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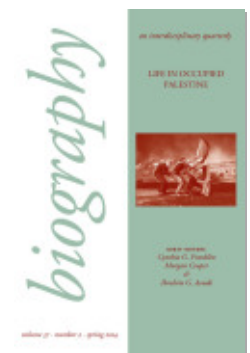
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NOT JUST A PICNIC: SETTLER COLONIALISM, MOBILITY, AND IDENTITY AMONG PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL

MAGID SHIHADÉ

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2003, while conducting interviews for my dissertation, I met the Imam of the village and told him about my research into the history of communal relationships in the village and the surrounding region. While talking about the need for Palestinian input regarding the relationship between Palestinian society and the Israeli state, and the responsibility of Palestinian scholars to enable Palestinian voices to be heard, the Imam argued that no matter what Palestinians write, Israeli authorities and their western supporters will use this writing to their advantage, and to the disadvantage of the local community. His remarks had a huge impact on me. After thinking it over for some time, I decided to continue working on the village, while remaining always sensitive to what the Israeli authorities already know—what is public knowledge—but also attuned to the community's history and experiences.

My writing, then, aims to expose state policies, as I keep my sources as anonymous as possible and try to avoid causing further frictions within the community. One of the strategies I use to protect community members is to intermix some of the stories and actors so that it becomes difficult to identify the people interviewed. Furthermore, due to my training in interdisciplinary studies, my fieldwork is not typically ethnographic, but rather utilizes local voices and archives as a central part of my political analysis. In other words, the voices I include in my research are not informants or *objects* of knowledge, but as will become evident in this article, *sources* of knowledge and theorizing about the past and the present.

Since 2003, I have amassed a personal archive, as I have gathered stories from and conducted interviews with residents in the village, and read anything that community members wrote or published locally in Arabic. The narratives in this article are part of over a decade of fieldwork.

Through the lens of two picnics that took place, one in the 1960s, and one in the early 1970s, and the people who were part of these gatherings, this essay explores the shifting social, political, and cultural lives of people living in Kafr Yasif; what it meant for them to remain on the land and become citizens of a state that was built on the ruins of their own society; how that historical event (1948) structured their sense of place, mobility, and identity; and what lessons can be drawn from that experience that can help in understanding both the predicament of those Palestinians who fell under Israeli colonial rule in 1967, and that of the Palestinian people in general. The essay will explore people's sense of place, the shrinking area of mobility that they enjoyed after 1948, and their relations to one another. My approach in exploring these issues through the lens of the village life is under-utilized in studies on Palestine. The history of this village, one known to possess many aspects of social and cultural life that are usually associated with cosmopolitan city life, might also help to complicate the binaries associated with urban versus rural social and cultural dynamics.

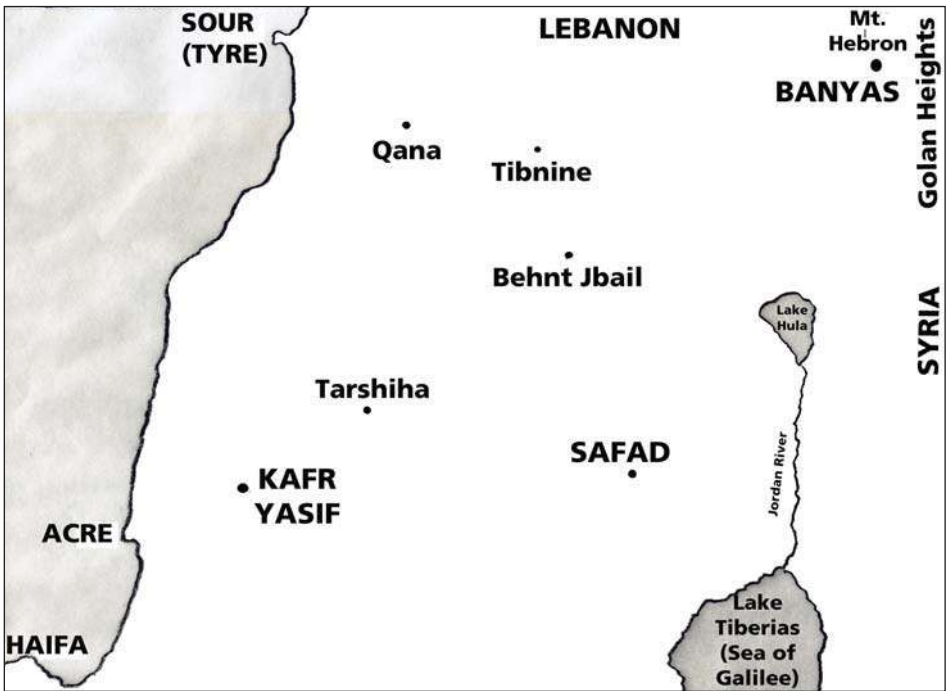
As I address the local impact of the rupture in 1948 from the perspective of the people in the village, I also focus on how the Israeli settler colonial state structurally disrupted the mobility, memory, and local and regional identity of Palestinians in Israel generally. By memory, I mean collective memory, oral history, and local knowledge that became alienated. I explore how villagers became alienated from other Palestinians and Palestinian society, from their land and region, and from the knowledge discourse about the region. After outlining the history of Palestinians since 1948 as it relates to my focus here, I turn to the history of the village as written about and told by community members.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE OF 1948 AND AFTER

Rather than finding themselves in an independent state in 1948, as stipulated by the mandate resolution issued by the League of Nations after WWI that assigned Britain to help Palestinians become independent, Palestine was turned over to the Zionist settler colonial movement by the British colonial rulers, with the help of other western states, chief among them the United States. Not only was no independent Palestinian state established, but Zionists, armed and financed by different western countries, destroyed all urban centers that Palestinians had built before 1948, displaced about 84 percent of the Palestinian society, and razed hundreds of villages and towns.¹ Those who



Figure 1. Kafr Yasif today (photo © and used by permission of the photographer, Sahar Rouhana).



