Oppositional Lives: Sustaining, skirting, and subverting systems of oppression in Palestine

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A dissertation

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of:

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2020

Reading Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Political Science

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Abstract

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How do daily frustrations, indulgences, and seemingly innocuous actions relate to, bolster, or undermine broader systems of power? How do people come to understand their place within and their ability to resist these systems? This dissertation takes a critical and nuanced look at the lives of a single, relatively privileged community in the Palestinian West Bank as a way to investigate these dynamics. The main argument of this dissertation is that it is *precisely* in the everyday moments among everyday people that systems of oppression are perpetuated. Through a close examination of everyday lives, I argue that Palestinians make routine, unremarkable choices every day that "buy into" and bolster Israeli authority (thus sustaining the Occupation). While this insidious reality may allow certain configurations of dominance to persist globally – despite massive disapproval – we must also recognize the everyday lives of people as important sites of agency and growth in an

otherwise stifling system. Oppression, certainly, but also possibilities for flourishing and resistance inherently develop *within* these systems of power.

While perhaps not as eye-catching as all-out political upheaval, exploring these seemingly mundane times of political stasis may help us better understand how systems of injustice persist and how roots of potential resistance are sown and carried through these times. I conclude by suggesting that calls for change *must* recognize of the realities of daily life and the full spectrum of both oppressive experience and potential action that unfolds within this space. I argue that, in Palestine, an exclusionary vision of revolution that calls for "all or nothing" participation, combined with shared feelings of political despair, creates a situation in which hope for institutional change dissipates. To address this phenomenon, I advocate for a re-stimulation of the political imaginary, a "bringing back" of hope and political promise. To do so, I propose we begin to acknowledge that flourishing and oppression occur hand-in-hand, that human relations and day-to-day lives seriously complicate the nature of all-out revolution, and that looking towards institutional (rather than individual) shortcomings may provide more effective, if more elusive, paths towards change.

For my friend Aya and my husband Adam

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Acknowledgements

This project could not have been completed without the help and support of an entire academic and non-academic village. First, this dissertation project begins and ends with my small but mighty committee. Sarah Parkinson, from my days in undergrad, to my applications for graduate school, to our Skype sessions while I was getting bogged down in the field – your guidance has come at crucial times and has guided me forward at every stage in my development as a scholar. Michael McCann, throughout this endeavor you have pushed me to clarify why this project matters to the discipline, to politics, and to people. By following your example, I have learned how to do work that may be a bit outside the scope of "regular" political science but still remains relevant and asks the big questions. Finally, Joel Migdal, your persistently thoughtful feedback and your ability to read through the roughest of my drafts has provided an incredible foundation for my work for the past six years. Most importantly, your continued faith that I had something valuable to say – even when I couldn't express it clearly – allowed me to get to where I am today. My entire committee has supported my life both within and outside of the academy. For that I am eternally grateful. In the end, I am proud of how this project evolved, and I thank you all for patiently waiting for me to find my voice.

Secondly, I am lucky to be surrounded by a community of scholars and mentors who provided guidance, edits, advice, and encouragement throughout this process. Mathieu Dubeau thank you for tirelessly reading new drafts of each chapter week by week. Your enthusiasm about this project, about critical theory, and about social justice kept me going even when I wasn't sure where I was headed. The Preface and Chapter 1 were fundamentally shaped by the feedback of my women's writing group – Emily Gade, Sarah Drier, Bree Bang-Jensen, Dani Villa, and Jillian Foster. Besides providing nuanced edits, I am also thankful to have such a strong community of women scholars around me. I always look forward to our conversations about ethics, the academy, and life. To Emily, I owe a special thanks. You have been a rock for me, and I am so grateful for our friendship and our conversations.

Third, I could not have pursued this research without the training, funding, and institutional support of several people and organizations. Courses in the Communications department at the University of Washington provided my initial education in how to "do" qualitative field research. The Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (IQMR) at Syracuse University built on this knowledge and led me through a much needed bootcamp in interpretive methods, fieldwork,

and ethnography in particular. Each summer at IQMR Fred Schaffer and Timothy Pachirat unleash a group of grad students in Destiny USA (the Syracuse shopping mall), and somehow many of us returned as ethnographers. Timothy, thank you for providing crucial guidance and advice before I entered the field. In the end, I needed to fully accept that this project was an ethnography guided by ethnographic sensibilities. Without you, I wouldn't have had the confidence to do that.

I also want to thank Milli Lake and Sarah Parkinson for leading the summer "Academic Research on Conflict and Contention" workshop. I'm glad that such a program exists in our field, and I wish more young academics were forced to ask themselves tough questions about the risks and necessity of their research before heading out into the real world. Finally, to the Qualitative Methods group (QUAL) at the University of Washington – thank you all for your feedback and methods advice!

This project was completed with the support of several grants and fellowships, including the David J. Olson Graduate Research Grant (University of Washington, Political Science Department), the Maurice and Lois Schwartz Fellowship (University of Washington, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department), the Fritz Travel Grant (University of Washington, Graduate School), and the U.S. Research Fellowship (Palestinian American Research Center).

I owe the largest debt of gratitude to the people whose stories fill the following pages. To the "Palestinian Academy" students, staff, parents, and broader community, thank you for taking me in and giving me a place to call home for nearly a decade. You have all challenged me, forced me to think differently, and kept me sane even in the most frustrating circumstances. From procrastinating at the front desk with Sara and Miriam, to student drop-ins and debates in my office, to board game nights at the foreign staff house… thank you all.

To the extended Kamal family – Zaid, Omar, Fares, Reema, Hind, Ranya, Mira, Teta, Sido, and more – I love you all from the bottom of my heart. I miss the calls to Friday brunch, the afternoons in chatting quietly in Teta's living room, and the nights spent in that tiny kitchen baking brownies and eating raw batter. I'll be back soon. You all so patiently tolerated my questions throughout this process, even when they seemed boring and inconsequential. The livelihood, love, and laughter in your home kept me grounded, and when I finally become a *doctora,* it is thanks to you.

Perhaps most importantly, thank you Aya. I don't even know where to begin. You are my mentor, my sister, my friend. You and your story are so much more than a footnote. So much more

than this dissertation. You inspire me every day. This is your project as much as it is mine. Thank you for always telling me when I was "getting it all wrong" and for pushing me to "finish the damn thing." Here it is.

Last, but not least, I thank my own family. To my parents, Larry and Margot Zelenz, who have always given me the freedom to forge my own path. Neither of you flinched when I first travelled to the Middle East in 2010, and you didn't bat an eye when I moved to Palestine after college. To my husband, Adam Turner, I couldn't have done this without you. I know you thought that when we moved to Seattle we were done travelling for a while. When my summers back in Palestine turned into a few months of fieldwork, which turned into a year, which turned into two years… you stood by and put up with disconnected Skype calls and poor WhatsApp connections. I know this process was likely hardest on you, so thank you for dealing with it all.

Finally, to Morrison Turner. Your imminent birth forced me to finish this project on a tight timeline. We did it.

Anna C Zelenz
Seattle, WA 2020

I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeward that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.

The story is not all mine, nor told by me alone. Indeed, I am not sure whose story it is; you can judge better. But it is all one, and if at moments the facts seem to alter with an altered voice, why then you can choose the fact you like best; yet none of them is false, and it is all one story.

— Ursula Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness*, (1987)

We do not grow absolutely, chronologically. We grow sometimes in one dimension, and not in another; unevenly. We grow partially. We are not relative. We are mature in one realm, childish in another. The past, present, and future mingle and pull us backward, forward, or fix us in the present. We are made up of layers, cells, constellations.

— Anais Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin, Vo. 4* (1971)

Author's Note: I tell these stories to the best of my ability, but in the end please don't forget that the people, the experiences, and the stories presented here are made up of constellations. This is not entirely my story to tell, and what follows is just one understanding, one interpretation. I have done my best to map what I see in the sky on one particular night, from one particular position. Mapping the night sky at another time, from another place, with different instruments, another astronomer may see some other galaxy entirely.

All errors are my own.

Preface

Aya Kamal and her husband Zaid almost never use their TV room. It's not that it is an uncomfortable space, it just so happens that the heartbeat of the house is the too-small kitchen in the back. No one *decided* which rooms to use or not use; no one ever *decides* these things. It simply happened that, over time, the Kamals fell into these particular rhythms and routines. The TV room sits off the main entrance of their home, making it a bit more susceptible to the cold in winter and the heat in summer. Bamboo window shades enclose the space on three sides and an old, L-shaped, white leather sofa is tucked into one corner. The flooring is a wood laminate – strange for Palestine, where floors are normally tiled with cold, white tiles – a sign of their wealth and their Western tendencies. A white, shag rug covers the center of the room. On top of it sits a deep mahogany coffee table. The room is cleaned daily by their housekeeper, but other than that it sits empty 90% of the time.

Fares Kamal, their fifteen-year-old son, spends more time in the room than anyone else in the family. He can occasionally be found there after school sitting inches away from the flat screen TV, playing Overwatch or Fortnite, shouting into a headset at friends who likely are sitting in the same position, also playing video games in their TV rooms across the city. Normally, however, Fares has far too many extra-curricular activities, far too much homework, or far better things to do than sit at home. He's an active and social kid, always trying to start a new business or running a campaign for a student council or MUN election. Gaming in the TV room is not an everyday occurrence.

Besides Fares' presence, the room sees Zaid lounging on the couch once every few months, flipping through satellite channels. Normally, he is also too busy to lounge, though. He runs one of the biggest spice businesses in the city. In the West Bank, probably. It is a family business, passed down from his father. His father still shows up for work every day, but the old man's mind is fading and so the logistics of the company are now handled by Zaid and his younger brother, Mohannad. They travel to trade shows around the world, import large quantities of dry goods through Israeli ports, and sell to businesses across the West Bank and within Israel. Zaid spends many late evenings at his office in the warehouse, and when he is home, he spends most of his time with Aya in the kitchen, across the street at his parents' house, or lounging on his bed flipping through Facebook or Pinterest on his phone (he is quite into the motivational quotes that splash across his feed, and he

shares them with me often). In short, on most days, the members of the Kamal family simply blow by the room on their way in and out of the house.

On December 6, 2017, however, Aya, Zaid, and I crowd into the small space in the early evening. It's a Wednesday night. Zaid spreads out lengthwise on the couch and Aya slouches next to him, her feet tucked up under a fleece blanket. I'm perched at the foot of the couch, closest to the TV. We sit together and wait, eyes glued to the screen. Any moment, Donald Trump is set to make a speech on the movement of the American embassy to Jerusalem. Tonight, the most powerful country in the world will recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Though the content of his speech has been reported for over a day now, the reality of such an announcement remains slightly unbelievable. Outside, the air of the city is buzzing in anticipation of this televised speech. The gravity of this announcement for Palestinians is almost inexplicable. Moving the embassy will be crushing to the spirit of a free Palestine. For Palestinians, Jerusalem is the rightful capital of Palestine. Though their society is deeply divided on almost all political issues, this is a point of unquestionable consensus. At the risk of getting sidetracked, it is worth noting just how divided the population is on most subjects: That winter, 50% supported the Palestinian Authority government, 50% didn't; 52% supported a two-state solution, 47% opposed it; 35% believed in armed action to create a Palestinian state, 33% wanted negotiation, and 26% thought non-violent resistance was best route to statehood; 26% thought poverty/unemployment was the biggest problem of their society, 25% said it was the spread of corruption, 23% said continued occupation, 20% said the siege of the Gaza Strip, and – almost ironically – 3% said the absence of national unity was the biggest issue facing the Palestinian people (Press Release: Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (65) 2017). In short, Palestinians don't agree on much when it comes to politics. But Jerusalem? Jerusalem is untouchable. Jerusalem is *al'asmh alabdyh* – the eternal capital – of Palestine. The status of the city is so universally accepted in the hearts of the population that it needn't show up on a poll.

As we wait for the announcement, Zaid flips through channels. On most stations, political pundits agree that declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel would be an enormous blow to any future peace process. The issue of Jerusalem, along with the issues of borders and refugee return, is one of the main sticking points to any possible settlement between Israel and Palestine. Negotiators have skirted around the topic of Jerusalem for almost seventy years, avoiding a delicate and untouchable flash point. The U.S. commander in chief is about to take it off the table in one fell swoop.

I'm curled up with one of the Kamal's micro-fiber blankets to guard against the chill, but it's still cold. Outside it starts to rain. Zaid keeps impatiently flipping channels. BBC. Al Mayadeen. CNN. Falastin. Israel24. Commentators continue speculating about what will happen in the wake of this decision. Zaid mutes them in frustration, announcing his firm belief that there won't be an uprising. The city just isn't on the verge of a revolution, he declares authoritatively. It's not uncommon for Zaid to offer his political analysis as fact. The streets don't feel like they did before the Second Intifada[1], he tells me. People are *khaml* – sluggish – these days, and idleness blankets the city. Aya seems less sure. No one sees these things coming, she responds, you just wake up one day and realize you're in the middle of a war. We sip ginger tea, snack on mixed nuts from Zaid's store, and ponder this possibility. Will we wake up to war? After a beat, conversation drifts to other things. Aya is the principal of a bi-lingual, K-12 school in the city, and I work closely with her, managing the international teaching staff. We start going over the events of a meeting we'd had earlier that day. We talk about our frustrations with students, parents, and teachers, and Zaid tells us we put up with too much crap.

Suddenly, all the channels cut to an empty podium in the Diplomatic Reception Room of the White House. Trump ambles up to the podium. We fall silent for the duration of the speech. Occasionally, Aya lets out a *tsk* under her breath, clicking her tongue against the roof of her mouth in disapproval. When Trump steps away from the microphone, we sit for several silent seconds before erupting in conversation. "Unbelievable!" "What now?" Aya grabs the remote from Zaid and flips channels. Mahmoud Abbas comes on to give the Palestinian Authority's response. She mutters "*ya haram*" – what a shame – as he begins to talk, sadly noting how old and unintelligible he is. Abu Mazen (Abbas) is very hard for me to understand, and when I ask for clarification, Zaid tells me that the president isn't saying anything important. Speaking over Abu Mazen, Zaid says the man is "just the mailman," the messenger.

"We all know he works for the Israelis," Zaid reminds me with conviction, "they told him what to say tonight."

Aya chimes in with a touch of pity for the old leader saying, "He really has no power, it's so sad how everyone hates him."

[1] The Second Intifada was a large uprising that lasted from 2000-2005. It was a period of intense violence between Israelis and Palestinians, with an increase in attacks by Palestinian militant groups and an Israeli siege on the West Bank that left thousands of people dead. The conclusion of the uprising led to the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and the construction of the border wall between Israel and the West Bank.

After his speech, we leave the TV on and continue chatting, predicting what will come next. We talk quietly and listen to hear if things are happening in the streets outside – we hear nothing besides the now torrential downpour. The TV is still humming in the background. We leave the it on, waiting to see if the *tarbiya* (the Ministry of Education) will announce a school cancellation tomorrow, due to the night's events. Often, when things like this happen a comprehensive strike is called and businesses, schools, and stores all shut down. Aya is getting texts that say the Palestinian Authority is definitely going to call for a general strike in response to the announcement. She thinks we should take the school students to a protest.

"I think I need to get into politics," Aya announces as we wait for official news about school cancellations, "This is starting to feel like a big moment. Jerusalem matters!"

Fares suddenly bursts through the front door. Seeing us all in the TV room, he ambles in and perches next to me on the arm of the sofa. He and his friends are eagerly texting each other with predictions about whether or not they will have to take their history test tomorrow or if school will be cancelled. Zaid asks Fares what's going on out in town. Fares reports that he had been out with friends at Strada – a popular café – and that they had switched the TVs in the restaurant from the usual soccer and Arab music videos to the Trump speech. Clearly, this was an important event. Zaid nods in approval and asks what is happening in the center of the city. Is anyone gathering? Anything happening?

"Nah," Fares replies casually, "No one is really outside. It's kind of gross out."

For a moment we sit in silence, again straining to pick up the sounds of *shebab* (local men) in the streets. Still nothing but the steady winter rain.

Zaid floats the idea that maybe they planned to do the speech on the day the rain came. This is not the most outlandish conspiracy theory I've heard. Zaid reminds Fares and me to never underestimate the strategic prowess of the Israeli government. They can stifle violence or protest when and where they wish. He doesn't go quite as far as some Palestinians who are sure that Israel has the technology to control the weather, but he definitely wouldn't put it past the occupying government. Better to overestimate them than underestimate them, he says. The more time I spend in Palestine, the less outlandish I find most of these conspiracy theories. He continues to flip channels, and stops to listen as a self-proclaimed Zionist, Israeli commentator denounces the embassy decision out of fear that it will ruin chances of peace and turn the world against Israel.

"Even the Israelis are against this!" Aya proclaims. Surely this decision won't stand. Still, the streets outside remain quiet.

Fares, still slouched next to me on the couch, is being very teenager-y, intently focused on his iPhone. Keeping his Snapchat streaks alive always takes precedent, even on this momentous evening. He leans over to me, laughing, and shows me a Snap from one of his classmates. It's a selfie with a caption reading, "let the third intifada come so I can get out of this stupid country" [sic]. The image shows a young Palestinian girl from his school holding a peace sign up to her cheek. A filter blurs her features and accentuates her eyelashes. Superimposed hearts and kissy emojis dot her face. Like several of the students I know at the school, she holds both Canadian and Palestinian passports, so if violence erupts in the city her parents will probably head back to Canada. Would Aya and Zaid take their kids away if something happened? Perhaps. In Palestine, they know better than to speculate too much about the future.

