

Decolonizing Documentary Photography: The Rawiya Collective in Palestine

by

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Abstract

Rawiya is an Arabic word that translates to “she who tells a story” and serves as the title of the first all-women’s photographic collective established in the Middle East. Comprised of former and continuing photojournalists and documentarians, the artists in Rawiya have been photographing the lives of marginalized and subaltern communities throughout the Middle East since and before their establishment in 2009.

Of the people and places photographed, the most difficult of subjects, and the most provoking of images, emerge from within the confined borders of Occupied Palestine. Rawiya artists capture both the well documented – although often unexposed – horrors of the Israeli occupation, as well as the quotidian resilience of a systemically oppressed community that prevails despite settler colonial occupation, displacement and disenfranchisement.

This thesis considers how the historical and socio-political specificities of a Palestinian perspective become central to an understanding of the implications of the documentary mode and its inception into realism in the nineteenth century. Through a close reading of long durée documentary projects pursued by Rawiya, I will consider how the photograph, in its indexical capacity and documentary ambiguity, is unique in its ability to mitigate the gap between the moment and its retelling, the narrator and the witness. In dialogue with John Tagg’s *Burden of Representation* I consider how Rawiya collects, creates, and circulates photographic images that entwine a complex interstice of Palestinian stories and voices, traumas and triumphs that are too often unheard and unseen.

Using intimate portraiture, monumental landscape, and performative documentary praxis, Rawiya photographers explore a new, decolonizing documentary mode that pictures Palestine in all of its intricacy. Conceptions of territoriality, Arab feminism in the wake of nationalist rhetoric, and a complex history of colonial European and indigenous Arab photography inform their photographic series. Through the lens of the women artists of the collective, the juxtaposition of a Palestinian collective memory and the subsequent creation of a collective Israeli and international amnesia becomes visible.

Lay Summary

This thesis considers the work of the Rawiya Collective, the first all women's photographic collective to emerge out of the Middle East in 2009. I focus on the work of member artists Tanya Habjouqa and Tamara Abdul Hadi and their series that take place in Palestine. Through the decolonial lens of these Middle Eastern women artists, I consider the complexity of imaging and imagining Palestine, now in the 70th year of settler colonial occupation by Israel. Situating my thesis historically between Euro-American documentary practice in the nineteenth century and the current socio-political climate in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, I consider how a repositioning of documentary praxis may shed new light on the situation in Palestine.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Sherena Razek.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Lay Summary	iv
Preface	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	viii
Acknowledgements	ix
Dedication	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Rawiya: She Who Tells a Story.....	4
1.2 Palestine/Israel and Zionism.....	6
1.3 Chapter Breakdown	11
Chapter 2: Picturing Palestine as a Land with People	14
2.1 Tanya Habjouqa’s <i>Occupied Pleasures</i> on Occupied Land	17
2.2 New Vulnerabilities Captured by Tamara Abdul Hadi	21
Chapter 3: Frames of Photography as Women’s Work in Palestine	30
3.1 Thinly Veiled Misogyny.....	31
3.2 A Gendered Lens: Redefining Arab/Palestinian Masculinity	36
3.3 The Question of Feminism	39
Chapter 4: History of Documentary Praxis in Theory	47
4.1 Social Histories of Early Photography	47
4.2 Documentary Photography and Proximity to the Real.....	52
Chapter 5: Picturing Palestine in the Nineteenth Century	57

Chapter 6: Conclusion	64
Figures	73
Bibliography.....	77

List of Figures

Fig. 1 Tanya Habjouqa, <i>Occupied Pleasures</i> series, 2012-2013.....	73
Fig. 2 Tanya Habjouqa, <i>Occupied Pleasures</i> series, 2012-2013.....	73
Fig. 3 Tamara Abdul Hadi, <i>Flying Boys</i> series, 2015.	73
Fig. 4 Tamara Abdul Hadi, <i>Flying Boys</i> series, 2015.	73
Fig. 5 Tamara Abdul Hadi, <i>Self Portraits from Inside Palestine</i> series, 2012.	74
Fig. 6 Tanya Habjouqa, <i>Women of Gaza</i> series, 2009.....	74
Fig. 7 Alexander Dumas, <i>A Bedouin from Beirut</i> , 1869, Mohammed B. Alwan Collection.	74
Fig. 8 Felix Bonfils, <i>A Bedouin from Jericho in Jerusalem</i> , Mohammed B. Alwan Collection..	74
Fig. 9 <i>Scenes and Types</i> , Moorish woman, c. 1907, Mohammed B. Alwan Collection.	75
Fig. 10 Tamara Abdul Hadi, <i>Picture an Arab Man</i> series, 2009-2014... ..	75
Fig. 11 Tamara Abdul Hadi, <i>Picture an Arab Man</i> series, 2009-2014... ..	75
Fig. 12 ‘Shantytown,’ March 4, 1880 in the New York Daily Herald.	75
Fig. 13 Daoud Sabungi, Portrait of Suleiman Girby, Jaffa, C. nineteenth century.	75-76

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Dedication

For my parents, Rose and Jamal.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What can images that move do for people who cannot? What can documentary photography as a practice, form, and genre do in its ubiquitous, global circulation for those rendered immobile by colonial occupation? More specifically my thesis asks: How do contemporary Middle Eastern women photographers working in Palestine, throughout the Middle East, and the diaspora contest Western constructions of difference through lens-based work? How can a sociopolitical and historical repositioning of documentary photography shed further light on the work of the Rawiya collective in Palestine and the continuing Israeli occupation? And how do we navigate a dialogue of this kind, which deals with the fragile topics of gender, sexuality, historical erasure and neocolonial oppression in a region that has been ideologically inundated by international politics and Western media images?

These questions will be addressed in the following pages as I explore the significance and transformative potential of documentary photography as practiced by photographers Tanya Habjouqa (b. 1975) and Tamara Abdul Hadi (b. 1980), founding members of the Rawiya collective. Rawiya is an Arabic word that translates to “she who tells a story” and serves as the title of the first all-women’s photographic collective to emerge out of the Middle East.¹ As a visual story telling platform, narrative is thus central to the collective Rawiya project, as are the dialectical operations of absence/presence and visibility/invisibility in their depictions of vulnerable minorities. In this contemporary photographic group, combined documentation of Palestine and the Middle East foment a charge against the history of colonial occupation and Western identity formation. Through a destabilization of photographic reportage and its

¹ It is worthwhile to mention that the ‘Middle East’ is a contested term used by Britain and later the United States to refer to the Arab region after the Ottoman Empire dissolved. For the purpose of clarity, I will use this term to refer to the geographical location.

incantations on truth, the documentary mode itself is also called to question.

Of the people and places photographed by the Rawiya artists, the most difficult of subjects, and the most provoking of images, emerge from within the confined territories of Occupied Palestine.² *The Question of Palestine*, as laid out by Edward Said in 1979, remains intact still, almost forty years later, and will be addressed through the work of the Rawiya artists. The role of the documentary photographer is a vital one that now more than ever straddles the precipice of a dissipating social reality in Palestine. The Rawiya artists capture both the well documented – although often unexposed – horrors of the Israeli occupation, as well as the quotidian resilience of a systemically oppressed community that prevails despite settler-colonial displacement and disenfranchisement. This thesis provides much-needed art historical analysis and attention to the work of the Rawiya photographers and focuses specifically on their imperative documentation in Palestine.

Through a close reading of the Rawiya series set in Palestine, I engage in a discussion of the settler colonial Israeli occupation that since 1948 and continuing to the present has encumbered Palestine and the Palestinians as they struggle for self-determination. The *Nakba* of 1948, the Arabic word for catastrophe, serves as an axillary moment for the Palestinian collective memory; it refers to the forced exodus of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes. Victims to post-World War II imperial implosion, local Palestinian populations were dispossessed of their lands by a foreboding Zionist sense of entitlement to a territory they deemed theirs. This was one

² Aside from a very brief *Afterimage* article on the *She Who Tells a Story Exhibition* and a Master's thesis written in 2015 by Alessandra Amin, student of Saloni Mathur at UCLA, there has been no other scholarly attention given to the collective. This lacuna in research is indicative of the marginalized place that the practice of photography holds in the perceived lives of women artists of Arab origin. Although there is a lack in academic scholarship researching and analysing the work of the *Rawiya* collective, there is an increasing interest in the collective by popular news outlets such as Time Magazine, Vice, and Vogue Italia who have in the last few years all published on the collective and interviewed the artists involved.

of several seismic shifts of neocolonial state partitioning that took place during the 1940s after the imperial powers of Europe were no longer in a position to maintain their mandates and colonies. 1948 marked the year that Israel declared its sovereignty as a sanctified Jewish State, at the immediate expense of the Palestinians already inhabiting the land to which Israeli militias laid claim to by force. As a direct result of this declaration and dispossession, there are now an estimated 5 million Palestinian refugees worldwide – one of the largest refugee populations in the world.³ However well known and readily available the statistics of the crisis are, information is not reducible to knowledge or understanding.⁴ The *Nakba* stands for more than a catastrophe of forced displacement or a declaration of imperial domination, it embodies the sharpness of the double-edged sword: the struggle for self-determination by the Palestinians who remain politically invisible while existing in plain sight.

The photograph, in its indexical capacity and documentary ambiguity, is unique in its ability to mitigate the gap between the moment and its retelling, the narrator and the witness. Contrary to the instantaneous circulation of media images that picture conflicts for viewerships removed from the tragedies of the under-developed world, I intend to delve deeper into the image and imagining of Palestine. Situating my thesis in contradistinction to the normative historical, political, and cultural paradoxes that have come to define the visual narrative of the region, I will argue that the series undertaken by Rawiya artists Tanya Habjouqa and Tamara Abdul Hadi collectively challenge this construct. Rawiya collects and creates photographic images that entwine a complex interstice of Palestinian stories and voices, traumas and triumphs that are too often unheard and unseen. Through the lens of these women artists, the juxtaposition

³ <https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees> this statistic only includes those Palestinian refugees who are eligible for UNRWA assistance.

⁴ Homi K. Bhabha (March 9, 2017, Carleton University).

of a Palestinian collective memory, and the subsequent creation of a collective Israeli and international amnesia becomes visible. The Rawiya collective, especially Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi, offers new documentary modes for photographing Palestine, producing images that reconcile a contested past, troubled present and possible future for the Palestinians.

1.1 Rawiya: She Who Tells a Story

Rawiya was established in 2009 by founding members: Tanya Habjouqa, Tamara Abdul Hadi, Myriam Abdelaziz (b. 1976), Laura Boushnak (b. 1976), and Tasneem Alsultan (b. 1985). Comprised of former and continuing photojournalists and documentarians, the artists in Rawiya have been photographing the lives of marginalized and subaltern communities within the Middle East since 2009.⁵ In 2016 the collective added two male photographers to the group: Ghaith Abdul Ahad (b. 1975), and Zied Ben Romdhane (b. 1981). Rawiya's photographs and documentary series accumulate and circulate through an active online and social media presence and through contemporary art exhibitions.⁶ Many of the photographers actually began their careers as photojournalists, and still undertake projects from Amnesty International, National Geographic, and the New York Times to name a few. Rawiya uses its social media presence also to feature other photographers working in the Middle East on independent photojournalistic and long-term documentary projects. Their photographs form a complex and nuanced image of the

⁵ In 2009 there was a major Israeli attack on Gaza— which might've provided the impetus to document and propagated the need for the photographers to create a collective.

⁶ In September 2013, the Rawiya Collective showed together in an exhibition titled *She Who Tells a Story* at Gulf Photo Plus in Dubai. In May, 2017 the collective showed together at Fort Worth Contemporary Arts at TCU in Texas in an exhibition titled *We Do Not Choose Our Dictators*. Tanya Habjouqa participated in an exhibition curated by Kristen Gresh at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, titled *She Who Tells A Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World*. The exhibition opened at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and ran from August 27, 2013 to January 12, 2014 with the prerogative to showcase the work of twelve pioneering women artist from Iran and the Arab world. Since, *She Who Tells a Story* has also been exhibited at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa in a subsequent show curated by Joanne Stober that ran from December 6, 2017 – March 4, 2018.

Middle East through the lens of mainly women photographers who have deeply rooted connections to the region. The collective states that their *raison d'être* comes down to an effort to push “both East and West to think about their own stereotypes. Rawiya is, to an extent, about redressing the way in which the world looks at the Middle East.”⁷ I will argue, for those series and photographs documenting Palestine, the images do more than simply invite us to look. Rawiya photographers instead demand that we actively *watch*. Specifically in images captured in Palestine and of Palestinians, a nexus of narratives and visual storytelling emerges. Rawiya photographers offer images from within the Occupied Territories of Palestine that are not distorted by Zionist parable. Instead, through the lens of women photographers who are intimate to the region and its peoples, and critical of the globalization of documentary photography, new stories emerge that speak to the dispossession of land and repossession of a national image.

The stakes of this thesis project and the status of documentary photography in the Middle East are of critical importance to the contemporary moment. In recent decades especially, international perspectives on the Middle East have become increasingly polarizing and distorted. According to Stephanie Gutmann, in her book *The Other War: Israelis, Palestinians and the Struggle for Media Supremacy* (2005), “globalization and unification of communication have had a big impact on war. For those not involved in some material way, war has become mostly global spectacle.”⁸ Especially in Palestine since the turn of the twenty-first century and the initiation of the second *intifada* or Palestinian uprising, the fight for visibility has been imperative to political and social resistance movements.

⁷ “Rawiya Collective,” <https://www.rawiyacollective.com/about>.

⁸ Gutmann, *The Other War*, 2.

Nuance is often lost on news correspondents and photojournalists who have been dropped into the region. These resulting Western media images of the Middle East have often naturalized violence in the region, especially since (though also before) 9/11. Oppression, poverty, and protest are pulled from conflicts in the Middle East in a process not dissimilar to resource extraction. Political upheaval is easily translated into catchy news headlines, and catchy headlines are even more easily converted into commoditized reportage in Western medias. The Rawiya collective offers an alternative image of the Middle East in which each photographer distinctly captures the intricacies of the conflicts they picture. The Rawiya photographers pursue intimate, *longue durée* projects that humanize their subjects through visual narrative, focusing on the people and their stories rather than the spectacle of violence. Those subjects featured by Rawiya have ranged from Palestinian and Israeli drag queens performing in Jerusalem, competitive male body builders in Gaza, and students involved in a young women's literacy project in Saudi Arabia, among many others. The photographers focus on the unseen aspects of capacious conflicts endured and maintained by the globalized politics of the modern-day Middle East. Transgressing the public realm of riot and oppression, Rawiya enters into the domestic, the quiet, and the rural to depict a quotidian Middle East and Palestine not otherwise seen.

1.2 Palestine/Israel and Zionism

Despite its relative visibility as one of the longest ongoing occupations of recent history, Palestine's history is little known to those who do not actively seek it. Although a plethora of historical scholarship exists that discloses the history of the region, the master narrative of Israeli nationalism often overshadows the history of Palestine in an international context. This is not happenstance. The delegitimization and erasure of indigenous histories have proven incredibly successful to settler colonial projects. So successful was the Zionist erasure of Palestine, that the

fourth Prime Minister of Israel, Golda Meir (1898-1978), felt dignified to declare: “There was no such thing as Palestinians...They did not exist.”⁹ This sentiment, which erases the native Arab Palestinians from the land has not changed in Zionist narrative. Consequently, reclaiming stolen and effaced histories has been an important project for Palestinian historians attempting to decolonize and reconstruct the historical subsistence of the Palestinian people. I recognize that it is necessary then to provide a synthesis of some of the scholarship done by Palestinian theorists and historians who have worked arduously to recover Palestinian history.