With views toward the Mediterranean and the Bay of Acre, Kafr Yasif is at a lower elevation and about thirty kilometers west of Safad; the site of the second picnic, Banyas, on the slopes of Mount Hebron, became accessible with the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights following the 1967 war.

were not killed or displaced outside of Palestine and who remained within the borders of the Israeli settler colony found themselves in a very strange place. Even though they remained on the land of their birth, suddenly they were subjects of a state built on the destruction of their own society and on the displacement and dispossession of their people. From the start, their loyalty to that state has been seen as suspect at best, and they continue to be viewed as a fifth column. Left behind enemy lines, overnight they found themselves living on their own land, but governed by a structure that was imposed on them that went against their very existence. Delinked from the region, they lived in limbo, with no national address and named by the state as “Israeli Arabs.”

Compounding this situation of estrangement, for the rest of the Arab world leadership, it was as if the Palestinians never existed. Political leadership in the Arab world spoke about Palestine and about liberating Palestine, but never about the Palestinians who remained on the land. In the eyes of the Israeli state they were and remain “present-absent”: physically there, yet legally, and as a national indigenous group, without existence. They are like ghosts who witness events but have no voice. Arab leadership became obsessed with nation-states, not with the members of the nation, thus buying into western modern discourse, and in a strange way mirroring Zionist thought; for the Arab leaders, too, the Palestinians who remained within the Israeli settler colonial state in 1948 did not exist. The poems of Mahmoud Darwish, such as “*sajjil ana arabi*” (“Record, I am an Arab!”), respond precisely to this denial of national identity for the Palestinians who remained, and issue a cry for the Arab people to remember that there are still Arab Palestinians behind enemy lines, facing forgetfulness by Arab leadership and a war on existence and memory by the Israeli settler colonial state (Maira and Shihade).

It is this strategy that Ahmad Sa’di and Nur Masalha speak of in their analysis of the Zionist war on memory. In the documentary *As the Land is the Language*, Darwish describes the Zionist strategy at work: “They want us to forget our present and recent past, while insisting on remembering a mythical ancient past of their own” (Bitton). Other Palestinians have used different strategies to counter this erasure and denial; from poetry, films, plays, novels, biographies, and autobiographies, to academic literature, Palestinians have recorded and theorized their history as it unfolded before as well as after 1948.

For Palestinians, it is the collective experience that shapes the individual’s history and predicament. This is true of oral as well as written histories. People speak about their personal stories, but always as part of a collective experience, because it was the collective that was attacked and continues to be the target of Zionist settler colonialism. Stories of presence and absence, of a community that has so much noise within it, go largely unheard. It is a society with a history that has been forgotten. The period of the 1940s–1970s,

in which the Israeli state imposed on Palestinians a military regime, involved an intense experience of adjustment and resistance. Responses included not only an absence of memory, but also deep depression and infighting. One must always be reminded that even as people engage in resistance, they still do mundane things, and daily life among colonized groups is often fraught with infighting and violence, even as opposition to the Israel settler state can be full of humor and everyday forms of heroism.

Mahmoud Darwish's *Memory for Forgetfulness* is an apt title for many of the experiences that Palestinians have had since the early twentieth century. Yet the pain of that experience is too powerful to be forgotten. It connects the past with the present, and there is little room to get away from it. One is reminded of it on a daily basis, and the '48 Palestinians have a special taste for that memory experience. Kafr Yasif has painful stories that need to be told in the context of the history of the village, which is part of the larger history of the Palestinian society. These stories also challenge oppositions between village and urban life. As a context for the stories, the next section provides a brief history of the village.

KAFR YASIF: VILLAGE STORIES FROM BEFORE 1948 TO THE PRESENT

Academic literature as well as public knowledge often portrays the city as a center for cultural production, a place where privacy of individuals is secured, a site of self-interested people, and as cruel and conflict ridden. On the other hand, the village is often represented as peaceful, harmonious, and lacking in cultural production, and in some senses, politics.

In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams criticizes representations of rural life as simple, natural, unadulterated, and free of class conflict, enmity, and animosity. Williams shows how this imagery not only reproduces the rural-urban divide, but also serves to justify the existing social order. The city is seen as the dark mirror of the country—the hub of modernity, a place of loneliness where individuals live as anonymous, and sink in privacy. Rather than upholding this dichotomy, Williams sees the country as inextricably related to the city.

Although Williams makes his arguments within the context of the nation-state, they articulate with the fourteenth century Arab scholar Ibn Khaldoun's understandings of the city as a space that is cosmopolitan, yet not fully so. For Ibn Khaldoun, the city is made up of people who come from less economically developed centers, such as villages and rural space. It is only through the larger number of people living in the city that its culture becomes different, due to the surplus labor and capital that gets invested in art and culture, exceeding the life style of necessity in the rural areas. Yet, even this

understanding is different today, especially in places like Palestine that have been under Israeli settler colonial rule since 1948. The urban space in Palestine was destroyed by Israel in 1948. Cities like Haifa and Jaffa were largely emptied of their Arab Palestinian population. Those who remained were placed at the margins of the city in ghettos isolated from the dominant Israeli political, economic, and cultural structures that aimed to make the space a Jewish one. In this context, Arab inhabitants migrated to the villages, including people who originally came from the villages and who had been working in cities such as Haifa and Jaffa until 1948. As a result, some villages in Galilee became spaces where working class, educated, and even wealthy individuals lived. Some of these villages—including Kafr Yasif—became central to the political and cultural life of the Palestinians in the region. Kafr Yasif's importance derived from its central location and proximity to Israeli settlements-cities; to the schools that existed in it pre-1948, where students from all around came to study; and to the more evenly distributed land ownership among its residents. In 1948, Kafr Yasif had the only high school outside of Haifa, Nazareth, and Shafa'mer, and it absorbed students from over fifty villages and towns in Galilee, many of whom, including Mahmoud Darwish, went on to become well-known poets and writers.