On the TV, a news ticker announces that people are beginning to protest in a different city about 30 minutes away from the Kamal's home. Still, nothing is happening here. Fares waits for the news ticker to bring information from the Ministry of Education about school cancellations. Anticipation builds. I'm reminded of scenes from my childhood in Minnesota, when I would sit and watch the TV in the same way, waiting for the district to announce a snow day on cold, blustery nights. At around 10:30pm, we give up on the wait, and I head to my apartment downstairs to sleep.

"We'll do what we do best," Aya says as I head out the door, "wait and see."

At 4:00am the next morning the Ministry officially cancels school. Aya texts me and we frantically inform our teachers and staff. That day, a protest is held in the middle of the city, and Fares attends with a group of his friends. He is careful not to tell his grandfather, who hates the idea of Fares being part of things like that. Despite Aya's political fervor the night before, she decides to skip the protests.

"We just have too much work to do," she tells me, "It's just going to be a bunch of people standing around anyway."

We end up watching coverage on TV and asking Fares about it when he gets home. His report? It was just a bunch of people standing around. He didn't stay long.

Zaid stays home too that day, as do most of their friends and family. Later the following week, I ask around and realize that most people I know – school staff, neighbors, my Arabic conversation partner, their family members – stayed home. The school secretary laughed when I asked her and sheepishly told me that she decided to catch up on sleep instead.

Aya's other son, Omar, a college student, attended the protests in Ramallah. He told me about it at a family dinner the following weekend. Later in the week, Mohammad – his friend and a

former student of mine – had been interviewed on CNN at some of the clashes between protesters and Israeli forces. Mohammad told a reporter that, "even if I took a bullet to the head, I wouldn't stop fighting until Jerusalem was free." As Omar recounts the story, I smirk knowingly and ask him if Mohammad really meant that. Omar cracks up, knowing that I know the real Mohammad, not just the one on camera. Sure, they believe in the cause, in Palestine, in Jerusalem. Of course. But Mohammad was also clearly putting on a show for the TV stations. Omar tells me they all laughed about it afterwards.

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Despite the less-than-full participation in country-wide protests, I can sense a genuine and tangible fervor that surrounds this political moment in the city. The question of whether there will be a Palestinian uprising or not dances on the lips of even the least political residents of the city for the next month. On Fridays, Aya and I go to a nearby city to have breakfast with her sister. After the announcement, the signs of protest and conflict always decorate the roads on our early morning drives, even when the protesters are all gone. Small rocks dot the entrances of the cities, upturned dumpsters barricade several lanes of the main roads, and, nearer to the checkpoints, the asphalt is covered with dark black piles of ash and wire that look like heaps of black cotton candy – remnants from tires burned days before. The scenery on these drives remains mostly the same, but in the weeks after the embassy announcement, I am almost sure that I see more Israeli army trucks on the roads than usual. When we drive home each Friday afternoon there is a new mix of Israeli medical tanks and Palestinian media trucks getting prepped for the next round of protests. Protests happen every week following the announcement, after Friday prayer, right on schedule. We make a conscious effort to get home before prayer gets out, because otherwise we may get stuck somewhere we don't want to be.

I think that maybe these slight changes in scenery and routine are a sign. A sign that things have gone one step too far. Jerusalem is off-limits, and this is something around which Palestinians can come together. At school, our students read poems about Jerusalem and make speeches at morning assembly. Violence on the outskirts of the city increases. As the protests continue, more and more political agitators are arrested in nighttime raids by the Israeli army. It seems like the country might be on the brink of something big.

In a unique moment of consensus, a new poll shows that over 90% of the population sees the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel as a threat to Palestinian interests (Press Release: Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (66) 2017). People wait. Some are confident that this will be the final straw. Certain that this, *this* will lead to another intifada, another uprising. Things heat up along the Gazan border. Palestinians, collectively, hold their breath in anticipation.

It is at this moment that I fail to be a good, observant, ethnographer. I wake up one weekend after the announcement wanting to *do* something, wanting to reclaim the "this matters" feeling that Aya spoke about during the speech. How can I sit back at a time like this? How can I just watch the Israeli government baldly assert itself? As a student of politics, as a loud critic of oppressive power and systemic injustice… surely, now is the time to act. Right? I am sick of doing nothing, and I care deeply about this community.

In the car on the way to school, I express my feelings to Aya. She agrees. She says we should think of something for the students to do at the school. Perhaps a march? Isn't that what the beginning of revolution looks like? We start brainstorming; we could have the students walk from our city to the border wall by Jerusalem. We wrestle with the message. Is this about the Trump announcement? Is this about the injustice of Israeli Occupation in general? Is it about the fact we can't freely travel to Jerusalem? By this point, we've arrived at school. We sit in Aya's office eating day-old Rice Crispy treats that are stuck to tin foil. As we suck down coffee, we continue plotting – the kids could walk on back roads to avoid settlers and traffic, they could sleep overnight at a mosque on the route, then we could plan a big vigil when they arrive at the Jerusalem border. We realize we'd need to get the approval of Osama, the chairman of the school board and the founder of the school. We call him around 10am, and head over to his office. It surprises me how fast things are moving.

Osama's not opposed to the idea, and he even gets out his map of Palestine and looks at which villages we'd have to walk through. He says he'll get back to us. As we leave, we pass Osama's lawyer heading into the office. Aya says, "I bet Osama will call in 20 minutes and tell me to forget it, his lawyer will stop all of us in our tracks."

We get back to school and keep planning. By this point, two of Aya's friends – Lubna and Ali – have joined us in her office. Their kids also attend the school, and we called them in to talk about our idea, get them on board with planning. Without their support, it would be difficult to gain

traction within the community. They are also lead members of the school's PTA, and the other parents look to them for direction on matters large and small.

We begin by talking about how horrible the Trump announcement is. Ali is a reporter in the city, and his projection for what will come is grim. Definitely a concentration of power for Israel. Not good. After Aya and I explain our idea, they sit in silence.

Lubna speaks first, "You can't do that. You can't be responsible for all those kids. They'll get hurt, the school's foreign teachers will all lose their visas. You'll lose *your* visas! You can't risk that Aya."

Ali is similarly suspicious and thinks it's not a great idea. They are quiet for a moment and then begin to talk in general about the protests the day before – Ali was reporting, Lubna watched from home. They move forward in their conversation, leaving our idea of a march behind. At the hour, like clockwork, we get a call from Osama. Forget it, he says. He tells us that he and the school can't be affiliated with something like this right now. Something so political. There's too much liability. Too many risks.

I sit in silence, disappointed by how completely and quickly this small plan for political action was torn down. I wonder if they just don't want to do the work involved, and they use their fear and the potential threats as an excuse. As soon as I have the thought, I feel guilty. Ali has been arrested and shot at. He's not just trying to "get out of it" by asserting his fears of backlash against the students or school. In the end, they tell us that we should have a conversation at the school with students instead. Do something internally. Don't forget, Lubna says as she leaves, "we live under a *mijhar* – a microscope." I think she means the Israelis are watching. But she could also mean Palestinian authorities, the elite of the city, or the parents. In my dejected mood, I forget to ask. She's right, though, it does feel like our moves are all scrutinized and judged. Taking a political position is sure to draw attention. And that attention will put us all – Aya, the school, the teachers, the students – in a more precarious position.

By the end of the day the idea is dead. Aya and I go for a walk and talk about maybe writing a letter to American congressmen. I think about writing an op-ed for an American paper, but I'm afraid I'll lose my visa and be kicked out of Palestine by the Israeli authorities. We move on. The rest of the evening is spent dealing with the landlord of the foreign teachers. He is concerned about the fact that they aren't buying groceries from his shop but are instead frequenting the shop across the road.

As the weeks pass, I realize that a revolution isn't happening, at least not in the way I am looking for it. The anticipation following the announcement? The collectively held breath? It passes. People breathe out. Routines resume. Protests slow and news coverage thins. The Israeli Occupation of the West Bank continues. As the weeks wear on, a feeling of depression and helplessness seeps over into the emotions of the city. The Kamals continue working, going to school, visiting family. And the U.S. officially moves its embassy to Jerusalem in May of 2018. In October of 2018, the U.S. closes the Jerusalem consulate serving Palestinians. Throughout the next year, the Trump administration turns a blind eye as the settlement population in the West Bank continues to increase despite international rebuke. In March of 2019, the U.S. formally recognizes Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. This is not to say that the American position on these matters is the only factor at play, but the future of a free Palestine certainly doesn't look as bright in the shadow of a Trump presidency. Despite these devastating blows, the West Bank stays relatively quiet throughout these changes. There is violence, sure, but it is sporadic and uncoordinated. There is no mass uprising. There is no revolution. And without coordinated resistance, the Occupation rages on.

Facing this lack of action, I am frustrated, angry, and disappointed. Why can't someone just *do* something?! The community that surrounds me has relative power – they are well-off, they have means, standing, voice – is their commitment to Palestine, to justice, to a better life just empty talk? Why don't things change? What will it take?

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Later, as I reflect on all of my field notes, all of my experiences, all of my time spent with these folks, I realize how pedantic and reactionary these questions are. As a scholar of political science, I hold specific understandings of what "doing something" looks like – I want marches, riots, sit ins, walk outs, anything to show the wide-spread disapproval of and dissatisfaction with the system. For those without the power to participate in such events, more subtle acts of subversion will suffice. I am trained to look at and look for *change*. But what does it mean when life just *goes on*? My frustration with the stasis of the system reveals my own condescending belief – deep down, shamefully, I sometimes think that if this were my community, my society, I would do better, be better, *act*, bring justice. But would I?

It is time to complicate what oppression and resistance look like. To make it clear how unclear these processes really are. It is time we throw out the idea that we'll know oppression when

we see it. Furthermore, we must more openly acknowledge that the space between recognizing injustice and changing it is often a monstrous chasm and can last lifetimes. We must abandon the simplistic belief that those who disavow oppressive systems will therefore immediately be able or willing to act in the face of injustice. This dissertation begins to illuminate the naiveté of such premises. What I have learned from Aya, from Zaid, from their friends and family, is that things are far, far more complex.

Importantly, this complexity is not unique to the Palestinian case. Though that is the focus of this project, I hope that the recognizability of these stories inspires the reader to think beyond this case. Indeed, the gap between recognizing injustice and changing it is a universal one. To bring it closer to home, there is no denying that the complexity of confronting oppressive systems has become particularly prominent in the United States since the election of Donald Trump. For example, as ICE raids in the US round up, detain, and deport undocumented immigrants, many tweets have gone viral comparing the situation to Nazi Germany (Katz 2018; Molloy 2017; J. Williams 2019). At the heart of some of these tweets is the idea that the behavior of regular Americans in this moment (particularly, whether or not they *act* – sheltering their neighbors from ICE, taking to the streets to protest, or otherwise demonstrating dissent) represents how they would have truly behaved in Nazi Germany. Nestled in these conversations is the idea that after recognizing injustice, action must be imminent. Yet, while nearly 70% of Americans "think that the conditions in immigration detention centers are a serious problem," (Quinnipiac Poll Release Detail 2019), the policies persist. Though there has been protest and action, most of those who oppose these policies are clearly not active participants in the movement for change.

While academics are not necessarily surprised by the apparent apathy of the masses (some, like Hannah Arendt, even celebrate it), few have taken the time to deeply explore it. It is widely accepted by social scientists that most people will remain politically inactive most of the time. Nevertheless, research has largely focused on the politics of change, on revolutions, on moments of action, on times of conflict – not on the spaces of seeming inaction. I begin from the premise that these day-to-day lives, though they may seem to be removed from politics or political activity, can help us explain the persistence of systems of oppression and injustice. Rather than take daily life for granted, I begin by looking at how people sustain, skirt, and subvert the status quo as they go about the rhythms and routines of their lives.

This dissertation begins to explain how power persists, how – despite mass disapproval of a political situation – systems of oppression slog on. To do so, I challenge the reader to look beyond

the typical sites of “politics” and “change,” exploring instead the everyday lives of people not in the throes of violence or revolution. Though things like joining a revolution, engaging in state/rebel violence, protesting, striking, campaigning for office, or voting are some of the most overt or traditionally explored means of political participation, this project looks instead at the way politics threads through the people’s everyday lives. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “politics” to describe power relations between people or groups of people, particularly as those relationships relate to larger institutions of governance and organized control over or within the community. This definition is deliberately broad, allowing me to explore mundane relationships that may be only subtly tied to larger power structures.

Overall, looking at everyday politics means looking beyond most vulnerable populations who bear the brunt of injustice, beyond the moments of extremity or revolt, and considering what shapes the social and political fabric of grayer areas – areas where people are not completely powerless, not paralyzed by suffering, not thinking about politics every moment of every day. The following stories force us to consider the ebbs and flows of daily life, to see how one community is embedded in larger power dynamics. This examination begins to uncover both how everyday choices bolster and maintain the status quo (preventing change), but also how people carve out spaces of flourishing and growth even in the midst of conflict and injustice. While that type of growth may not lead to immediate or instant political change, it should not be overlooked as an essential ingredient for eventual resistance and systemic shifts.

At its core, this dissertation presents stories about real people navigating privilege and oppression simultaneously. While this may not be as flashy as a tale of all-out political revolution, the truths found in these stories are perhaps more common, more recognizable, and more likely to stretch beyond the disputed borders of Palestine. I hope that these lives can tell us a bit more about how oppressive power sustains itself and how people are able to find love, light, and flourishing despite living in unjust systems.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation takes a closer look at apparent inaction and ostensible apathy towards political action within the West Bank. Overall, I explore why – despite wide-spread desire for social justice and political change – structures of oppression are so difficult to dismantle. To examine these dynamics, I look closely at the rhythms and routines of one community in the Palestinian West Bank in order to better understand how everyday life simultaneously sustains, subverts, and skirts the oppressive forces of status quo power. The stories of these middle- and upper-class Palestinians begin to unearth the subtle ways that power shifts and changes in the times "in-between" conflict, uprising, demonstration, or political reform. Through a close examination of everyday lives, I argue that Palestinians make routine, unremarkable choices every day that "buy into" and bolster Israeli authority (thus sustaining the Occupation).[2] Nevertheless, these choices *simultaneously* allow them to carve out spaces for individual and community growth, importantly creating sites of flourishing in the midst of conflict and violence. Recognizing the ways in which collaboration with, resistance to, and avoidance of oppressive power occur throughout everyday life is a necessary starting point to understanding both the durability of these structures as well as the possibilities for change.

[2] Throughout this project, when I use the phrase "*the Occupation*," I am referring to the Israeli occupation and military control of the Palestinian West Bank. Importantly, "the Occupation" has several dimensions. First, it is a **territorial descriptor**, referring to a physical area controlled by the Israeli military. Second, it describes a **set of governing institutions** throughout this space. Beginning with Israeli seizure of the area in 1967, Israeli authorities have controlled a combination of civil and security affairs throughout the space known as the West Bank (Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories 2020; Tahhan 2018). With the settlement of the Oslo Accords (1993-1995), civil control of Palestinian cities was largely handed over to the Palestinian Authority, however Israeli hegemony over security and military power in the West Bank remained strong (N. Brown 2003). For more on these dynamics see Rashid Khalidi's history of Palestinian politics (2007). Finally, I also use the phrase "the Occupation" to refer to **non-military economic, cultural, and social structures** that undergird Israeli political endeavors in the West Bank. Among Palestinians, furthering Israeli economic enterprises (for example, buying Israeli products or going into business with private Israeli firms) is *also* seen as supporting the Occupation of Palestine. When I say that someone "buys into" Occupation, I mean that they are in some way supporting or accepting any one of these dimensions. Ultimately, I talk about "the Occupation" throughout this project in the same ways that most Palestinians employ the term, broadly encompassing a range of institutions, organizations, and informal structures that sustain the current domination of Israeli power over the Palestinian West Bank.

Ultimately, I seek to demonstrate that dismantling systems of oppression is challenging – not because people don't "know better," but because once erected, these structures play an important role in structuring our daily lives, our decisions, and even our beliefs and understandings about the world around us. Oppression, certainly, but also any possibilities for flourishing and resistance inherently develop *within* these systems of power. Because our lives are so deeply entrenched in the various institutions of the status quo, dismantling these systems requires asking people to abandon the routines and lives that they are able to build in spite of (and occasionally because of) the injustices that surround them. Rather than view systemic political change or uprising as necessary for oppressed populations to live purposeful, prosperous, or satisfying lives, I urge the reader to recognize the flourishing that emerges *even within* the most brutal spaces. Importantly, the opportunity for meaningful growth or development is not distributed equally across time, or across the population, and therefore acknowledging the spectrum of vulnerability and privilege that exists within oppressed groups is also a key aspect of this exploration and crucial to understanding the nature of these spaces.