In *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of The Palestinians 1876-1948* (1984)

Walid Khalidi divides the history of Palestine before al-Nakba into five periods via archival photographs and historical text.¹⁰ The narrative that Khalidi draws out, however, begins much earlier than 1876. Etymologically, records of Palestine can be traced to the 5th century BCE. At this time, Herodotus and other visiting Greek and Latin scholars interested in the Philistine coast named the region Palestina Prima.¹¹ After the transgressions between religious crusaders vying for the possession of the holy city of Jerusalem in the first and counter crusades between 1099 and 1291, the Egyptian Mameluke sultans ruled Palestine. Following the Ottoman Empire’s conquest of Palestine in 1516, Palestine remained a relatively peaceful and self-determined region under Ottoman jurisdiction until the Empire fell at the end of World War I.¹² During this pivotal period of the British Mandate in Palestine one can locate the threads of a tragic history of loss incurred against the Palestinians. Negotiations for Zionist land acquisition took place with

⁹ Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 181.

¹⁰ The chapters are organized chronologically as such: The Last days of Ottoman Rule, 1867-1918; From the British Occupation to the Great Palestine Rebellion, 1918-1935; The Great Rebellion, 1936-1939; From the London Conference to the UN Partition Recommendation, 1939-1947; Civil War and the Destruction of the Palestinian Community, November 1947-May 1948.

¹¹ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 27.

¹² Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 31.

no affirmation from the Palestinians. However, deeming Palestine a “conflict zone” is highly problematic. The term connotes anachronous violence when in fact Jews, Christians, and a Muslim majority co-habited the region for much longer than the current conflict would suggest, especially in the city of Jerusalem due to its significance to all three of the monotheistic faiths.¹³ The first Zionist immigrants only arrived in 1882, paving the way for German-Jewish millionaire Baron Maurice de Hirsch to establish his Jewish Colonization Association in Palestine.¹⁴ This same year, Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) published *Der Judenstaat*, which outlined how a sovereign Jewish State should be implemented in historic Palestine.¹⁵ Pressure from European powers in support of Zionist colonization grew exponentially in the nineteenth century along with growing interest in European colonial photography in Palestine and other parts of “the Orient.” Today the Zionist propaganda continues through the collective denial of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.¹⁶

Edward Said’s rigorous intervention in *The Question of Palestine* establishes the right to Palestinian self-determination vis-à-vis a historiographical and theoretical elaboration on the existence of Palestine despite its denial by Zionist parable. The second section of the book, which explores Zionism from the perspective of its victims – the Palestinians – reveals that Zionism was largely fabricated through an overwriting of historic Palestine. Colonial erasure

¹³ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 305. At the United Nations General Assembly in November 1947, a resolution was passed in favour of partitioning Palestine into two separate Jewish and Palestinian states. Due to Jerusalem’s importance to the competing religious and national groups in the region, it was meant to acquire a special international status with economic responsibility shared between Israel and Palestine. It was deemed *corpus separatum*. The recent move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem on May 14, 2018 reveals how this special resolution for Jerusalem has failed. U.S. support for Israel has ensured that Israel never be held accountable for its crimes at the international level. The embassy move legitimates Israel’s claims to Jerusalem as its rightful capital despite the UN ruling.

¹⁴ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 35.

¹⁵ Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora*, 35.

¹⁶ For more on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine, see Ilan Pappé *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006).

translates easily to imperialist denial in this case, where the very real presence of the Palestinians in historic Palestine has been systematically negated. Palestinians must continuously fight for their right to exist whether they are living in Israel, in the Occupied Territories, as refugees in their own country, in exile, or in the diaspora. Said writes: “To criticize Zionism now, then, is to criticize not so much an idea or theory but rather a wall of denials.”¹⁷ Since 1979 this obstacle to Palestinian sovereignty has remained intact. To map an encompassing history of Zionism, as it emerged in nineteenth century Europe during the rise of nationalist discourse and the height of European imperialism would require more space than can be provided here. What is important to know within the parameters of this thesis is how the Zionist political and nationalist movement has come to define the settler colonial continuation of Israel.

Theodor Herzl is known as the father of modern political Zionism and requires specific attention here for his eminence in popularizing Zionist political discourse in Europe in the nineteenth century. Around the time when plans for a Jewish homeland in Palestine were calibrating in the 1880s, Herzl would have undoubtedly been aware of the 650,000 Palestinian Arabs inhabiting Palestine.¹⁸ One can ascertain from Herzl’s diary that not only was he cognizant of the native Arab Palestinian population, but that he also had a decisive plan for its elimination. In a diary entry, Herzl writes: “We shall have to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own country...both the expropriation and the removal of the poor must be carried out discretely and

¹⁷ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 51.

¹⁸ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 70. Said adds that if by the off chance Herzl had not encountered one of many volumes recounting European travel to Palestine (by Lamartine, Chateau-briand and Flaubert among others) certainly through Baedeker’s Palestine travel guide (1875) Herzl would have determined that the Palestinians existed on the land he sought to re-establish as a Jewish State.

circumspectly”¹⁹ And indeed the Palestinians were expelled. This entry reveals that recursive to Herzl’s vision for Israel was a total disregard for the existing Palestinian population. After the successful formation of a sanctified Zionist movement, the secretive signing of the Balfour Agreement in November of 1917 – a British-mandated promise to support the establishment a Jewish homeland in Palestine – the precedence for Zionist realization was firmly set in place. The historical and socio-political status of the small nation of Palestine is now all but indissoluble from its occupation by the neoliberal, pseudo-fascist regime of Israel.²⁰

In Saree Makdisi’s more recent positioning on Israel/Palestine he challenges Derrida’s speculation that South African Apartheid represents “the last state racism on the entire planet.”²¹ This rather common notion and overall ignorance towards Israeli war crimes, colonial occupation and violation of international law continues to perpetuate disregard for the plight of the Palestinians. Makdisi argues that the difference between South African apartheid and case of Palestine/Israel is that in the latter, apartheid is never spelt out. What has prolonged the protracted Israeli occupation of Palestine since the 1948 al-Nakba and the 1967 al-*Naksa* (Arabic for *the setback*) is its evasion of a name. Because of this careful framing, Israel is able to self-designate as a “pluralistic community” predicated on values of freedom, equality, and tolerance while simultaneously eradicating and expropriating the indigenous Palestinian population.

Distinctions between Jewish nationals and non-Jewish “civilians” (meaning the non-existent

¹⁹ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 13 and 70-71.

²⁰ For many leftist Jews and Israeli’s, the status of Jewish sovereignty poses socio-political problems as well. Ariella Azoulay writes: ““Jewish sovereignty” today has become the cry of a violent Jewish nationalism, whose discursive, political, and military practices amplify the totalistic element in the logic of sovereignty. The very idea and the daily practices of Jewish sovereignty threaten today every Israeli who wants his citizenship to be determined in non-Jewish, universalistic terms, as well as every Jew who refuses to shape his Jewish life according to the logic of political sovereignty.” Azoulay, “100 years of Zionism: 50 years of a Jewish State,” 68.

²¹ Makdisi, “Apartheid/Apartheid/ [],” 304.

national status of Palestinians living within the pre-1967 Israeli border) are not written out clearly, or at all, as they were in Apartheid South Africa. Indeed the main difference between the two forms of racial segregation can be likened to the differences “between inferiority and dehumanization...between exploitation and annihilation.”²² Israel functions under “a racism that denies its proper name, a racism of erasure that places its own name under erasure. Not apartheid, not even ~~apartheid~~, but rather simply [].”²³ Through this prevarication, [], the unnamed State oppression predicated on racial stratification and extermination can remain invisible in plain sight. It explains – at least in part – the crucial and unconditional support of the United States and the audacity of the Jewish National Fund and the Israeli State to declare that illegal Jewish-only settlements built over the demolished ruins of Palestinian villages are pluralistic, diverse, and tolerant. The state of exception, as David Lloyd describes Israel in its regulatory abuses of human rights and international law, produces “a profound and insuperable contradiction between the aspiration to normality of the Israeli state and the actual practices that are essential to and constitutive of its existence.”²⁴ In constant paradox to its image as the so-called “only democracy in the Middle East,” Israel in its current image survives through its justifications and covering over of its abuses against Palestinians. The issue of invisible visibility plagues both sides of the border, though it is almost exclusively the Palestinians who suffer the consequences of both.

1.3 Chapter Breakdown

In order to accomplish what I have set out, this thesis is divided into four chapters. The first introduces and analyzes two series by Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi in an attempt to

²² Makdisi, “Apartheid/~~Apartheid~~/ [],” 320.

²³ Makdisi, “Apartheid/~~Apartheid~~/ [],” 322.

²⁴ Lloyd, “Settler Colonialism and the State of Exception,” 68.

demonstrate the recurring typologies and methods used to depict an alternative image of Palestine. This section explores the motifs and methods employed to describe settler colonial occupation in Palestine without falling susceptible to the violence of meaning and the fallacy of transformative representation. Through images of people and place, situated in the landscape of Palestine, Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi use intimate portraits, monumental landscape, and performative documentary praxis to explore a new documentary mode that pictures Palestine in all of its intricacy. These elements inform both photographers' praxes, all through the prismatic of the geopolitically and historically specific place of Palestine. Documentary photography in particular, as practiced by these artists, will be considered for the varying methods used to narrate and depict the lived realities of isolation and colonial occupation in Palestine.

After exploring the topological landscape of Palestine as pictured by Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi, I will probe the photographs and the collective functioning of Rawiya in terms of visual, temporal, contemporary, gendered, socio-political implications. The second chapter explores the question of feminism in relation to the question of Palestine and the collective practices of Rawiya. Specifically, feminism in Palestine and in the context of Arab Palestinian identity and nationalism will be discussed.

The third chapter considers the history and theory of photography and how these epistemologies have come to inscribe the photographic image of Palestine historically and contemporaneously. I will refer to the influential writing of Walter Benjamin on photography, in particular his "Little History of Photography," which continues to be of pertinence to the field of art history, photography, and media studies. Furthermore, Gisele Freund's position on documentary photography and John Tagg's challenges to the erroneously theorized "real" provides theoretical grounding to the questions I pursue. My intervention is to show how

interpolating Palestine as the pivotal case study for exploring the status of documentary photography can expose both its potentials and limitations.

The final chapter provides a brief historiography of early photography in Palestine by both colonial European photographers and local Arab practitioners. The problem of both histories, colonial and indigenous, is that they have been rendered incongruous when they are in fact deeply enmeshed. Both practices have been deeply influential on the current photographic imaging and imagining of Palestine. In correlation with recent scholarship that has begun to prod into the ontological specificity of photography in the Arab world, namely Stephen Sheehi's *The Arab Imago* and Issam Nasser's *Photographing Jerusalem*, I explore the interstices of foreign European and native vernacular photography in the region.

Chapter 2: Picturing Palestine as a Land with People

All members of Rawiya have lived and studied both in the Middle East and in the diaspora and must navigate between the polarizing semantics of Western media and contemporary art fascinations with the Middle East. Rawiya photographers documenting conflict in Arab countries must negotiate their praxis along axes specific to geographical, cultural, political, temporal, racial, class, and gendered disparities. Escaping hegemonic narratives of Western art history, the authority of documentary photography and mass mediated images, and their subsequent, encumbering stereotypes Tanya Habjouqa and Tamara Abdul Hadi explore the complexity of occupied life in Palestine. The question of ethics, and what a picture can do, returns to the photographic.

I would like to begin this discussion on Rawiya in Palestine, with a series by Habjouqa called *Occupied Pleasures* (2012-2013). This series, which explores the quotidian resilience of Palestinians living in Gaza, pictures Palestinians as people rather than victims. More pointedly, it pictures people in place, and thus Palestine as a peopled place, contrary to current and historic Zionist fallacy. Habjouqa's series is the first I will discuss to explore the typologies of certain photographic successions I have come to identify as pertinent to the socio-political crisis in the region. The first and perhaps most self-evident visual device used most effectively by Habjouqa is the landscape. I will consider how place comes to inform depictions of Palestine both in the series described and its relation to the colonial history that has serviced to erase Palestine from collective Zionist and international memory. The Zionist slogan "A land without a people for a

people without a land" which first appeared in the late nineteenth century is explicitly challenged in the series that follows.²⁵

Habjouqa's photographs are concerned with the capturing of strange and obscure moments. For Habjouqa, the title *Occupied Pleasures* satirizes the Israeli occupation of Palestine in a way that "straddles passive and active meanings: to be occupied under Israel, and to occupy oneself, joyfully and defiantly, in pastime and simple pleasures."²⁶ Her performative documentary photographs capture Palestinian subjects in their daily lives, outside of the overt violence and instead in the domestic or private moments of the everyday. Abdul Hadi incorporates an intersectional feminist lens that is most preoccupied by a shifting Arab masculinity and subjectivity she approaches through documentary portraiture. Both artists push the boundaries of documentary photography through dialectical explorations into what documentary means and how one can practice it in a region that has been so excessively photographed and mythologized. Although both Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi have described Palestine and Palestinians as being underrepresented, their photographs, I will argue, rather speak to the oversaturation inherent in the violence of meaning inscribed within depictions of Palestine. Through visual metaphor and performativity both artists interrogate presuppositions about Palestine and the Arab world. Neither artist documents the explicit violence of occupation, but instead challenges the violence of representation Palestinians have been subjected to under photojournalistic and neocolonial gazes.

Tanya Habjouqa was born in Jordan and educated in Texas. She received her Master's degree in Global Media and Middle East Politics from SOAS University of London. Habjouqa is

²⁵ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 9.

²⁶ Habjouqa, "Tanya Habjouqa," <http://tanyahabjouqa.com/occupied-pleasures/>.

represented by NOOR (an Arabic word meaning *light*) photo agency, has received attention and acclaim for her series *Occupied Pleasures* which has been heralded by TIME magazine and the Smithsonian magazine as one of the best photo books of 2015. She has exhibited her work internationally and can be found in permanent collections at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, and the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh. Habjouqa is also a mentor across the Arab region for Magnum Foundation's "Emerging Arab Photographers Documentary Fund" together with the Prince Claus Foundation and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture. She is currently based in East Jerusalem and has been documenting the Right of Return Marches in Gaza.

Tamara Abdul Hadi was born to Iraqi parents in the UAE before moving to Montreal where she was raised. Currently, she is based in Beirut. Along with being a practicing photographer, she creates and teaches photography workshops, so far in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia. In 2016, Tamara gave a documentary storytelling workshop in Gaza with the Rawiya collective. Her work has been published in The New York Times, The Guardian, The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times, The National, Huck Magazine, VICE, Slate and more. Along with her membership with Rawiya, Abdul Hadi is also a collaborating member of The Medium, an artist collective comprised of interdisciplinary artists working independently. Neither practitioner is from Palestine, but feature the land and people of Palestine quite centrally in their distinct practices. I have chosen to focus on their work in particular (and not say Laura Boushnak, who is of Palestinian descent) because both Abdul Hadi and Habjouqa have dedicated several series to the question of Palestine. Neither artist speaks for or over Palestinians but through their shared stories, alongside their collective struggles, and against the colonial forces that threaten their historical and physical erasure.

