ottoman Empire, the Arabic-speaking population of early twentieth-century Palestine was a primarily rural-based society with a sense of very localized forms of ‘identity.’ Palestinians hence did not embody nor assert a vision that was comparable to that of the early Zionist enterprise, which was rooted within European nationalism. In the Palestinian countryside a patronage system of feudal landlords [*zu’ama*]¹⁷ existed, although the *zu’ama* tended to live in cities such as Jerusalem and Beirut, where they constituted an intermediary position within the diffuse administrative system of Ottoman rule, which was backed up by a clan-based system of authority in the provinces. In the cities, however, an urban merchant class did exist, and it was this class that formed the backbone of the proto-Palestinian National movement during the interbellum period (especially during the Great Arab Revolt of 1936–39¹⁸), defying British rule and the *systematic* exclusion of Arab labor by the Jewish Labor Federation (*Histadrut*)—a fact carefully omitted in Colin Shindler’s pro-Zionist account,

¹⁵ Ariel Sharon famously stated in 1998: ‘Everybody has to move; run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements, because everything we take now will stay ours. Everything we don’t grab will go to them.’ Quoted in R. Khalidi (2011) No Chance of Peace, *The New York Times*, May 18, 1998. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/09/01/negotiating-with-the-israeli-settlers/no-chance-of-peace-with-settlements-around>, accessed September 18, 2012.

¹⁶ B. Ashcroft et al. (2007) *Post-Colonial Studies*, pp. 31–33, 175–176; S. Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, pp. 92–94, 110; J. Cook (2008) *Disappearing Palestine: Israel’s Experiments in Human Despair* (London: Zed Books), p. 98; M. Bishara (2001) *Palestine/Israel: Peace or Apartheid, Prospects for Resolving the Conflict*. (London: Zed Books), p. 45; R. Dolphin, *The West Bank Wall*, pp. 5–7, 16–18, 22, 71, 86–87, 97, 145–146, 149–150, 152–163; J. Halper (2000) The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control, *Middle East Report*, 216, pp. 14–19; A. Handel, *Where, Where To*, pp. 179–222; W. Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, pp. 591–593; I. Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israel Conflict*, pp. 90–93; UNOCHA (2011) Barrier Update – Seven years after the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Barrier: The Impact of the Barrier in the Jerusalem area. *UNOCHA Special Focus*, pp. 1, 2, 6, 8, 20. Available at: http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_barrier_update_july_2011_english.pdf, accessed January 20, 2012; O. Yiftachel & H. Tacobi (2003) Urban Ethnocracy, pp. 677–678, 680, 689–690.

¹⁷ Many of them *sold* their lands to Zionist funds, without much knowledge of those working on and inhabiting the land.

¹⁸ Interestingly, the revolt was put down in a joint collaboration of the British colonial troops *and* Zionist militias, such as the *Haganah* (predecessor of the ‘Israel Defense Forces’ or IDF).

A History of Modern Israel.¹⁹ Preceding World War I, the independent emergence of this urban Palestinian class, without incentives from Istanbul, was related to European merchants' privileged access to the area subsequent to the nineteenth-century Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms, creating Eurocentric pockets of urban commerce (capitalist penetration). However, their interests were of a local nature, with a sense of loyalty and belonging relating more to family (clan), the city/village and/or *umma*/community of believers than to the modernist notion of a delineated 'nation.' Thus, it can be argued that concrete notions of 'Palestinian identity,' as we have seen and heard them voiced in recent decades, i.e., as a narrative that is distinct from wider forms of *mashrek/sharqi* and Arab identity, only began to take concrete form in the second half of the twentieth century,²⁰ namely through the *distinctive experience of forced migration* and internment in refugee camps, brought about by the establishment of the state of Israel, just prior to and during the Arab-Israeli War of 1948.²¹

It can be argued that both Zionism/Israeli nationalism and post-1948 Palestinian nationalism are intrinsically intertwined. Zionism, it is argued, even can be seen as a particular ideological extension of European settler-colonialism,²² and hence one may interpret Palestinian nationalism as a particular reaction to it. Notions of Jewish and Muslim holiness of the land only were revived actively in political terms at a later stage within these ideational configurations, as functional emotional dimensions of the two national projects, by both religious Zionists and political (Palestinian) Islamists.²³ This basic historical-materialist outline for framing the Israeli-Palestinian *problématique* now lets us proceed to analyze critically sociological notions such as nationalism, landscape, power-discourse and, most importantly, their intertwining in respect to visual representations of Belonging, Homeland, the Self and Other in this configuration of asymmetric 'conflict.'

¹⁹ C. Schindler, *A Modern History*, pp. 38–77.

²⁰ It is this fluid context that emboldened former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to state in 1969: 'There is no such thing as a Palestinian people... It is not as if we came and threw them out and took their country. They didn't exist.' Cited in: A. Marquardt (2011) Newt Gingrich 'Ignorant', 'Racist' Say Palestinians. *ABC News*, December 10, 2011. Available at: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/12/newt-gingrich-ignorant-racist-say-palestinians/>, accessed February 10, 2015.

²¹ D. S. Bernstein (1998) Strategies of Equalization, a Neglected Aspect of the Split Labour Market Theory: Jews and Arabs in the Split Labour Market of Mandatory Palestine, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21(3), pp. 449–475; M. Campos (2010) *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine* (Stanford University Press), pp. 166–223; M. Kramer (1993) Arab Nationalism: Mistaken Identity, *Daedalus* 122(3), p. 175; I. Lustick (1997) The Absence of Middle Eastern Great Powers: Political 'Backwardness' in Historical Perspective, *International Organization* 51(4), pp. 665–666; I. Pappé, *The Making of*, p. 21; J. Peteet (2005) *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), pp. 71–74; E. Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 108–114, 120–121, 250–259 & 311–320; R. Sayigh (1979) *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books), pp. 14–15, 39; and Z. N. Zeine (1981) *Arab-Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (Greenwood Press Reprint), pp. 83–115.