Recognizing the somewhat problematic but undeniable way in which people are able to uphold systems of power in one moment, resist them in another moment, and avoid them in yet another moment, not only helps explain the endurance of oppressive systems that are widely condemned, it also unveils the inadequacy of the narratives we use to demand political mobilization, participation, and change. Often, political leaders, organizers, and philosophers in search of social justice call for system-wide upheaval as the only path to liberation and a better life for the oppressed. Narratives of resistance and revolution may take on a singular focus or experience as representative of injustice, oppression, or the "issue" at hand. If calls for change fail to acknowledge the thriving, dynamic, and multi-faceted lives that exist even in unjust systems, they may be ignoring important diversity in life experiences and key facets of a community's calculus towards action. Therefore, I suggest scholars reframe and rethink our vision of revolutionary politics – better accounting for the spectrum of life that *does* exist in these spaces and potentially providing a path for system-wide change and the advancement of social justice.

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Explaining Inaction, Resistance, and the Durability of Power. Before turning to the theory that undergirds this project, it is useful to explore how other political scientists, sociologists,

and academics explain the persistence of oppressive systems and the lack of resistance emerging from some of these places. What do existing theories tell us about why – despite massive disapproval on all sides – the Occupation goes largely unchallenged and unending in the Palestinian West Bank? Can current literatures fully capture Aya's daily choices to participate in or avoid the politics that surround her life in Palestine?

The "Collective Action Problem". For many academics, the lack of a Palestinian uprising following the Trump announcement of the embassy move can be tidily summed up as a collective action problem. Indeed, the rationalist framework of collective action "has been the dominant paradigm for the analysis of political groups and group action in sociology, economics, and political science since it was introduced by [Mancur] Olson in the 1960s" (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Using Olson's logic, the collective action problem applied to the situation in the West Bank can be described as follows:

To begin, it is virtually uncontested among Palestinians, political analysts, and even Israeli citizens that the Occupation perpetuates injustice across the West Bank and Gaza (Lustick 1993). The end of Occupation and the institution of a just political system is widely desired. Nevertheless, a person needn't participate in the revolution in order to reap the rewards of such systemic change. Therefore, Olson tells us to expect "free riding" – people who desire change but decide to stay home, sitting out the risky revolt and banking on the fact that others will correct these injustices for them. Multiply this mentality, and no one acts.[3]

The solution? Theorists suggest that the collective action problem can be overcome if movement leaders (or other actors) offer selective incentives (material payouts, appeals to solidarity, eventual benefits contingent upon participation, punishments for inaction, etc.). The problem of mobilizing collective action may also be reduced if the barriers to organizing distribution of incentives is lowered or if other political, social or economic changes lower the risks associated with action.[4] This basic theory of collective action (as well as how the "problem" can be overcome) has been used to explain a variety of political events (or lack thereof) from civil war (Collier and

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[3] For the foundational literature on the collective action problem, see (Olson 1971; Popkin 1979; Tullock 1971)

[4] Some authors have also explored how factors like public support, trust in leadership, or emotional investment, may draw support for collective action for public goods, even without a direct material incentive. For example, in a volume edited by Valarie Braithwaite and Margaret Levi, authors lay out the ways that democratic leaders often must rely on the confidence of the citizenry in order to generate public participation in and acceptance of state policy and politics (Braithwaite and Levi 1998).

Hoeffler 2004; Fearon 1995; Kalyvas 2006), to insurgency and rebel recruitment (Moore 1995; J. M. Weinstein 2016; Wood 2003) to protest and social movements (McAdams, Tarrow, and Tilly 2003; Tarrow 2011; Tilly 1985).[5]

Does a "collective action" framework explain Aya's actions around the Trump embassy? At first glance, the above explanation certainly seems to "fit" the outcomes of the situation – in the West Bank people didn't rise up; the system didn't change. Indeed, rational choice theorists would likely take one look at the situation and say that Palestinians are failing to step up for what they believe is right, in the hopes that someone else will take on the risks and drive change. It could be that Aya Kamal didn't attend protests because she didn't care as much as she claimed, or she said she cared but was unwilling to make the sacrifice. Be it selfishness or hypocrisy, laziness or apathy, according to the theory of collective action Aya ultimately decided to let "someone else" fix the broader injustices of the political situation. Aggregate that attitude up, and you have a population that stayed home, unwilling to resist, allowing the status quo to persist.

The largest shortcoming to this approach is that it fails to capture the fact that Aya wasn't making a decision between "action" and "inaction." She certainly didn't think of herself as "staying home." In fact, the day of the protest she was hard at work, ensuring the continued functioning of the school. While this may not be as explicit a "political action" as attending a demonstration, for Aya it was ultimately a more important investment in the Palestinian cause and in her livelihood, a cause and a lifestyle that would be sacrificed if she joined protests. With collective action theory, our explanations of behavior are forced into a binary, a "0/1" outcome of inaction or collective resistance in a specific moment. What about the myriad other ways that everyday behaviors – collective *or* solitary – may be important sites of action? For Aya, a decision regarding political participation in the protests that day was one consideration in a much larger exercise of choosing between countless actions with differing impacts. Therefore, while collective action theory may seem to explain the lack of protest that day, it fundamentally fails to capture or explore the actions that *were* taken in lieu of this demonstrative show of politics.

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[5] Importantly, there are many scholars who explore the durability of power structures *without* examining individuals on the ground. These scholars look beyond the actions of individuals and explore how structural conditions may be at the root of structural change. Most prominently, Theda Skocpol's theory of social revolution points to specific system-level indicators – social class relations, relations between society and state, repressive state breakdown, external political crises – that lead to rapid reorganization of state and society (Skocpol 1979). Nevertheless, this theory largely ignores the potential impact of individuals and society – a central focus of this dissertation – and is therefore less useful in explaining the relationships *between* people and power.

Responses to Collective Action: Expanding ideas of resistance. In the past several decades, new scholarship has emerged that looks more closely at how everyday behaviors and relationships – while not as extreme as instances of collective insurgency or popular uprising – impact political structures. The decision to look at "everyday" life as a locus for "power" and "politics" – focusing on public (work, school, government), private (home, family), *and* social spaces – is a bold move that runs counter to many foundational theories of political science. Most notably, theorist Hannah Arendt insists that the private sphere remain "depoliticized," and not be confused with the dynamics of public life (Arendt 1958). Nevertheless, as the stories of this dissertation will show, the ways that Occupation, local politics, and discourse spill into living rooms, kitchens, and dining rooms *must* be acknowledged if we are to gain a deeper understanding about how these structures of power persist.

James Scott, one of the first scholars to look beyond the traditional idea of "resistance," usefully illuminates ideas and behaviors that simmer just beneath the surface of one rural community in Malaysia, exploring the rarity of open revolt (Scott 2008). While the peasant farm workers do not collectively organize, they do engage in acts of ideological and material defiance. These measures may not change the macro power structure or the peasants' positions in it; however, they do demonstrate the vast gaps between ideological and material hegemony. While from the outside it may look as though the peasants in the village are satisfied (they do nothing to change the status quo), they hold beliefs that run counter to the narratives of the ruling class and these beliefs do shape how they behave day to day. Scott highlights "ordinary" forms of resistance that arise in everyday life – like deliberately putting in partial effort at work – and unveils an ideological defiance among a seemingly compliant population. Moreover, by continually cultivating a sense of quiet resistance, these daily experiences potentially lay the groundwork for broader collective action as the opportunities or openings present themselves (McCann 1992).

Scott's ideas are a foundational starting point for this dissertation, as they crucially expand the definition of resistance. Unlike the criteria used by collective action scholars, "resistance" for Scott needn't be public or organized, it needn't be selfless, and it needn't result in revolution or systems change. Scott also pays close attention to the ideological power that runs through a space, taking seriously how elite values and the narratives of the powerful are often rejected and resisted by the subaltern – whether or not we see an active revolution. Throughout this dissertation, I embrace the idea that power is not just about instrumental, individual calculations. Rather, I follow Steven Lukes' theoretical work on the "multi-dimensional" nature of power. In his book *Power: A Radical View*, Lukes implores us to think about structures of power and oppression beyond the material

factors that are so heavily explored in rational choice theory (1974). By looking at institutions and ideas, we can unearth the often-hidden ways that hegemonic forces structure not only our material lives, but also our day-to-day actions and beliefs.[6] These theoretical undercurrents are certainly present in Scott's observations of peasant resistance in Malaysia.

Beyond Scott, other political science literature also expands concepts of resistance and revolutionary activity, highlighting how individual and everyday behaviors may impact the landscape of conflict. From examinations of quotidian social networks, to explorations of non-combatant activity in war, to exposure of strong local institutions in failing states, scholars have shown that the dynamics of everyday, "low-level" social and political life *matter* in developing a full picture of conflict or oppressed spaces (Arjona 2017; Lake 2014; Migdal 2001; Parkinson 2013; Shesterinina 2016). These ideas are also foundational for this project, and they encourage me to think beyond a single instance of action/inaction. Instead, it is necessary to look at the rhythms and routines that occur in the spaces "in-between" political uprising in order to understand how power structures are sustained more broadly.

Finally, scholarship emerging from Palestine specifically critically expands understandings of resistance beyond the narrow scope of rationalist, collective action theory. Under Occupation, the idea of resilience and a passive resistance movement is frequently invoked through the Palestinian concept of *sumud* (Abed 1988). *Sumud*, an Arabic term roughly translating to "steadfastness," describes a political strategy centered around remaining in the space, in spite of oppressive forces.[7] For many Palestinians, when faced with Israeli demolition of their homes, the continued expansion of the settlement movement, or dwindling economic and educational opportunities, simply *remaining* on one's land is seen as a powerful act (Alkhalili 2017; Meari 2014; Nassar and Heacock 1990; Ryan 2015). As a movement, *sumud* is heavily associated with Palestinian peasants and farmers who have an inherent connection to the land. The literature on *sumud* crucially begins to recognize the reality of how oppressive power limits the range resistance activities that are possible within oppressive space. Rather than characterize Palestinian non-action as submission, *sumud* transforms even a passive presence in the space into a mode of resistance.

Room for improvement. These theories importantly begin to expand the study of conflict and revolution beyond incendiary or extreme political moments. They point to the importance of

[6] For more on these ideas, see also Michael McCann's work on methodological nuances (2007)

[7] There are also more "active" conceptions of *sumud*, focused on how Palestinians build institutions and participate in non-violent resistance movements more broadly (Nassar and Heacock 1990).

everyday behaviors and ideas (not simply material factors) in understanding systems of oppression and modes of resistance. In many ways, these theories form the backbone of this dissertation. Nevertheless, I still see three major spaces in which both collective action theorists and those who delve deeper into the complexities of resistance have remained silent. Therefore, building off of the aforementioned work, I expand my theory to encompass the following nuances.

First, while scholars have impressively begun to broaden our understanding of revolutionary behavior, these theories still neglect to address the full spectrum of behavior that unfolds within conflicted and oppressive spaces. In addition to resistance and inaction, I delve deeper into two other modes of behavior: "buying in" and "opting out". Though scholars may acknowledge these behaviors exist, I theorize more directly about how they may be tied to the durability of power structures and why (under what conditions) these options are taken. Furthermore, building off of Scott's work, I look at how the choice to actively support the status quo (despite ideological disapproval of these structures) may be a *necessary* action in order to build a life under a system of oppression. Turning back to Aya, the decision to put her work with the school above the protest reveals the importance of considering this full spectrum of behavior. While the school's presence may be instrumental in building long-term resistance, sustaining this project requires not only "opting out" of more direct, participatory political activity, it also requires active collaboration with the Israeli authorities. Considering the tensions wrapped up in a single action, as well as the myriad choices that individuals make throughout a single day, requires thinking along a more nuanced spectrum of behavior.

This leads to a second point of theoretical expansion. While the aforementioned theories begin to acknowledge the importance of ideational power in these spaces, more work can be done to capture how people understand politics within these spaces. For example, several weeks after the embassy move, I asked Aya why she didn't go out to join in any protests, marches, or actions. Before even answering, she reiterated the embassy move was an egregious assault on her core beliefs and Palestinian identity, and that skipping the protests didn't mean that she wasn't outraged and grief-stricken. When pressed about her paradoxical belief in the movement but apathy towards participation, she laughed and said I didn't understand the bigger picture. She informed me it wasn't as simple as caring about something, dropping everything, and becoming a political activist. That's not how things work here, she told me. As we talked, she explained that she didn't believe that

protests would actually lead to any political change. My naiveté in blindly connecting resistance and change eclipsed her realistic resignation about the state of affairs in the country.[8]

Taking this a step further, she went on to express that even if another violent uprising would end the Occupation, she had no faith that there was a more just system in store at this point in time. Her lack of faith in the future of local, regional, and international governance and leadership was astounding. From her point of view, she wasn't waiting for someone else to fix the problem for her ("free riding" as Olson would say), nor was she participating in continued, subtle efforts of subversion (as Scott may suggest). Rather, she struggled to even imagine a more socially just system for Palestine. Thinking about how and why people view certain resistance activity as effective and other engagement as futile – and how these ideas are shaped by their everyday interactions with systems of power – adds important nuance to our understanding of resistance activity and visions for potential change. In fact, a failure to acknowledge the ways in which hegemonic power actively shapes peasants' rationalizations and ideas is Timothy Mitchell's primary critique of Scott's work. Mitchell notes that by simply highlighting the dangers or impracticalities of rebellion, rather than explore *why* peasants see it as rational to conform, Scott is ignoring a major aspect of the power at play in these spaces (Mitchell 1990). Therefore, contextualizing the historical, social, and narrative contexts of daily action will be a central focus of this project.

Finally, perhaps most importantly, none of the aforementioned theories are actually crafted with someone like Aya in mind. Unlike collective action theory which collapses the "masses" into a non-descript "oppressed" group, or the more critical work that focuses heavily on "peasants," or impoverished actors, Aya is relatively privileged. Current theories of oppression and resistance tend to essentialize actors into static, oppositional, binary groups – the "haves/have-nots," the "elite/subaltern," those in power, and those rising up. The nuances of Aya's life highlight the shortcoming of this schema. On one hand, Aya is Palestinian and is therefore subject to a number of abuses at the hands of Israeli authorities – restrictions in travel, discriminatory treatment at checkpoints, and an overall denial of certain freedoms. On the other hand, Aya's class privilege, her social standing in the city, her American passport, and her education afford her far more opportunities, luxuries, and comforts than many of her Palestinian neighbors.

Indeed, across the population of possible Palestinian political actors, a wide spectrum of vulnerability and privilege works its way through daily lives and choices. By collapsing this group

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[8] I borrow the phrase "realistic resignation" from Michael McCann.

into a single category of "oppressed," we erase this nuance and fail to capture how the Occupation impacts different people differently at different moments in time. While most work on resistance to oppression either assumes a mass "collective" (putting all Palestinians in the same category), or focuses on the most oppressed (refugees, peasants, prisoners, the poor), I theorize that intersectional identities complicate these categories. Taking seriously the internal diversity, disparities, and differences within Palestine – with particular attention paid to the ways that privilege ebbs and flows through this space – is therefore central to this project.[9]

Overall, addressing the shortcomings and erasures of existing theory requires centering the ways that dynamic systems of power surround Aya's daily life. By diving deeper into the day-to-day realities of her space, we can begin to see the multi-dimensional forces at play. The nature of the Occupation (as well as its durability) cannot simply be captured through the lens of Israeli vs. Palestinian, rich vs. poor, dominant vs. oppressed. Rather, in order to understand how power "works" in this space, we must take a more holistic look at the landscape upon which everyday life unfolds.

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Re-centering "Power": Thinking along a spectrum of possibility. Existing theory may accurately explain the occurrence or stagnancy of political change in a single moment. It also gives us the tools to see how everyday actions (rather than just overt political participation) *matter* when considering the relationships between people and power. For example, ideas about the difficulty of generating collective action as well as the presence of other "everyday" methods of resistance go far to explaining dynamics within the West Bank. Indeed, these ideas capture both the lack of overt rebellion and the persistence of Palestinian attitudes of defiance to the Occupation. Nevertheless, there is clearly more work to be done in explaining the subtleties, complexities, and broader contexts of these spaces. How and why does a choice to actively "buy into" Israeli power emerge in a space of ideological defiance? How does privilege (or vulnerability) impact daily choices differently at different moments in time? How do 'non-political' aspects of everyday life shape broader political

[9] Many scholars have noted the potentially problematic nature of our tendency to "study down" in ethnographic work (L. Brown and Strega 2005; Smith 2012). While some work "studies up" (Ho 2009; Seaver 2014) – looking at political or economic elites, this project takes those ideas a step further by exploring the ways that individuals are rarely either in a static position at the top of social/political/economic hierarchies or in a position of perpetual suffering at the bottom of these hierarchies.

attitudes and behaviors? Before turning to the general outline of the dissertation, this section provides the theoretical undercurrents that run throughout the project. My hope is that the nature of this theory will emerge as the reader progresses through the ethnographic account that follows.