2.1 Tanya Habjouqa's *Occupied Pleasures* on Occupied Land

In one of the most compositionally captivating photographs in Habjouqa's *Occupied Pleasures* series, a family of six enjoys a picnic at a road stop near the beach (Fig. 1). The ochre-coloured sand in the foreground of the image is marked by the tire tracks of the rusted family vehicle. The yellow car is missing hubcaps and appears too small, almost comically so, for the family and plastic white lawn chairs one can presume were packed into it. Now they are sitting behind the shade of its opened back-hatch door enjoying the view of the expansive Mediterranean Sea that reaches out before them. The breaking horizon line between the sea and sky cuts the composition in half and is just visible through the side windows of the small, dated car. The beach is curiously empty and this adds a strange surrealism to the photograph. Reminiscent of a Salvador Dali painting, the vacant beach gives the impression of timelessness. The slightly overcast sky in fact dominates most of the image. Without seeming too imposing it compresses the vehicle and the family into the immediate foreground. The stillness of the image is at once soothing and ominous. The water appears almost too dark for the time of day, like a storm could be rolling in at any moment. The shadows over the water speak metaphorically for the violence that could erupt at any moment in Occupied Palestine, but for now we look at what Habjouqa describes as *Occupied Pleasures*. In the lap of one of the girls a round-cheeked baby boy stares directly into the lens and thus directly at us. Returning our gaze the little boy, although certainly too young to be capable, appears obstinate. His awareness of being photographed at such a young age disrupts the voyeuristic enjoyment in the image. This gaze is undoubtedly the *punctum* of the photograph, but only because of its situation within the ominous landscape. While the other family members stare out at the water in a scene that can only be described as sublime, the little child stares at us.

The background saturates both photographs with double meaning. The photograph renders the subjects and their surroundings visible while they remain refugees, exiles, non-citizens, and essentially invisible in political reality. The landscape further propagates the predicament of life under occupation by informing each image in the series with an ominous miasma. The blue of the sky is deeper than it should be. While the rubble of past, present and impending Israeli military incursions spills into the frame, the ocean at once serene is also menacing; it is simply another unsurpassable border, though more beautiful to look at than a concrete wall or guarded checkpoint. Whether it is the expansive sea or the graphitized separation wall, the occupation is present in every “pleasure” Habjouqa captures. The landscape functions throughout the series as an image of the occupation underlying and undermining Palestinian presence and belonging on their land.

According to W.J.T. Mitchell in an essay included in his anthology *Landscape and Power*: “Landscape is something to be seen not touched. It is an abstraction from place and a reification of space, a reduction of it to what can be seen from a distant point of view, a prospect that dominates, frames, and codifies the landscape in terms of a set of fairly predictable conventions. . . . A landscape, then, turns site into sight, place and space into a visual image.”²⁷ Mitchell’s essay focuses on the symbolically loaded site/sight of Jerusalem and the ways in which Israel has manipulated and framed the landscape to conform to the Zionist construction of a sanctified Jewish State in Palestine. I use the word construction both literally and figuratively. The landscape, as a loaded visual icon in many ways serves to legitimate certain histories. In other words: Israel has efficiently transformed Palestinian sites into Israeli sights. The rapid construction of Jewish-only settlements, the uprooting of olive groves and planting of evergreen

²⁷ Mitchell, “Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” 265.

forests prove how effectively landscape functions as a constructed image for settler colonial manipulation. Through the degradation and demolition of Palestinian villages, homes, and olive groves Israel has successfully afforested over the ruins, using landscape as a weapon of colonial domination. Mitchell describes this harnessing of the landscape in a section of his essay called “The Bulldozer and the Fist,” wherein the Israeli State stakes its claims to the land through virulent demolition and gentrification. The Zionist euphemism for this colonial landscaping, “making the desert bloom,” exposes the unprecedented violence of the manicured lawns, afforestation, and cityscapes that have come to define the benevolent image of Israel. Mitchell maintains: “Zionist iconoclasm has little to do with religious piety or moral disapproval of idolaters, then. It is strictly a strategy of conquest, the appropriation of territory under the cover of a moral crusade.”²⁸ In Edward Said’s words, the segregated Jewish-only European style settlements and gardens which include “a huge ring of fortress-like housing projects around the city of Jerusalem, were intended to visibly illustrate Israeli power, additions to the gentle landscape that signified aggression, not accommodation and acculturation.”²⁹ This carefully shrouded strategy is visualized in Habjouqa’s photographs where “territory becomes the site of terror.” But it is not enough to expel and displace the indigenous population, “the very landscape must be purged of their traces, their claims, their history, their idols.”³⁰ The ruination of Palestinian existence appears like a backdrop in each photograph of this series. Zionist efforts to control the landscape are at once a structure of erasure and an effort to erase all structure. In another image, four young boys throw their bodies through the air against the backdrop of a bullet-ridden and half demolished building (Fig. 2).

²⁸ Mitchell, “Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” 282.

²⁹ Said, “Invention, Memory, and Place,” 255.

³⁰ Mitchell, “Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” 282.

They are members of the Gaza Parkour And Free Running team. Their practice takes place in a cemetery on the outskirts of the refugee camp where they live, in Khan Younis, Gaza. The walls show damage from past Israeli incursions. Much of the destruction was likely caused in the three-week massacre known as the Gaza War, though in the necropolitical landscape of Palestine, bullet holes and demolitions are an occurrence of the everyday. What remains of the structure are fragments of territorial terror imposed by the settler colonial state. Rebar pokes out of one of the larger holes through which we can see the deep blue of an ominously dark sky. The boisterous youths are not phased by their surroundings, however. They play before the camera in an act of defiance or indifference. I find these terms more palatable for boyhood than resistance, though they certainly would describe themselves as contributing to such. Captured in Habjouqa's image, they are more than boys playing against a backdrop of ruins. The sport they practice is about movement and creativity, a getting from one point to the next in the most creative way possible. The bullet-laden wall which first appears like a misplaced theatre setting against the young boy's play befits the conditions in Gaza under which real physical motion is severely limited. Blockaded in the coastal enclave of Gaza, which is increasingly entrenched in internal crises of unsustainability under military siege, the boys perform metaphorical political movement. They transcend the walls, ruins, and obstructions as imaginatively as possible, free running as if they are preparing to do so on the borders, shores, and checkpoints that constrain their movement otherwise.

Interestingly, rather than attempting to show the rootedness of the Palestinians, a didactic trope in visual representations, Habjouqa shows the strangeness of uprootedness. This strangeness of place is diametrically opposed to the imaginative geography described by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978). The visual trope of a homogenized, exotic, and constitutively othered

“Orient” undergoes a representational reversal in this series. Palestinian pleasure is the anathema of Israeli disciplinary control. Picturing moments of enjoyment and refuge against the backdrop of the inescapable siege of Gaza and occupation of the West Bank proves affective if only at revealing what the landscape hides. In Habjouqa’s subliminal framing, using her access to the region she shows the Palestinians against the landscape of Occupied Palestine. She exposes its injuries, wounds and ruins and in doing so creates a mnemonic allegory for the inhumanity of the Israeli occupation.

2.2 New Vulnerabilities Captured by Tamara Abdul Hadi

In Abdul Hadi’s series *Flying Boys* (2015) glistening brown skin, wet from the Mediterranean Sea, reflects water droplets off the back of a young boy (Fig. 3). Frozen in the frame in an impossible feat of balance, the boy postures forward, leaning off the edge of a board, or perhaps a cement ledge, as he prepares to lunge himself into the water below. Suspended over the sea with arms held out and fingers splayed, the title of this series by Tamara Abdul Hadi – *Flying Boys* – comes to fruition. The boy’s soaked black trunks hang with the weight of the saltwater, in stark contrast to the bright sky and calm sea pictured in the background. The expanses of blue and harsh delineation of the horizon line between sea and sky appear like a monochromatic painting or backdrop. There is no architecture or shoreline included in the frame to negotiate the exact whereabouts of the scene. This flying boy could be taking off from anywhere, though his dark hair, tattered pants, and bronzed skin automatically discolore that he is from the global south. In another image from the series a flying boy is captured from below (Fig. 4). Leaping from the cliffs of what appears to be the coastline of West Beirut (if the new infrastructure of the high-rises and condos in the background are of any indication) he dives through the frame headfirst. The pose, with arms extended and feet together, gives the appearance of an inverted Christ on the

cross, his slim frame extended to its fullest with a youthful chin raised upward away from the gaze of the lens. Both photographs in Abdul Hadi's series intimate an interesting relation between Arab masculinity, new documentary modes of portraiture, and the literal and dangerous escape provided by large bodies of water that separate Middle Eastern and North African countries from Europe. In the current moment of refugee crisis, the relationship between othered body and water is all too perilous. However, Abdul Hadi's *Flying Boys* never actually touch the water. The images capture instead the precarious moment before the body breaches the surface. The figures, literally suspended in the air embody the uncertainty surrounding the landscape of historic Palestine and the Arab world.

These images from Tamara Abdul Hadi's *Flying Boys* series picture young men jumping into the water surrounding Beirut, Akka, Tunis, and Gaza although the specificity of the locations are not delineated in the individual images. Picturing precarity in the sense that Judith Butler describes it in *Frames of War*, as vulnerable life unidentified and suspended by the State, Abdul Hadi's *Flying Boys* both concede to and resist this status. The issue posed by these precarious lives (i.e. the stateless, non-citizen Palestinians living in Israel and Occupied Palestine) according to Butler, are a threat to the sanctity of the settler state. As a symptom of the split, Kantian subjecthood that has dictated freedom and morality since the Enlightenment, the Arab male embodies the antithesis of all that is modern and enlightened. In so many words, this is the premise of Said's *Orientalism*. More recently, Joseph Massad describes in "The Persistence of the Palestinian Question" (2005) the internalization and projection of anti-Semitism unto the Palestinian "Arab" by Zionist disavowal. Massad affirms that "the persistence of Zionism's oppression of the Palestinians is necessary for Zionism's ability to maintain the ontological structure of its new identity, without which, it fears, the diaspora Jew within might

return to haunt it.”³¹ This persists from the anti-Semitism of nineteenth century Europe and the subsequent internalization of anti-Semitism central to Zionist ideology. In order to maintain, or in this case metamorphose the ideal “I” there must be an unideal “other”. In other words, Massad is describing the projection of racial discrimination from the subjugated European Jew of the nineteenth century to the post-Nakba Palestinian Arab. Western constructions of identity have been built up from what they are not, and this negative formation of the self is structured largely by a denouncing of Arab masculinity. The defining negative self of the European “I” has historically been projected upon the othered body, or cast over it, like a shadow. Abdul Hadi’s emphasis on this particular subject in shadow throughout her oeuvre proposes an interesting break from the usual voyeurism directed towards women of the region. The inclining of a feminist gaze presents itself behind the lens, and manifests through the art of portraiture. I will consider this series by Abdul Hadi by situating her practice in dialogue with the particular condition of Palestinian subjugation to colonial and heteropatriarchal violence (as if these terms could ever be separable).

Judith Butler’s latest iteration of vulnerability in the anthology *Vulnerability in Resistance*, co-edited with Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay newly investigates the ostensible vulnerability displayed by the *Flying Boys*. Rema Hammam’s chapter on “Precarious Politics” explores the classifications of grievable life through the visible vulnerability of the male Arab body, or rather its new transparency. In doing so, she explores the potential for shifting gender roles in Palestine. Hammam attests that “Palestinian male bodies are the most directly targeted by and thus most vulnerable to Israeli colonial violence...In this understanding, the male body no longer belongs to a separate domain of the masculine; rather, it becomes invested with

³¹ Massad, “The Persistence of the Palestinian Question,” 16.

the entire political ethic of the community in resistance, opening up the possibility of reordering norms of masculine/feminine and vulnerability/protection.”³² Now more than ever, “women from communities are often described as being the front line of collective actions. In demonstrations they are always in the lead or when someone (usually male) is arrested by the military, it is women who engage physically with the captors in order to “steal back” the captured body.”³³ With women literally on the frontlines of protest, the normative order of a female, sexed vulnerability is subverted as a tactic for resistance. Israeli soldiers that raid homes and abduct young men in the middle of the night to be illegally detained (5800 in 2018 alone)³⁴ are perplexed by the opposition by Palestinian women because of heteronormative scripts that inscribe the female body – especially Orientalized ones - as vulnerable and to be protected, especially by soldiers. Destabilizing parochial heteronormative gender roles, women’s work takes on new significance – and is often invested in picturing the vulnerability of the men in the community. This pivotal positioning, consistent throughout Abdul Hadi’s oeuvre reveals an interesting connection to both historical and ideological constructions of masculinity in the region, and its problematic depiction in the media. Abdul Hadi’s *Flying Boys* capture the irony of the precarious “threat” inscribed in the vulnerability of the male Arab body.

To frame a photograph is to selectively point the lens at a particular subject in space, and if only by default, strategically away from another. Framing is insidious. To be framed in any other connotation is to be falsely accused for an act you did not commit. This etymology reveals that there is also an intangible fallaciousness in the framing of a photograph. Subjects are always

³² Hammami, “Precarious Politics: The Activism of “Bodies That Count” (Aligning with Those That Don’t) in Palestine’s Colonial Frontier,” 183-4.

³³ Hammami, “Precarious Politics: The Activism of “Bodies That Count” (Aligning with Those That Don’t) in Palestine’s Colonial Frontier,” 182.

³⁴ “Statistics on Palestinians in the custody of the Israeli security forces,” B’tselem, https://www.btselem.org/statistics/detainees_and_prisoners

framed and thus accost much of their agency to the photographer. This is inherently inscribed in the practice of photography. The camera and its gaze cannot be trusted. Nonetheless, photography still possesses a commonly believed affinity to truth through its indexical dialectics, a relationship that has been called to question, and rightly so, by poststructuralist and postcolonial debate. Kracauer concludes in *History: The Last Things Before the Last* (1969): “History resembles photography in that it is, amongst other things, a means of alienation.”³⁵ The subject is isolated in the frame and then shot by the camera in an act of violence. Cadava also picks up on the morbid status of portrait photography, which “allows us to speak of our death before our death. The image already announces our absence...the photograph tells us we will die, one day we will no longer be here, or rather, we will only be here the way we have always been here, as images. It announces the death of the photographed.”³⁶ In Palestine, the purgatory of occupation resides precisely between alienation and death. To take a portrait is to take something away and Palestinians are particularly familiar to the scrutiny of the camera that takes their image for identification, “security”, and surveillance. Yet every subject in the photographs by Rawiya artists still agrees to have their picture taken. Be it the photojournalist, the social documentarian or the stratifying gaze of state surveillance, Palestinians know too well the feeling of having their image taken.

Rawiya artists thus have gained the difficult to achieve trust of their subjects, as women from the region who speak Arabic and use their cameras – powerful weapons indeed – to narrate stories rather than take them. As such, within their collective practice it has always been of the group mandate to gain the sitters’ consent before taking their picture. Along with this trust, the

³⁵ Kracauer, *History: The Last Things Before the Last*, 5.