²² Although the relationship between the Jewish settler population and the British authorities was not one-dimensional (e.g., tension surrounding *Irgun*, *Stern Gang*, British 'Passfield White Paper' etc.), there was a positive *modus vivendi*, which significantly favored the Zionist movement over the native Arab population. This was certainly the case towards the end of the mandate period. A good example can be found in the fact that the British ultimately left all their military material to the disposal of the Zionist militias after their evacuation on May 14, 1948, just before the Arab-Israeli War; thus deconstructing the 'David vs. Goliath' myth present in Israeli military discourse that accompanies its foundational myths—they were militarily superior *vis-à-vis* the Arab armies [cf. I. Pappé (1992), *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, p. 57; and E. Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 311–320, 322, 330–337 & 369].

²³ I. Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, pp. 21, 47; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, p. 94; Sayigh, *Palestinians*, p. 55; O. Yiftachel & H. Tacobi (2003) *Urban Ethnocracy*, pp. 278–279; N. Yuval-Davis (1997) *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications), pp. 11–21, 26–31, 40–60, 66–67, 199–120; and Zeine, *Arab-Turkish Relations*, pp. 83–115.

Projections: Shaping National Identity, Landscape and History

It is interesting that from a legal perspective ‘Palestine,’ as often applied by Palestinian activists, does not formally exist. One should interpret this term as a projection of Palestinian discourse aiming at self-determination. Moreover, people in positions of power in Israel often do not even recognize or apply the legally regulated terms for the Palestinian territories: The West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Instead of using ‘West Bank,’ many Israeli politicians apply biblical geographies to describe it, namely ‘Judea and Samaria.’ An interview in Ray Dolphin’s excellent study, *The West Bank Wall: Unmaking Palestine*, vividly illustrates this point:

Ha’aretz [Israeli newspaper]: You gave up the Gaza strip in order to save the West Bank? Is the Gaza disengagement meant to allow Israel to continue controlling the majority of the West Bank?

Dov Weisglass [senior advisor to Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon]: Arik [Sharon] doesn’t see Gaza today as an area of national interest. He does see Judea and Samaria [the West Bank] as an area of national interest. He thinks rightly that we are still very, very far from the time when we will be able to reach final-status settlements in Judea and Samaria.²⁴

Clearly, the application of such negating terminology relates to the projection of (political) hegemony: One tries actively to redefine space, according to a particular ideological vision, by means of speech. Through such a power-discourse, a structured hierarchy of terms, categories and appreciations are put forth to influence mainstream perception.²⁵ In contrast, the *United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* (UNRWA) stipulates these legal Palestinian entities under the umbrella-term of ‘Occupied Palestinian Territories’ or, more often, through its acronym ‘oPt’. In doing so, the selective capital use of the letter ‘P’—stressing *Palestinian*—highlights both an institutionalization of counter-discursive and affirmative action in their humanitarian *parole* (*vis-à-vis* Israeli policy), as well as an internalization of diplomatic prudence by thus inevitably downplaying the first letter of the acronym that might refer to a controversial political practice (i.e., occupation).²⁶

As the images that are displayed below further will substantiate, the term ‘Palestine’ has been used denotatively in different periods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, with very diverging connotative meanings. The first four figures entail posters that initially were advertised in the first half of the twentieth century by the proto-Zionist movement, namely by the Jewish Agency for Palestine. This was done, in order to spread and advertise the idea of Jewish immigration to British mandate Palestine. Today, however, they are being re-used by Palestinian activists as a sort of visual guerilla strategy (asymmetric ‘warfare’) to mobilize sympathy for the establishment of their own state. One easily can find them today in various formal and informal tourist shops²⁷ in the old city of Jerusalem.

²⁴ R. Dolphin, *The West Bank Wall*, p. 165.

²⁵ S. Hall, ed. (1997) *The Spectacle of the Other*, in: *Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Thousand Oaks), pp. 234–235.

²⁶ Cf. UNRWA’s webpage. Available at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=47>, accessed September 15, 2013. This jargon is legitimized through reference to the UN Partition Plan of 1947, which was adopted by the General Assembly as Resolution 181(II); Available at: <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7f0af2bd-897689b785256c330061d253>, accessed September 15, 2013.

²⁷ This primary observation is based on my stay in Israel and the OT in 2010 and 2012, when I resided in both Ramallah and Jerusalem for academic studies at Birzeit University and subsequently for an internship with UNRWA’s BMU research office. Examples can be found in documented travel accounts (blogs) online, e.g., G. Cimarosti (2012) I’m in Israel, *Travel Reportage*. Available at: <http://www.travelreportage.com/2012/07/15/im-in-israel/>, accessed February 20, 2015; Anonymous author (2013) In the Heart of the Holy Land – Bethlehem and Jerusalem. *Wanderfull*. Available at: <http://wanderfull.us/in-the-heart-of-the-holy-land-bethlehem-and-jerusalem/>, accessed February 20, 2015.

The term ‘Palestine’ hence was used geographically to refer to British mandate Palestine in the Zionist narrative but now is applied in Palestinian national discourse to advocate and realize an independent state. Both ideological projections thus use or have used similar terminology for different political purposes, hence altering the ‘code’ or ‘myth’ associated with a particular, literal term (denotation). This contemporary Palestinian counter-discourse can be seen as an intervention of ‘trans-coding’, i.e., the re-appropriation of new meanings to old Zionist imagery.²⁸ This is ultimately done to defy and/or alter the contemporary reality within its actual geographical referent (‘Palestine’: West Bank, Gaza, Israel). Moreover, one could claim that Palestinian activists use such Zionist representations as a subtle manner of implicitly highlighting the historical strategies of the Zionist movement, not least that of the *Terra Nullius*²⁹ thesis, which claimed Palestine was an uninhabited land. This doctrine was present in various colonial discourses, which often were deconstructed by either critical scrutiny or by the manifest struggles of various indigenous peoples, looking for inclusive recognition and civic equality (native Americans/First Nations, Aboriginals, Amazon Indians etc.).³⁰