In short, the theory of this book takes seriously the notion that our daily lives are deeply entrenched in larger structures of oppression. Following Lukes' framework, I pay close attention to the way **institutions**, **ideas** and **intersections of power** weave their way through our relationships and our choices. In some ways, the most dominant theories in the field tend to assume that individual, community, and macro-level political choices emerge from a vacuum – uninfluenced by historical experiences, by future projections, by narratives or understandings of current political structures, or by *other* dynamics of domination/oppression that wind their way through these spaces. For example, rational choice theorists often consider the privately held beliefs of potential protestors "unknowable," and therefore choose to focus only on material and measurable factors that are observable from a distance (Kuran 1989; Kuran and Romero 2019). Rather than discount or sidestep the more slippery aspects of how power intersects with personal histories, beliefs, and narratives, this project confronts these dynamics head-on. This project is founded on the idea that systems of power are all interrelated and embedded in our lives: holding each other up, shifting and changing one another, and even creating spaces for potential change. By taking the dynamics of daily life and power seriously, we can begin to see a) why this web of power is so strong, b) how oppressed populations navigate power in order to *live life*, and c) what this may mean for the possibilities of revolutionary social change.

Expanding the scope of action. As mentioned in the previous section, the first step of this project is to consider a full range of action, the context of these choices, and the potential ramifications of these decisions. Therefore, I expand my exploration to include behaviors that may be seen as politically apathetic or submissive, as well behaviors that actively *support* the Israeli Occupation.

Central to this theoretical expansion is the idea that none of these individual choices exist independent of the political structures (the Israeli Occupation of the West Bank, or institutions of the Palestinian Authority), global orders (capitalism and economic inequalities, colonial legacies, racial hierarchies), and social and religious mores (relations around sex and gender, moral codes, patriarchal practices) that surround them. I focus most heavily on political institutions in this project – particularly the durability of the Israeli Occupation. Nevertheless, the strings of these other systems are also ever-present. While Aya and her community are active agents making choices (even those that bolster unjust power), this dissertation attempts to look a bit deeper, unearthing the ways

a full range of day-to-day relationships, choices, and behaviors are embedded in macro power structures.

The importance of considering institutional power is perhaps best illuminated by an article that has very little to do with the subject matter of this dissertation. In a riveting piece about environmental politics by Michael F. Maniates entitled, "Individualization: Ride a Bike, Plant a Tree, Save the World" Maniates discusses the ways in which we've "individualized" environmental problems to the detriment of producing actual change (Maniates 2001). He shows how we focus on behaviors like household recycling or driving less (or "greener"), rather than on institutional or systemic factors at play. When we look at (and blame) the actions and shortcomings of individuals for the current environmental crisis, "there is little room to ponder institutions, the nature and exercise of political power, or ways of collectively changing the distribution of power and influence in society — to, in other words, 'think institutionally'" (2001, 33). In the end, these institutions importantly structure the choices that are available to us in important ways. For example, though we may focus on an individual's decision to ride a bike vs. drive a car, we tend to overlook the fact that another option - free, fast, safe, and eco-friendly mass transit - is not even available to most citizens.

While this book is obviously about a different type of conflict, I believe the thrust of Maniates' argument holds. If we wish to "think institutionally," we must first consider a full range of actions – not simply revolution, subversive resistance, or staying home, but also the choices that actively support the Occupation. Considering the ways that Palestinians "buy into" the Occupation can be uncomfortable. Not only is collaboration heavily stigmatized but looking at these behaviors can quickly lead to conclusions that the persistence of the Occupation is the fault of certain Palestinians. This line of thought is highly individualized, and with it we risk losing sight of the way that the choices available to these individuals are embedded in, and often shaped by, much larger institutions of power.

I argue that the establishment of political institutions – such as the Occupation – fundamentally alters the options and possibilities for action within a system. It changes the rules of the game. Terry Moe, a political economist, elucidates this point in his analysis of global economic structures. While many scholars point to these economic institutions as a net benefit to countries in the global south, Moe suggests that their creation (largely at the hands of powerful states in the global north), essentially renders *non-participation* a road to certain economic failure for any developing nation (1990). Here, I suggest what Moe sees at a global scale – economic institutions re-structuring the viable options available to weaker states – is also occurring on a regional scale in

Palestine. Institutions of Occupation or political power, once erected, fundamentally re-structure the behaviors and range of options available to those who live within these systems.

I bolster my theoretical contribution by integrating ideas of political burnout, fatigue, collaboration (within the Palestinian context), and feminist theory throughout the text. The toll that active resistance to power takes on other aspects of life cannot be undervalued, particularly if the *point* of revolution is to improve lives (Lora, Panizza, and Quispe-Agnoli 2003; Pines 1994; E. Weinstein 2017). In her analysis of activism surrounding the AIDS epidemic in the United States, Deborah Gould traces how unceasing death rates and the proximity to illness in daily life led to "a physical and emotional exhaustion among [activists] that was fertile ground for despair" (2012, 98). Political despair – or the feeling that things will never change – then eroded "activist energy, replacing their rousing desire and forward momentum, sometimes even their anger, with frustration, exhaustion, and immobility" (ibid., 100). I suggest that similar dynamics are at play in Palestine, growing out of a historical sense of failure and continued Occupation and leading to a wide-spread sense of hopelessness among the population.

Finally, I build on the work of other academics who look at the relationship between class and complicity with status quo power. In particular, I follow Walid Habbas' new work on economic collaboration between upper-class Palestinians and Israelis, by continuing to expand thought on the possibilities for agency *within* potentially exploitative colonial relations (Habbas 2020). While economic growth and personal financial gain may be possible through collaboration, experiences of advancement and agency still occur under the broader structures of Occupation, in which Israeli power dominates. Continually considering the subtleties of Palestinian class dynamics further helps unveil the nuances in the politics of daily life within the West Bank.

Perhaps most importantly, the theoretical foundations of this project are heavily influenced by feminist work that explores the "patriarchal bargain." (Kandiyoti 1988). First laid out by Deniz Kandiyoti the "patriarchal bargain" is a concept used to explain why women may engage in behaviors that sustain, accept, and even overtly support a patriarchal system, even if that system exploits or oppresses them. Rather than see collaboration with the oppressor as naïve or a "false consciousness," these theorists explore the ways that active participation in oppressive systems can strategically "maximize security and optimize life options," despite leaving the system itself in tact (Agarwal 1994; Apffel-Marglin and Simon 1994; Kandiyoti 1988, 274, 2005; Lindridge, Peñaloza, and Worlu 2016). I build off of this work, suggesting that similar dynamics are at play for Palestinians living under Occupation.

As you will see in the chapters that follow, the folks in these stories sometimes act in ways that sustain unjust political arrangements. It is easy to judge these actions, and we must certainly acknowledge how these behaviors are problematic. Nevertheless, an approach that considers institutional power is also able to see that these choices are not merely hypocritical, selfish, or "bad" for the advancement of social justice; they are often also some of the only options available and are heavily structured by macro-level institutions. Once institutions of power (here, the Occupation) are established, it becomes difficult or impossible for an individual to exist outside of these structures. While *thinking* about a world beyond these structures is crucial for generating resistance and moving towards structural change (McAdam 1982; Piven and Cloward 1978), the realities of day-to-day experience and shared history cultivate a sense of hopelessness that stifles these imaginaries. Therefore, though people may avoid or undermine institutions of power at certain junctures, I argue that, in a space where many are resigned to the impossibility of change, regular decisions to cooperate, collaborate, and "buy in" must also be explored.

Adding complexity to our understanding of resistance requires accepting that individuals may simultaneously be involved in struggle against, and support of, power. Resistance in the morning may be followed by compliance or collaboration in the afternoon. Calculations shift and change moment to moment, and a single decision can be wrapped up in complex and contradictory motivations on the individual level. Rather than reduce these everyday actions as instances of complicity, apathy, or ignorance at an individual level, I encourage the reader to think about how these lives are embedded in institutions of power. Importantly, by telling the stories of this community in an accessible way, I hope that the reader is able to see these people *as people*, to think beyond the impulse to blame or judge, and to consider the confusing and chaotic ways in which institutions of "oppression" and "occupation" manifest in real lives.

Exploring the political imaginary. In addition to considering the material factors that so heavily influence rational choice theorists, many of the critical and feminist scholars cited above also consider how power impacts the ideational dimensions of individual and group considerations. Particularly, when considering why someone may buy in, these scholars pay close attention to the "sense of one's selfhood" that is expressed by "values and priorities" that may not be exclusively about justice and revolution (Kandiyoti 2005, 140). Therefore, this project also thinks carefully about how individuals see themselves, what aspects of their lives they consider important or meaningful, and how they understand the political constraints and possibilities that frame their lifeworlds.

At its core, this means looking closely at the context of the decisions being made (the lives being lived) and exploring the ways these choices are embedded in history, narratives, shared beliefs, daily life experiences, and more. Turning again to a study located far from Palestine, John Gaventa's seminal work on quiescence and rebellion within American Appalachia illuminates the importance of hegemonic power in shaping these ideational frameworks, and therefore bolstering the durability of oppressive political systems (1982). After spending time in a small mining town, Gaventa begins to question the surprising lack of political engagement within the community given the harsh conditions people face. To explain the absence of political action, he looks beyond material and structural power dynamics and looks closely at how people make sense of the political situation and how they imagine possibilities for change. He shows that, as former rebellions failed and as quality of life continued to decline, the community internalized defeat and hardship in a way that began to structure their own narratives of what they want, what they need, and what actions may produce change.

I posit that nearly identical forces are at play in the Palestinian West Bank. Historical defeats, narratives of loss, and daily interactions with local and regional authorities all shape how Palestinians understand politics in their community. Additionally, because more privileged community members are able to circumvent the formal political channels they view as ineffective, traditional ways of seeking political change become less and less viable in the minds of many. Finally, as community members navigate the deficiencies and futility of local government action on a daily basis, many find themselves disenchanted with the idea of a future under total Palestinian control – leading to questions about whether an end to Occupation really would bring a "better" life.

Exposing a spectrum of vulnerability and privilege. Finally, I theorize that intersectional identities and continually fluctuating positions of vulnerability and privilege are important dynamics in explaining the durability of status quo power. To best explore this theoretical tenet, I choose to focus on a community that holds relative privilege within the West Bank. By looking at middle- and upper-class families who hold comparative economic, social, and educational advantages within Palestinian society as a whole, I am able to home in on people who both face moments of oppression but are also potential perpetrators in a system that oppresses. While I believe these dynamics (being both a subject and instrument of oppressive power) are at work across the entire population, I also expect them to be most obvious when looking at those whose identities fall along both dominant and subordinate dimensions.

This theory can be understood as an extension of the ideas put forth in Eve Troutt Powell's book, *A Different Shade of Colonialism,* which looks at historical dynamics of nationalism and colonialism within Egypt (2003). Here, Powell does something that has stuck with me throughout my time as an academic – she destroys the binary relationship of colonizer/colonized. While many historians write of powerful European empire on one hand and defenseless non-European colony on the other, Powell blows up these categories through her exploration of Egypt's colonization of the Sudan (which occurs simultaneously to British colonization of Egypt). Egypt is at once colonized and colonizer, and the webs of power surrounding these dynamics are deeply entwined.

This work shows how the categories that are meant to give us theoretical clarity – oppressor/oppressed, powerful/powerless, perpetrator/victim – are far too static to be useful when faced with the dynamism of the real world. The position of states, communities, or individuals within these boxes is in constant flux. As humans, in particular, our myriad, concurrent relationships create the space for us to embody seemingly contradictory positions at once. Therefore, throughout this ethnography, I present stories of people who face moments of oppression while also being instrumental players in a system that oppresses. In the pages that follow, I urge the reader to resist creating static boxes for these characters. These individuals cannot be reduced to a single characteristic or identity marker. These people are not meant to serve as caricatures of "the elite business leader", "the politician", the refugee", "the Arab man", "the Muslim daughter". Though they certainly may hold these titles or fit into these groups, they are also much more.

More important than these boxes, is a recognition of how people's lives exist along a spectrum of vulnerability and privilege. Dominant/oppressed is not a simple relation between those amassing power and making decisions at the top and those suffering at the bottom. Rather, we must reimagine these systems as ever shifting and changing sets of relations both influencing and sustaining our day-to-day lives. By drawing attention to the ways people are able to leverage their privilege along one dimension to avoid oppression along another dimension, I show the importance of these intersections in understanding the power dynamics of the space. Most notably, the relatively privileged status of some may allow them to side-step certain oppressive relations, creating room for growth, agency, or prosperity. Ultimately, keeping "politics" and violence in the background is essential to the persistence of these systems. Nevertheless, the violence and potential strength of oppressive, Israeli power lurks in the background, a constant and subtle reminder of how tenuous any flourishing within this system may be.

The background presence of power in our lives, as well as its impact on resistance or revolution is not easy to capture. Here, I focus specifically on the ways in which Israeli material power – namely, violence – does and does not thread its way through daily life. I theorize that intersections of privilege allow certain individuals to hold violence at bay, while at the same time the ubiquitous (if subtle) nature of this violence serves as a constant reminder of just how tenuous this privilege is. Individuals take seriously the ways that violence can arbitrarily and suddenly transform even the most privileged lives. This underlying potential to move up and down along a spectrum of vulnerability and privilege from moment to moment and day to day is central to understanding what is at stake for those who may wish change. Finally, I argue that the daily choices that people make to maintain their relative privilege, escape violence, or avoid politics, impacts the possibilities for change in that it fractures and divides the Palestinian population.

Overall, I hope that this dissertation can shed light on how and why people are willing to sit out traditional forms of collective political action and ignore or "buy in" to systems that they know are oppressive, despite the conviction that those systems are unjust. Beyond this, I hope to present these individuals in a way that highlights how these choices are often positive, life affirming forms of action, rather than a retreat from or abdication of liberation. Focusing on institutions and ideas as well as individuals, I seek to unearth the ways in which seemingly amorphous, disembodied, abstract systems of power shape, change, and constrain the lives of well-intentioned people, people who know better, people who want to see change, and people who care. While I look at these ideas in the context of Palestine, with particular focus on the sustained Israeli Occupation of the West Bank, I urge readers to relate the themes of this dissertation to their own personal lifeworlds and their own experiences, as we are all unavoidably tangled in these webs of power. Only when we connect our conversations of oppression and power to *real people* and *real lives* can we truly see how difficult dismantling these systems is, how deeply enmeshed we are in these webs, and how much work lies ahead.

The stories that follow show how – when taken down to the level of "everyday life" – principled beliefs about social justice collide with daily routines, family demands, work, threats of violence, social relationships, fatigue, political corruption, personal problems, limited agency, love, desires for convenience, and more. With the blink of an eye, the path to effective resistance and social justice is no longer clear or straightforward. The fact that we often place our everyday needs and personal relationships above some amorphous ideal of justice or an abstract political vision - is

the source of both our vulnerability *and* our tenacity as humans. Though these human inclinations to push politics away when it threatens to undermine our lives and loved ones may be a fatal flaw when it comes to toppling unjust systems through political protest or mobilization, *at the same time* by forcing "politics" into the background, people create spaces of flourishing even when living amid oppressive power dynamics. Certainly, much of this growth occurs along problematic dimensions and is deeply rooted in existing power structures, but the joy, love, laughter, and flourishing that emerge in everyday moments are in many ways the antithesis of oppression.

In Palestine and around the world, most people are not paralyzed by systems of oppression, but continue to push forward in their lives to the best of their abilities. And as they work, play, love, laugh, weep, and learn, people may unintentionally fortify certain threads in the webs of power that surround them. They may effortlessly break down other strands and they may, over time, end up weaving entirely new structures. To ignore these dynamics in our quest for social justice or revolutionary change is to massively undervalue the daily comforts, routines, and growth that unfold even in deeply oppressive spaces. Therefore, in the conclusion of this text, I begin to address the question of how we may begin to reframe our understandings of social and political change to encompass these nuances. While the ending of this book is certainly not decisive or purely prescriptive, I hope that these stories help us all reflect, learn, and grow, perhaps sowing the seeds for the creation of a more thoughtful and more just future.

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Exploring these dynamics in Palestine. This project is an ethnography. Though many potential research tools within the social sciences may begin to unearth and explore the dynamics theorized above, ethnography provides a uniquely nuanced look at the intricacies of daily life within Palestine. As a method, "ethnography involves immersion in the place and lives of people under study [as well as] a commitment – what some call a distinct 'sensibility' (Pader 2006; Schatz 2009; Yanow 2006) – to chronical aspects of lived experience" (Wedeen 2010, 257). Many agree that, as a tool and as a sensibility, ethnography is particularly attuned to the dynamics of power that thread through a space (Pachirat 2013; Schatz 2009). Instead of looking simply at big moments of change, ethnography requires a consideration of mundane actions, attention to subtle attitudes, and an awareness of overall environments. Finally, ethnographic approaches are acutely suited to "revealing

the meanings people attribute to the world they inhabit" – another important aspect of this project (Schatz 2009, 6).

This project is based primarily on field research conducted from August 2017 - March 2018, and it is supplemented by additional notes collected between July 2018 – May 2019. The "data" gathered for this project is multi-faceted. In accordance with the ethnographic traditions cited above, I supplemented daily field notes with photographs and newspaper articles, and I kept anonymized records of text conversations and emails. I also followed and collected data from the municipal Facebook page and a social, community Facebook page (both of which are quite active). While I was particularly attentive to issues related to everyday politics and security (service provision, policing, crime, local Israeli action, etc.), I also kept detailed notes about weddings, funerals, dinners, social outings, and general conversations.