The village also became home to the many internal refugees displaced by the Israeli state in 1948, which contributed to its diversity. The village held weekly poetry readings attended by hundreds of people. It was also a political hub for the region. Under the leadership of the mayor, Yanni Yanni (of recent Greek origins), the village resisted state policies of repression and deportation. News of its activities reached progressive publications in France, leading a delegation of parties on the left that included Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre to visit the village in 1962 to learn about its struggles. It was a village that had a woman council member in the 1960s and a woman mayor in the early 1970s. It was a village that had cafes, bars, restaurants, a clinic, a transportation system, and a weekly market that drew people from around the region. It was a village that created a political coalition between Marxists and nationalists, a rare phenomenon at the time. With others from Nazareth and elsewhere, Yanni, the head of the local council, formed and became the first leader of a national political organization, The Arab Socialist Front (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).²

Kafr Yasif's political and cultural influences complicate the divide between country and city and make it critical to the history of Palestine. In addition to its national importance and worldliness, Kafr Yasif's history is inextricable from Israel's colonization of Palestine. It is because of the destruction of Palestine's urban centers by the Zionist settler colonial state that this village assumed the social, cultural, economic, and political roles usually held by



Figure 2, above. Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre visiting the village as part of a French delegation in the early 1960s.

Figure 3, right. A demonstration in the village in the 1950s protesting Israeli policies of land confiscation, deportation, and discrimination.



Figure 4, below. Mayor Yanni Yanni (seated, center), with local Council member and later mayor Violette Khouri.

Unless otherwise noted, all photos are from the author's family collection, and used by permission.



cities. It is in this context of the village's national and local significance that I will discuss two picnics that were narrated by village residents. The picnics offer a way to learn about the impact of 1948; about the history of people in the village in the 1950s–1980s; and about the village's recent economic, social, political, and cultural shifts.

STORIES OF PICNICS AND PEOPLE

PICNIC 1: PICNIC TO SAFAD

Growing up after the events of 1948, (M) used to ask his parents and older relatives about their sense of what happened in 1948 and thereafter. Looking at the collection of photos of his family, two pictures struck him as interesting. The first photo is of his parents, grandparents, other relatives, and friends. The photo was taken in a hilly area, lush, green, and full of trees. Although in a picnic area, the people were dressed formally. (M) was told that the photo was taken in 1962 in Safad, a Palestinian city located about thirty kilometers northeast of Kafr Yasif, in the mountains of Galilee. In 1948, Safad was depopulated of Arab residents by Zionist/Israeli troops, becoming an exclusively Jewish city. It also became a site to which the Israeli authorities internally deported some of its Arab Palestinian citizens (Figure 5). Those who were politically active were sometimes put in prison, without any specific reason except for their organizing against Israeli laws and policies of social, economic, political, and national discrimination, repression of the Palestinian community, and confiscation of Arab owned lands.³

(M) was informed by his family that this supposed photo of a “picnic” was in fact a visit family and friends made to see Yousef Shihade and Min'im Jiryis, two men who had been deported from Kafr Yasif to Safad. The Israeli military governor of Galilee had deported them because they were politically active. As with other such cases of internal deportation during the military rule, which officially lasted from 1948 until 1966, the two men were supposed to find and pay for their own housing in Safad, and report to the local police station every morning and afternoon. Knowing no one in Safad, they looked forward to the visit of family and friends who managed to get a permit from the local military officer to travel there. The Israeli military governor of the region rarely granted visit permits to see family and friends, or travel permits in general, which is why the gathering in Safad looked so festive, with those photographed smiling and happy. Arriving with food and drink, they took Yousef and Min'im for a picnic to one of the public gardens of the city, and ate, drank, and talked until the time came for the men to report to the local police station and for the visitors to return to Kafr Yasif before

sunset, when their travel permit would expire. Before leaving, they gave the two men money for food and rent. When their families could not visit, they sent money by way of smugglers, crucially needed during this period when military rule, although not officially declared against Arabs as such, extended over certain localities that “happened” to be mainly inhabited by Palestinian Arabs (see Jiryis; Pappé; Sa’di, *Thorough Surveillance*).

At the time of deportation, Yousef was in his early 40s. When he returned to the village after the two month deportation period, he had started to lose his hair, and whatever remained on his head had turned completely white. People say that this must have been due to the stress of being away from his wife, children, family, and friends, and the repeated arrests and interrogations by Israeli authorities. In fact, even when in the village, Yousef and others who were active politically often slept outdoors, hiding among the olive trees bordering the village, because they so often got the news that the Israeli military authority was about to arrest them again. While in hiding, they received



Figure 5. Some of the many “internal” deportees to Safad from Kafr Yasif in the 1960s.

news from their nephews and nieces, who also smuggled in food and water at night to the olive farms where Yousef and others hid. Each day they hid in a different place, telling their nephews and nieces where to meet the next day. Sometimes Yousef would smuggle himself into homes at the edge of the village, ask the people to let him take a shower, and then run back again to the olive orchards.