Understanding their disadvantaged³¹ position when it comes to voicing their struggle, i.e., the absence of a proper state and representative government deprives a people *a priori* of a voice in certain formal arenas of international relations (e.g., limited UN recognition, lack of proper embassies, PR-funds, etc.)—the Palestinian movement has resorted to strategies that are both cheap as well as relatively effective in intellectually dislodging dominant Israeli narratives about ‘them’. Such venues of advocacy underscore the strength of images in the contemporary (consumer) world, as we live increasingly in an age of visual imagery and no longer in one that is dominated by text. This inherently implies the reinforcement of an endless dimension of connotative meanings—synchronically and diachronically layered—that are effectively present in the fluid societal reception thereto (‘floating’ meaning). Moreover, the strength of images is found in the fact that they can make us believe that a connotative meaning *is* denotative (universal) and therefore ‘objective’, while this is in fact *the delusive myth*.³²

The Zionist posters presented in this article were anchored with words that were necessary to transform or ‘encode’ the visuals into a *particular* narrative, thus narrowing down the possibility of connotative meanings in the early twentieth century.³³ Today, the Palestinian

²⁸ S. Hall (1980 [1973]) Encoding/Decoding, in S. Hall (ed.) *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972–79* (London: Hutchinson), pp. 128–138; Idem. (1997) The Spectacle, pp. 226, 228; and B. Latour (1990) Drawing Things Together, in: M. Lynch & S. Woolgar (eds) *Representation in Scientific Practice* (London: MIT Press), pp. 26, 31–35, 42, 44–45, 51–52.

²⁹ Referencing the Dayr Yasin Massacre, which generated a mass exodus of Arab-Palestinians, often makes up for an important counter-argument. (cf. E. Rogan, *The Arabs*, pp. 326–327).

³⁰ B. Ashcroft et al. (2007) *Post-Colonial Studies*, pp. 32, 97, 176; and A. Haddour (2001) *Colonial Myths: History and Narrative* (Manchester University Press), pp. 24–41.

³¹ E. Said intelligently dubbed his 1984 article related to power-discourse as ‘Permission to Narrate?’, *Journal for Palestine Studies*, 13(3), pp. 27–48; G. Spivak named her key 1988 essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in: C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (1988) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press), pp. 271–313; William Blake stated: “If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite,” quoted in Aldous Huxley (2004) *The Doors of Perception* (London: Vintage Books), p. 1.

³² M. Sturken & L. Cartwright (2001) *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: New York University Press), pp. 1, 14–15, 18–19, 29.

³³ S. Hall, Encoding/Decoding, pp. 128–138; Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices of Looking*, pp. 1, 14–15, 18–19, 29.



Figure 1. Historical Zionist poster, issued by the Jewish Agency in 1936, by Franz Krausz, an Austrian immigrant and graphic designer.

movement seems to favor using those historical posters of the Zionist movement that appear most ambiguous and ‘amendable’, more specifically the poster that reads ‘Visit Palestine’ (Figure 1) and which includes a panorama of Old Jerusalem and the Temple Mount [*Al-Aqsa* Mosque and Western ‘Wailing’ Wall]. The conscious application of such historical, visual material by actors in Palestinian society highlights its ever-lasting vibrant nature.³⁴ In the tradition of the First Intifada [1987–1993], which was a culmination of *local* social mobilization that developed largely outside of the reach of the PLO’s *external* activities/authority, such images signal a modest re-emergence of a dialectic integration of both intellectual and popular dimensions (Gramsci’s ‘constant persuaders’) for the synergistic benefit of reaffirming their anti-colonial struggle, ready to engage with Israeli discursive projections that often dominate global mainstream perceptions, in a ‘war of position.’³⁵

³⁴ The relevant poster (Figure 1) can today be seen hanging in the historical city center of contemporary Jerusalem—still home to a sizable Palestinian community—as witnessed by myself on site in 2010 and 2012. See, for instance: Palestine Poster Project Archives. Available at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/visit-palestine-unauthorized-reprinting-3>, accessed February 10, 2015.

³⁵ V. Dudouet (2008) *Nonviolent Resistance and Conflict Transformation in Power Asymmetries* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management), p. 7; S. Hall, *The Spectacle*, pp. 226, 228; Q. Hoare and G. Smith (eds) (2003) *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London: Lawrence and Wishart), pp. 3–10; B. Latour, *Drawing Things Together*, pp. 26, 31–35, 42, 44–45, 51–52; J. Proctor (2004) *Stuart Hall* (London: Routledge), pp. 60, 63–64; R. Simon (1991) *Gramsci’s Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence & Wishart), pp. 23–27; Sturken and Cartwright, *Practices*, pp. 1, 14–15, 18–19, 29; E. Said (2002) *The Public Role of Writers and Intellectuals*. In: H. Small (ed.) *The Public Intellectual* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), pp. 20–21.