Importantly, from 2012 to 2014, I also lived and worked as a teacher and school administrator in this community (not conducting formal research).[10] Therefore, when I returned to embark on this project, I was able to continue working at the school and living with a local family. In many ways, I entered the city as a participant in civilian life, not as an observer of only political institutions and actors. While I will always be a foreigner, my close relationship with my host family - forged prior to the conception of this project - gave me intimate access to their family life and private social groups. Additionally, as a full-time college counselor and administrative assistant at a local school, I spent hours with students, teachers, parents, and administrators every day.

In this project, I choose to center – rather than footnote – my participation in the more mundane aspects of daily life: my work at the school, social outings, events, and family/community conversations. Some of these moments were more overtly "political" - the tensions between the community and the municipality concerning feral dogs being one example. But some of these moments - helping students with college applications, listening to a group chat about where to get the best Botox treatments, drinking Americanos in the sunshine, or going on a late-night ice-cream run – are not traditionally included in an exploration of "resistance" or "oppression." Nevertheless,

[10] Throughout the text, I use the phrase "**the community**" in reference to Aya's immediate social circle and the broader upper- and middle-class Palestinians of a certain socio-economic tier. Because of the clearly stratified, widely understood social dynamics of broader Palestinian society, this level of "community" is commonly identifiable. In local dialect the term *al-bi'aa* (بيئة) is used to describe the group of which I speak. Literally translated, this means "the environment," but colloquially it is a phrase used to describe those who belong to the middle- and upper-class who are also a part of a respected family (social background). Occasionally, I also use the phrase "the community" to refer to all residents in the city or to a broader "Palestinian community" that pushes locational bounds. In these cases, I try to clarify the scope of my usage.

by encompassing this diversity of experience, an ethnographic approach allows me to situate moments of insecurity and flourishing within the same story, and helps us see people's complex understandings of themselves, of conflict, of violence, and of power more broadly.

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Organization of the Project. Chapters Two through Five of this dissertation focus on different aspects of daily life within the space. They seek to bolster the ideas presented above by a) highlighting how the ebbs and flows of everyday life are embedded in institutions of power, b) the rich history, narratives, and contexts that shape community perspectives on politics, life, and possibilities for justice, and c) the layers of privilege within the community that, though they may allow for growth, are under constant threat of violence and collapse within this space. While each part is told primarily in narrative form, I briefly lay out the theoretical importance of each chapter below.

Chapter Two: Chapter Two leads the reader through a typical "day in the life" of Aya. Instead of starting with stories of injustice, violence, and disparity that so often inspire our accounts of resistance, I instead look at the mundane happenings in one woman's life. While not all days are the same, by looking at the challenges Aya faces at work, the social dynamics of her community, the topics of gossip, etc., Chapter Two intends to bring one life in the West Bank staggeringly closer to other lived experiences around the globe.

Fundamentally, this chapter is meant to demonstrate how everyday actions are often entrenched in larger institutions of power. Political issues, questions, and injustices simmer beneath many of the dynamics of the day. Chapter Two also begins to show the ease with which Aya keeps politics at bay – rarely letting it creep into the center of her experiences. While her choices ultimately are part of these larger webs of power, the connections between mundane, day-to-day experiences and macro-level institutions is difficult to trace and is often obfuscated by the simple hustle and bustle of daily life.

Looking closely at these dynamics also exposes the complexity surrounding the range of actions available to people living within oppressive systems. By simply navigating the rhythms, routines, and demands of life, Aya avoids, supports, and resists Israeli power in different ways throughout her day. Thinking about this full range of action also requires acknowledging that people

are doing far more in spaces of conflict than thinking about politics. In the midst of Occupation, people go to meetings, concerts, weddings, and funerals. People get sick, children are born. Time is filled with workplace drama, laughter, outings with friends, and family dinners. Examining the fabric of these people's lives grounds the discussion of politics and resistance in the reality of lived experiences. While exploring everyday life may help us understand mobilization, rebellion, or action, it also helps shed light on the realities that undergird decisions *not* to rock the boat.

Chapter Three: Following the trajectories of Chapter Two, Chapter Three takes a closer look at how beliefs and narratives around political possibilities take shape in the community. This gives critical context to people's understandings of how politics "works," as well as to the histories and life experiences from which these understandings emerge. Maintaining a focus on daily life, this chapter centers everyday engagement with local, Palestinian government authorities as well as Israeli-Palestinian politics at large.

In particular, looking at day-to-day public service provision and attitudes of the community towards local government (mis)management of these services, shows the reader just how tiring it can be to continue relying on a seemingly "broken" system. This chapter shows how small disruptions create an atmosphere of annoyance that laces its way through the otherwise privileged life in the West Bank. These nuisances, while certainly related to the broader political problems of the space, are not as "big" or "bad" as other manifestations of Israeli Oppression. Importantly, this chapter demonstrates the shared belief that local government is inept and incapable of dealing with these problems – leading to a widespread feeling that "traditional" political action (voting, attending town halls, protests, or revolution) is a waste of time and energy.

Rather, in this environment people often seek change through other means often accessible through class privilege or social connection. Chapter Three shows how certain axes of privilege allow people to bolster their own sense of security and control, even if it is at the expense of building strong local government or faith in local politics. While it may not be clear moment to moment, the opportunities for growth, peace of mind, personal freedoms, and preservation of lifestyle that come with a privileged class status, are also deeply tied to other systems of power. In this case, I highlight the ways gendered, emotional, historical, and class-based dynamics all interact in a way that forecloses possibilities of political action or change. Taken together, these dynamics highlight how quotidian rhythms simultaneously bolster the status quo *and* are seen as necessary for building the best possible life within the constraints of oppressive power.

In detailing everyday interactions with governments, bureaucracies, and authorities, Chapter Three showcases how these dynamics of "everyday" life importantly set the bounds of the political imaginary. The final portion of this section shows that it is the nature of the day to day presence (or absence) of politics and government in people's lives that structures what individuals or a community can conceive of as "politically possible" in moments of resistance or upheaval. In essence, daily life establishes a narrative for how people understand their worlds. This narrative persists through moments of potential revolution and importantly shapes how people respond. Actions in and understanding of times of crisis are constrained and constructed by ideologies formed in times of mundanity. As people navigate everyday obstacles and observe the patterns of city leadership, people learn the rules of their space.

Though the day to day problems facing wealthier Palestinians are rarely security concerns (such as house demolitions, arrests, or violence), the persistence of these lower-level daily issues - and the inability of government leaders to 'fix' anything - creates a broader atmosphere of apathy, disappointment, and powerlessness. As seen in Gaventa's study of Appalachia, these ideological factors importantly influence what people conceive of as possible or realistic. Ultimately, I show how this culminates into the general sentiment, "If the present Palestinian leadership is unable to even clean up streets, how could they possibly wage effective resistance to Israeli Occupation?" Confronted with a constant barrage of daily annoyances left unsolved by ineffective local governance, this community turns to back channels and class power to circumvent their problems. This reifies the idea that change comes through elite collaboration, *not* through democratic debate, group solidarity, or mainstream politics.

Chapter Four: This section turns from the mundanity of daily life to the exceptional moments of violence and threat that punctuate routines. Overall, the most extreme form of insecurity – actualized violence – is largely removed from the everyday experiences of most Palestinians (regardless of socioeconomic status). Chapter Four explores when, where, and how violence creeps into the everyday life of the middle and upper class, and how it shapes people's understanding of conflict, politics, and resistance. By looking closely at how violence (state and non-state) permeates the lives of the relatively privileged, as well as how privilege is leveraged to keep violence at bay, this chapter provides important insight into the anxieties, fears, and past trauma that simmers beneath the mundanity of life in Palestine. Though this violence may not materially impact life day-to-day, this backdrop of violence and Israeli power makes the any "flourishing" within the space feel tenuous and transient. Arbitrary or unexpected exposure to violence can also throw someone from a

position of privilege to vulnerability in a matter of seconds, making it clear that traditional and static binaries of "dominant" or "oppressed" do not fully capture the dynamics of this space.

First, when violence erupts in the city, it most commonly occurs either in the middle of the night or in the 'usual' spaces of protest. In this way, the most disruptive elements of conflict and the most painful results of oppression can either be hidden or avoided. In many ways, privilege allows members of this community to keep direct violence at an arm's length. While they may hear bombs in the night, in the "light of day" the situation doesn't seem so bad, fear and danger fade. Much of the pain and suffering that happens at the hands of Israeli and Palestinian authorities is just outside the bounds of everyday experience – it happens to neighbors, or distant relatives, or refugees.[11] Nevertheless, it is there. The small ways in which it is made known (even if not through direct physical pain) serve as potent reminders of the fine line between safety and suffering.

Additionally, the history of violence in this community also plays a key role in these dynamics. While to an outside observer the lives of this community appear quite comfortable, this section provides meaningful historical context. The memories of the First and Second Intifada are still raw within the West Bank as a whole, and the events of these conflicts deeply impacted even the wealthiest of families. This section tells these stories. Delving into these memories also serves as a vital reminder that the consequences of "standing up to power" are not abstract or hypothetical within this community. They have seen what it looks like when a group tries to throw off the yoke of oppression. They have lived through those moments and their aftermaths. As in Chapter Three, historical experiences crucially shape current narratives and understandings within the community. Connecting present life to past violence thus renders our theoretical conversation about shifting power structures very real, indeed.

Finally, this section demonstrates how the *avoidance* of political violence - a community's commitment to maintaining daily routines as regularly as possible - is a calculated choice. It requires people to remain politically silent and uninvolved, essentially rendering this community voiceless in

[11] This idea is largely influenced by Timothy Pachirat's exploration of power dynamics in a Nebraska slaughterhouse, which is itself grounded in the work of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1979, 2000; Pachirat 2013). In his book, *Every Twelve Seconds*, Pachirat explores how power often persists by removing violence from sight. The slaughterhouse is not only located far from the urban centers of life, but it also relies on immigrant labor - a group not part of the daily lives of many Americans. Within the slaughterhouse violence is also hidden, dissected, and confined, making it more palatable and processable for the workers. Though the violence explored in Chapter Four is obviously of a different nature, thinking about how it is strategically employed in certain spaces, at certain times, and against specific community members (often *not* the upper class), is an important part of understanding its persistence and normalization.

the international political arena. Furthermore, as some individuals distance themselves from violence, they also distance themselves from their Palestinian neighbors who *are* experiencing physical suffering. The roots of this fractionalization may stem from the basic 'unsharability' of pain. In her book, *A Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry delves into this idea, highlighting the way that experiencing pain necessarily distances someone from those around her, simply because of her inability to fully communicate her experience (Scarry 1987). For certain parts of the community to bear the pain and others to be free of it will *always* create a separation. In the end, the subtle but insidious presence of violence in the city fractionalizes the broader Palestinian community, silences those who wish to remain safe, and effectively extinguishes a collective will to resist.

This section brings together both the fulness of life in conflict zones, as well as the fragility of day-to-day stability and routines. Times of political change and revolution are full of risk; no one can be sure what will result. As psychological studies show time and time again, uncertainty is a powerful stressor and dealing with unknowns is often more challenging than navigating situations of injustice (Beck 2015).[12] Exploring the reality of violence in this space paints a clearer picture of life under Occupation, and makes evident how the pain of a bad situation is sometimes better than the anticipation of the unknown. Noble as it may be to stand up for what is right – regardless of how small the injustice, regardless of the cost – this section attempts to contextualize that stance within the messy reality of real lives. These folks certainly care about justice, but they are simultaneously committed to their families, jobs, friends, and communities. Nevertheless, this section shows that any security gained is tenuous, the future remains uncertain, and unease lurks beneath the surface of even the most comfortable Palestinian communities.

Chapter Five: As Chapters Two through Four demonstrate, people in this community often ignore, dodge, buy into the systems of power as they navigate their lives within systems of oppression. These chapters also show the context and narratives from which these actions emerge, the difficulty of keeping "politics" at a distance in such a political environment, and the ways in which privilege and vulnerability shift and change throughout daily life. Chapter Five moves on to examine possibilities for system change, despite the durability of power structures and the complexities of living in oppressive spaces. Ultimately, I propose that re-thinking and reframing our ideas of revolutionary politics may better address these realities and potentially help facilitate change.

[12] As another example of this psychological reality, one study showed a significant increase in blood pressure for subjects trying to ready themselves for an unpredictable shock when compared to subjects who knew when the shock would come (Greco and Roger 2003)

Building off of Chapter Four, I begin by exploring the ways in which calls for revolution – without recognition of the realities of daily life may overlook the full spectrum of both oppressive experience and potential action that unfolds within this space. Furthermore, because Palestinian identity is deeply rooted in ideas of resistance and struggle, macro-narratives about resistance are often at odds with the seemingly small ways that folks navigate around politics. As will be clear from the preceding chapters, in order to get through day-to-day life and build their communities and families, Palestinians may necessarily choose to buy into the Occupation in small ways. While they may also engage in impactful resistance activities, I show that any decision that supports the Occupation essentially strips one of the authority needed to participate in Palestinian politics. Instead, many feel that an "all-or-nothing" approach to participatory politics and resistance dominates the space.

I highlight the ways that singularly focused ideas about oppression and resistance – structured around a) what oppression "looks like" and b) whether or not resistance should occur from within or from without – are often impossible to reconcile with the reality of one's lived experience. For example, while the plight of refugees in the camps remains dire, the claims of those with relative privilege are often disregarded or considered a distraction from "more important" political fights at hand. Furthermore, some feel that if individuals or communities collaborate with Israeli power and politics – even towards resistance – they are undermining a broader resistance movement. Other activists look down on those who renounce *all* ties with Israel, seeing this hardline approach as unrealistic and a handicap to a real solution. Overall, self-perceptions, external judgements, and the mutually exclusive nature of these narratives add to feelings of despair and internal fractionalization that run through the broader Palestinian community.

These stories showcase the challenges of generating solidarity, unified resistance, and even the *hope* for change in such an environment. While the upper-class community may be tight knit, empathetic, and full of love for one another, in many ways this group is estranged and distanced from other sections of Palestinian society. Surrounded by the strains and frustrations of everyday life, the potential for violence and loss, and a deep sense of despair, choices to forgo political action, social movements, or overt resistance are the norm. Instead, many choose to craft the most meaningful lives possible given the circumstances – an understandable outcome given the dynamics of power unearthed throughout this dissertation. Ultimately, the ways that power works within this community is recognizable across time and space, the choices individuals make are deeply human, and these realities are important to bring to light if we want to address injustice more broadly. To

discount individuals or communities who hold privilege along certain dimensions and who use that privilege to build better lives for themselves and their families within oppressive structures, is to write off *most* people. To put it simply, seeking a more just world without accounting for the complicated, contradictory, and problematic nature of our lifeworlds is likely futile.

Furthermore, narratives or calls for revolution that are based on achieving a "better life," fail to acknowledge the thriving, flourishing aspects of life that exist within even oppressive spaces. As mentioned, bargaining away what you know (even if it is imperfect) for a potentially unknowable "better" future is counter to our human psychology. By ignoring the lives that *do* exist in these spaces, leaders and organizers may be further alienating a population from participation in social movements or pushes for change. Rather than frame resistance movements as "all or nothing" or alienate potential members of a group for leading contradictory lives, I conclude by suggesting several ways we may re-think our narratives of struggle, justice, and social/political change.

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Because this book is about people's lives, frustrations, and feelings, I also want to acknowledge that the ways that theory fits with the stories that follow it is a bit messy. I urge you to accept the mess. Presenting a parsimonious theory that explains immeasurably complicated human relations would be disingenuous. If anything, the dynamics that unfold in the following pages are complex. That's the point! Nevertheless, I also have faith that the stories in the chapters that follow will speak for themselves with a clarity that surprises you. As Hannah Arendt purportedly said, *storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it,* and I aim to "reveal meaning" throughout this dissertation. I hope that these stories arouse emotions, provoke reactions, and lead to personal insights for each reader. While the ideas above point the reader in a certain theoretical direction, I wouldn't be surprised if the stories themselves provoke other, equally profound but altogether unique takeaways as you read.

Of course, this is not to overlook the fact that my own interpretations, beliefs, and positionally underscore the construction of the events that I present in the following pages. Indeed, it is incredibly important to consider how my own biases, privileges, and perspectives shape what I "see" (or don't see) in this space. As a non-Arab, white, well-educated, upper-middle class, American woman my understanding of this community is in many ways quite distant. I will never know the pain of living through an Intifada. I will never catch all the nuances in an Arabic conversation.

Nevertheless, my friendship with Aya and my relationships in this space are almost a decade old, long pre-dating the fieldwork that undergirds this book. Therefore, there was never a possibility of "neutral" observation. Many of these people were my friends before they were the subjects of this book. They know me as their children's teacher, as Aya's "plus one" at all community events, as Anna. And I know them not as "the upper-class," but as Karim's mother, as Zaid's sister, as down-to-earth Lubna, or as slightly ditzy, yet fiercely loyal Sara…

Even with my biases and through the lens of my particular position, I believe that these stories from Palestine hold nuggets of clarity about difficult to understand ideas like *power* or *oppression.* These are slippery concepts that are simultaneously obvious and ungraspable, overwhelming and elusive. On one hand, we know dangerous power imbalances when we see them: phenomena like occupation/colonialism, institutionalized racism, and economic disparity baldly threaten ideals of justice and equality. On the other hand, the ways these systems are woven into our daily lives can be almost imperceptible. Obviously, for those in the throes of violence, pain is abundantly clear.[13] But systems of oppression do not inflict constant or transparent physical pain on all bodies. Even in the darkest spaces of conflict, even in the most powerless populations, people do not live in states of perpetual suffering. And so, while we may understand oppression in its most nebulous or conceptual forms (*"occupation is oppressive"*) and suffering in its most individualized and concrete manifestation (physical pain), everything in-between is a bit tricky to pin down. Not only are the webs of power incredibly complex, intersectional, and difficult to trace, they are also constantly in flux. By showcasing the dynamics of one small community, this dissertation attempts to make some of these intricacies more tangible.