Much of the political activism was done in secret then, including political meetings and distributing leaflets and *Al-Ittihad*, the Arabic newspaper published by the Communist Party. However, not all activism was in secret. Despite Israel's repressive policies, as in other villages, people also openly resisted: they built coalitions, held demonstrations, and managed to frustrate the military governor and Israeli authorities, who were keen to make all remaining Arabs into "good" Arabs—pacified, informants, etc.—and if possible, to deport some of them. Kafr Yasif made news soon after 1948, when refugees from neighboring vicinities poured into the village, seeking a place to stay and help from the local residents. Because they were not recognized as people under occupation by the United Nations or the international community, these internal refugees had no UNRWA to take care of them, give them food, or provide them with education. They—and the rest of the Palestinian community who remained within the 1948 borders—were denied legal status granting their right to self-determination. As a result, their struggle against Israel became harder and had to take different forms, particularly those that could be defended legally, which allowed Israel less room to respond with collective harsh retribution. Without protection from the so-called international community, despised by a state that was willing to complete its ethnic cleansing program against them, and neglected and forgotten by the Arab leadership/states, their resistance was and has been, with few exceptions, "peaceful," as captured in the image of the picnic and its representation of "peaceful people gathering around food, drinks and chat."

The first picnic is only one example of a political history that goes largely undiscussed. The second one I address takes up a later critical moment in the history of the village, and of Palestine. As a settler colonial state bent on expansion, Israel has maintained an open frontier, well evidenced in the 1967 War, when Israel took over additional Palestinian and Arab territories. In taking the rest of Palestine and territories from Lebanon and Syria, Israel brought Palestinians who remained within its newly drawn borders closer to the neighboring states, and Palestinians started to visit these newly occupied territories. The second picnic that I discuss took place at such a site, and sheds more light on the political and social life of the village in the decades since 1948.

PICNIC 2: PICNIC TO BANYAS DURING ISRAEL'S "INDEPENDENCE DAY"

The second photo that (M) saw in his family's collection was of a picnic in the Banyas area bordering Syria and Lebanon, a territory occupied by Israel in the 1967 War. Looking at the family photos, (M) remembered the trip that he took with his family and friends when he was five or six years old. He flashed back to the drive to Banyas, with his family and friends singing and dancing in the vans. He also vividly remembered the Israeli flags filling the streets, and waving from the side poles and cars.

Later on, growing up politically conscious of the racist structure of the Israeli settler state, he was puzzled as to why native Palestinians celebrated when surrounded by Israeli flags. Although he did not recall the date of that picnic, he knew that it took place during the spring, when the red, yellow, pink, and purple wild flowers filled the fields and sides of the streets. When he asked his family, he learned that this picnic occurred on Israel's day of independence, May 14th, 1972.

Partially out of anxiety or the shame of learning about a past that might trouble his political consciousness, and partially because he was afraid of embarrassing his family, he avoided asking about the picnic for years. This was especially so as (M) was living and studying abroad, first in Europe and later in the United States, where for the first time he got to meet other Palestinian refugees and Arabs studying and/or living abroad. Although he was sometimes met with admiration—"you are the real Palestinians"—more often he encountered suspicion. He was asked "how could you be a Palestinian and have Israeli citizenship?," as if one had a choice, and as if European or US citizenship did not contaminate one's political image or bother one's consciousness.

During graduate school, while conducting research for his dissertation on the history of the village, he came across archives of the local council and of political parties active in the village since the creation of the Israeli state. Some of these documents detailed how his family members were part of the community resisting state policies of discrimination, land confiscation, repression, and imprisonment. This was further corroborated by the oral histories of many villagers who spoke positively about his family's history of protecting Palestinian refugees who came to the village during and after the 1948 war, after being displaced by the Zionists and the Israeli military. The villagers also spoke about the family's history of resisting Israeli military rule and other state policies. This encouraged him to ask his family members about his childhood memory of the picnic.

After asking his family why, at the time of that picnic, there were so many Israeli flags, and why were they all singing and dancing, he was reminded

that this was during the only day that they were allowed to travel outside the village without a permit. Even after the end of official Israeli military rule in 1966, his father and uncles were often not allowed to leave the village without a permit. So the family took advantage of the only day that they could travel together. Their celebration was not in honor of Israel's "Independence" Day. This was a relief for him, and he proceeded to ask more about those friends who were part of the family picnics. Although he grew up unaware of their religious backgrounds, he learned that some of them were Christians and others were Muslims, including some Druzes. He inquired as to what happened that made the social fabric so different now, decades later, when there is less mixing among different religious communities, and people's external features and clothing often indicate their religious background. Of the people who were family friends during that period, some of the women later started wearing hijabs, and men started talking about what they could no longer drink and eat. At that picnic, everyone ate pork and drank alcohol. The photos show no markers of external difference, or of anyone's religion.

The stories of those at the picnic illustrate the impact of 1948. From a politically active community, with a vibrant culture and social mixing, the village has become a consumerist site with much less political activity and cultural production, and one split by religious differences. This phenomenon, as I will discuss, reflects shifts in the larger Palestinian society.

In both picnics, (AD) was present. In the first picnic to Safad, she participated as a mother of a deported child, visiting him, giving him her affection, and assuring him that he had done the right thing. (AD) was always supportive of her children. Her politically active daughters and sons participated in demonstrations, and fought the Israeli military and police personnel. Her daughter (B) one time beat an Israeli police officer with her shoe because the policeman was about to hit her brother (H) with a stick from behind. (AD) was proud of that. She was humble, yet strong and blunt with people, and she did not bow down to those who thought they deserved special treatment. Beating government officials or their local informants was not a rare occurrence in that family's history even before 1948. For example, her husband (T) did not want to participate in the Ottoman wars, but his name was given to Ottoman officials by the local mukhtar (the mayor, appointed head of the local council). This led to the mukhtar being beaten, which scared the mayor into reducing the number of people on the list that he shared with other Ottoman officials, so that fewer people from the village were asked to fight in the Ottoman wars. (T) was supportive of Palestinian revolts against the British, and then against the Zionist war to colonize Palestine. He let fighters store their arms at his house, fed them, and helped connect them with local politicians and others who could help resist British colonialism, and then

Zionist settler colonialism. As a result, his house was burned twice: once by the British in 1938, and then by the Israelis in 1948, after which he and his family, like many Palestinians, sought refuge in Yerka, a nearby Druze village, until it was safe to return home.