³⁶ Cadava, *Words of Light*, 8.

photographers also commit to honouring what I imagine would be the incredible burden of doing justice to the stories shared by the people who have agreed to appear before the lens. In Abdul Hadi's *Self Portraits from Inside Palestine* (2012), the traditional relationship between subject and photographer is inverted. In this series, resident refugees of the Al Amari camp near Ramallah – and almost immediately across from one of the most aggressive Israeli settlements – are invited to step before the camera and take their own portrait via a shutter-release cord (Fig. 5). According to Abdul Hadi: “The idea came to me after I spent some time in the Palestinian refugee camps and saw so many outsiders coming in and photographing these people. They are under-represented people in a marginalized community and by allowing them to take their own image I was giving them the choice as to how they wanted to be represented.”³⁷ There is give and take in this series. In return for taking the portrait, Abdul Hadi gives her subjects control over the framing of their own image. The result is an aleatory series of compositions that depict the self-conscious self-representations of mostly young boys and girls and elderly women and men. If indeed upon viewing a portrait one anticipates their death, as says Barthes, Cadava, and Sontag, then the status and precarity of the refugee is most aptly captured in the self-portrait. Agency is not the right word for this act. If the recent massacre of over a hundred peacefully protesting Gazans (the majority of whom are refugees) proves anything, it is that the Palestinians in their fight for sovereignty, justice, and return must also fight for their framework. Knowing they have little to no agency against the heavily armed military forces in Israel, Palestinians continue to storm the military border. What these portraits reveal, as the protesters in Gaza have, is that the Palestinians recognize the power of framing and their subjection to the neo-colonial gaze. Abdul Hadi offers a platform to express this resistance through self-portraiture.

³⁷ Seaman, “The Untold Tales,” <https://www.thenational.ae/the-untold-tales-1.303120>.

In both Abdul Hadi and Habjouqa's series, which picture precarious non-citizens in the landscapes of Occupied Palestine (Habjouqa) and the more ambiguous waterscape of the Mediterranean Sea (Abdul Hadi) the vulnerability of the subject is rendered inherently apparent. There is a certain appeal in talking about these subjects within the framework of Foucault's biopower, or later, Agamben's propagated descriptions of bare life. The interrelated terms refer to the status, or rather non-status, of refugees, migrants, exiles, and nomads forced to procure an existence outside of the nation-state and thus outside of any official declarations on their human rights. Stripped of recognized national identity Palestinians are constantly exposed to unmitigated biopolitical violence at the hand of the Israeli sovereign. The irony of this situation is not lost, where European Jews displaced after the ethnic cleansing and death camps of the Second World War now comprise a nation built upon the same crime. While Hannah Arendt had argued after the Holocaust that the displaced Jews were part of a new liberatory frontier of subjecthood emancipated from state borders, this was not always the case. Instead, the paradox of the settler colonial state of Israel emerged.

It is an irony many point to including J.A. Mbembe who proposes an alternative to biopower, offering the language and tools necessary to navigate this difficult terrain. Mbembe introduces a third term to Foucault and Agamben's descriptions of asymmetrical relations between the governing body and the human body subjected to governing. In the case of Palestine, the quintessential example of late-modern capital occupation, "Colonial terror intertwines with colonially generated fantasies of wilderness and death and fictions to create the effect of the real."³⁸ Here the "stateless" Palestinians are relegated to the regime of *necropolitics* in a space between subjecthood and objecthood where their killing becomes necessary to

³⁸ Mbembé, "Necropolitics," 25.

maintaining the State. Following and then diverging from the Hegelian notion that links death and the “becoming subject” Mbembe concludes that for a state of protracted exception such as Palestine, death inscribes and makes the subject. The threat of death is effervescent, informing the everyday. Of course it was Foucault in *il faut defendre la société* who first designates the sovereign as the one who controls and regulates death, and does so on the premise of a racial hierarchy.³⁹ Mbembe’s addition is to emphasize the regulation of death. He states: “The first synthesis between massacre and bureaucracy, that incarnation of Western rationality” first emerges in the colonial world.⁴⁰ In the case of Palestine, the late modern colony, the regulation of death is concomitant with living under the restraints, regulations and violence of settler colonial occupation. To maintain control and the appearance of an exemplary case, Israel must devise the threat posed by Palestinians. The occupation necessitates the bulldozing of Indigenous existence, physically and metaphorically. It codetermines or precedes the appropriation of land, water and airspace resources.⁴¹

The sky that so perturbed me in both *Occupied Pleasures* and *Flying Boys* materializes in the vertical sovereignty Mbembé describes: the occupation of land, sky and sea as a resource, but also as a surveillance zone by the colonizer.⁴² The landscape thus functions as icon, as described by Said and Mitchell, but also as a politicized terrain for colonial control where Israel is able to target and track the killings of Palestinians through high-tech observation-domination.⁴³

³⁹ Foucault, *il faut defendre la société*, 17. I should note here that Foucault’s term “biopolitics” was first coined in the first edition *History of Sexuality* (1984), but more fully elaborated in the text I have cited.

⁴⁰ Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” 23.

⁴¹ Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” 29.

⁴² Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” 29.

⁴³ Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” 29. Most of the policing is done from the sky. The technologies include, but are not limited to: “sensors aboard unmanned air vehicles (UAVs), aerial reconnaissance jets, early warning Hawkeye planes, assault helicopters, Earth-observation satellites, all techniques of “hologrammatization.”

Picturing the vulnerable yet resilient subjects within this terrain and context renders the *punctum* of these images legible. It takes the myth of the blooming desert asunder and reveals instead the necropolitical conditions of the everyday inscribed onto the body and the land.

Chapter 3: Frames of Photography as Women's Work in Palestine

In Habjouqa's *Women of Gaza* (2009) series, a photograph depicts three women wearing the jilbab, a loose fitting dress that covers everything but the face and feet in a Gaza gym exercising on the basketball court (Fig. 6). According to Habjouqa "the women say they cover at the gym because they have no privacy in the public sphere due to limited economic options. They say they cannot afford private gyms and they're tired of being stuck at home."⁴⁴ The women pictured with hands held high above their heads seems peculiar at first glance because of the strangeness of the gesture, not immediately associable to any familiar exercise. I soon realized that the peculiarity of the posed bodies, three mirror images of one another, resonated uncannily with images I had encountered elsewhere. Alexander Dumas photographed a Bedouin woman from Jericho in 1869 whose hands are held in a similar posture, above the head (Fig. 7). Felix Bonfils captures his own depiction of the exposed breast and lifted arms of a Bedouin woman from Beirut in the same year (Fig. 8). Images of sexualised women from the Orient were popular at the time to European tourists, soldiers, and colonists. Their exposure to the camera acted as an allegorical embodiment for the succumbing of the Middle East to the white, male, colonialist gaze. Women's bodies have always been the grounds for war, be it as nationalist symbol or surrogate for colonialist violation. Like Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapalus*, the ruination of the female body is at stake in every national or political defeat. The female body is a central icon for nationalism that has embodied every nationalist struggle without fail, Palestine included.⁴⁵ These are the stakes of Habjouqa's *Women of Gaza* and *Occupied Pleasures* series, and they are also, undeniably historically inscribed. Delegating images of indigenous people into

⁴⁴ Habjouqa, <http://tanyahabjouqa.com/>.

⁴⁵ Hasso, "The "Women's Front"," 442.

figments of the past is of course a dangerous undertaking, as it is often used to negate the continued existence of native populations in settler colonial societies. In this case however, the historical burden of colonialist imagery is called to the present and demands interpretation. These images thus must be read through a historical, and intersectional lens.

3.1 Thinly Veiled Misogyny

The exposed breasts and seductive body language of the harem women, with their eroticized dress in different states of unveiling, were not restricted to Levantine women. Malek Alloula's book *Colonial Harem* (1986) is a pivotal text that explores this issue closely, though not unproblematically. Alloula focuses on the colonial postcards that circulated most vehemently between 1900 and 1930 in Algeria. In their depictions of unveiled and bare-breasted Moorish and Maghreb women, the postcards provide a visual usurping of the Middle East through the desecration of the Oriental woman (Fig. 9). The postcards of Algerian women that circulated outside of Algeria provided a "pseudoknowledge of the colony" that perpetuated stereotypical ideals of the exotic Orient.⁴⁶ In Alloula's contemptuous prose, they provided "fertilizer of the colonial vision."⁴⁷ Before the colonial postcards from the harem were in circulation, the European flâneur was frustrated by the negation asserted by the veil. Photographing women in the public simply would not do. The rejection propagated by the impermeable veil provoked the diffident white male gaze, which desires scopic, colonial voyeurism and domination. To unveil the Algerian woman, a symbol of the sanctity of Algerian self-determination, would be to dismantle the persistence of the Arab nation, the Oriental Other. Alloula continues: "It will be noted that whenever a photographer aims his camera at a veiled woman, he cannot help but

⁴⁶ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 4.

⁴⁷ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 4.

include in his visual field several instances of her...These white islets that dot the landscape are indeed aggregates of prohibit, mobile extensions of an imaginary harem whose inviolability haunts the photographer-voyeur.”⁴⁸ The colonial photographer is perfectly illiterate, returning to Benjamin’s quote, in the sense that “he cannot help” but frame the pictures of Algerian and Bedouin women in such a way that reveals his insecurities to their gaze, protected and threatening behind a veil. Habjouqa’s *Women of Gaza* are thus ostensibly still very much in dialogue with this turn of the century framing. Like Alloula’s reading describes, the exercising women appear in multiples, this time metaphorically accompanied by the curtains hanging from the gymnasium that mimic the fabric of the scarves worn on their heads. In this image, the veil is rendered vacuous. Like a window unto the world, the veil is supposed to mediate between the private and the public. In Palestine, especially in Gaza, which has endured an inhumanistic decades long blockade, the difference between public and private is never decisive. Under Israeli occupation the walls of Palestinian homes are subject to constant and unmediated invasion. The fabric headscarf stands little chance at delineating the space between public and private, but functions rather symbolically. In Palestine especially, the veil is exposed for its function outside of its religious and personal context as both an inane symbol of nationalist feminine cooptation and neo-colonial fascination.⁴⁹ The main difference with Habjouqa’s images then, is that a

⁴⁸ Alloula, *Colonial Harem*, 12-13.

⁴⁹ The veil has become a highly problematic symbol in postcolonial studies of the Middle East. I have tried to avoid falling into stereotypical traps with this particular trope due to the oversaturation and neo-colonial fascination with it. I find it incredibly and increasingly harmful to women artists who are of Arab, Iranian, Muslim or Middle Eastern origin, who are objectified and commoditised based on their engagement with the veil (even those who do so critically are often subjected to neo-colonial fascination rather than critical engagement). The archetype of the oppressed Muslim woman is overplayed in Western museums and media and artists are being selected to exhibit work based on how it in some way pays homage to the politics of the veil. Such narratives perpetuate the need for imperial interventions in the Middle East, not so cleverly disguised as women’s rights initiatives to save Arab and Muslim women.

Middle Eastern women photographer is now capturing the contemporary harem, and the apocryphal burden of unveiling has been thankfully abandoned. The photograph is neither a message for nationalistic rhetoric nor a voyeuristic foray into the confines of the harem. Rather, it performs the surreality of settler occupation through a demystification of the veiled woman – whose prominence in Western media reveals how the postcards and photographs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century still deeply inform her image.

The photograph of the three women in jilbab is part of Habjouqa's *Women of Gaza* series and appears in the catalogue for the *She Who Tells a Story* exhibition that opened at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in the Henry and Lois Foster Gallery. The show ran from August 27, 2013 to January 12, 2014 with the prerogative to showcase the work of twelve pioneering women artists from Iran and the Arab world. Curator and art critic Michket Krifa suggests that growing interests in women artists from the region is in direct response to the 2011 Arab Revolts. This

(See also, Lila Abu-Lughod's *Do Muslim Women Need Saving* (2013) for an analysis of current, and postcolonial issues.)

For a well-situated discussion of the veil, I would suggest reading Fatima Mernissi's *Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1992). It is a rigorous account of the historical, sociopolitical, and religious contexts surrounding the veil and its resurgence in Islam. The premise is clear: the manipulation of Hadith, sacred inscriptive texts by the Prophet's closest comrades, have been claimed by elite male historians and religious leaders who have systemically written women out of early Muslim history. This erasure has sequentially and incessantly infiltrated the structures of power in Muslim societies. Mernissi argues that after the defeat and embarrassment of pan-Arabic aspirations in 1967, political formation in Middle Eastern nations has relied heavily on glorifying accounts of the past. This past, which permeates the present through both the centuries-old Hadiths of the imams and modern histories of prolific writers such as Sa'id al-Afghani, has not only written out the radical activism of the Prophet's wives, but also made an example out of female agency. These earliest icons of women in the Muslim faith – namely the Prophet's wives Khadija and 'A'isha – are blamed for the ensuing detriment of a unified Arab-Muslim world. Mernissi suggests that this obsession with the history of the Golden Age of Islam (the Abbasid dynasty of the eighth and ninth centuries) has prevented social and political progression for women in Muslim majority countries.

Tracing the detailed recordings of the Prophet Muhammad's life, Mernissi concludes that the veiling of Muslim women is a practice that emerges from a double perspective that on the one hand, is intended to cover and protect women from the threats of the post-industrial, homogenizing West (initially, it was protection from the threats posed by the civil war in seventh century Medina), and on the other hand, exists as a symbolic, embodied representation of Muslim community values.

renewed interest supposedly “raised consciousness about the issues of freedom of expression and gender equality.”⁵⁰ While I must agree with Krifa’s statements to a certain extent, I am also viscerally opposed to what is left out: namely the neoliberal infatuation with the reified Muslim woman. Her emancipation serves an insidious purpose, acting as a symbolic proxy that validates imperial invasion through ersatz concerns on women’s rights. Worse than Spivak’s searing allegation that “White men are saving brown women from brown men”⁵¹ is growing concern that white women are attempting to save brown women from brown men.⁵² Certainly, Krifa identifies correctly the important role of women artists in the region, who she deems as active protestors. Brown women are thus elevated to some form of agency. Krifa declares “these women” (with little to no specificity) “were just as active as men during these [Arab Spring] insurrections” and “are fighting to acquire or redefine their rights and to achieve a status that is constantly threatened by radical Islamist movements. Most of these radical discourses and activities are crystallized in and projected onto the female body, the eternal object of identity-based fantasy. As a result, women artists are at the forefront of a battle waged on two fronts: one for their creative and intellectual freedom, and the other against discrimination.”⁵³ But discrimination from whom?

Curator Kristen Greshti proposes that Habjouqa’s practice: “records the experience of females in Gaza, who like all residents of the occupied territory, live with limited freedom. The photographs celebrate modest pleasures such as a picnic on the beach an aerobics class, or a boat ride on the Mediterranean. Connecting intimately with her subjects, Habjouqa gently portrays the

⁵⁰ Krifa, *She Who Tells a Story*, 9.

⁵¹ Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” 92.

⁵² Lughod, *Remaking Women*, 14.