The Zionist movement abandoned the term 'Palestine' after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The fact that most of the contemporary Israeli public would not even relate to the usage of the term 'Palestine' *within* a Zionist discourse of the Self implies that the 'cultural citizenship' thereto effectively has shifted. A new dialogic process thus has been established in relation to this sign, firmly incorporated into the sphere, or 'system of classification', of Palestinian activism and wider Arab society. This furthermore reinforces the aforementioned statement that meaning/connotation is ultimately fluid ('floating') throughout both space and time, and hence intrinsically subjective, socially constructed and politically amendable. Moreover, as various critical scholars have endeavored to point out, people and (powerful actors within) their social surrounding actively construct *what* is known and *how* it is known. Meaning is thus by itself a very contested space, captured so vividly by the trajectories of these historical posters.³⁶

While interpreting the world, one thus often internalizes and then unknowingly exerts or reproduces (i.e., often exacerbates) an implicit system of societal rules ('codes') that constitute one's subjective normative framework, a communicative space that is, among others, permeated by ideological parameters. Hence comes forth the *power* and extent of discourse. Furthermore, it is precisely through discourse, often the hegemonic one, that the surrounding world acquires 'meaning' among wider audiences or 'listeners.' Connotations are clearly fluid spaces, and precisely because there is a great and intrinsic margin for external influence, interest groups often debate over them and try to shape consecutive interpretations, judgments and actions. While these analytical notions often tend to be applied in discussions of Western societies, they are abundantly operationalized in the Israeli-Palestinian context, in direct conjunction with more physical regimes of power projection (i.e., occupation, siege).³⁷

With regard to Figures 2 and 3, both produced in the 1930s, one should take note of the use of inter-textuality in the Zionist representation of 'Palestine' or *Erez Israel*. Here ethno-religious signifiers are applied to invoke the constitution of Jewish mythology in relation to an envisioned political project (Israel), i.e., 'See Ancient Beauty Revived,' and 'The Land of the Bible.' Figure 2, especially, raises Romantic sentiment through the inclusion of what appears as an extrapolated sketch of historical architecture on site, covered by beams of sunshine ('light') that contrast with a clear ('blue') sky, thus reinforcing the idea of national historicity as a particular tradition that inevitably forecloses exclusive entitlement (i.e., ownership of Palestine). Psychological appeal for the whole idea of visiting this topography, or migrating to this ancient 'home' was made further attractive through the inclusion of nutritious fruits—generating *desire* through 'appetite'—as the symbolic reward for such well-promoted physical mobility. The ideological 'meta-message,' or what is conceptualized as the 'signified,' relates in this case to the propagation and mobilization to settle in a particular region and 'revive' the nation. As an ideational poster, Figure 3 simultaneously includes Romantic and even Leftist notions of labor (i.e., agriculture). In this respect, one needs to be aware that Zionists often portrayed 'Palestine' as an empty 'barren dessert,' which was waiting to be rediscovered and made 'fertile.'³⁸ This notion is amplified vividly

³⁶ S. Hall, *The Spectacle*, pp. 223–290.

³⁷ A. Haddour, *Colonial Myths*, pp. 24–112, 155–174.

³⁸ J. Massad (1995) Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism, *The Middle East Journal* 49(3), p. 471.

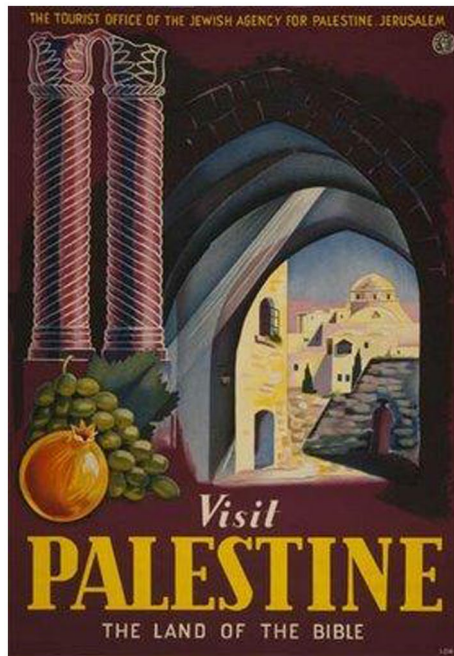


Figure 2. Zionist poster, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1930s.

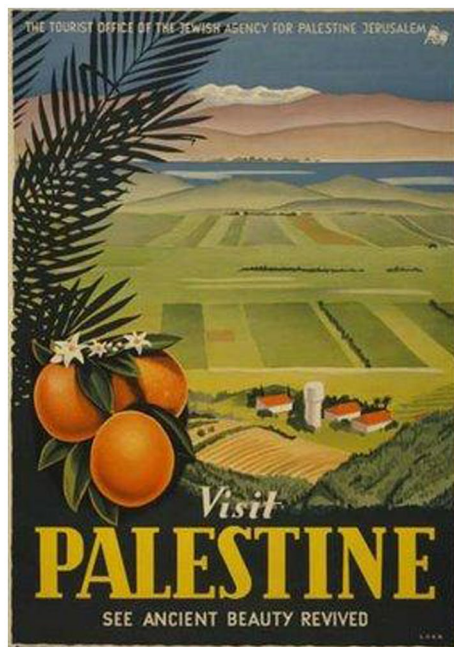


Figure 3. Zionist poster by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1930s.

by contrasting Figures 4 and 3 which respectively feature as a proclaimed starting point and the envisioned result, or cognitive ‘horizon.’³⁹

Moreover, one could argue that this portrayal of an ‘environment’ that was to be ‘tamed’ by man’s ‘noble’ ability to usher in ‘advancement and prosperity,’ is rather exemplary for both the colonial discourse of the time and the adjacent evolutionary modernization paradigm, which stipulated linear social progression as the ‘destiny’ of Enlightened, ‘superior’ beings.⁴⁰ Indeed, the idea of ‘Jewish labor’ in the early twentieth century often was framed within a celebratory discourse of technical innovation, popular emancipation and unionism that were similar to narratives emanating from socialist movements. In fact, the Soviet Union was among the first countries to recognize Israel in 1948, hoping for an ally after observing Jewish experiments with Kibbutz-style collectivism in Palestine.⁴¹ The modernist idea of a model society that was man-made and superior to more ‘backward’ modes of ‘traditional’ organization actually is recognizable in Figure 3, which displays organized agricultural plots and industrial-style farmhouses (i.e., technological infrastructure). The abundance of water as a symbol for all ‘life,’ also features prominently here through the lake in the background—likely Lake Tiberias (the Sea of Galilee)—and the water tower, i.e., water in its ‘tamed’ and domesticated form. Yet again, citrus fruit is included in this Zionist ‘vision’ of the Holy Land, symbolizing ‘fertility’ through manual ‘production.’