These experiences made the whole family become more active politically, many with the Communist Party. As a teenager in 1954, (J) joined the Communist Party, until the leadership pushed him out because of his nationalist tendencies. For the same reason, his brother (H) was expelled. (H) had been the first in the family to be recruited into the Communist Party, after he was seen at the Haifa port fighting the Israeli police and the thugs they had enlisted to break up the port workers' strike in 1950. With the help of others, (AS), a nephew, used to run to the olive orchards to give food and water to his uncles and those hiding there from the police. (AS) and others also served as guards in Communist Party demonstrations and gatherings, because the Israeli state often used thugs to disrupt these meetings. The whole family was active in the Communist Party because early on it was the only party that allowed membership by Palestinian citizens in Israel. For that reason, and because they wanted to resist, through a political party framework, state policies of repression, deportation, land confiscation, and discrimination, many Palestinians joined that party. (Y) was also active politically as a teenager in the Communist Party. She attended and led demonstrations, delivered pamphlets and the party's newspaper, and organized election campaigns. At the age of twelve she was forced to leave school because her father was hospitalized for an operation that put him out of work for months. She worked on a pig farm that her family originally owned, and then as a laborer for the new Jewish owner who bought it from them. Like her sisters and many others, she was smart, yet the economic conditions meant that they worked as day laborers at farms, textile factories, and other nearby Jewish-owned business that required few skills and offered little pay. Later on, like many women, she became a housewife. She and the rest of her family went from being very active politically and socially to remaining within a small circle of very close relatives. At gatherings now there is talking, cooking, eating, watching television, and not much news unless there is a war or a crisis. Family members also attend wedding parties as part of the village social duties. Enormously costly, these weddings are currently the main economic and social activity in the village.

In addition to the (SH) family, the picnic included (G), whose family, which worked in carpentry, was from Syria. (G) came to Palestine via Lebanon. In 1948, the new border disrupted the links with relatives in the region. He married a local woman in Kafr Yasif, they had eight children, and he was active in the Communist Party from an early age, while also working very

hard, feeding his family, and sending his children to school. Some of them managed to acquire college degrees.

He was known for being a very funny person, even when times were tough economically and politically. He always made people laugh. One time, his neighbor, who was not friendly to the Communist Party, came to visit, asking for (G)'s daughter to be married to his son. (G) responded: "I will ask the daughter first to see what she thinks, then I will ask the political bureau of the Communist Party for approval, and then I will get back to you." At another time, while sitting reading the newspaper at a local barbershop that used to be the hangout for many in the Communist Party, but also others, he was listening to a group of younger men talking about a research study they read conducted by professors from the Hebrew University, Oxford, and Harvard, claiming that pot (hashish) is addictive. He joined the discussion and disputed the findings. One of the young men asked him: "How can you dispute a research finding done by such well known scholars from prestigious universities?" (G) responded: "I can tell you from personal experience that the research finding is nonsense. I have been smoking pot on a daily basis for fifty years, and from experience not research, I can tell you with certainty that pot is not addictive."

The picnic also included (G's) friend from Syria, (HM). As a young man (HM) fell in love with a woman in his hometown Hama, but her family did not allow them to marry. Upset by his failed attempt at marrying the woman he fell in love with, he walked through the Golan Heights and landed in Tiberias, in upper Galilee, which was part of British Mandate Palestine in the 1930s, when the borders were still open. There he met a Jewish woman and fell in love with her. Soon after, he received threats from her family and was asked to stay away from their daughter. He went further west to Akka (Acre). At that time, cities required residency papers for a person to work and live. He could not afford the fee for residency in Akka, and while telling his story to a person from Kafr Yasif who used to hang out in Akka, he was offered a free residency in the village. He started living in Kafr Yasif, met a local woman, married her, and they had six children. He never expected what was to come, when in 1948 the links to his family in Syria were disrupted by the creation of the Israeli state. He never saw them again.

The picnic also included (AK), who was the son of the mayor of 'Amka, a village near Kafr Yasif that was destroyed by the Zionist armed groups in 1948. Its inhabitants were pushed out, finding refuge in nearby villages that took them in. After arriving in Kafr Yasif, he managed with the help of friends in the village to build a house, marry, and have children. He was very humble, funny, and always jokingly spoke as if he was still the son of the mayor. He worked hard in construction, and even though he never was

officially a member in the Communist Party, he always voted for them, and his friends were mainly Communists.

His neighbor (MT), who was also at the picnic, was a tough woman and very funny, always joking despite her tough life. She married a person who came to live in Kafr Yasif from Lebanon. Soon after the birth of their seventh child, her husband died, and she had to work to provide for the children. She was respected, and many in the village assisted her in finding jobs. (H) helped her find work in the seasonal citrus farming, and also protected her from annoying men. At the picnic, one child came close to her glass of Arak (a regional alcohol). She grabbed her glass, and shouted jokingly at the kid: "If you come again close to my Arak glass, I will f... your mother." Everyone started laughing, as she was known for cursing whenever she spoke. Cursing is common in the village. Those who watch Ziad Doueiri's film *West Beirut* will find a common cursing culture and style in the village especially by men, but also by some women.