⁵³ Krifa, *She Who Tells a Story*, 9.

bright side of their not-always-so-bright lives.”⁵⁴ The euphemistic hyphenation of occupation as something “not-always-so-bright”⁵⁵ does little justice to the complexity of Habjouqa’s series. Artists who “declare no intention other than to offer a wide panorama of images of Arab and Iranian women, seen from the “inside” and by the women themselves. The endogenous glimpses they provide privilege the plurality and complexity of representations of the feminine.”⁵⁶ The didactic text that accompanies Habjouqa’s photographs in the catalogue suggests that the immobilization of the exercising women’s feet could be a metaphor for the immobilization imposed upon Gaza.⁵⁷ I am less concerned about metaphors and narratives on limitation, and more interested in the way the photographs in Habjouqa’s series appropriate and perform historical visual tropes that have constructed certain ideals related to Muslim women, and Palestine. What Alloula misses in his publication on the cartes de visite in Algeria is to further divulge the exchange between photographer and subject. The Algerian woman who exposes her body to the camera is certainly more aware of her social and class position than Alloula concedes. Already ousted by Algerian society, working as prostitutes and thus deemed undesirable to the public sphere otherwise, the Algerian women posing in partial nudity are not unbeknownst to the transaction taking place. Due to her work, she is already unsuitable as a symbol for nationalist pride and propaganda for she does not uphold the impossible standards of chasteness, resilience, and righteousness. The only thing that is destroyed in this monetary exchange is the reliance on the female body as a passive symbol for nationalist ideology.

⁵⁴ Gresh, *She Who Tells a Story*, 31.

⁵⁵ Gresh, *She Who Tells a Story*, 31.

⁵⁶ Krifa, *She Who Tells a Story*, 16.

⁵⁷ Gresh, *She Who Tells a Story*, 112.

3.2 A Gendered Lens: Redefining Arab/Palestinian Masculinity

Abdul Hadi's 2009-2014 *Picture an Arab Man* series captures semi-nude Arab men of diverse backgrounds in tightly framed, intimate portraits images. Where Habjouqa is drawn to performative images of absurdity that mimic the absurdity of the occupation and the misconceptions she witnesses as a diasporic artist, Abdul Hadi's interest is in capturing the vulnerable subjectivities of young and mature men in Palestine and throughout the Middle East. Abdul Hadi writes of this series: "The conceptual aim of this portrait series is two-fold: Trying to uncover and break the stereotypes placed upon the Arab male, and providing an alternative visual representation of that identity. Secondly, it is a celebration of their sensual beauty, an unexplored aspect of the identity of the contemporary Arab man, on the cusp of change in a society that reveres an outdated form of hyper-masculinity."⁵⁸ Here, Abdul Hadi does not designate which society she is necessarily referencing, but it could easily be either the hyper-masculinity of the Arab society she grew up in or the Western, Canadian society where she pursued her studies. Regardless, what Abdul Hadi presents are intimate moments in which Arab men are deterritorialized from the limiting context of violence and perpetual war they are so often associated with in Western media images. They perform reticently for the camera the vulnerability of their subject positions in the colonial and post-colonial contexts of the modern Arab world.

In one of the more self-conscious portraits in the series a young man with curly hair lingering over his brow looks away from the camera, slightly smiling and bashful (Fig. 10). A portrait of a middle-aged man reveals the visage of someone who is less a boy and more a man. The lines on his face and darkness under his eyes give away the pressures he may endure as a

⁵⁸ Abdul Hadi, "Picture an Arab Man," <http://www.tamarabdulhadi.com/>.

father, brother, or husband (Fig. 11). We begin to imagine the stories of the men through our immediate proximity to their expressive faces. The more portraits viewed from this series, the more nuanced the representations become. The men, of different ethnicity, age, and stature are completely removed from the discourse of violence they have been situated within in Western media depictions. The viewer is invited to gaze at the portraits, and in doing so, a realization postulates that the gaze of the viewer, who is looking through the eyes of the photographer is not familiar. John Berger's much cited essay "Ways of Seeing" (1972) provides an explanation for this peculiarity. Berger states, in recognition of his oversimplification of the condition (as he goes on anyways): "*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight."⁵⁹ Berger's study refers to eighteenth and nineteenth century European oil painting and representations of the female nude, but also incorporates advertisements and magazines. The gaze in these media has always been male, but Abdul Hadi's portraits are not so easily situated in the epistemological framework of Western art history and her gaze does not register with the usual scopophilia of the camera.⁶⁰ The gaze in this series is empathetic, not predatory.

In Catherine Soussloff's article on the historical and visual implications of the Abu Ghraib photographs, performativity is central to the image's conceptualization. The photographs, which document the torture of Iraqi detainees by American occupation soldiers during the Iraq

⁵⁹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 47.

⁶⁰ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 840. The scopophilic gaze incited by the camera in narrative film is also relevant to narrative documentary photography. Mulvey's essay from 1973 was pivotal in introducing psychoanalytical theory to film studies. Her discussion of the gaze and how it is manifest in "fetishistic scopophilia" and "sadistic voyeurism" provides a position through which to consider Abdul Hadi's own gaze in her portrait series.

War, are ubiquitous. The “Hooded Man on the Box” is one particularly potent image. I need not even show the photograph to conjure the ominous image for my interlocutors. A man in a hooded garb standing on a small wooden crate with arms extended against a cement wall jumps to the forefront of the memory so easily. What is interesting about Soussloff’s reading of these archetypal atrocity images is how they are symptomized through their circulation, emerging “direct from the “theater of war.””⁶¹ Both prisoner (through force) and officer (through perversion) perform for the camera. Soussloff argues: “Photographs of war crimes, lynching, and now, torture are *performative*, in that they call the viewer into action, but they are also traumatic in that the traumas represented in them persist through the affectivity of the medium. With such photographs *performativity* requires trauma for its effectivity.”⁶² Soussloff invokes a psychoanalytical intersection into the scholarship surrounding the Abu Ghraib tortures through Franz Fanon to describe the protracted affect of the trauma photographs. If Soussloff’s theory is stretched further still, it becomes a compelling position through which to view Habjouqa’s and Abdul Hadi’s photographs.

After the iconoclastic images of Abu Ghraib, Arab bodies can no longer be pictured in Western media without the visceral torture of colonial occupation present on them. Although the trauma is less immediate than the torture pictures from Abu Ghraib, the documentary photographs by Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi reveal the slow violence of colonial occupation. Their subjects, through their returning gaze, recreation, poses and portraits perform their resistance to the viewer. Had the detainees in Abu Ghraib had a chance they surely would have too. The *punctum* – Roland Barthes term for the ability of the photograph to shock the viewer through its

⁶¹ Soussloff, “Post-colonial torture,” 164.

⁶² Soussloff, “Post-colonial torture,” 164.

indexical, visual blow – is further intensified after Abu Ghraib, when the power of photography as a revelatory device for social justice and injustice, pornography and torture, and the documentary is unquestionably known, and yet remains equally as ambiguous. The gaze that takes pleasure in the contorted male bodies at Abu Ghraib cannot be the gaze that captures the vulnerable portraits of the men in *Picture an Arab Man*. This gaze, aware of the latter, sadistic one, draws attention to the voyeurism of the gaze in the title of the work. “Picture an Arab Man” suggests that a pre-existing idea on Arab men already exists in the Western imagination (which of course it does). Abdul Hadi’s portraits reveal instead a feminist, decolonial gaze that calls upon the other voyeuristic one and challenges it through intimate portraits of men laid bare in domestic spaces.

3.3 The Question of Feminism

The role of Rawiya as the first all-women’s photographic collective is an interesting one. Of course, they are not the first female photographers to practice in the region. According to Issam Nasser, the earliest traceable professional woman photographer in Palestine was a woman named Karimeh Abbud who began practicing her craft in the 1920s. Karimeh Abbud was mainly a portrait photographer; due to the relegation of women to the home at the time, the practice of studio photography was more suitable to the norm and simplest to conduct.⁶³ Her legacy both as a professional woman photographer, worker and figure of Arab modernity deeply informs the photographic praxis conducted by Rawiya. Unlike the period in which Abbud practiced, now there seems to be a disproportionately large number of female photographers in the Middle East, and especially Palestine. That women in particular occupy this role is of great importance considering the tropes and burdens placed upon Middle Eastern women by the Western

⁶³ Nasser, “Early Local Photography in Palestine: The Legacy of Karimeh Abbud,” 25.

imagination. The question of gender equality, women's rights, and feminism in the Middle East is a difficult topic often bereft of critical engagement. Rather, the conversation is often inundated by Islamist misogynistic rhetoric and further burdened by representations of victimized and veiled women in the West. As visual storytellers, Rawiya photographers interrupt reductive narratives on women and reveal their vital role as the narrators and preservers of history.

The question of Arab feminism has in recent decades drawn the attention of prominent Middle Eastern scholars.⁶⁴ In Lila Abu Lughod's anthology *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (1998) the question of feminism and modernity in the Middle East region is called to question. Abu-Lughod situates her discourse between the tension of modernity, nationalism and postcoloniality, emphasizing the nineteenth century and early twentieth century as a pivotal moment that underscores the emergence of Arab modernity (also known as the Arab Renaissance or *nahdah* which I will discuss in the final chapter). The two competing camps Abu-Lughod outlines – of indigenous/vernacular gender debates and Western influenced feminism – further obfuscates the historical ambiguity surrounding “feminism” in the Middle East.⁶⁵ The book essentially seeks to unbind the binaries and reconsider what women's roles have historically been in the making of modern Arab nations. Taking into account both the influence of internal, national pressures to grow economies and globalize, the outside influence of European modernity, colonialism and postcolonialism, as well as renewed religious fervor, Abu-Lughod considers the unique pressures, expectations and outcomes of women's suffrage in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran. Rather than denouncing European encounters, or nationalist

⁶⁴ Paving the way for recent literature are several illuminating chronicles and anthologies: Deniz Kandiyouti's *Women, Islam and the State* (1991); Leila Ahmed's *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992); Fatimeh Mernissi's *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (1992); and Margot Badran's *Feminists, Islam, and Nation* (1995). All perform exegetical exercises that challenge ahistorical accounts on the religious, social, and economical subordination of Muslim women.

⁶⁵ Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, 15.

rhetoric, Abu-Lughod considers how the two polarizing positions on gender have informed women's movements historically and contemporaneously. The biggest success of the anthology is to question the inviolability of modernity as an inherently progressive movement pushing towards women's emancipation. Rather, Abu-Lughod connects the role of women within the domestic sphere first, and later their emergence in the public sphere to an Arab modernity in tension with gender.

Palestinian feminism is an even more precarious subject. In Frances Hasso's "'The Women's Front': Nationalism, Feminism, and Modernity in Palestine" (1998) the 1970s are posited as a crucial period in history that saw the beginnings of independent women's political and social organizations forming in Palestine. Women's movements for gender equality in Palestine certainly date back further to the period of revolt against the British Mandate between 1920 and 1948, but were largely overshadowed by the embeddedness of women's status in the nation-state struggle over Palestine.⁶⁶ Hasso focuses on the Leftist-nationalist DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine) and its affiliated nationalist-feminist women's organization PFWAC (the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees). Both existed a decade before the uprising or *intifada* that began in 1987 and were severely stunted and later dissolved by it (though they emerged again in the late 80s and 90s).⁶⁷ Membership in Palestinian nationalist parties post-1967 was illegal in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Organizations thus outsourced their organizing bodies by basing their parties in the neighbouring Jordan and Lebanon.⁶⁸ If functioning through displaced geography was not already enough of a setback for the movement towards self-determination, the struggle for PFWAC was already two-

⁶⁶ Fleischmann, *The Nation and its "New Women*, 137.

⁶⁷ Hasso, "The 'Women's Front'," 460.

⁶⁸ Hasso, "The 'Women's Front'," 444.

fold. For women's rights activists involved in nationalist projects, another tension arose from the outside pressures of a globalizing rhetoric on feminism in the Third World. Palestinian women were not only fighting for freedom from the occupier and equality in their homeland, they also had to justify Palestinian progressiveness. The worthiness of their ultimate cause, that is the emancipation of their people from Israeli occupation, was mitigated by the worthiness to be a self-determining body, often judged by their national status as women. Under the scrutiny of white liberal feminism, Palestinian women's right activists were faced with proving their nation's "cultural worth," something that was and continues to be "symbolized by subaltern women's bodies and status," while also trying to ascend their social status at home.⁶⁹ What Hasso's otherwise thorough study does not touch on are the methods used by Palestinian women to further their status: namely their solidarity among one another and their strategic positioning of the nationalist mandate as a maneuvering mechanism for gender equality.

More recently, in Nahla Abdo-Zubi and Ronit Lentin's *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation* (2002) a dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian co-editors Abdo-Zubi and Lentin attempts to bridge the gap between disparate experiences with displacement and the heteropatriarchal violence of the Israeli State. Women's solidarity movements between Israeli and Palestinian women are increasing in number and strength though not without tension; relational issues are bound to arise out of the unequal privileging of one national status over the other's lack. In the candid and often tortured conversations between friends and colleagues Abdo-Zubi and Lentin, nationalism arises as a central point of contention.

Abdo-Zubi declares in one of her letters to Lentin: "It is not surprising, as I have

⁶⁹ Hasso, "The "Women's Front"," 459.

mentioned earlier, that this experience has created favourable conditions for prioritizing nationalism over gender issues, for making me more a 'Palestinian' than a gendered being, a woman. This experience was partly strengthened further and partly shaken during the 1980s, particularly in the late 1980s during the Intifada."⁷⁰ Lentin is hesitant to support this notion, as an Israeli advocate for Palestinian rights she is hyper sensitive to the colonial decimation caused by Zionist nationalism, which emerged largely in response to anti-Semitism in nineteenth century Europe. This is a valid point considering the repercussions of this ethnic nationalism, which ultimately led to and now maintains Israel's occupation of Palestine. Nonetheless, Abdo-Zubi's determination for a feminist nationalism, which takes her away from her gendered position, is perhaps a way of getting away from normative gender ideals and reconsidering "the question of feminism."

As Ariella Azoulay argues in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, the image of the modern woman (which Azoulay aptly identifies as tied to the modern Museum's context) "is a distinctive arena for identifying the traces of the interplay between women's sanctification and their abandonment."⁷¹ The negative space between women's status as religious, national, political icons and bodies vulnerable to biopolitical state violence (what Azoulay contextualizes within the discussion of citizenship and abandonment) holds the potential to reconsider Palestinian women's fight for self-determination. Nationalism, of course, complicates this dynamic. Due to the interstices of gender disparities, late colonial occupation, gendered violence, religious and political oppression amongst others, feminism in Palestine has often been superseded by pursuits for national emancipation. Though women's organizations have been

⁷⁰ Abdo-Zubi, *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation*, 9.

⁷¹ Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 58.

involved in and vital to the movement for Palestinian liberation before, during, and after the establishment of Israel as an occupying power, their prominence as political and activist agents has garnered very little attention. What appears to emerge from Abdo-Zubi and Lentin's conversation however is a refusal to be relegated to the realm of sanctity or abandonment.

In Jaleh Mansoor's article "A Spectral Universality: Mona Hatoum's Biopolitics of Abstraction" (2010) the tensions between universalist notions on modernity and the material specificities of Hatoum's practice provides an opportunity, and it is an enduringly rare one I must add, to consider the Palestinian context in relation to larger discourses on art and gender. Mansoor situates the modernist grid – typically seen as a symbol of modern utopic ideals – instead as a method through which to reconsider contingencies between the universal and the particular. The binary might be compared to Azoulay's positioning of the modern women, trapped between her universal status as an object or image and her embodied and vulnerable existence in the material and politicized world. Both Mansoor and Azoulay cite Agamben's biopower and women's abandonment (Azoulay) or absence (Mansoor) from Enlightenment discourse and Universalist notions on basic human rights. For Mansoor, the visceral and political abstraction of the exile and the refugee is recovered through Hatoum's often abject and embodied intervention into modernist visual tropes such as the grid and the monochrome.⁷² Hatoum's use of the grid creates space to reconsider "aporetic binaries characteristic of the grid" and "make it functional as a structure for articulating, and deferring, many other binaries...and suspends numerous contradictions that are seemingly impossible to resolve in the social political

⁷² See Mona Hatoum's *Keffieh* (1993-1999), the garment and symbol of Palestinian resistance Mansoor anchors her argument to wherein Hatoum uses human hair to weave the symbolic grid pattern of the keffieh scarf.