As a scientific discipline, various scholars have deconstructed cartography as often having formed an integral part of power-discourses that established colonial hierarchy and modes of dominance. The ability to produce centrality for technical purposes (navigation) was further instrumentalized to infuse Self-importance, as an epistemic dimension of colonial authority and exploitation. The ‘staged’ poster below (Figure 4), produced by the Jewish Agency in the pre-1948 era, displays Mandate Palestine’s geography and reads ‘Visit *Erez Israel*,’ Israel here referring to the Jewish nation (the tribes of Israel), before it was constituted as signifier for the state in 1948. It can be termed as a ‘mythological map’: A graphic product that exalts power equations through the articulation of ideational projections that aim for hegemony and are embedded in mythical *parole*.⁴² These posters represent some of the early Zionist movement’s *mythopoeitics*, i.e., carefully staged pieces of propaganda that include a complex ideological repertoire that draws on particular socio-cultural codes, directed at a specific historical public.⁴³

Many post-colonial scholars have argued that the colonial (knowledge) production of ‘The Orient’ incorporated a subtle set of preconceived hierarchies, which then were conveyed to audiences, initiating and reinforcing ‘common beliefs’ (categories) in colonial societies. The relevant Zionist posters clearly carry strong myths and active silences (i.e., in relation to the local Arab population). Such ‘silences,’ as the ‘thing’ one is disinclined to say, name or show (visually), function actively alongside discourse, not as its limitative boundary, but rather as an integral part of a particular hegemonic narrative or ‘regime of truth.’ Therefore, one has

³⁹ U. Hannerz (1993) *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning*. (NY: Columbia University Press).

⁴⁰ I. Blumi (2012) *Foundations of Modernity: Human Agency and the Imperial State* (New York: Routledge).

⁴¹ Zionist Socialism represented a strong current within the Zionist movement from the early to mid-twentieth century. It is amplified visually, for instance, in historical Zionist posters celebrating ‘Red Army Day’ on June 22. See: Palestine Poster Project Archives. Available at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/long-live-the-red-army-long-live-the-ussr-long-live-socialist-zionism>, accessed February 10, 2015.

⁴² J. Black (1997) *Maps and Politics* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd), pp. 11–12, 18–21, 26, 113–114, 119–120.

⁴³ A. Haddour, *Colonial Myths*, pp. 155–174.



Figure 4. Zionist poster by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1930s.

to seek for and critically contemplate on the deeper meaning of the visual representations on display (ideology, propaganda, political project etc.).⁴⁴

Violent Imagery: Palestinian ‘Terrorists’ in ‘Judea and Samaria’

In order to elaborate further on the Zionist construction of the Self, one needs to shed light on the ongoing Israeli discourse of the different geographies under its direct and indirect control. For example, one can compare a map of the West Bank area, as depicted by the United Nations (UNOCHA), with those of the same topography on the website of The Jewish Agency, an organization that was founded in 1929 at the 16th World Zionist Conference to serve as the representative body for the Jewish population in Mandate Palestine before the establishment of the state of Israel. Attentive scholars will notice great disparities in their respective production of maps. Interestingly, missiles often accompany the aforementioned markers ‘Judea and Samaria,’ as Israeli terms for the ‘West Bank,’ implying conveniently the need to colonize the area further as a ‘space of exception’⁴⁵ from a ‘national security’

⁴⁴ H. S. Becker (2007) *Telling About Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press), pp. 5–9, 11–13; S. Chaturvedi (2002) Process of Othering in the Case of India and Pakistan, *Royal Dutch Geographical Society KNAG (Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie)* 93(2), p. 1; E. Abrahamian (2003) The US Media, Huntington and September 11, *Third World Quarterly* 24(3), pp. 529–530; S. Hall ‘The Spectacle,’ pp. 228–229, 232, 234–235, 263–264, 268, 270, 274; Latour, Drawing Things Together, pp. 28, 38–39, 42–43, 48–49, 52–60; E. Said (2000) Traveling Theory, in M. Bayoumi & A. Rubin (eds) *The Edward Said Reader* (New York: Vintage), pp. 195–217; T. Seaton (2009) Purposeful Otherness: Approaches to the Management of Thanatourism, in: R. Sharpley & P. R. Stone (eds) *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism* (Bristol: Short Run Press), pp. 77–82.

⁴⁵ D. Gregory (2004) *The Colonial Present* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), pp. 62–71.

perspective—a normative policy prism that increasingly also contaminates wider social science research *tout court*.⁴⁶ On the Jewish Agency's website, such a picture is accompanied by the following emotive text: 'Missile and Artillery Ranges: This map illustrates Israel's vulnerability to attack from Judea and Samaria. The range of artillery covers all of Israel's main population centers.' Today, The Jewish Agency is still an official organization, linked to the Israeli government that facilitates the ongoing 'call' for 'Jews' worldwide to immigrate to and permanently settle in Israel, a right denied to the descendants of Palestinian refugees who fled or were expelled from what became Israel in 1948 and subsequently were registered with UNRWA (cf. UN Resolution 194). This interplay of ideas, conveyed by terms and visuals and chained together into a master-narrative, should alert scholars of the links between political interest and (visual) knowledge production.⁴⁷