After spending the whole day in Banyas, eating, drinking, chatting, and discussing all kinds of topics, everyone went back to the village, riding the vans and trucks, singing and dancing. Today such a gathering would be impossible. That socially cohesive and politically active period, which lasted until the late 1970s, happened despite, and maybe because of, the tough period of military rule and state repression that began in 1948 (Sa'di, "Control and Resistance"; Shihade). People often left their doors open for neighbors, friends, and relatives. During the hot season (most of the year), people gathered outside their houses in the alleys to talk, joke, and discuss local, regional, and global news. They attended poetry readings in the main square; participated in demonstrations; helped one another build homes and host wedding parties, which took place over many nights of food, drink, music, and dance; and volunteered for projects designed to compensate for the low funding the village received from the Israeli government. In Kafr Yasif's village-urban culture, anonymity was impossible, privacy was difficult to maintain, and yet all the markers of urban space were present in a life that was politically, socially, economically, and culturally vibrant. It was never a wealthy village, but offered many outlets and services for locals and for people in the region.

This scene started to change in the 1980s. Now the village is full of more stores, bars, restaurants, and new and fancy cars, and yet political participation has diminished. Social life also started to shrink, with fewer people hanging outside in the alleys and the neighborhoods, with doors of houses rarely left open for sudden visitors, and with the composition of the social gatherings less religiously mixed. Even the larger family gatherings have become smaller and smaller. Now the village has the different

contradictory features typically associated with the urban-village divide. Economically it looks like a city, with its number and types of businesses. There is hardly anything that cannot be found in the village, when it comes to consumption. Yet cultural life is greatly reduced, and politically, the main activity is voting in the local and national elections. The village also used to have a very clean public space. People helped the local council in cleaning the streets. Now, volunteering, practiced in the village since the 1920s, no longer can be seen. The place looks more miserable, almost reflecting Fanon's theorizing of Algeria: Arab space is dirty, and it looks shabby, compared to the nearby Jewish towns and cities, which are well lit, with clean and wide streets, and gardens. Arab villages look like shanty towns, full of crime and violence, external ghettos to the Jewish towns and cities. The state policy of repression, divide, and rule seems to be more successful now compared to the 1950s–1970s. Religious divisions, economic divisions, and social divisions, even within the same family, are much more apparent. Self-interest is more the norm today. The sense of solidarity among smaller groups that Ibn Khaldoun argues is stronger in rural than urban areas is also long gone in the village. Life is more individualistic. So what happened, according to local knowledge offered by residents in the village?

THE CHANGES IN THE VILLAGE SINCE THE 1980S: LOCAL, STATE, REGIONAL, AND GLOBAL FACTORS

Residents in the village spoke about several internal, regional, and global factors that contributed to the change in the village, and academic literature largely corroborates their analysis. People spoke to how difficult times hold people together more. Yet, these times also negatively impact individuals and the community. Over time, the isolation that people felt after 1948, and the rupture of their social, cultural, economic, and political environment, created a more provincial, internally focused culture. Furthermore, the military rule alienated people from one another, from those in the neighboring villages, and from their land. During the military rule, because of needing a permit to leave the village to visit towns or nearby villages, to go to work, and to go to school, people traveled and interacted less with people from other villages and towns.

Estranged from place and from one another, people started to focus more on their own interests, and became more individualistic. Today, there is no longer the same sense of community or spirit of volunteering. People no longer feel ownership over the public space; instead, it has become their enemy. It is the property of the state that practiced repression against them in the earlier period, and now it is the site of the Israeli police, which constantly tickets residents for any imaginable traffic violations, and often abuses them

physically. On at least two occasions last year, the police beat villagers so badly they required hospitalization. The public space also has become more a site of internal fighting and violence, one better avoided. The sense of fear and disgust that villagers express towards the public space at least partly explains why it has become dirty; people no longer see it as theirs, and instead focus on caring for their own homes.

This shift reflects similar patterns in different sites, including in the West Bank. For example, in reference to the first Intifada in the later 1980s and its economically slow cycle, people speak about how social bonds were stronger, as people were actively resisting and challenging Israeli colonialism (Figure 6). Since the early 1990s and the start of the Oslo period, economic liberalization and foreign money created an apparent wealth, reflected in new and expensive cars, fancy buildings, and a strong consumerist society. In addition to neoliberalism, other factors contributing to change include the so-called “peace process,” and the effects of repression, such as increasing confinement owing to the Israeli checkpoints erected during the first Intifada and then especially after Oslo. In other words, the apparent economic development of urban and non-urban spaces in the West Bank is misleading. Rather than an active urban culture, there is more provinciality and confinement, and new religiosity and internal frictions. Globally one can also mark a shift between