“real.”⁷³ In other words, faced with the ontological weight of being woman, artist, exile, refugee, and Palestinian, a position identity politics has tried and often failed to substantiate, a leap into spectral universality might allow Palestinian women to occupy and “haunt that exemplary emblem of universality.”⁷⁴ The universalist economy that still informs many liberal feminisms needs decolonizing. Palestinian women’s refusal to engage with those Western and nationalist forms of feminism that have done little to serve them begins with dissolving this binary.

One method for doing so is to continue the transnational conversations between feminist movements and agents. Rawiya, which bridges East and West, allows for conversations to flow dialogically across borders otherwise deemed impermeable by the colonial control of the Israeli State. To navigate the rocky terrain of feminism in the Middle East means to be skeptical of the more insidious vestiges of universalism and nationalism while allowing for reconsiderations of both. The Rawiya Collective functions like a dialogue between the participating members and the larger community of photographers and locals who participate in the social media accounts and visual storytelling workshops Rawiya artists have held individually and collectively in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Tunisia. Through images and workshops, Rawiya works collaboratively to form a supportive and imperative coalition between Palestinian, Arab, diasporic, and Western women placing women’s narratives and perspectives centrally in the picturing of current day Palestine and the Middle East. Documentary photography and feminism must be decolonized to be effective, and to do so requires the emotional and physical labour tackled by the collective, artists and scholars discussed especially in this chapter. Rawiya offers a

⁷³ Mansoor, *A Spectral Universality*, 52.

⁷⁴ Mansoor, *A Spectral Universality*, 53.

platform to reconsider Middle Eastern and non-Western women's roles in the discursive framework of global feminism. Through visual storytelling, collaboration and dialogue – traditionally feminist tactics of knowledge production – there exists the potential to create a connection between the myriad of global feminisms, including national feminism in Palestine.

Chapter 4: History of Documentary Praxis in Theory

The apparatus of discipline and the apparatus of photography resonate malevolently in the historical moment that saw the rise of European imperialism, support for a Zionist State, and colonial photography in Palestine. As such, this chapter gives special attention to the formations of photography that took place in the nineteenth century and onwards as these constructions have come to define the image and imagining of Palestine.

4.1 Social Histories of Early Photography

The introduction of Walter Benjamin's Exposé of 1939 *Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century* begins with a quote from Maxime du Camp: "History is like Janus; it has two faces. Whether it looks at the past or at the present, it sees the same things."⁷⁵ It is not without irony that I cite du Camp here, whose photographs of Palestine have undoubtedly contributed to a collective European mythologizing of Palestine. Nonetheless, the figure of Janus is relevant here: in Roman mythology Janus is known as the animistic deity of doorways, often pictured with two faces looking in opposite directions. The image of Janus who sees past and present dialectically had obvious appeal to Walter Benjamin in his writings on photography and history. For the artists in the Rawiya collective, emulating the figure of Janus has become a necessary part of their practice. It is a practice loaded with the burden of identity politics, of being Middle Eastern and women and exhibiting work outside of the region photographed. Their practice, however, presents a potential departure from the regime of truth and sense traditionally assigned to documentary photography. As demonstrated in the first section, through the peoples and place of Palestine, Rawiya photographers have offered a nuanced and subversive imaging of Palestine that goes beyond the usual limitations of documentary imposed by its suggested incantations on

⁷⁵ Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 15.

truth and the revelatory real. Before delving into the specificities that render this cultural dichotomy apparent, it is necessary to setup the scholarly apparatus and thinkers who have defined the predominant history of photography—Walter Benjamin, Gisele Freund, and later John Tagg and Eduard Cadava – and scholars who have attempted to revivify the alternate but co-constitutive history of photography in the Arab world – via Stephen Sheehi, Malek Alloula and Issam Nasser.

Gisele Freund traces her history of documentary photography in *Photography and Society* (1980) from within a socio-political discourse concerned with photojournalism and press photography in particular. According to Freund: “The task of the first photoreporters was simply to produce isolated images to illustrate a story. (It was only when the image itself became the story that photojournalism was born.”⁷⁶ Freund herself was a photographer and had experience in the realm of photojournalism that she draws on at several pivotal moments. For the purpose of this thesis, I am interested in a particular experience Freund describes in her chapter on “Photography as a Political Tool.” Freund joined Magnum Agency as a photographer in 1947 where she remained until 1954. She describes her aspirations as a photographer to contribute to a growing economy of the image not only as a means for making money, but also as a socially conscious contribution to critical contemporary issues. At the time, the proliferation of photo agencies such as Magnum (founded by Robert Capa and his colleagues in 1947) reflected a growing interest and demand for press photography.⁷⁷ Unfortunately for Freund, her aspirations were quickly deflated by the realization that her work as a photographer and social documentarian were of little concern or issue to the photo agency. Freund saw one of her first

⁷⁶ Freund, *Photography and Society*, 115.

⁷⁷ Freund, *Photography and Society*, 161.

photojournalistic portraits – a picture of a small nervous man at the Paris Stock Exchange – extrapolated beyond her control. Her photograph circulated in several conflicting news stories, manipulated by conflicting captions in Belgium and then Germany that changed to reflect the nation-specific anxieties of economic collapse. To further complicate matters, Freund admits that the photograph she had captured “illustrated perfectly the stockbroker’s despair and the speculator’s panic as stock value dropped.”⁷⁸ In other words, the picture fit the bill in each miscommunication. Co-opted by the caption and the framing of the text, the image was absolved of its original intent and context. From this experience Freund concedes that press photography and television – certainly capable of inciting an awakened public consciousness in America – was just as easily manipulated.⁷⁹

This anecdote comes after Freund introduces the first photograph to adorn a newspaper. It appeared in the final decades of the nineteenth century, on March 4, 1880 in the *New York Daily Herald* with the caption, ‘Shantytown’ (Fig. 12).⁸⁰ After searching for the image, a grainy halftone reproduction depicting a slew of decrepit buildings, I found that the caption also declares that the photograph was taken “direct from nature.” The image is of a style and era largely accredited to Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, pioneering social reform photographers, both of whom photographed the poverty-stricken inner city communities struck by industrialization and urbanization. Hine is to Freund the first person to use photography as a strategic tool for social criticism.⁸¹ This history posits the beginnings of documentary photograph as a revelatory device. But following the debacle surrounding Freund’s own photograph in print media, it is

⁷⁸ Freund, Freund, *Photography and Society*, 162.

⁷⁹ Freund, Freund, *Photography and Society*, 173.

⁸⁰ Freund, *Photography and Society*, 103.

⁸¹ Freund, *Photography and Society*, 108.

understandable why she is quick to dismiss the appraisal of photography as a forensic device for exposing social injustice. She writes: “The lens, the so-called impartial eye, actually permits every possible distortion of reality.”⁸² There is truly nothing “direct” about an image. Within each photograph she argues, there is the charged framing and intent of the photographer, the influences of industry, capital, labour, gender, and the potential charge or lacunas of history. To take a photograph for face value is an imminent failure. Freund calls this misconception of the photograph as a document of truth an “illusory objectivity” and is to my knowledge the first to make this charge overtly against documentary praxis in particular.⁸³ Photography is a composition, or rather a constellation of dialectical images. It is this issue of representation, of historical incoherency that her friend and colleague, and perhaps most famous portrait sitter, Walter Benjamin takes up as well.

Benjamin challenges further the common belief in the unbiased mitigation of reality by the camera. In his essay on the small history of photography Benjamin notes that: “We are compelled to find the inconspicuous place in which, in the essence of that moment which passed long ago, the future nestles still today, so eloquently that we, looking back, are able to discover it. It is indeed a different nature that speaks to the camera than that which speaks to the eye; different above all in the sense that a space saturated by a person who is conscious is superseded by one saturated unconsciously.”⁸⁴ Benjamin’s delineation between the nature that speaks to the eye and to the camera has to do with an ethos of memory. The eye cannot preserve an image while a camera can. But only through the ‘now’ of its recognizability does the image make itself known. The interstice of time that passes over the photograph can be blasted forward to the

⁸² Freund, *Photography and Society*, 5.

⁸³ Freund, *Photography and Society*, 4.

⁸⁴ Benjamin, “Small History,” 66-7.

present because of the indexical view of the camera that rests dormant, encapsulated in the photograph. This is why the erasure of indigenous histories through looting and destruction has been such an effective tool (consider how indigenous nations in Canada have been similarly undermined despite their ties to the land since time immemorial).⁸⁵ The camera however, does not necessarily capture the real. Articulating the misconception of reality as synonymous to photography, Benjamin problematizes the neutrality of the photograph. He does so in his discussion of Eugène Atget, the Parisian father of documentary photography, whose practice Benjamin sees as “directed against the exotic, grand, romantic tone of city names.”⁸⁶ Atget’s photographs, rather than feeding the egos of the up and coming imperial bourgeoisie class, were functioning perspicaciously to “suck the aura out of reality like water from a sinking ship.”⁸⁷

This allegory of the sinking ship –material history versus its obscuration in memory by the aura – works in a two-fold manner for the question of Palestine. With two competing groups who have laid claim to the land, only the Palestinians have actual material claims to a land they have lived on for generations. Zionist propagations of a promised land for displaced Jews works against the actual history. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Mbembé describes colonial occupation as strategically manifesting “a large reservoir of cultural imaginaries...[that give] meaning to the enactment of differential rights to different categories of people for different purposes within the same space; in brief, the exercise of sovereignty.”⁸⁸ This is not to discredit the very real imperial and political drivers that have contributed to and maintained the Israeli

⁸⁵ For a recent and provocative take on the condition of recognition politics in Canadian federal government relations with Indigenous communities via reconciliation in Canada see Glen Coulthard *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014).

⁸⁶ Benjamin, “Small History,” 83.

⁸⁷ Benjamin, “Small History,” 83.

⁸⁸ Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” 26.

State, but rather to consider how two forms of history might exist as antinomies. According to Benjamin: “while the relation of the present to the past is a purely temporal, continuous one, the relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.”⁸⁹ History, which saturates photographs with not only temporal but also ontological weight, works dialectically against the present. History and therefore photography have the potential to be revived and re-imposed onto the present. For Palestine, this hope is of utmost importance, and is embodied in the practice of Rawiya artists who have taken on the challenge of documenting the native Palestinians in a history they have been isolated from via colonial hegemonic narratives perpetuated by Israel. Before there was Israel, there was photography, and in these photographs there is the potential to relocate historic Palestine and repossess Palestinians isolated from their own histories.

4.2 Documentary Photography and Proximity to the Real

John Tagg’s intervention into the disciplinary regime of documentary photography also focuses on the late nineteenth century. Rather than regurgitating a chronology of facts and findings on the photographic medium, Tagg positions the history of photography from within an analysis of power. In doing so, Tagg exposes the convergences between apparatuses of discipline and the apparatus of photography. According to Tagg, photography is “historically implicated in the technology of power-knowledge, of which the procedures of evidence are part, must themselves be the object of study.”⁹⁰ For Tagg, photography is inextricably bound to knowledge-power productions. Soon after its mainstream invention, photography as a medium became ubiquitous and therefore impartial to its perhaps countless subjects, content, and uses. It was

⁸⁹ Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 462.

⁹⁰ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 65.

henceforth easily appropriated by the State from which it has since to be emancipated. Tagg writes that: “The camera is never merely an instrument. Its technical limitations and the resultant distortions register as meaning; its representations are highly coded; and it wields a power that is never its own. It arrives on the scene vested with a particular authority; authority to arrest, picture and transform daily life. This is not the authority of the camera but of the apparatus of the local state which deploys it and guarantees the authority of its images to stand as evidence or register a truth.”⁹¹ Through an analysis of reductive forms of physiognomy deployed through the photographic medium, Tagg problematizes the ironic use of the camera in its current moment, as an expository device meant to reveal social and political injustice. Tagg proclaims: “The documentary mode held in such esteem by certain sections of the left – call it ‘real reportage’ or what you will – cannot achieve this because it is already implicated in the historically developed techniques of observation-domination and because it remains imprisoned within an historical form of the regime of truth and sense. Both these bind it fundamentally to the very order which it seeks to subvert.”⁹²

The observation-domination to which Tagg refers is exemplified in his discussion of Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond, founding member of the Royal Photographic Society and resident superintendent of the Female Department of the Surrey County Lunatic Asylum.⁹³ Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond’s 1856 paper ‘On the Application of Photography to the Physiognomic and Mental Phenomena of Insanity’ is illustrated with psychiatric portraits of patients. Seated in a studio chair against a curtained backdrop, the women appear in varying states of mental distress, sometimes looking pleased and posing for the camera, other times appearing absolutely

⁹¹ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 130.

⁹² Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 102.

⁹³ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 77-78.

distraught. Diamond posited that photographing asylum patients could be useful on several accounts: in the documentation of the appearance of insane patients in order to use them for comparison and diagnosis for future patients; in the identification of patients submitted for readmission; and for the remedial quality of the photographs that he considered capable of showing the patients a realistic view of themselves rather than the distorted one in their minds.¹ These portraits are situated in a much larger discourse of anthropological study further addressed in Alan Sekula's essay "The Body and the Archive" (1986).

Both Tagg and Sekula consider the uses of photography to contain and archive physiognomic types, thereby rendering the body legible to legal and punitive scrutiny. For Sekula these disciplinary photographs would fall under the category of repressive portraiture, rather than honorific, which attempts to portray the dignity of the sitter. Images of Dr. Diamond's patients are repressive. They are captioned with anonymous titles indicating the institution to which the "inmates" belonged, rather than their given names, further propagating the scientific value of the camera to observe and record objectively, inaugurating the camera into the institutional order as a tool for categorization and control.⁹⁴ In the documentary context, what was once utilized by the punitive institutions Tagg and Sekula describe have been replaced by the visual categorizations and objectifications substantiated by the media. Here, circulating in the mass media the othered bodies in the material archive that was based on categorizations of race, nationality, sexuality, pathology, and social class have been digitized into the updated archive of broadcast television and the Internet: all this while continuing to be neatly folded into their derivative classifications. This instance, and the subsequent documentation of prisoners, criminals, racialized bodies and other "degenerates" reveal the dangerous potential of the

⁹⁴ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 78.

documentary and archival image to reduce vulnerable subjects to documented typecasts dissected under the gaze of institutional archives, and now I would add, the media.⁹⁵

While the scrutiny of Tagg's analysis in *The Burden of Representation* is not to be questioned – it is indeed relentless – Tagg's position on documentary photography as an apparatus for State power has often been over exaggerated. Those social art historians and photo theorists who have interpreted Tagg's vantage purely as a repudiation of all photography⁹⁶ fail to observe what he means by the *burden* of representation. It is representation's burden, which photography certainly can and has contributed to that Tagg renounces. In this earlier work Tagg identifies the ways in which the camera was indoctrinated into new modes of governmentality and control in the nineteenth century. He maintains: "As a strategy of control, its [documentary photography's] success has been greatly exaggerated; but as a strategy of representation, its claims and their consequences seem to have gone largely unchallenged."⁹⁷ Tagg later revisits the potential political function of images to incite action in the viewer. This more recent reflection on the documentary mode, in *The Disciplinary Frame: Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (2009) points to the contingencies of photographic images to sometimes operate against the "apparatus of discipline."⁹⁸ In this study, Tagg discusses how the violence of representation through the capture of meaning has historically problematized documentary praxis. Tagg argues: "Documentary realism is thus more than a system of coding. It is a concerted attempt to forestall a crisis in the field of meaning and the field of the subject. It works explicitly as a rhetoric of recruitment whose mobilization seeks to incorporate its targeted audience in an identification

⁹⁵ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 81.