While not going into the technical (military) precision of the above-mentioned statement, it suffices to say that the inclusion of violent symbols into a geographical depiction of the West Bank relates to a core feature of Israeli state discourse, which characterizes Palestinians as inherently aggressive. This 'fact' is of course reflexive then, because it reinforces the propagation that Israel, the only nuclear power in the entire Middle East, is supposedly under existential threat. The prism of 'national security,' together with the image, or rather stereotype of the 'violent' Palestinian-Arab ('terrorist') has been applied, from the very moment of the establishment of the state of Israel, as a binary to construct dually the Israeli Self, namely that of a peace-seeking democracy under constant threat⁴⁸ and deprived of any serious, 'civilized' negotiation partner. Firstly, such a discourse denies Israel's military industrial set-up and its quasi-full *control* over Palestinian space and life—conceptualized as an absolute 'matrix of control' that, in its entirety, goes beyond the military aspects of policing the occupation (West Bank) and maintaining a siege (Gaza).⁴⁹ Secondly, I would argue that such systematic and categorical reduction of the entire Palestinian population to a violent, homogeneous Other ('Barbarians at the Gate'/'Savages') constitutes by itself a violent act, as an aggressive, discursive projection of power.⁵⁰ Various scholars have analyzed the words of David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, or Yitzhak Rabin to illustrate this binary Self-construction *vis-à-vis* the Palestinian Other, *in extremis*.⁵¹

It is highly deplorable that Israeli political commentators still actively try to diminish the Palestinians' humanity to a particular, violent feature or 'essence': 'Arabs [i.e., Palestinians] only understand the language of violence, and to deal with them by favors doesn't help.'⁵² The

⁴⁶ L. Stampnitzky (2013) Toward a Sociology of 'Security, in: *Sociological Forum* 28(3), pp. 631–633.

⁴⁷ See: The Jewish Agency. Available at: <http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Jewish+Education/Compelling+Content/Eye+on+Israel/Maps/25.+missile+and+artillery.htm>, accessed September 19, 2012; See also: UNOCHA (2011) Restrictions of Palestinian Access in the West Bank, *Map December 2011*. Available at: http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ochaopt_atlas_westbank_december2011.pdf, accessed September 15, 2012.

⁴⁸ The Israeli national army bears the name in relation to this idea: The Israel 'Defense' Forces or IDF.

⁴⁹ Cf. D. Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, pp. 76–106; J. Halper (2007), 'The 94 Percent Solution,' pp. 14–19.

⁵⁰ D. Gregory, *The Colonial Present*, pp. 47–75.

⁵¹ I. Maly (2001) Over Rascisme en Beeldvorming in het Israëlisch-Palestijns Conflict' [About racism and representation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict], MA thesis, University of Ghent, Belgium; Published online on *Centrum voor Islam in Europa* [Center for Islam in Europe]; see online sections 1.2.1, 1.3.4 & 1.3.5. Available at: <http://www.flw.ugent.be/cie/imaly/index.htm>, accessed September 19, 2012; and N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, pp. 11–21, 26–31, 40–60, 66–67, 199–200.

⁵² Shipler, quoted in Maly (2001) online section 1.2.4.

fact that Israeli political discourse articulates demography in a racialized manner also can be found in Shimon Peres' comments on the Israeli disengagement from Gaza: 'Politics is a matter of demography, not geography.'⁵³ It is important to notice that, during this reduction process, the ordinary Palestinian citizen is completely absent, for he/she does not fit into the pre-designed category of what it means to be 'Palestinian' and thus is trapped in the deep binary structure of the negative stereotype, as opposed to the cultivated, democratic Israeli Self through a socio-linguistic process of 'splitting'. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, one can relate such discursive strategies to what Slavoj Žižek has dubbed as the active 'culturalization of politics' by those in power, depleting actors of their human dimension and conflicts of their material basis. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the marginalization of historical-materialist critique, this feigned culturalistic prism seemed to undergo a booming success in various analytical disciplines. This only has been reinforced subsequent to the events of 9/11.⁵⁴ However, attentive scholars have been repositioning themselves in their advocacy for analytical schemes based on material and human equality within the world we daily perceive:

Until future research proves otherwise, we ought to take for granted only two basic human entities: individuals and all humanity. All entities between these two, save a mother and a newborn child, are arbitrary formations created by our perception of ourselves *vis-à-vis* others. ... Various unifying factors, such as language, religion, and colour (sic.) of skin, seem 'natural'. I propose that none is. Language, culture, a real or assumed historical origin, and religion, all form identities for an 'us' in our minds, and only so long as they exist in our minds as unifying factors do the entities of 'us' persist.⁵⁵

Signs of Resistance: Defying Colonial Negation

In her article entitled 'The Crisis Within: The Struggle for Palestinian Society,' Sara Roy poses the question 'What sort of activity is politics in Palestine today?'⁵⁶ I contend that the contemporary appropriation of historical Zionist propaganda by Palestinian grassroots activists, for the purpose of engaging with ensuing colonial myths that have prolonged occupation, represents one of many⁵⁷ subaltern strategies that amplify Palestinian *politics from below*. Such creative articulations of defiance represent two intersections. Firstly, they pay homage to Palestinian civil society's resilience along the native principle of *sumud*⁵⁸ [fortitude], the First Intifada being a prime example thereof. Secondly, as they circumvent formal Palestinian politics, currently incapacitated through the Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) comprador-like cooperation with Israeli security paradigms, they also

⁵³ N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, p. 30.

⁵⁴ E. Abrahamian, 'The US Media', pp. 529–544; O. Jabary Salamanca et al. (2012) 'Past is Present', pp. 1–8; S. Žižek (2008) 'Tolerance as an Ideological Category', *Critical Inquiry* 34(4), p. 660; N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, pp. 11–21, 26–31, 40–60, 66–67, 199–200; and S. Zubaida (2011) *Beyond Islam: A New Understanding of the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd), pp. 120–130.

⁵⁵ D. Ronen, quoted by Maly (2001), online section 1.3.4.

⁵⁶ S. Roy (2000) 'The Crisis Within: The Struggle for Palestinian Society', *Critique* 9(17), p. 9.

⁵⁷ Another prominent strategy is the law-based 'Call for Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions' (BDS) movement, which has now gained global dimensions. For more on the 'Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel' (PACBI, 2004) and the ensuing 'Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions' movement (BDS, 2005), see O. Barghouti (2001) *Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights* (Chicago: Haymarket Books), pp. 6–61.