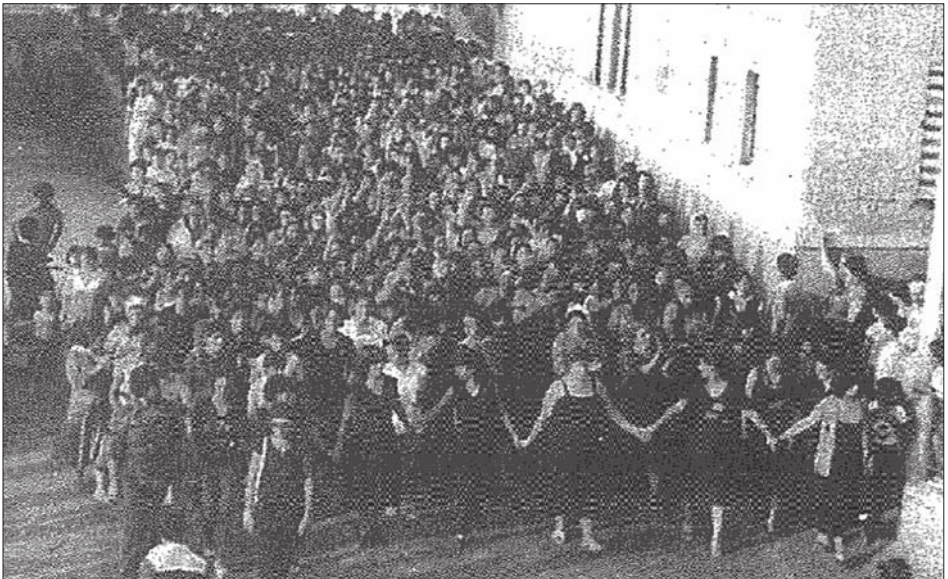


Figure 6. Women of Kafr Yasif protesting the Sabra and Shatila massacres in 1982.

the period of the 1950s–1970s and the time since then. Political activism has declined, and an “easier” credit system allows for more consumerism and apparent wealth, but also more debt. Religiosity is also on the rise since the 1980s; in the United States, for example, the Christian Right has become a powerful force in the Republican Party, and influences public debate and policies. Yet, it is important to note that this apparent apathy or pacification, and consumerist and individualistic culture is not complete, and individuals and groups continue to be active on many fronts.

Residents of Kafr Yasif addressed these global and national as well as local shifts in accounting for changes in the village. Some spoke of how in addition to the state policies of encouraging communal divides, the state’s encouragement of Islamic political parties, and its punishing policies for acts of resistance, created more divisions in a community previously known for coalition building among people from different religious backgrounds and from among nationalist, socialist, and Marxist political ideologies.⁴ Some also addressed the role played by the local council and the village leadership, noting the deals that the Communist Party made with religious Islamic parties, whose origin was a state tactic (Sa’di, “Control and Resistance”; *Thorough Surveillance*; Shihade). People saw the political deals between unnatural allies as dirty politics, and looked at them with disgust. Over time, the local council became an official space for villagers to take care of bills and taxes, or to ask for jobs and favors.

The local council’s agency was also undermined by its underfunding by the Israeli state, which simultaneously gave funds to neighboring areas to punish and defeat the village for its political resistance. The state created schools and strengthened other public services in neighboring villages, and funded roads to undermine Kafr Yasif’s high school as a site of nationalist education. Over time, for many local residents, this also created a sense of defeat, failure, and distrust of the local politics of resistance that had distinguished the village in the past. The state created not just envy among villages through these punishments and rewards, but also among villagers, by manipulating access to education, jobs, and opportunities for Arabs who either collaborated with the state or were silent about its policies. Sometimes Israeli authorities also rewarded individuals who were active politically as a way to create suspicion towards them among the local community. Creating suspicion and envy became a weapon of the state for fomenting divisions within and pacification of the community.

Internal friction now disrupts political activism within the community. Obsessed with dominating the local scene, political parties and their members spend more energy fighting one another than the state. People who were not formerly active politically and who were from families that were either collaborationist or quietist now malign those who are not in line with their

political affiliation, and often charge them with being insufficiently “patriotic.” People accuse each other of many things that would not be possible if memory of the past had been kept rather than fractured. The situation is mind-boggling for some of those politically active members of earlier generations. How could someone who worked with Zionist parties accuse these individuals of being collaborators, or of lacking patriotism? The local leadership in the village since the 1970s has contributed to this situation, elevating ex-collaborators and branding them as “patriotic,” while calling any who disagreed “collaborators.”

Many have argued that there is nothing wrong with people changing their political paths. Yet, it is problematic to have such people become the representatives of the community, and in that new role, judging others for being inadequate politically, especially those who were punished by the state for their activism during the early rough period. As is also clear from other, similar sites of political struggle, such politics can convey the lesson that silence and collaboration in tough times, followed by political engagement and attacks against those who were previously active pays off, and is the model for success and good politics. This development also can lead to disgust or apathy. It is a dangerous trend because those defining the future do so without the necessary experience or knowledge, and such blind leadership can result, as we know well from many different political movements, in stagnation. Between the state/authority’s tools of repression and pacification and internal struggles for power, movements split, stagnate, and split further and further.

Another shift evident in the village is the contraction of land and resources. This owes in part to the rise of the right-wing Likud Party and its neoliberal economic policies. Even as residents are buying flashy cars and building grandiose homes on credit, space is shrinking due to state policies of land confiscation and encroachment on Arab villages and towns. The past, where homes were more humble but surrounded by large gardens with fruit trees, is almost extinct. Along with the contraction in the village’s territory, the houses are crammed, the streets are narrower, and the number of residents has increased. After destroying the Palestinian urban space that existed before 1948, Israel built hundreds of Jewish settlements on land confiscated from Arab villages, limiting further the space for those villages that remained intact after the creation of the state. These villages’ natural space and fields shrank, and the villages became more crowded. Kafr Yasif, for example, had about 1,000 residents and much surrounding land on the eve of 1948; it now has less than half the land and roughly 10,000 residents.

Indeed, Kafr Yasif is now a ghetto of a certain type. While resembling ghettos in many western cities, here the village as a whole is constituted as a ghetto, a shanty town to the Jewish cities nearby, which have much more

space, superior public services, cleaner streets, gardens, libraries, cinemas, and more state funding. This inverted ghetto, which exists not inside but rather on the outskirts of Jewish towns and cities, divides Palestinian Arab citizens from Jewish Israelis, who come to the village only for cheap labor, cheap products, cheap food, and possibly to feel good that they have some contact with the Palestinian Arabs. And yet, they punish Palestinians by boycotting them whenever the Palestinian Arab community resists state policies, whenever there is an uprising in the West Bank, or whenever Israel goes to war against Palestinians in Gaza or Arabs in Lebanon.