⁹⁶ See Christopher Carter's *Rhetorical Exposures* (2015) and Susie Linfield's *The Cruel Radiance* (2010) for example.

⁹⁷ Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 11.

⁹⁸ Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame*, 54-5.

with the imaginary coherence of its system – an identification that enacts and secures a particular regime of truth, of subjectivity, and of sense, closing down the openness and disputability of reality that is so dangerously prone to erupt at times of crisis. But in documentary, the refinement of this strategy of appeal is also, as we have seen, tied in some way to the disciplinary reconstitution of the social field and the history of a strategy of governance – a history bound up, in turn, with the configuration of the modern, interventionist State.”⁹⁹ Tagg is describing here the concretization of crisis through documentary realism. Since documentary practices are bound in the origin of the modern capitalist State of surveillance, photography as a revelatory device seems at first counterintuitive. In other words, documentary photography has historically worked to immobilize and striate social relations. This does not mean that documentary practice is predestined to operate only within the parameters of State imposed disciplinary control. What Tagg maintains is that representation is always historically and politically situated. With this in mind, Rawiya’s photographs appear diametrically opposed to the trajectory Tagg outlines if only because they are deeply invested in undermining it. Through a denunciation of the “real” perpetuated by parachute photojournalists dropping into Palestine to document each erupting crisis, Rawiya instead pursues the negation of the falsified Israeli “real” in favour of an alternative narrative from the native Palestinian perspective.

⁹⁹ Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame*, 57.

Chapter 5: Picturing Palestine in the Nineteenth Century

Of importance to the contemporary project of photography in Palestine is a lesser-known history of photography in the region that emerged in the nineteenth century and reveals both colonial and local investments in the land and its people. This research is an attempt to interrogate the historical and socio-political specificities of a Palestinian perspective, which I argue is central to an understanding of the implications of the documentary mode overall, both in its inception into realism in the nineteenth century and its international hegemony now, in the information age. This thesis necessarily considers not only with the arduous work of women photographers battling settler colonial surveillance and censorship by the Israeli state in Palestine today, but the socio-political implications of the documentary mode and its history. According to Siegfried Kracauer, "historicism is concerned with the photography of time."¹⁰⁰ The photograph acts as both artifact and archive of history. In Eduardo Cadava's words, "That photographic technology belongs to the physiognomy of historical thought means that there can be no thinking of history that is not at the same time a thinking of photography."¹⁰¹ Historiography and photography are thus inextricable. This realization has inevitably led to a historiographical investigation of early documentary photography in Palestine and the Arab world that evolves in tandem with European practices. My interest in this line of inquiry is to consider the complimentary and contradictory elements of photographic interest that preoccupied European colonial photographers and Ottoman photographers. Both were carried out in close proximity yet are typically read in isolation. This lacuna necessitates a reading and synthesis of these coinciding histories as they deeply inform the photographing of the present.

¹⁰⁰ Kracauer, "Photography", 50.

¹⁰¹ Cadava, *Words of Light*, XV1U.

During the same moment that Freund and Tagg situate as crucial for understanding the documentary mode, Europe was embarking upon a period of colossal colonial expansionism.¹⁰² In a rigorous intervention into the history of Palestine and photography, Palestinian photo-historian Issam Nassar ventures into the practices of the early European photographers sent to the Arab World in the mid to late nineteenth century. Certainly the year 1839 stands out in the history of photography. It is the year that Daguerre announced the successes of his fixed photographic method via iodized silver plates exposed to light; this monumental breakthrough is cited in every historical text on photography without fail. What interests Nassar however, is that in December of this same year, the first European photographers, Horace Vernet and Frederic Goupil-Fesquet arrived in Palestine.¹⁰³ From this point onwards, throngs of commissioned European photographers were sent to capture the biblical and mythical Jerusalem described so appositely in religious and historical literature. The images of significant religious sights including the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the road to Jerusalem, Damascus Gate, and the Wailing Wall were particularly popular sights to photograph.¹⁰⁴ These locations were so sought after by the commissioned French and English photographers that when viewed together they form a simulacrum of these holy sites. The visualization of the road to Jerusalem is particularly interesting in its uncanny reproductions in the oeuvre of European photographers. The scene appears almost identically in the work of Bonfils, the American Colony and an anonymous photographer contemporary to the two former. They reveal a strange reality of representation in Jerusalem at the time: all the commissioned images of Jerusalem that have accumulated in the galleries and collections of the government agencies, scientific or archaeological organizations,

¹⁰² Nassar, *Photographing Jerusalem*, 25.

¹⁰³ Nassar, "Familial Snapshots," 141.

¹⁰⁴ Nassar, *Photographing Jerusalem*, 36.

and religious missionaries who dispatched these photographers, almost none of the photographs pictured the local Arab population.

Particularly before 1867, in the work of Maxime Du Camp, Auguste Salzmann, Robertson and Beaton, and Francis Firth to name a few, the ancient city of Jerusalem is depicted as an immaculate vision bereft of any indigenous Arab population that might sully the illusion – unless through a visual slippage that would have them reinforce biblical iconographical tropes via the solemn shepherd or pious pilgrims whose brownness is not visible from a distance.¹⁰⁵ Those who were sent to Jerusalem to photograph it already had an image of what the land should look like that would have been tainted with the inclusion of the Arabs that actually lived there.¹⁰⁶ This is a history Edward Said locates first in Orientalist painting of Palestine and the ‘Orient’ by seventeenth century European artists. This imagining of Palestine makes a pernicious reappearance half a century later as an important maneuvering slogan propagated by Zionist ideologies that were able to quite easily justify the taking of that “vacant” land.¹⁰⁷ The framing of a photograph is inherently important, as is its status as a device for truth: thus the success of the Zionist aphorism "A land without a people for a people without a land."¹⁰⁸

Orientalist titillation was not the only source of inspiration for early photography taking place in the Arab world. Although Middle Eastern photography is often considered as derivative of European practices and influence, Stephen Sheehi argues that the dichotomized histories,

¹⁰⁵ Nassar, *Photographing Jerusalem*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ In the latter part of the 19th century, however, Jerusalem’s booming photography and studio industry saw the emergence of anthropological and staged studio portraiture that would frame Palestinian men and women in phantasmagorical renditions of traditional garb often untrue to the culture. These figures were confined to studios only, and thus the mythical image of Palestine as a land without a people remained untarnished.

¹⁰⁷ Nassar, *Photographing Jerusalem*, 37.

¹⁰⁸ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 9.

though disparate, are actually rather enmeshed.¹⁰⁹ In a recent account, Sheehi reclaims this history from the hegemony of European art history in his book *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography 1860-1910* (2016). Here, Sheehi explores the historical specificity of *al-nahdah al-'arabiyah*: the Arab renaissance that took place in the nineteenth and early twentieth century across Egypt and the Ottoman Arab speaking world. He argues that the predominance of the Ottoman Empire has not often been seen as a major influence in the region. Especially in Palestine, the British and French Mandates in the region that followed the dissolving of the Ottoman Empire in 1922 have often overshadowed the significance of Ottoman influence. It is worthwhile to mention that it was not until after the Second World War that the Middle East was allocated into the nations that can be named today, with borders stringently imposed. Accordingly, Sheehi focuses on the more prevalent impact of the Tanzimat, an internal political and economical reform designed to modernize Egypt, and Syro-Lebanon.

In concurrence with social photography and portraiture this political reformation initiated the autogenic modernization of the Ottoman Empire. In particular, Sheehi isolates the practice of Ottoman Arab, Turkish, and Armenian portraiture, which he understands as “a photographic “screen image” of a variety of social and ideological forces...[that]... expressed the new “Arab imago” – the ego ideals and ideal ego of the new, reformed subject.”¹¹⁰ The Arab imago refers to the striation and circulation of modernized *osmanlilik* (Ottoman) ideology and class categorization through portraiture. Contrary to the emerging modernist State corrugation of class, gender, and racial types discussed earlier in a Western context through Tagg, “Photography arrived in the Wiberian wake of the Ottoman modernizing project that was enmeshed in a

¹⁰⁹ Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 5.

¹¹⁰ Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 28.

struggle between the rationalizing impulse to disenchant governance, society, and economy and the desire to maintain cultural authenticity.”¹¹¹ The *Indigenista nahdah* portrait photography utilized a “repetitious formalism” that Sheehi considers to establish a “relationship between repetition and *identification*. Photography in the Ottoman world was couched in the overarching discourses of “civilization and progress,” in *Osmanlilik* and, in the Arab world, *nahdah* ideology.”¹¹² *Nahdah* or Arab modernism not only inscribed the photographs with the charge of European and colonial encounter, but with an insular desire to create a new progressive state full of “new” men and women. The transformative potential of portraiture thus reveals itself in this history, later picked up by the alternative documentary praxis of Abdul Hadi and other Rawiya photographers.

Indeed, there was an imminent practice of indigenous photography taking place in the Ottoman Arab world at the same time colonial postcards were gaining popularity in the region. The ubiquity of Arab portraiture has not garnered much scholarly attention despite the copious archival material available. Sheehi interrogates the practice of cartes de visite taken by, of, and for Arabs in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. His account narrows in on the practice of portraiture in particular and thus provides a critical historical framework through which to consider Abdul Hadi’s documentary portraiture in context. For Sheehi: “The paradoxical “nature of [*nahdah*] photography is this: The authority of personal experience rests at the interstice between the ontology of an individualized self and the epistemology of positivism; it rests at the base of a scopic regime that is a photographic vision and expressed in the *verum factum* of the

¹¹¹ Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 4.

¹¹² Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 19.

carte de visite.”¹¹³ *Al-nahdah* represents the radical stratification of Ottoman social and political hierarchies under the guise of progressive *Osmanlilik* politics that affected the middle class, or *effendiyah*, most especially. Faced with an accelerating capitalist modernity in Europe, the Arab economy had to respond to compete, resulting in multivalent transformations at the level of the economy but also, always, class, race, politics, and gender. It is no coincidence that the camera appears at this very moment, its history in the region inextricable from the ideological transformations of *nahdah* dogma.¹¹⁴ The ubiquity and repetitious form of portrait photography across lines of class is particularly important as it distinguishes the “nature” of Ottoman photography, capturing the Arab imago at the time and the validation of the *effendiyah*. The portrait, constructed by photographer, sitter, and viewer in tandem, had the capacity to dissociate the sitters rural or peasant origins. Through the staging, framing, and distribution of the image, the status of the photographic portrait in the Ottoman Empire would come to ascribe and declare an emergent identity for the new middle class. Sheehi admits not accommodating a gendered intersection into this history. Although it is not my current prerogative to address this particularly gendered lacuna in all of its historical and ontologically complexity, it speaks to the documentary photography and work done by *Rawiya*. The Ottoman *nahdah* portrait still informs the practice of portraiture in the Middle East.

In the final chapter of Sheehi’s foray into the methodological and theoretical contentions of portrait photographer in the Ottoman Arab world, he shows a portrait by established photographer Daoud Sabungi of Suleiman Girby, an Arab boatman posed in Jaffa in the nineteenth century (Fig. 13). The photograph is dated to circa 1900 and portrays an

¹¹³ Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 145.

¹¹⁴ Sheehi, *The Arab Imago*, 145.

uncomfortable looking, but burgeoning young man with medals of honour pinned to this chest. An inscription on the reverse of the photograph and other archival information reveals that Girby was a skilled oarsman who worked for Thomas Cook and Son, a tourist company that contributed enormously to the commercialization of Palestine as a tourist site of the Holy Land in the 1880s.¹¹⁵ We learn that Girby had been a well respected guide, steering European tourists safely to Jaffa over rough and dangerous waters, and that after earning the favour of a particularly affluent patron was gifted with a gold watch, only to then have the governor of Jaffa demand the accolade be handed over, and Girby sent to prison. Soon after Girby's release, in 1905 he succumbed to the cholera epidemic in Palestine.¹¹⁶ The inscription that narrates this story in English, and the stiff posture of the subject photographed, reveals a saturated constellation of information on the economy, labour, tourism, class hierarchy, gendered expectations, and cross-cultural exchange of the time. It is an anomaly in the portraiture that emerged in tandem with the teleological formation of Tanzimat reformation under Abdülmecid I and Abdülaziz. I include this photograph to draw a line of flight between the intentions of Ottoman portraiture to portray "new men and women" of the era, and the futility of attempting to control the discursive meaning of such representations. This discomfort of the subject, his timidity before the lens is decipherable still in Abdul Hadi's portraiture discussed earlier in the second chapter. Still, Arab and Middle Eastern photographers must grapple with the fragments of the Arab Imago while simultaneously addressing the recondite vulnerability of colonized and subjugated Palestinians.

¹¹⁵ Sheehi, *Arab Imago*, 193.

¹¹⁶ Sheehi, *Arab Imago*, 193.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

“You went far away and were bewildered by the torn thread between reality and imagination, between war narrated and war witnessed.”¹¹⁷

This apocryphal phrase haunts the pages of the self-elegiac collection of writing Palestinian poet laureate Mahmoud Darwish published towards the end of his career in 2006. Titled *In the Presence of Absence*, the work defies scholarly categorization, resonating formally and linguistically between poetry and prose, life and death, and the personal and objective. Composed at the culmination of his career, Darwish’s book eloquently narrates the poet’s farewell bid. It is an ode to exile, resistance, love, and the homeland; it is a melodic dialogue turned inside out, defined by a lifelong career working in and on the deplorable condition of the Palestinian struggle for self determination. A melancholic rhythm fluctuates in the rifts between the poet’s internal ponderings where past and present self are situated in tension through their conflicting memories and desires, portrayed in a writing style epitomized by the Palestinian experience that since 1948 has been characterized by settler colonial occupation¹¹⁸, exile, and marginalization.

Darwish’s *In the Presence of Absence* addresses the Palestinian experience through a dialectical rendering of past and present self, allowing for a non-linear understanding of the

¹¹⁷ Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 30.