In the simplest language, this is a project that looks at what life looks like for a group of people living under a broader system of oppression. I look at what happens when this one group faces obstacles to living the lives they want to live, where they stand up, where they shut up, and how life moves forward. I look at why a situation that everyone agrees is not ideal, not just, and not fair, continues on. While this is a story about Palestine, it holds infinite moments, interactions, and relationships that readers may recognize regardless of their familiarity with the region. Such instances shed light on concepts of power and oppression without getting bogged down in the language of the academy. Though we may not all have the exact words to explain these dynamics,

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[13] As Elaine Scarry notes, for the person suffering, "so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty'" (1987, 4).

these flashes of recognition sharpen our understanding of the world more broadly, and *that* is powerful indeed.

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Chapter 2

A THOUSAND LIVES A DAY

And the air was full of Thoughts and Things to Say. But at times like these, only the Small Things are ever said. Big Things lurk unsaid inside.

— Arundhati Roy*, The God of Small Things* (1997)

Aya has dark eyes, full black brows, and beautiful olive skin. I only mention this because she works hard on her appearance. She is happy to tell you about her fillers and her Botox, her Urban Decay makeup or the M.A.C. products she has me bring over in my suitcase when I travel from America. Her makeup is flawless, but never too much. Not like some of the women in the city, who look like garish Kardashians gone wrong. She carries her makeup around in a huge bag that is nestled inside a larger Free People purse. Every day, she has to wash it all off to pray and then put it all back on again. Over and over. This is the routine.

She can put on her face in five minutes. I've seen her do it after a long day at work, when she needs to run to a wedding or a funeral or a women's dinner in the evening. As with all of her life, her actions are fast, practiced, and not a movement is wasted. Cheeks sucked in. First the liquid foundation. Brushed smooth in five sweeping strokes. Then the blush. The rolled-on eyeshadow. Mascara. A swipe of lipstick. Done in her bedroom in front of a big mirror that sits atop her dresser. A jewelry tree also sits on the dresser, drenched with necklaces, rings, and bracelets – evidence of her family's jewelry business. I can't count the times I've sat in an old, oversized armchair in the corner of that room, slouching next to the prayer rug thrown over the back of the chair. I wait and watch. She throws makeup brushes in the top drawer, slams it shut, throws others in her bag, and grabs her head covering. She covers her hair, but not with the traditional hijab that most women in the city wear. Instead she has a brown, loose, cap. It's from Abu Dhabi, and it's altered by her sister Reema to fit. She wears the same brown cap every day, though she has others. She thinks the black is too harsh for her light olive skin tone.

I've seen Aya do this makeup routine in the car, in the school bathroom, in Teta's living room in front of the mirror above the buffet table. She looks flawless. In contrast, her hair is often undone. Slightly stringy, dark brown, dyed with hints of reddish auburn. It's short, shoulder length. But it's always pulled back in the cap, so what's the point of doing it? For women's parties she'll get

it blown out down the street by her hairstylist. In the cramped salon women sit in front of a nearly broken air conditioner and get their hair done perfectly before covering it up and heading out into the street. Aya gets her brows done here too. They are thick and bold, but perfectly plucked. Always. Sometimes she'll get her face waxed as well, and occasionally she'll have the women at the salon do her eye makeup. But she has to specify, she doesn't want it as dark as most of the women in town.

Perfectly done, Aya floats in and out of the rich circles of the city. She is able to talk with women about skin care regimens, she longs to go shopping at the Nordstrom by her sister Leyla's house in America, or at least go to the big malls in Saudi with her sisters Karma and Summer who live in Jedda. She always looks the part. Finely dressed. Fashion on point, and just a little bit more "in style" than the non-American women of the city. She's been a part of this community since marrying her husband, Zaid, back in 1996. Born in America, Aya's family moved her and her sisters back to Palestine when they were in high school.[14] Rocked by a family scandal - a cousin who eloped with a non-Muslim man - her father thought it best his daughters be raised in the *bilad*, the home country. After finishing high school, she attended a local Palestinian college and studied business. While doing a school project she was forced to go door-to-door in a neighboring town to conduct a survey. It was then that she met Zaid's family. They invited her in, hit it off, and Aya and Zaid were married the following year. She moved to his hometown and has been there ever since, leaving in the summers to visit her family in America, leaving in the winters to visit her mother in Saudi, or leaving when the violence gets to be too much.

For as long as I've known her, she's been in the same small house across the street from her in-laws. She lives on the ground floor of a multi-story complex, and Zaid's family owns the whole building. The woman upstairs died recently, so that's vacant now. The top floor is used by Zaid's sister-in-law for her Qaran club, but other than that it sits empty. The basement level is a one-room studio; that's where I live. Aya's floor is well decorated and cozy. She hates it. She calls it a "cave" because it's rather dark, nestled in the hillside overlooking the city. She and I spend most of our time

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[14] Between 150,000 and 250,000 Palestinians live in the United States, forming a uniquely tight knit community that is "to an unusual degree… deeply involved in the politics of their native land" (Christison 1989, 18–19). Many of these families travel back and forth between the US and Palestine – spending summers in Palestine, moving their children to Palestine for schooling, or returning to Palestine to find marriage partners. Because these communities (Palestinian/American and Palestinian) are so intertwined, there is far less distance between returning Palestinians and locals than one may find in different contexts. Integration back into a community on the ground in Palestine is usually quite fluid from a social perspective (Naif 2014; Rahss 2017). Nevertheless, there are some Palestinian-American communities in the West Bank who are insulated from the rest of the Palestinian population (Nieberg and Zaher 2019), these groups are *not* the focus of this project.

in a tiny, cramped kitchen in the back of the house. If she's home, she's either there or in her bed. Other than that, she's at work, at her in-laws' home, or visiting her Reema in a nearby city. She's been begging her husband to build a new house, buy a new house, renovate the upstairs apartment… anything, just get her a new kitchen. She wants out. Until then, she practically lives at the school.

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This chapter details a "typical" day in Aya's life. It provides details about moments, emotions, and choices that may not seem related to politics or oppression at all. Nevertheless, by providing the reader with a full sense of what life looks like in this space, I hope to reveal the complexity of recognizing, confronting, or challenging power in our daily lives. As will be clear, Aya is not overtly weighing the political ramifications of her seemingly mundane daily choices. The politics and power restricting her movements, her visa, her freedom to act, all sit in the background, present but irreparable at the moment. No one could possibly expect that she pause in every instant to analyze the power structures in which her life is embedded. How would she get anything done?!

However, as you will see, as she moves through her everyday life her behaviors (both overtly and implicitly) support, avoid, *and* resist a plethora of interwoven institutions throughout the day. From the Israeli authority (my focus here), to gender stereotypes, to social norms, Aya navigates the rules, constraints, and expectations that different power structures place on her shoulders every day. In some moments she, and those around her, choose to push back, while in others she reluctantly accepts the state of things. Finally, in some small moments we see how she actively chooses to buy in to the Israeli Occupation – perhaps compromising the moral high ground, but ultimately reigning in a bit of chaos and making life a little bit smoother.

I hope that this chapter provides the reader a sense of how subtly, but deeply, our lives are embedded in these power structures. The durability of this power cannot be fully understood if we focus our study on revolutions and resistance movements. Rather, we must acknowledge how *living life* within the confines of these systems often bolsters and reifies the status quo. By looking at a single day in a single life, it also becomes clear that power and politics are not the singular focus of those who live under systems of oppression. Recognizing these tensions will be essential in rethinking how we – activists, leaders, and academics – think about generating broader, more effective resistance to injustice.

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Aya and I have a running joke that working at the school is like "living a thousand lives a day." From the moment she wakes up – around 4:00am for *fajr* prayer – until she sleeps, she is on the go. One of her favorite songs of 2017 was "Flames," by Sia and David Guetta, and she would often belt the mantra-like refrain, "Go, go, go / Figure it out, figure it out, but don't stop moving." It's her anthem. "If you keep moving," she tells me, "then you don't have to think about the hopelessness of your life." She's joking, but only slightly. We talk often about depression and feeling directionless with our lives. Some of it has to do with Palestine – "This is just such a *hard* place," Aya laments. I infer that she is talking about a number of things – her struggle to get a spousal visa from the Israeli administration, the background of violence that can disrupt her daily life, the lack of local resources due to years of struggle that compromise the infrastructure and functioning of the city. But some of the hardships are more universal, family, career, life stuff.

In a moment of self-reflection, Aya once told me that life would be easier for her if she hadn't grown up with the American messaging – *You are special! Put yourself first! Live for you!* In Palestine, a woman her age with kids doesn't "live for herself." Suggesting such an audacious notion would draw a laugh. In Aya's world, family and community can trump individual happiness. Aya struggles with this. On one hand, she is brimming over with ambition, with thoughts of leaving her husband and family, starting a business empire, living for herself. On the other hand, how could she? "This American mentality is so selfish!" she exclaims. With a sigh, she admits that ideas of venturing out on her own is terrifying anyway. What if it backfired? While Aya is not averse to taking a stand and making hard decisions, leaving her life here in Palestine is not one she could afford. Better the devil you know than the abyss. And so, she throws herself into her work, into her day-to-day tasks. She keeps moving.

For as long as I've known her, Aya will wax on to whoever will listen about how the school is the thing keeping her together. I always find this ironic because the school also seems to be the source of her daily headaches. For the past decade, she's served as the head of an elite, bilingual, non-profit, locally run, K-12 international school. Built from the ground up, the school is still in its nascent stages, with about 600 students and a staff of around 80. Each year, the school recruits and brings in around 15-20 foreign teachers to provide an immersive English education. It's never been done before in the northern part of Palestine, and it hasn't been an easy road.

Aya constantly feels undervalued and under-appreciated in the school community. I can't count the times I've watched parents and board members blame her for things that go wrong, regardless of her culpability. If students aren't picking up English fast enough, if test scores are too low, if foreign teachers seem to be pushing a foreign agenda, if foreign teachers aren't "foreign" enough… Aya takes the angry phone calls, takes the blame. What infuriates me most (on Aya's behalf) is that the same group of parents and staff seem happy to take the credit when things go right. "That's the society," she tells me, "it'll never change." And she's right. Every few months some new school catastrophe wells up, a new fire to put out. Some problems are huge (all of the American and British teachers being denied entry by Israeli soldiers at the border), some are small (parents forming a Facebook group to boycott the increase in book fees). Nevertheless, these issues always lead to a flurry of phone calls, yelling, gossip in the community, quiet tears shed by behind closed doors, and – occasionally – Aya loudly declaring that she is going to quit. But then the ship steadies and things keep moving forward. The school gets her out of bed in the morning, and she needs that.

On a typical day, we head into work around 6:30am. While Aya may have relative economic privilege within the broader city community, her daily work habits are not an outlier. The unemployment rate in Palestine has been declining steadily over the past few years, and unemployment in the West Bank has consistently been well below the numbers coming out of Gaza (Palestine Unemployment Rate Data 2020; Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics Report 2019). Therefore, Aya's preoccupation with work that comes up throughout this chapter is not unique to her situation.

We meet at the top of her stairs, me coming up from my apartment, her from hers. With the 2017 pop hits CD (a mix from her niece in America) blasting, Aya winds her car down back streets toward the school. She veers around upended dumpsters and packs of wild dogs, mumbling, "*astaghfirallah*" (lit. "God forgive me," colloquially used to express shame or disapproval of a situation) under her breath as the dogs bark and start to chase the car.[15]

We're always the first people to arrive at school, and Aya parks her brown Volvo with the yellow plates in the gravel lot in front of the school gates. The car was recognizably hers in this city - the only one of its kind - and it was therefore a constant signal of her whereabouts. The Volvo used

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[15] As will be clearer in Chapter Three, daily annoyances (like the feral dogs) are ever-present but not all consuming, a background reminder of the inadequacy of the local government in dealing with pest control.

to be a real luxury vehicle, but the washed out Nabulsi streets, full of potholes and debris, wore it down over the years. Because she carries an American passport, Aya was allowed to register her car in Israel back in 2011 when she first got it, giving her access to the coveted yellow Israeli license plates. These plates – as opposed to the Palestinian white plates with green writing – allow a driver to take a car directly from the West Bank into Israel. From a Palestinian city straight to Tel Aviv. For many years, this meant that Aya was able to travel into Israel freely with her American passport. This privilege is rare, as it allowed her to sidestep the process that Palestinian ID holders must go through to travel across the border wall. Riddled with bureaucratic red tape, a notorious drain on time and money, and often resulting in seemingly arbitrary decisions, this process is grueling for many Palestinians.

Movement across the Israeli border wall is highly monitored and restricted by Israeli authorities. Palestinian cars bearing white plates (issued to all Palestinian ID holders) are not allowed to cross. Palestinian ID holders are also not allowed to cross without a permit (*tasreeh*; تصريح). Applying for and receiving permits is a highly politicized process, requiring a Palestinian applicant go through both the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Israeli offices in the West Bank. Approval of permits is often contingent on the reason for the petition, personal connections within the PA or Israeli authority, and financial status. For Palestinians who work in Israel, continued employment often means crossing the border illegally if permits don't come through (Palestinians in Israel n.d.; Restrictions on Movement 2017).

Since 2016, however, Aya's own visa issues began to complicate that journey. Now, though the car was legally permitted to enter Israel, she was not. The new restrictions on spousal visas for Palestinians without Palestinian ID living in the West Bank came without warning or explanation. In a flash, the privilege Aya once had to travel freely was completely revoked. What's more, because she doesn't hold a proper Palestinian ID, she is unable to apply for a permit through the Palestinian channels. Like many foreign-passport holding Palestinians, Aya chose to forgo getting a Palestinian ID (*hawiya;* هوية) when they were first issued after the First Intifada. Had she registered for a Palestinian ID, she would have lost the privileges that came with her American passport (travelling into the Tel Aviv airport and travelling freely between Israeli and Palestine, as well as less formal privileges concerning treatment at borders). For a decade, she therefore remained on her American passport – legally residing in the country on a spousal visa, travelling freely into Israel as an American. Then, without warning, changes in policy suddenly jeopardized Aya's ability to consistently be granted this visa and her access to Israel was cut off (Laub and Daraghmeh 2018).

Essentially, she is now stuck in the West Bank. Practically, this means that in the fall of 2017, when the Volvo's registration expires, Aya's restricted visa makes it impossible for her to enter Tel Aviv to re-register the car. She can still drive it unregistered in Palestinian controlled areas, but if she is ever stopped by Israelis on the roads between Palestinian cities, she'll face huge fines at the least. This, of course, is all something she says she doesn't have time to think about. It is the state of things, and it seems to be largely outside of her control.

The school has changed locations three times in the past seven years, and its stability and sustainability are a constant question in the back of Aya's mind. The Palestine Academy was a brainchild of a group of Palestinian community leaders (doctors, lawyers, engineers) in the wake of the Second Intifada. Because the city bore the brunt of some of the most extreme violence of the uprising, there was a need to rebuild. The founding board agreed that a competitive, global, English education was the only way for Palestine to move forward. The city needed a place to build the next generation of leadership for the country. So, the Academy was born. In so many ways, the Academy represents the focal point for Aya's resistance to Israeli Occupation. In it, she has vested her hope for the future – creating a space where students can think critically, develop strong English skills, and use their privilege to build Palestine up again.

The school opened its doors in a building shared with a local NGO, just grades 1-3 with a group of families who felt that anything was better than the government education available at the time. The shared space worked for a few years, but as the Academy program expanded the generosity of the NGO waned and things ended on not-so-pleasant-terms. With desks piled in the streets, the Academy needed a new home. From there, thanks to a generous mayor who believed in the school's mission, the group moved to a municipally owned community center. After a team of teachers and parents added temporary dividing walls to the community center's large basement the space worked fine. That is, until it flooded with sewage during the rainy winter of 2012. School was cancelled and the same team of teachers and parents salvaged as much as they could (although some of the school's library books still have a questionable film coating their pages… a sign that perhaps *less* salvaging may have been in order). The Academy moved again.

This time, the school's board of directors agreed to rent land and build a temporary school structure as they searched for a more permanent solution. There was a hot debate about where to rent due to the political, security, and municipal splits within the West Bank. In the mid-1990s (before the Second Intifada), the Oslo Accords effectively divided the West Bank into three Areas (A, B, and C) with varying levels of Palestinian autonomy. All of the major Palestinian cities –

Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, etc. – fall in Area A. In these areas both civil and security affairs are dealt with by the Palestinian Authority (PA). Alternatively, Area B contains most Palestinian villages, rural communities, and refugee camps. Area B is under the civil control of the PA, but Israel remains in charge of security. Finally, Area C (about 62% of West Bank land) is under full Israeli control (Haas 2012; Oslo II: Annex I 1995). While most of the city and the potential locations for rent fell within Area A, one amazing plot of land was located in Area B. This caused a great deal of angst because, while things were calm at the moment, any rise in tension may mean that Israeli authorities would step in, cut off access to Area B, and the school would effectively shut down. The board decided it was too risky.