⁵⁸ Cf. M. Qumsiyeh (2011) *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 95–120.

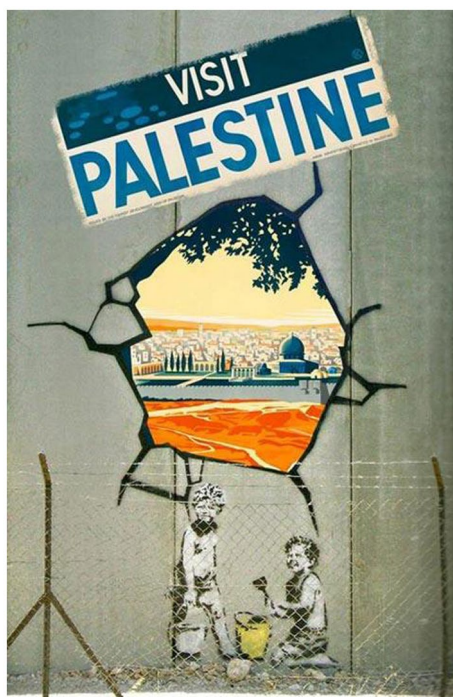


Figure 5. 'Wiz', blending historical posters with contemporary 'Banksy' art.

challenge normative ideas on where politics (and legitimacy) ultimately is located and the very ways in which it is enacted in today's West Bank.

The poster depicted in Figure 5, by the Palestinian designer 'Wiz', amplifies how this sort of Palestinian grassroots activism in visualizing *the political* today even is 'travelling' to (sympathetic) global audiences as well. It depicts a graphic blending of the aforementioned historical Zionist poster by Franz Krausz, dating back to its commissioning by the Jewish Agency in the 1930s, with contemporary 'Banksy' art that today is found on sections of the Israeli-built 'barrier' in the OT, into what can be dubbed novel experiments of counter-discursive symbolism: 'Signs of resistance.' These popular interventions operate as visualized 'techniques' that seek to disrupt the discursive order, which continuously is put forth by contemporary Zionism. Indeed, they need to be interpreted as Foucaultian markers that aim to unsettle a hegemonic 'technology' that 'polices' both opinion and conduct (through myths) regarding the settler-colonial status quo in historical Palestine.⁵⁹ Such apparent states of activist consciousness and bottom-up defiance in the face of Zionist reductions of Palestinian space and its people are crucial, if the Kafkaesque nature of the entire occupation is to be unveiled for the benefit of moving beyond the instigated play of 'nations' and *angst*. These images, which feature increasingly in the urban landscape of Jerusalem and the OT, are 'loaded' reminders of a shared history for both the Arab-Palestinian community as well as

⁵⁹ M. Foucault (1977) *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin); M. Foucault (1983) The Subject and Power, in: Dreyfus, H. & Rabinow, P. (eds) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd edn. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 208–222.

for the inherently diverse Israeli public. Scholars like Edward Said and Nira Yuval-Davis long ago advocated that social justice and the easing of suffering in Palestine could be attained precisely through the exploration of ‘bi-directional’ solidarity mechanisms and egalitarian constitutionalism that cut *across* the various popular constituencies. In the meantime, however, the current status quo of encroaching colonialism continues to be presented in dominant discourses under the mere euphemism of a ‘political deadlock’ within a stalled ‘peace process’ or ‘conflict’—implying often supposedly ‘equal’ actors, thus ignoring the fundamental power asymmetries at hand.⁶⁰

Theorizing occupation and siege as a totalizing structure that regulates profoundly the daily lives of Palestinians in Israel and the OT allows one to make sense of the acute need for voicing resistance, notwithstanding the limited margins to do so.⁶¹ It needs to be pointed out that contemporary experiments of visual incursions into the discursive hegemony of the settler-colonial structure did not come about recently, but rather draw today on a historical tradition of popular Palestinian activism, i.e., resistance *as* tradition. One such example is the frequented image of the Palestinian female-farmer (turned ‘Mother of Martyrs’) as a symbol for indigenous ‘authenticity.’ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) especially used such female imagery from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, and today it often is re-used by Palestinian activists and bloggers.⁶² This particular imagery is clearly a counter-discourse *vis-à-vis* the Israeli ‘*Terra Nullius*’ doctrine by a people that continues to face existential precariousness. For instance, if one observes carefully Figure 6—originally a PFLP poster, one can notice that the shape of the women’s necklace is a referent to the entire geographical space of Mandate Palestine—in exactly the same manner in which Yasser Arafat used to shape his sartorial appearance (i.e., the iconic and consistent arrangement of his *kefiyya*).

The PFLP poster draws upon notions of the female body as representative of ‘virginity’ and ‘fertility’ in emotional (and gendered) references to ‘land.’ At this point, it is worthy to mention the ‘Palestinian Nationalist Charter’ (*Al-Mithaq al-Qawmi al-Filastini*), which was one of the first constitution-like documents formally issued by the PLO and which stipulated a set of political goals and rights next to framing Palestinian identity. Interestingly, Palestine was presented therein through reference to the image of the ‘mother,’ while the Zionist project featured through metaphors of violent sexual nature, i.e., as ‘rape of the land.’⁶³ In his 1995 essay ‘Conceiving the Masculine,’ Joseph Massad pointed out that this emerging Palestinian narrative was dialectically ‘in full concert with early Zionist discourse that viewed the role of Zionists as fertilizing the virgin land.’⁶⁴ In fact, the pre-1947 condition of ‘Palestinian-ness’ would ever since feature (in retrospect) as a feminine conception that imbues a concrete territoriality (Palestine), whereas such a narrative of the Self would, subsequent to the lived experience of forced exile, shift toward a predominantly masculine *and* de-territorialized conception of the Palestinian Nation.⁶⁵ Hence, ‘maternity’, as displayed in Figure 6, thus needs

⁶⁰ E. Said, *Permission to Narrate*, pp. 27–48; and N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation*, pp. 11–21, 26–31, 40–60, 66–67, 199–120.