¹¹⁸ Pappé, *The Biggest Prison on Earth*, 3-4. In my use of the terms “settler colonial” violence and the “occupation” of Palestine I refer to the language used by activists, native Palestinians, and scholars dedicated to the liberation of Palestine. I do so with Patrick Wolfe in mind and Ilan Pappé’s rightful hesitations around this language. As Palestine is not free, the full effects of the settler colonial logic – indubitably at work – is not yet known. What we do know is that “settler colonialism is a structure not an event. A structure of displacement and replacement, or, to paraphrase Edward Said’s words, substituting presence with absence” (p. 3). Occupation is another politically charged term that usually refers to a temporary period of occupation. So far, the protracted and imperial intentions of Israel to maintain military control over the “mega-prison” (p.4) of Palestine since 1967 shows no intention to end. This has been an extended occupation with the clear purpose to maintain its permanent installation.

tragedy of the *Nakba* that coagulates the narrative form. Only through the arduous work of activist resistance and creative intervention can the Palestinian condition be rendered visible. The *Rawiya* collective was established a year after Darwish's passing. Nonetheless, the photographers in the collective heed to Darwish's caveat: "So memorize this night of hurt by heart. You may well be the narrator, the narrative, and the narrated."¹¹⁹

The geopolitical and historiographical issues of Palestine offer an inherently dialectic opportunity to consider the stakes of documentary photography as a contemporary tool for understanding the contemporary crisis situation in Israel-Palestine. Torn between on the one hand its colonial and indigenous past, and on the other, the settler colonial Israeli occupation of the present, issues pertaining to the problematics of photography emerge as significant. These are: the visibility of contemporary identities in a precarious political region; the legibility of images in a time of the manipulation and massive dispersion of the photo-based image; the ties between the historical and contemporary documentary images of Palestine and the Palestinians. The *Rawiya* artists I have discussed, Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi, stand apart from the other's in the collective in their shared interest in Palestine. The strength of their series' reflects the complexity of this investment in returning to Palestine to take its pictures. Their work addresses one of the most critical issues in photo studies today: the ethics of photographing peoples and places facing atrocity. Alternatives to the picturing of violence emerge as important interventions by these artists. Tanya Habjouqa engages a performative mode of documentary intervention, suggesting a certain perceptiveness to the value of recovering a disenfranchised, indigenous history. It is an interest that both photographer and subjects share. The resulting images leave the viewer slightly perplexed and wanting to know more. Tamara Abdul Hadi's intimate yet

¹¹⁹ Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 38.

pugnacious portraiture speaks to the practice of Ottoman modernization via photography and the multivalent ways the photograph can and cannot be used as a liberating device from such historical hegemonies. Abdul Hadi's interest in depicting Arab male subjects reveals a complex negotiation of gender vis à vis colonial occupation, mass mediated representations, and the transformative roles both men and women in Palestine in particular are beginning to embrace.

Through a gendered and historically cognizant analysis of the work of Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi I have tried to present the formative work of the Middle East's first all women's photographic collective. Palestine as a legitimate nation of disenfranchised peoples is in dire need of alternative perspectives to picture what is often left out of the frame in Zionist parable on the fictional non-existence of Palestine. Documentary photography has on many occasions failed to do this, although as I have tried to describe through Tagg, this failure is in principle not practice. In attempts to move away from the polemics of documentary and its representational valour, Habjouqa and Abdul Hadi have instead worked through long durée projects that explore the unseen quotidian of the land and its peoples. By reinscribing the field of photojournalism and documentary photography with women's views and thus alternate modes of documentarian approach, the artists that comprise *Rawiya* are contributing greatly to a re-imagining of Palestine. It is a perspective that banks on the narrative potential of photography rather than its erroneous hold on the "real." Isolated behind the cement walls of colonial occupation and suffocated by Zionist ideology and imaginative histories, the Palestinians have no real voice in the international community. Through the lens of the women artists of the collective, the juxtaposition of a Palestinian collective memory, and the subsequent creation of a collective Israeli and international amnesia barricaded becomes visible.

Due to its geopolitical isolation and its constant tension with the occupying force of

Israel, Palestine has become an internationally recognized conundrum. Each igniting clash draws international media attention. And yet, the attention garnered has proven that representation is not enough, especially when those representations only further obscure the reality of the events unfolding. In 2000, during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, news coverage of the conflict showed “Palestinian rock-throwers, fuel bombs, and militiamen...in full view on American TV screens night after night, [while] the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land – continuous since 1967, condemned repeatedly by the United Nations, and rejected as contrary to international law by most of the world is almost ethereal in its absence. It hovers over each report, and yet never fully appears.”¹²⁰ The Great Return Marches in Gaza of 2018 have garnered similar attention. What is different this time is the explicit targeting of news reporters and photojournalists by Israeli snipers. Since March of this year there have been an estimated 66 injuries and 2 fatalities suffered by photographers and journalists documenting attempts at peaceful protest on the Palestinian side of the barrier.¹²¹ Israel is never held accountable for these casualties. Instead, “a “shop-worn euphemism “caught in the crossfire” [is] often used to describe high profile civilian killings by Israeli soldiers.”¹²² Upon documenting peaceful protests in Bet Eel, Habjouqa was herself hit with a rubber bullet that severely bruised her leg, an incident she shared via her Instagram account.¹²³ Nonetheless, international leaders have all but turned a blind eye. Light

¹²⁰ Ackerman, “Al-Aqsa Intifada,” 62.

¹²¹ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/israeli-snipers-targeting-journalists-gaza/24081>

¹²² Ackerman, “Al-Aqsa Intifada,” 65.

¹²³ Palestinian artist Rehab Nazzal was shot in the leg by an Israeli sniper while photographing protests in Palestine in 2015 (protests occur almost daily in certain cities like Bethlehem though only the largest garner international attention). The account given by Peter Simpson in the Ottawa Citizen is pitiful at best, and demonstrates the overt denial of Israeli crimes by Western media and political apologists. Simpson states: “A spokesman for the Israeli embassy in Ottawa said Wednesday there is no report of any such incident, though Eitan Weiss added, “it’s very difficult to ascertain what happens during a riot, because you have to imagine hundreds of people throwing rocks, Molotov cocktails, using live firearms,” and, as for one person sustaining a non-lethal injury, “it’s very difficult to prove that it ever happened,

reprimands comparable to a slap on the wrist have already all but faded as Israel once again is pardoned through a manipulation of events on the ground. Condemnation called against the excessive force used by the Israeli military against unarmed Palestinian protesters atrophy and reappear as a justifiable response to so-called insurgency.¹²⁴

The question I've had to ask myself then is whether the camera and the photograph have the potential to serve the native peoples of Palestine when cameras and photographs are all too often, both currently and historically, used against their causes. My hopeful answer is yes, as I explore an alternative documentary mode practiced by the *Rawiya* collective.

For the *Rawiya* photographers, the saturated history of Palestine offers an opportunity for nuanced documentarian projects. The volatility of the settler colonial state of Israel and its militarized control over Palestine has been central to the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict since 1948, and the discovery of photography. I concur with Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi that "The crux and kernel of the Arab-Israeli...interstate conflict is derivative from the non-resolution of the Palestine problem."¹²⁵ This continues to be the case and also reflects the converging interests of the *Rawiya* photographers who return to photograph Palestine and its people year after year. While the collective does not engage directly with the history of Palestine through conventional historical praxis, their use of narrative documentary forms revivify the existence of the Palestinian people and their ties to the land. Narrative as a historical device is of course not without controversy. Helpful here is Hayden White's "Interpretation in History" (1973) wherein

and it's very difficult to prove that it didn't happen." Simpson, "Artist who caused protests in Ottawa shot in Bethlehem." 2015. <http://ottawacitizen.com/entertainment/local-arts/artist-who-caused-protests-in-ottawa-shot-in-bethlehem>

¹²⁴ The US vetoed a UN Security Council resolution calling for the protection of Palestinians, especially those inhabiting the blockaded coastal enclave of Gaza from excessive military force. See <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/06/1012162>.

¹²⁵ Khalidi, *Palestine Reborn*, 1.

White outlines an epistemological intercession into the speculative meta-histories of nineteenth century historiography as defined by Hegel, Droysen, Nietzsche and Croce. In White's essay, interpretation is deemed central to both writing and deciphering history. According to White: "A historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events, a congeries of established and inferred facts, at once a representation that is an interpretation and an interpretation that passes for an explanation of the whole process mirrored in the narrative."¹²⁶ Although White is not recalling photography in particular, the idea that history can be mirrored in the narrative poses an interesting departure for our understanding of documentary photography in Palestine. While it has not been my intention to provide a revisionist history of Palestine through the documentary photographs I have discussed, I am immensely interested in the potential they hold for reinterpretation. The photographs and series taken in Palestine by Rawiya artists Tanya Habjouqa and Tamara Abdul Hadi provide some of the strongest work done by the collective. A shared interest in Palestine, which appears across the collective more than any other national or geographical region, reflects the position of Palestine as the "crux and kernel" of the Middle East. On a global scale, it is not too far fetched to think of Palestine as a sort of allegorical microcosm for the larger ongoing crises of increasingly racial violence, forced migration, and capitalist reification. Indeed this positioning could explain the influx of recent scholarship exploring the violent symptoms of globalization through the prism of Palestine.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ White, "Interpretation in History," 281.

¹²⁷ A few examples of recent scholarship include: T.J. Demos's *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary During Global Crisis* (2013); Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008); Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (2006); Judith Butler's *Vulnerability in Resistance* (2016), Angela Davis's *Freedom is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (2016).

According to Martha Rosler: “It is easy to understand why what has ceased to be news becomes testimonial to the bearer of the news. Documentary testifies, finally, to the bravery or (dare we name it?) the manipulativeness and savvy of the photographer, who entered a situation of physical danger, social restrictedness, human decay, or combinations of these and saved us the trouble. Or who, like the astronauts, entertained us by showing us the places we never hope to go. War photography, slum photography, “subculture” or cult photography, photography of the foreign poor, photography of “deviance,” photography from the past.”¹²⁸ Even those who take pictures as social photographers: “W. Eugene Smith, David Douglas Duncan, Larry Burrows, Diane Arbus, Larry Clark, Danny Lyon, Bruce Davidson, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Walker Evans, Robert Capa, Don McCullon” to name a few of the most luminous and well-known documentarian “stars”¹²⁹ often instead find their images participating in an exploitative and voyeuristic media ring. The framing of Palestine in Western media reduces a complex and historically situated conflict into stereotypical images or caricatures that are either totally encumbered by the trope of the oppressed Muslim woman or the equally problematic trope of the aggressive Arab radical. When historicized and situated as I have tried to do, there is a potential to redeem the Palestinian narrative burdened by documentary photography through performativity. Through a double entendre of the documentary mode and a refusal to participate in the profitable market of atrocity images in Palestine, Rawiya is able to subvert the tropes of this modality of documentary practice while simultaneously negating the exotification of Arab bodies by colonial domination.

The status of documentary photography in Palestine reveals its highest stakes with the

¹²⁸ Rosler, *decoys and disruptions*, 180.

¹²⁹ Rosler, *decoys and disruptions*, 180.

recent arrest and incarceration of Ahed Tamimi, a 17-year-old Palestinian activist from the small village of Nabi Saleh who was arrested for slapping an Israeli soldier who had attempted to invade her home. She is the image of vulnerable resistance and emerges from a culture of resistance. Her mother, Nariman Tamimi was also incarcerated, for the inauspicious crime of photographing and recording the incident. In the absence of basic human rights, there is the presence of the photograph to mitigate or at least expose the injustices committed. Its ability to cut through the invisibility of absence proves its political, cultural, and visual significance on the ground and in the images captured by the *Rawiya* collective. Their photographs remind us “Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent.”¹³⁰ The question of Palestine has always been a question of recovering absence. Whether it is the loss of sovereignty after the 1948 Nakba and the dispossession of land that followed, the set back of the 1967 Naksa, or the loss of citizenship and basic human rights, since and before the invention of photography, there has always been absence. But in the absence of presence, the camera – at the hands of *Rawiya* – and the photograph in circulation, are perhaps the best amelioration of an inescapable absence inherent to Palestinians under colonial occupation still. Cadava states: “That there can be neither truth nor photography without ashes...like allegory, both take place only in a state of decay, in a state that moves away from itself in order to be what it is. Like the photograph that tells us what is no longer before us, truth can only be read, if it can be read at all, in the traces of what is no longer present.”¹³¹ Photographing absence has the transformative potential of photographing what has remained largely invisible outside of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. What can images that move do for people who cannot? Returning to

¹³⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 10.

¹³¹ Cadava, *Words of Light*, 22.

Darwish's torn thread between reality and imagination that opened this chapter, I would suggest that these images could potentially mend the broken threads between truth and visibility and unravel others.

Figures

Fig. 1 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tanya Habjouqa, *Occupied Pleasures* series, 2012-2013. In it, a family of six enjoys a picnic at a road stop near the beach in Gaza. <https://habjouqa.photoshelter.com/gallery/Occupied-Pleasures/G0000baUmyAvOgBM/>.

Fig. 2 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tanya Habjouqa, *Occupied Pleasures* series, 2012-2013. In it, four young members of the Gaza Parkour And Free Running Team practice in a cemetery on the outskirts of Khan Younis refugee camp where they live. <https://habjouqa.photoshelter.com/gallery/Occupied-Pleasures/G0000baUmyAvOgBM/>.

Fig. 3 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tamara Abdul Hadi, *Flying Boys* series, 2015. In it, a young boy leans over an edge preparing to leap into the waters below. <http://cargocollective.com/tamarabdul/FLYING-BOYS>.

Fig. 4 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tamara Abdul Hadi, *Flying Boys* series, 2015. In it, a young man is pictured from below as he jumps into the water on the shores of what appears to be Beirut. <http://cargocollective.com/tamarabdul/FLYING-BOYS>.

Fig. 5 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tamara Abdul Hadi, *Self Portraits from Inside Palestine* series, 2012. In this image a child living in a Palestinian refugee camp takes her own portrait using a shutter-release cord setup by Abdul Hadi.

<http://cargocollective.com/tamarabdul/SELF-PORTRAITS-FROM-INSIDE-PALESTINE>.

Fig. 6 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tanya Habjouqa, *Women of Gaza* series, 2009. In it, three women wearing jilbab exercise in an indoor gymnasium in Gaza.

<http://noorimages.com/feature/women-of-gaza/>.

Fig. 7 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Alexander Dumas, *A Bedouin from Beirut*, 1869, Mohammed B. Alwan Collection. In it, a young woman poses for a portrait with her arms poised over her head and breasts exposed.

Fig. 8 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Felix Bonfils, *A Bedouin from Jericho in Jerusalem*, Mohammed B. Alwan Collection. In it, a young woman poses for a portrait with her arms poised over her head and breasts exposed.

Fig. 9 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. *Scenes and Types*, Moorish woman, c. 1907, Mohammed B. Alwan Collection. A young Moorish woman poses for a portrait.

Fig. 10 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tamara Abdul Hadi, *Picture an Arab Man* series, 2009-2014. In it, a young man with curly hair looks into the camera, posing for an intimate portrait. <http://tamarabdulhadi.com/>.

Fig. 11 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Tamara Abdul Hadi, *Picture an Arab Man* series, 2009-2014. A middle-age man poses for an intimate portrait. He looks tired but stoic. <http://tamarabdulhadi.com/>.

Fig. 12 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. 'Shantytown,' March 4, 1880 in the *New York Daily Herald*. It shows a slew of decrepit buildings located in the poverty-stricken inner city.

Fig. 13 This image has been removed due to copyright restrictions. Daoud Sabungi, Portrait of Suleiman Girby, Jaffa, C. nineteenth century. It is a portrait of Suleiman Girby in his sailor's

uniform, posing awkwardly for his portrait. Sheehi, Stephen. *The Arab Imago: A Social History of Portrait Photography, 1860–1910*: pp. 194.

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