The other constraint the board faced in purchasing a permanent plot of land was economic. The Chairman of the board, a diehard Palestinian leftist named Osama, refused to take any grant money from organizations like USAID or the World Bank because he didn't want support coming from countries or organizations that were also deeply invested in Israel or the global political order that sustained the Occupation.[16] Therefore, the school relied primarily on local donors and bank loans. As a non-profit organization with no revenue, this ideological stance seriously limited the Academy's options for investing in land. While subtle, this act of defiance was certainly a small way that the group pushed back against the Occupation. It undoubtedly was the harder road to development, but it was development without any strings attached. In the end, Osama himself was instrumental in funding and coordinating a three-year lease on a plot of land on the outskirts of the city. He and the rest of the board figured out a way, in the month before school, to erect a mishmash of prefabricated construction units and open the school doors.

On the first day of school this year, in 2017, the school had been at this location for two of its three years. Each summer the board had to build prefab-structure on top of prefab-structure as enrollment expanded. We prayed it would stay upright and crammed as many students as we could into the buildings. The walls snapped together like Legos, and the complex bore a noticeable resemblance to an Israeli settler outpost (providing fodder for countless tongue-in-cheek comments from teachers, staff, and community members alike about the potential colonial nature of the international program).[17] Nevertheless, the school ran a competitive program and graduated its first class in 2016. The SAT scores of several graduating seniors were high enough to secure them

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[16] As we will see shortly, this belief is at odds with the school's need to coordinate teacher visas with the assistance of an Israeli legal team. The dynamics of this choice are discussed later in the chapter.
[17] For more on illegal Israeli settlement construction and for visuals of the prefab units see Berger (2018).

positions at elite universities in America and Canada, and so, in many ways, the original dream of the founding board has come true. As we enter the prefab units, however, it seems like there is always more work to do.

Today, it's a mid-September morning and the craziness of the first week of school has passed. Even though it is already autumn, the morning heat hints that the day will be a scorcher – we'll surely get complaints from all the teachers with broken air conditioners in their classrooms. A soft haze blankets the squat, aluminum buildings, and the resident cat (whom Aya detests, but students and teachers love) darts under the fence and heads down the road.

Every morning starts the same, and Aya is both comforted and stifled by the routine. After we drop our bags in our respective offices – mine at the front of the administration section of the units, hers at the back – we amble down the main corridor to the small staff kitchen. The kitchen is just a narrow space next to the female teachers' bathrooms, maybe one yard wide, three yards long. It had a sink, a cabinet housing about 50 Arabic coffee cups, a few big mugs, salt, spices, tea bags, Arabic coffee grounds, utensils, and old plastic bags (the "bag of bags" is apparently a universal phenomenon). Defying all fire codes, under the cabinet there is a portable stovetop. It has three burners and is perched precariously on top of an old student desk. A hose winds down from the burners to the floor where the stove is attached to a big, blue gas canister. Once the canister got hooked up wrong and filled the whole kitchen and bathroom with gas. It's astonishing there wasn't an explosion, given the lack of ventilation. I try not to count the potential crises (architectural, electrical, etc.) that have been averted thanks to sheer luck.

As will become clear in the next chapter, the mandates, regulations, and policies of the local and regional Palestinian governments are often ignored by Palestinians. While there *are* safety standards, and while the Ministry of Education does come to check that these standards were being met, there is a constant tension between the school administration and the local Ministry authorities. More often than not, when we fail to meet a certain standard for safety, curriculum, or procedure, someone from the board who is friends with the Minister of Education will intervene to ensure that the school is not shut down. This is not to say that our administration does not take safety or academic standards seriously. On the contrary, the lack of regard for the Ministry standards more often stems from a belief that the Ministry had no idea how to run an international, English language school, and that therefore we need to do whatever is necessary to get through their red tape. The practice of using back channels is not unique to our program.

Trusting that the stove won't burn the building down today, I fill the silver Arabic coffee pot with water and set it directly on the flame, making sure not to cut off the gas and put the fire out. The wall behind the stove is a dirty yellowish brown, sticky with oil and small brown flecks, stained from the things cooked over time. The water heats slowly, and I duck into the bathroom to fix my hair while Aya puts four scoops of our Starbucks ground coffee into the French press. Aya bustles around making sure our mugs are clean and I lean in the entryway to the small kitchen.

I comment on the fact that Umm Ameer saw a mouse in the kitchen yesterday. Umm Ameer is a middle-aged woman who works for the school. I'm not really sure of her job title, I don't think she has one. She cleans the kitchen, brings Aya food, makes coffee for the teachers, serves guests if we have any, straighten things up, and helps out the janitorial staff. Aya swears that without Umm Ameer she couldn't work here.

It's early, so no one else is in the building. Normally, you have to be careful while chatting in the kitchen because everyone in the bathroom or in Aya's office can hear what you're saying because of the shared aluminum walls. Or vice versa. Aya often has me run and check the bathrooms before certain meetings so she can make sure no one is listening in.

When the water is just close to boiling, Aya pours it into the French press and we carry the French press and two ceramic mugs back to her office. We sit and wait for it to steep. Talking casually and snacking on some dates that Aya's sister-in-law brought back from Medina, we bask in the calm before the school day begins. The dates are sweet and moist, a perfect breakfast treat. As we prepare for the day ahead, we keep circling back to the two biggest problems the school is facing at the start of its 7th year: hiring and visas. This ends up being a problem for both the international and the local Palestinian department.

Each year, finding the local talent for the Arabic program (which covers Arabic language, religion, and Palestinian social studies) is an uphill battle. Teaching is an undervalued profession in Palestine, a country that still uses a matriculation exam to determine college majors. The brightest, most engaged students are pressured to become doctors and engineers, leaving the country with an odd surplus of these professionals. In fact, our gym teacher is an engineer. Even with the amazing people the school has found over the years, some of the best Palestinian teachers are not stable employees. Between a brain drain caused by the economics of the Occupation and the upheaval caused by Israeli political and security measures, there is a lack of consistency year to year and sometimes even day to day (Abumaria 2017; O'Sullivan 2011; Statistics on Palestinians in the custody of the Israeli security forces 2020).

The two men who lead the high school Arabic and religion departments are a good example of how these dynamics impact the school each year. Both men are often in and out of Israeli prison. They participate in online political message boards and their engagement in community politics often results in midnight detentions by the Israeli forces. Sometimes they're gone a few weeks. Sometimes a day. Sometimes months. Once, one was detained without charges for a year and a half. In addition to the emotional toll this takes on students and staff, there is also an economic component to these detentions. Throughout detention, the PA attempts to financially support families of detainees through the "Martyrs Fund" (a social welfare program), and often this program is supplemented by a continuation of support (through regular salary dispersals and/or through holding the prisoner's job) from the prisoner's employer. Additionally, in 2018, Israel began withholding funds from the PA "to penalize it for paying stipends to Palestinian prisoners" (Kershner 2018). While it is difficult to trace the myriad impacts of these decisions to "stand up" to Israeli power, it is clear that the ramifications of imprisonment and the aftermath of detention ripples through political, social, and economic organizations in the West Bank.

Aya, who deeply appreciates the work of these two men, supports them and their families throughout each detention. The school ensures that their wives and children are cared for and refuses to let them go despite their instability and the immense strain their imprisonments put on the already tight resources of the program. There is tension in this support – Aya simultaneously cares for their families and overtly voices her frustration with how the men's political engagement puts stressors on the school's ability to succeed. These unforeseen detentions not only hurt the program economically, they also cause students to lose valuable class time as we scramble to find a substitute for the interim period.

Several months after a particularly long imprisonment, it was brought to Aya's attention that one of the men was back on a message board. She sent the assistant principal on a house visit to the teacher, urging him to focus on his job, begging him to stay politically silent. In many ways, gagging political speech is essential in holding up the status quo and enabling the Israeli Occupation to persist. At the same time, there are very real ramifications for the school if this man continues to be imprisoned. Is having to shut down the Arabic program worth the airing of grievances online? How do we weigh these choices against one another? For Aya, the day-to-day realities of what it means to keep the school running win out. And so, she asks for silence.

The international department presents a whole different set of issues for the stability of the Academy. The school relies on a cadre of foreign teachers to sustain the immersive English program

– the main draw of the entire Academy compared to other programs in the area – but finding willing and capable teachers and then getting them into the country is a nightmare. As International Program Coordinator, this has been a central part of my job with the school over the past five years. Finding eager, young, qualified candidates who are willing to move to the West Bank, work at a school with few resources and high expectations, live in shared housing, and get paid a mere 2,000 shekels/month (about $500) is only the first hurdle. Interviews are conducted via Skype, and despite checking references we're never *really* sure what we'll get until the teachers arrive. Each year a few will stay for two years, maybe three, but none of them are here to build a life. Even if they wanted to, the visa process makes it nearly impossible for any foreign teacher to enter the West Bank year after year.

When I first started with the school in 2012, foreign staff were allowed to come in through the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. There, after intense questioning teachers were given a three-month tourist visa. Upon arrival in the West Bank, the school would send everyone's passports through the Palestinian Authority to the Israeli Military Authority and the three months would be extended into a one-year volunteer visa. My first year, policy inexplicably changed, and our tourist visa was turned into a one-year volunteer visa with an extra stamp that declared us "West Bank Only".[18] This stamp restricted travel and meant that we could not go beyond the separation wall into Israel. In protest, a group of teachers carpooled down to the Israeli military compound near Ramallah in an attempt to change the stamp. Along with several teachers from Bir Zeit University, as well as spouses of Palestinian ID holders, we met with the general in charge of the visa program. When asked why I wanted to travel into Israel, I looked at him and declared naively, "Well wouldn't you?" It got a chuckle, and that year our passports were amended with a hand-written note that we could, in fact, travel freely throughout Israel and Palestine.

Two years later, policy changed yet again. It was 2014, and I had just returned to the US to start my PhD program. My husband and I were driving from California up to Seattle to start fresh, though I was still working closely with the school on hiring and training foreign staff. On an August morning as my husband sat in a roadside diner, I sat on the curb taking a very expensive international phone call with Aya. All of our foreign teachers had been detained at Ben Gurion

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[18] These denials, restrictions, and other visa problems faced by those trying to live and work in the West Bank are tracked and reported by the "Right to Enter" campaign. This group organizes, advocates, and documents visa problems. However, they have difficulty in finding people to come forward with issues due to fears that any action or protest will be met with Israeli crackdown and banishment from the country (Right to Enter 2019).

airport and were not allowed to enter Israel. They were being held for 24 hours at the airport and then the teachers were to be put on planes out of the country. They were told they needed to get visas before arrival (an impossible process, as any American who asked a local Israeli consulate about visas would have been told to enter on a tourist visa…).[19]

That year was a low point for the school. Alumni teachers, friends of the school, and others reached out to political and legal contacts. The school year started with no foreign staff, and a drastically reduced English program. Eventually, the school was able to find an Israeli human rights firm and get a lawyer on the case. She was able to petition the court to allow the teachers to enter the West Bank through Jordan. The ones who stayed on contract (a handful of the denied teachers left for other jobs) arrived months later, untrained, unprepared, and were thrown into classrooms.

From that point forward, even approved visas are "West Bank Only," meaning foreign staff are not allowed to enter through Israel or visit any Israeli-controlled cities (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Haifa, Acre… all the main tourist destinations) during the duration of their contracts. Ever since the staff detentions at Ben Gurion, the school has kept Leah, an American-Israeli lawyer, on retainer. This is done in a hush-hush way, as the school's collaboration with an Israeli firm is a source of shame for the Chairman of the board. There is no getting around the fact that a significant amount of the school's budget is going to Israel. Osama, himself, refuses to travel to Israel on principle, refuses to collaborate or pay for any of the services that would make his travel and movement around the country easier. And on the matter of school legal assistance, he is forced to cave. Though the legal team is pro-Palestinian and devoted to making sure the school stays open, the school's connection to and reliance on the Israeli team deeply pains him. Nevertheless, without the legal assistance, foreign teachers would not be able to enter the city, and the entire school would close.

Osama knows our hands are tied but wishes we could be independently Palestinian. To stand up against the status quo on this issue, to hold true to his political beliefs, would simultaneously mean sacrificing the school – his main source of pride, his investment in Palestine's future, his form of resistance to the Occupation. Escaping the institutions of power in this case is impossible. Resistance is not possible without submission. Though this Catch-22 is clear in the visa process, it is not something that either Aya or Osama can dwell on for long. Both have a thousand other things

[19] From 2012-2019 the entry process for those wishing to live, volunteer, or work in the West Bank has become harder and harder. In addition to the spousal visa issues mentioned earlier, foreign volunteers and academics are also being routinely shut out of the country. For more on these issues see (Redden 2019; Zabaneh 2018)

to attend to throughout the day, and so the tension between the institutional reality and their ideological commitments is pushed into the background.

The visa process, while drawn-out and convoluted, has now become part of our routine. Each spring, before the current school year has come to a close, we begin the working on visas for the upcoming year. In May, our lawyer Leah petitions for visa "pre-approval" for our teachers as soon as they are hired. After filing paperwork, petitions, and letters of support, this approval sometimes granted immediately. Sometimes it is not. If we can't fulfill our hiring needs by the end of May, our chances of getting teachers in by the start of the coming school year drops significantly. If an approval does not come through in time, Leah then appeals to the Israeli Supreme Court for a faster decision. Overall, bringing in foreign teachers costs the school around one million shekels a year. And there is never a guarantee that these foreign staff members will a) get in, b) stay with the school, or c) be good teachers. "But what is the other option?" Aya laments, "The English program is the reason parents enroll their kids in the school." Our hands are tied.

This fall, we are still waiting on approval for three teachers. The teachers have flown to Jordan, and they sit on stand-by in Amman, ready to enter at a moment's notice. As we drink our coffee and munch on our dates, Aya and I discuss the pros and cons of the situation. Is it right to have the teachers fly overseas and wait, causing the school to hemorrhage money on per diems and hotel fees? Or would it be best to have them wait in their home countries and then pay for next-day airfare when the approval comes through? The problem with the latter choice is that they might bail. We have no guarantee on approval, and we've had several instances where newly hired staff get sick of waiting. I tell Aya I'm glad we've put them up in Jordan, we just have to pray that Leah gets them through soon. Between filing papers, waiting, and strategizing day-to-day logistics, we do not have time to think about the fact that Leah's salary is – according to some – a sign that Aya, Osama, and the school are "buying in" to Occupation. At the day-to-day level, the onerous "choice" to buy into the Occupation is reduced to a 10-minute talk over morning coffee.

At 7:10am I leave Aya's office. Though I thought I could dedicate the whole day to shadowing her work, she needs me to teach a few blocks. I'm covering classes until the other foreign teachers get in, and so I run off to make copies for the lesson. This leaves the administrative staff short-handed, but we have no other options. The students always come first. After an hour and a half with the fourth graders, I go out with the elementary students to monitor their break time. As I watch them, I'm struck by how much these kids are just *kids*. They run, play soccer, talk in small

groups, wander in pairs. They have open hearts, even if they aren't always kind to one another (or to their teachers). Some of them are sassy, some die for adult approval, some are rude, some are weirdos. They face different challenges and different triumphs in their lives, most of which are unknown to me.

After the break, I head back to Aya's office. She seems visibly upset, head in her hands. When I walk in, she looks up and rubs her eyes. "I give up," she says, "I need to just leave everything to the white men." She shakes her head and explains how the head of the high school international program – Thomas, a wonderful, yet *very* white, American man – spent five minutes talking to a mother who Aya had been dealing with for a week, and the woman left satisfied. This mother was the head of a group of parents who were up in arms about the fact that some of the school materials - science and math texts - weren't being printed for the students in color. Due to the lax copyright laws in Palestine, sometimes printing out copies of books for students was cheaper than shipping them from the US. The fact that we printed some of these texts in black and white was causing an uproar. Aya had been working for a week on calming these protests. One meeting with Thomas and the parents calmed down. Aya loves working with Tom, but I understand her frustration. These parents don't treat her the way they treat him. They complain to her, call her at all hours of the night, make her life a nightmare if they have any small problems with the school program. Yet they listen to Thomas. His Ivy League education, his passport, his stature, these things take him far in this town.[20] "Draft my resignation," she jokes, "none of this is worth it, he can just take the school."

She moves on, turning to the other pressing issues for the day. First, she needs to find a solution for an American teacher who is already floundering in the high school science department. While his grasp of physics is clear, he is unable to communicate well with the students. The seniors need to pass the SAT Physics test in order to graduate, so we need a solution. All week parents have filed into Aya's office demanding a change. Many of them have hired private physics tutors at home. Last week, the students in one of his classes staged a walk-out because they didn't understand any of the lesson. Aya was horrified. She calls in the middle school science teacher and discusses the possibility of switching her to high school. It could solve things, though Aya has no idea if this petite, local woman will do any better.

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[20] In many ways, Aya simultaneously loves and loathes Thomas' privilege and status. His intervention in this case has made her life easier, solving a brewing issue, but she is frustrated that such intervention is necessary.