⁶¹ J. Halper (2007) *The 94 Percent Solution*, pp. 14–19.

⁶² See, for instance, Figure 6 featuring in a blog post example: Anonymous (2011) *On International Women’s Day: Remember Palestinian Female Prisoners. My Palestine Blog*. Available at: <https://avoicefrompalestine.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/on-international-women’s-day-remember-palestinian-female-prisoners/>, accessed February 15, 2015.

⁶³ J. Massad (1995) *Conceiving the Masculine*, pp. 470–473.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 471–473.



Figure 6. 'Mother of Martyrs,' 2009 Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) poster for International Women's day.

to be read as a spatial reference to 'Palestine' as a territory of envisioned liberation—i.e., as a counter-discursive and visualized sign, in defiance of the Zionist project in Palestine.

Yet other subversive examples of the historical Palestinian context/tradition of anti-colonial discourse in which the current 'Visit Palestine' campaign ultimately needs to be placed, easily can be found within the fixation upon notions of Belonging, Homeland and Exile in Arab prose, poetry and political manifestos. It was PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, who famously addressed the UN General Assembly in 1974 by stating: 'Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun; do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.'⁶⁶ Hereby, one needs to understand the connotative symbolism of the olive branch in Palestinian folklore, being a symbol for peace, celebration, and even 'life' (through subsistence) in itself. Furthermore, one of the most famous Palestinian poets, Mahmud Darwish, wrote a poem, entitled '*Jawaz Safar*' or 'Passport' that was put into a song by the famous Lebanese composer, Marcel Khalife. In this song there are multiple implicit references to the experience of refuge and the denial of return. The signifier of 'Passport' hence acquires entirely additional, connotative *dimensions of exile*, next to its mere legal-formal definition (denotation).⁶⁷

Such forms of political *parole*, poems, and songs, represent, together with some of the contemporary activist posters that were discussed in this paper, an entire Palestinian spectrum of epistemic resistance that testifies to existence, defying a discursive Zionist machinery that took shape in the early twentieth century and which continues to operate vehemently

⁶⁶ Yasser Arafat, quoted in E. Rogan (2009), p. 521.

⁶⁷ Marcel Khalife, Lyric Translation *Jawaz Safar*. Available at: <http://lyricmusicarabic.blogspot.de/2010/06/lyric-jawaz-safar-marcel-khalifa.html>, accessed September 22, 2014.

today. Visual political satire, as the coded language of past and present, is a potent format for unveiling the colonial state of affairs in contemporary Palestine. By means of pioneering novel techniques of disobedience to occupation, these symbolic efforts open up unconventional venues for popular contestation that seek to shape alternative imaginations of a post-colonial future.⁶⁸

Conclusion: Visual Activism—Challenging Zionist Myths in Palestine

Through various examples, this article has alerted the reader to the historical dimensions and current manifestations of the ‘politics of representation’ within the context of Israeli settler-colonial encroachment in Palestine. Many of the projected layers of exclusive ‘differences,’ whether formulated historically by ‘race’ or contemporarily by ‘ethnicity’ and ‘religion,’ can be traced back to ideological visions and propagations of the Nation, Belonging and Homeland, rooted intellectually in European Romantic praxes. These notions are no mere abstraction on the ground. Judging from the discussed visuals at hand, they are externalized in the daily reality of two opposing, political projects in the Holy Land which form integral parts of broader systems of power-projections and material interests (hegemony, physical state and nation building, knowledge production, etc.). Especially in Israeli political discourse, one sees the culmination around homogenizing ideas of ‘national identity’ and phantoms of ‘national insecurity’ (threats) through highly distortive fixations on supposedly engrained and aggressive Palestinian Otherness, which continue to serve as the discursive backbone that seeks to mobilize popular appeal for the state’s settler-colonial enterprise. The re-appropriation of historical Zionist posters by Palestinian activists, in their contemporary defiance of Israel’s ongoing occupation of the West Bank and siege of Gaza, highlights both Israel’s very colonial foundation as a state, as well as amplifying more subaltern methods of the Palestinian people’s current resistance thereto.

Many international visitors that frequent Jerusalem today and who are sympathetic to the Palestinian people’s engineered precariousness continue to buy the ‘Visit Palestine’ posters as consumer products, often taking them home today as emotional souvenirs without much knowledge of the historical intricacies and ideological proclivities that lay behind them. However, by gazing critically at them, one is bound to notice that they represent grassroots *politics* of great creativity. By appropriating historical Zionist posters that still featured the term ‘Palestine’ to refer to Israel and the OT in the early twentieth century, Palestinian activists not merely are defusing their own national project but also are challenging the entire settler-colonial hierarchy that continues to confront them and negate their very existence. The small-scale, commercial provision of these posters in shops across Jerusalem and their subsequent increasing appearance in public spaces thus represent dislodging snapshots of Israel’s settler-colonial genealogy (foundational myths and mobilizing strategies). Not only do they, through a complex interplay of codes, point out how the Zionist movement in Palestine has shifted/reconstituted its *own* key jargon over time, but in turn, they also raise questions on the very *nature* of the latter project on site, not least by disclosing its enduring ‘silence’ in relation to the plight of the native population. Indeed, these posters inevitably aim to ‘speak’ of a historicity that inherently testifies to the indigenous existence and persistence of a Palestinian-Arab society, as a political means of asserting claims of belonging to the land. These visuals thus demonstrate originally that Palestinian voices continue to defy the

⁶⁸ ‘Wiz’ (2013). Available at: <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/visit-palestine-banksy-tribute>, accessed September 16, 2014.

‘disciplined’ cage that is enforced on them through intelligent visual guerilla techniques that challenge Israel’s dominant settler-colonial technology, which, as a layered regime of totalizing power, insists on denying the Palestinian public under its effective military control any meaningful form of self-determination or comprehensive civil rights.

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