The defeat and retreat of the global left in light of the collapse of the Communist Bloc has also contributed to present-day conditions in the village. Compared to Islamic political parties, the left became more marginalized, more poorly funded, and less politically active. The Communist Party, which used to have such a strong presence in the village, now has no influence whatsoever. Instead, local politics is dominated by wealthy individuals, religious groups, and family politics. This dramatic shift in the life of the village, this paralysis, exemplifies the larger Palestinian scene.

CONCLUSIONS AND CONNECTIONS

In her short film *Nation Estate*, Larisa Sansour captures the sense of confinement and the alienation of people living in the West Bank in the bizarreness of the post-Oslo period. The film encapsulates what the Israeli-American model for peace means, as its images well represent the reality on the ground in the West Bank and what one hears from people living there. This decades-long “peace process” has allowed Israel to grab more land and build more settlements, shrinking the Palestinian space further and further. It is a process that supports Israeli policies of expansion. As the sole broker of the peace process, the United States has supplied Israel with full financial, military, and diplomatic support, while talk of the two-state solution has helped Israel buy more time and caused the Palestinians to lose more lands. As Sunaina Maira details in *Jil Oslo*, this process accounts for the younger generation’s sense of blockage, where young Palestinians find themselves less mobile but also frustrated with the status quo, and in possession of neither peace nor sovereignty and self-determination.

Sansour’s film conveys the confinement not only of the present, but also of the possible future Palestinian state that will be the result of Israel continuing to occupy and eat up Palestinian lands, including those decreed in 1967 to be part of the Palestinian state. The increasing checkpoints between different Palestinian localities, the increasing size and number of Jewish Israeli settlements, the carving up of more space from the remaining 22 percent of historic

Palestine—making it look like Swiss cheese on the map—are reflected in this sci-fi, short, silent film. The main character, played by Sansour herself, goes back to Palestine via Jordan. After going through the immigration window at the Amman airport, Sansour leaves the airport in an underground train that deposits her somewhere in the West Bank in what appears to be a large hotel similar to Dubai's buildings. She arrives at the reception hall and goes directly to the elevator. Instead of the floor numbers that one usually chooses from in elevators, here the floors are names of Palestinian cities: East Jerusalem, Hebron, Ramallah, Jenin, etc. This surreal scene imagines the kind of future state that might result from the peace talks with Israel, and is a powerful way to depict visually confinement, isolation, and the Bantustan-like geographic reality of the Palestinian territories in areas colonized by Israel in 1967.

The sense of alienation from geography depicted in this short film is also accompanied by social alienation. People who ride the elevator do not look at each other, do not talk to one another, and appear to be strangers. This alienation from one another and from geography was corroborated by the many discussions I have had with people over the last three years in the West Bank. Those who are from Gaza but who live in the West Bank can hardly visit their families in Gaza anymore. They speak about their relatives as being confined to a very small territory. Others spoke of how, since the Oslo process started in the early 1990s, they travel less and less between the different Palestinian cities, as checkpoints become psychologically as well as physically oppressive. That this situation characterizes times of peace provides insights into the nature of settler colonialism, at least in the Israeli case. The early period military rule imposed in Galilee on those Palestinians who remained on the land after 1948, nominally becoming citizens of the newly created Israeli settler colonial state, was justified by state authorities through the lens of security, during what they claimed to be a time of war. Repression and military rule, and restrictions on movement, created among those Palestinians a sense of alienation from geography as well as from one another. People grew more distant from one another, hardly knowing other villages and towns, and becoming confined to their own village or town, and even to their own homes. Public space and travel became something rare due to the decades of limitation on mobility and the repression imposed by the Israeli state. The same patterns have been taking place in the West Bank since the start of the Oslo period. In other words, war and peace in the Israeli settler colonial context create the same social, economic, political, and cultural rupture for the native population regardless of its legal status or whether or not it is at war against the state.

At the same time, Arabic memory tells us, as Ibn Khaldoun puts it, that nothing comes from nothingness, that repressive regimes naturally create resentment and resistance. There are still groups comprised of Palestinians of

younger and older generations who work to overcome this paralysis, to express dissent in different ways, to challenge state policies, and to work together despite political differences.

The conversations I had with people in the village about the past and the present, and their stories that I have told, cause, on the one hand, sadness about a harsh history, the inhumane nature of the settler colonial state, and the rupture it created in peoples' lives. Yet, I also find in these stories evidence of a memory that never dies, along with a hope that some have in themselves for a different future. History shows that change is always possible, when committed groups regardless of their size keep working to challenge the status quo. It is only by overcoming this settler colonial rupture that people once more will be able to move freely within and without the country, reestablish connections that were in place for centuries, and recreate a space that connects different regions, ideas, products, and peoples. That stage is only a matter of time because it is only human for this to be so.

NOTES

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1. For more on the war of 1948 and the period immediately thereafter, see, for example, Jiryis; Khalidi; Rouhana; Sa'di, "Catastrophe"; Pappé; and Masalha.
2. For more about the village, see Sa'di, "Control and Resistance," and *Thorough Surveillance*; and Shihade.
3. See Jiryis; Cohen; Robinson; and Sa'di, *Thorough Surveillance*.
4. See, for example, Sa'di, "Control and Resistance," *Thorough Surveillance*; Cohen; Pappé; Shihade; and Robinson.

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