Next, Aya turns to an issue that arose in the 8th grade social studies class. The foreign teacher apparently used a text that had a picture of the prophet Mohammad riding a horse with the head of a woman. As a non-Muslim, he didn't understand the fallout that this would create among a group of students who viewed depicting the prophet as a grave sin. Aya quickly needed to come up with ways to prevent this issue from blowing up within the community. Things like this could easily become topics of city-wide discussion, and occasionally parents would call for the firing of the foreign teachers. The bigger issue was that this teacher's lessons hadn't been approved by his coordinator, meaning that either a) he was ill prepared and hadn't submitted lesson plans the week before, or b) his coordinator didn't check his plans. Either way, the policies that Aya had put in place were clearly being ignored.

As a temporary solution, Aya calls one of the most vocal 8th grade fathers, explains the situation, and asks him to help mitigate fallout. Luckily, she reaches him before he hears about the incident from someone else. He agrees to help, as long as she ensures that the teacher will be punished. Again, this "back channel" solution is the norm. While informal problem-solving in the political arena will be a central tenet of the next chapter, connections and personal relationships are also key factors in navigating professional and private issues within the city. After hanging up, she decides that she'll deal with the teacher's "punishment" later. There weren't many options on that front. Sure, she could issue warnings or fire someone, but hiring new teachers partway through the year is an impossibility due to the visa restraints. For today, she has temporarily solved the bulk of the issue, and so we leave it at that.

Are these problems "political"? Are the choices made related to the Occupation or macro-institutions of power? There are certainly connections. For example, without the visa restrictions that the Israeli authority imposes on the school, recruitment and hiring would almost certainly draw a stronger cadre of teachers. Perhaps if the global order were different, those coming from the West would better understand and appreciate Muslim culture. These are big "ifs", however, and Aya does not have time to pause school activity and challenge Israeli visa policy or international implicit biases. Where would she even begin? And so, in the moment, she solves these problems as best she can. While pushing the larger, institutional issues to the side may inadvertently sustain these systems, at the individual level it is difficult to see another way forward.

Moments after this issue is put to rest, another problem comes up. Something has happened in a 7th grade English class. The teacher, Ms. Nasreen, is an Arab-American who married a

Palestinian and moved to the West Bank. She's a phenomenal teacher, this is her second year at the school, and normally her native English combined with her Muslim sensitivities make her invaluable. However, today a student from her class comes into Aya's office with the complaint that Ms. Nasreen was spouting "pro-Israel" views in the class.

This is the type of complaint Aya takes quite seriously, due to the potential fallout this could cause in the community. Many Palestinians are already weary of an "American" style school in the city, worried that we will brainwash the children with a political agenda bent on finding peace, rather than justice for Palestine. There is a widespread stereotype within the broader Palestinian community that students who attend the few international, private schools throughout the West Bank are rich kids who don't have a true love for Palestine. As will be clear in later chapters, wealth and relative privilege are often tied to an assumption that someone does not truly understand the hardship of what it means to be Palestinian (this "all or nothing" idea of identity, struggle, and ultimately resistance will be considered at length in Chapter Five).

Nevertheless, accusations of teachers spreading a political agenda that even *hints* at being pro-Israel is cause for real concern. Aya launches an inquisition. She calls in another student from Ms. Nasreen's class. His mother is one of Aya's best friends, and she expects that he is comfortable enough with her to be honest. He is a skinny, darker skinned student with huge front teeth and an unfortunate overbite. He recently got glasses, which make his head look comically bigger on his scrawny frame. He explains in a lisp-y Arabic that Ms. Nasreen was having them play a game called "Around the World," where students went one-by-one, rapid fire, listing things in a certain category. For example, if the category was "vocab words," they would go around the room listing new vocabulary until someone either messed up, repeated a word, or couldn't think of anything. Through elimination, eventually one student would emerge victorious. The problem arose when Ms. Nasreen announced the category of "countries." She also participated in the game, and on her turn, she listed "Israel." In response, several students rejoiced shouting that Israel wasn't a real country and therefore she was out. According to Aya's turtle-faced student informant, Ms. Nasreen proceeded to explain that regardless of their political feelings, Israel was indeed a recognized country.

Here, things get a bit fuzzy. The student can't exactly remember, but he thinks that maybe Ms. Nasreen said that Palestine wasn't a country. His story veers off (a frequent occurrence in these student interrogations), and he begins to complain about a different incident that happened a few weeks ago. He tells Aya that at one point Ms. Nasreen told the class that students who travelled to the *dakhal* (into Israel) with their families had no *intima' al-watani* (national pride/patriotism). This is

a common view held about Palestinians who have the permits to travel across the separation wall, an action seen by other Palestinians as collaborating with the enemy. The student – whose family does, indeed, travel to Tel Aviv for the occasional shopping trip – doesn't seem to grasp the faulty logic of lodging this complaint alongside the first. He's angry that Ms. Nasreen is judging them for not being Palestinian *enough*, but is also upset that she is using class time to project a supposedly pro-Israeli stance? In her tenure as head of school, Aya has grown accustomed to students complaining in any way possible, rational or not, about teachers, work, school activities, etc. She is unfazed.

Still concerned about the stories that may be retold over dinner later tonight, she calls in another student in an attempt to gauge the severity of the debate that may or may not have erupted about the legitimacy of Palestine as a country. Majd, a Palestinian-Canadian transplant whose family moved back to the *bilad* (the home country) a few years ago comes in to offer another perspective. She addresses Aya in English. Aya hopes her fluency will help iron out any miscommunications that may have occurred due to translation. When Aya asks about the "Around the World" incident, Majd genuinely doesn't seem to know what she's talking about. When prompted, she vaguely remembers the game, but doesn't remember who said Israel. Aya lets her go. There's no answer to what actually happened in the class, but Aya is fairly certain it won't spiral into a larger issue. She pulls up the class roster, scanning it for "problem" parents – those most likely to storm into her office demanding Ms. Nasreen be fired. She will give them a call later to get ahead of the issue.

Though it may seem trivial, the Ms. Nasreen incident gets at an internal tension that Aya has been struggling with for years. Raising strong, critical thinking, future leaders of Palestine is the mission of the school. At the same time, the hell that parents, community leaders, or Israeli authorities can raise if she does one thing out of step with their expectations (which are often conflicting) is hardly worth the headache. High school physics, middle school social studies, a 7th grade game… everyone has a problem with something. The consequences for the school are not just theoretical – upset parents have removed their students, teachers have quit, and foreigners have been denied entry at the borders. The cost of rocking the boat on even small matters is potentially enormous.

Simultaneously, this example shows a subtle but important thread of resistance that winds through the school's day-to-day operation. Rather than cave to or sweepingly accept the attitudes and politics of its foreign teachers, the administration works tirelessly to ensure that a staunchly Palestinian ethos envelops the space. If international teachers come in with any ideas about co-existence, normalization, or cooperation with Israel, it is made clear that these ideas have no place in

the classrooms of the Academy. Palestinian politics are only to be discussed with Palestinian teachers, and if it seems that foreign teachers are trying to spread ideas of "peace politics" they are immediately given a warning and a strong talking to. While this stance certainly causes tension between the administration and the foreign teaching staff, it is a red line on which Aya stands strong.

With this incident, however, Aya is fairly sure that things will blow over. She knows that Ms. Nasreen is one of the most pro-Palestinian teachers. She is Muslim, she is Arab, she is not trying to sympathize with Israel. In this case, it is likely a misunderstanding. It won't go anywhere. Tomorrow there will be a new problem to solve.

We move on and begin discussing the schedule for parent-teacher conferences next week. Then there's a meeting with a mother who wants to send her daughter to America for college. Next, a meeting with student leaders from the "Palestinian Culture" club, a school extracurricular aimed at raising awareness of Palestinian history, politics, and culture around the school. They're planning a huge conference where they bring speakers from throughout the country. There is controversy about whether or not they should invite a Palestinian activist with Israeli citizenship (some of the students are opposed to bringing anyone from Israel). Aya leaves it for them to decide. It's another thing she expects will become a debate within the community (for the reasons discussed above), but she can't deal with that today.

I rise and head out of her office. I was supposed to help proctor a practice SAT test that Thomas is giving the 11th graders today, but too many things have come up. I head down to the teacher's lounge, find someone to take my place, and then go around the school looking for Ameer. Ameer has been with the school almost since its inception. He works with the administration, but his job title has never really been clear. If I am Aya's right-hand woman, he is Aya's right-hand man. He secures and runs all of our foreign housing, he plans events for the school, he contracts and manages the janitorial staff, he organizes after school activities, he does it all. Whenever I see him, he's dashing around on some urgent errand or another. Ameer is stick-thin, with a long, gaunt face, and short dark hair. He always wears a nice pair of slacks, white socks, and black leather loafers. Sometimes, Aya and I make fun of his fashion sense, but then she always feels bad. His family is from a village outside of the city, which translates into a lower social status. His brothers all cross the border wall each day, unpermitted, to work construction in Israel. Labor jobs in Israel are notorious for paying well, and Ameer told me once that he would make more doing that than

working for the school.[21] He does it during school vacations, but it's unstable work - you never know when they'll crack down on people sneaking through the borders. He also loves the school and he would never desert Aya.

I'm looking for him because several foreign teachers have come to me with complaints about their new landlord. The school rents housing for foreign staff members, and this is always a nightmare. It is difficult to find local landlords willing to rent to a group of Westerners, as most are wary of the stereotypes attached to such tenants. In a dry, conservative, Muslim city, the potential for scandals with foreign renters is high. This year, Ameer has found new apartments near the school, on the outskirts of the city, with a landlord willing to host a group of young, Western teachers. Unfortunately, the construction of the final apartment, which he promised would be done by August, is still incomplete. Not all of our teachers have received permission to enter Palestine, so it's okay for now, but I need to talk to Ameer about getting final dates on those rooms.

Many of the complaints I've received from foreign teachers are out of my control. We can't take all of the responsibility for cockroaches… that's part of life in Palestine in the summer. We also know there will always be leaks in the winter, it will be too hot August through October, and too cold November through March. Ameer and I try our best to appease them, but we can't rebuild entire structures that were done "on the cheap." The complaint that I'm concerned about has to do with the new landlord, Waleed. He had invited all of the new teachers to a BBQ in the apartment courtyard at the beginning of the year, which was not entirely unsurprising. He and his family lived on the top level of the building, and like most Palestinians they were incredibly hospitable. Nevertheless, an issue arose when he offered our teachers Carlsberg, a light, European beer.

As we covered extensively in teacher training, alcohol was *not* a culturally acceptable substance in the city. If parents found out that Academy teachers were drinking, they *would* remove their students from the school. Luckily, the teaching staff refused the alcohol offer. However, the story didn't stop there. After everyone finished eating, Waleed – a large man with a round, hairy tummy that peeked out from even the best-fitting shirts – donned a Speedo, invited them to swim in the small pool next to the house while blasting Celine Dion's best hits on a portable speaker. Mixed swimming (male and female), was also not culturally appropriate within the city, and while Celine

[21] The economics of cross-border labor also thread through this space. Around 120,000 Palestinians cross into Israel each day for work – 63,000 with permits around 57,000 as undocumented laborers (Loewenstein and Kennard 2016). This is a key example of how daily Palestinian labor (literally) sustains the Occupation, while also allowing Palestinians to support their families. Unfortunately, there is not space within this chapter to expand on this dynamic. For more, see (Angrist 1996; Farsakh 2002; S. Roy 1999)

Dion was not off-limits, blaring music into the night was certain to draw the ire of neighbors. All in all, the entire event was problematic, and if this behavior continued it would reflect quite poorly on the school's reputation around town.

When the story was reported, Aya, Ameer, and I met to discuss our response. We certainly couldn't find another home for the teachers at this part, so moving out was not an option. Most likely, Waleed was just excited about having so many foreigners in his home, and he was "showing off." We decided that Ameer would call him, explain that his behavior was inappropriate, and hope for the best. So, during this small break in my day, I wanted to get an update on the situation, but I couldn't find Ameer. I ask around, and the school secretary tells me she thinks he went into town to try to figure out some visa issues. Waleed would just have to wait.

As the end of the day draws near, I head back to the office to see what Aya needs. Her last goal for the day is to track down a shipment of books and supplies that should have arrived from America a month ago. Each summer, Aya shipped a huge quantity of textbooks, library books, school supplies, and more from the United States to a port in Israel. The container came on a boat via the Atlantic, and it was received by an Israeli businessman that Aya's husband worked with named Uri. Uri would help our shipment clear Israeli customs (a process which took several weeks) and would then arrange a truck to bring the pallet into the West Bank. Without this connection, I'm not sure how the school would have been able to get the materials it needed. Again, collaboration with Israel appears to be a nasty side-effect of what it takes to provide the high-quality education that Aya, Osama, and so many others believe necessary for the future of Palestine. In this decision, support for Occupation and resistance to Occupation exist simultaneously.

The freight cargo had arrived last week, but Aya had also shipped several copies of a 9th grade biology textbook, last-minute via air. Those were still missing, and we needed to find them. Unfortunately, Uri was out of the country on business, and he wasn't returning Aya's calls. Last she'd heard, he had no news about the missing shipment. Aya had decided to take matters into her own hands, and she had enlisted my help in tracking the box down. We sit at the front of the office, where the school's two secretaries, Sara and Miriam, have a large computer, a printer, a fax machine, and a landline. Aya plops down behind the front desk while Sara, Miriam, and I all sit on office chairs behind her. It's the middle of afternoon classes, so there isn't much commotion in the office. Aya starts by looking up the tracking number with USPS. According to their website, the box

arrived in Israel several weeks ago. The site doesn't say *where* in Israel, but it does note that the shipment is being "held" until "funds are released". Aya laughs, "What the heck does that mean?!"

She decides to try looking at the Israeli end. She looks up the post office in Tel Aviv and finds a phone number. The school's landline can't call into Israel, so Aya whips out her phone which has dual SIM cards - one for Palestine, one for international calls. She dials, the phone on speaker so that Sara, Miriam, and I can listen in. Someone answers with a gruff Hebrew accent, Aya says "Hello?", the person hangs up. We look at one another, silent for a moment, and then start laughing. Why would they just hang up?! Aya says that people in Israel always hang up on you if they don't think you speak English. I scan the Israeli postal website (Google translated to English from Hebrew) and Aya tries Uri again. I find a full list of different numbers to fax, but no phone number. Then I see something promising at the bottom of the page that says, "For issues dial 171." Aya dials, the phone started to ring, she *shushes* the secretaries who are whispering to one another in rapid-fire Arabic. They start giggling again, finding it hilarious that Aya so bent on being "American" right now so that she can get good service from some post office employee. The number ends up just being a pre-recorded switchboard, all in Hebrew. Together, we can make out the numbers being said ("*Ahat. Shtaim.*" – "One, Two," etc.), but none of us can figure out the other parts. However, the fourth number is pre-recorded in a different voice from the other numbers, so Aya decides to push that one. We all wait expectantly.

The phone rings on the other end, just as gruff as the first, and speaking in Hebrew. Aya loudly asks (in English), if they speak English. There is a silence. Either the person is hanging up, or they're getting someone else. After a few beats, someone else responds. "Hello?" Aya slowly, in very basic English explains that she is looking for a package. After a bit of back-and-forth, spoken at high volume but still difficult to decipher, it becomes clear that she needs to send a fax to a different number. The voice gives her a fax number and tells her to just use Google translate. She hangs up. I type up a quick paragraph explaining the problem, we run it through Google translate, print it out in Hebrew, and fax it off.

After it's sent, Aya goes to do the *dhuhr* prayer which she missed earlier because she was running around. I stay in the front office, swiveling around in Miriam's chair, chatting casually with the secretaries and waiting for the final bell to ring. Miriam is younger, maybe about 24, with a round, bright face, and a small mouth that is often coated in red lipstick. Sara, the other secretary, has been with the school a bit longer. She's around 28, has two kids, and is known for her crass sense of humor and penchant for complaining. The two are like peas in a pod, spending their days

filing papers, responding to parent phone calls, and redirecting students who come into the office. They also are the center of the office gossip hub.

When the bell rings, the chaos of end-of-day begins. Parents swarm the gates to pick up their kids, and the school's gatekeeper calls out student names on a loudspeaker that reverberates through the entire building. Our elementary teacher's aide, Ms. Hana, saunters into the office and announces that she just heard there's not going to be school the next day. I ask her how she knows, as I've heard nothing official. I do know that Mike Pence is planning to visit Israel, and rumors of a strike in protest of US policies towards Palestine have been floating around for a while. She says that a local news reporter posted on his Facebook that the PA was going to call a strike and the Ministry of Education was going to cancel classes. This means it could be true. The reporter she mentions is widely known, and it's not uncommon for him to announce things before the government. And Facebook is the main information highway of the city. If he's posted it, that means all of our parents will have seen it. I run out of the school to catch Tom, who is walking down the dirt road to catch a taxi home. I tell him it's not 100%, but it's likely, and he should inform his teachers. It takes a bit for our foreign staff to adjust to all the last-minute schedule changes that happen at the school, so we want to give them as much information as we can - even in this information poor environment.

When Aya is finished praying, we head to her car. As we begin the drive home, both of us ready for a hot meal, her phone rings. I see that it's Waleed, the landlord, and we both groan a bit. She answers, listens, and then her eyes bug out… she mouths at me "they're getting kicked out." I'm shocked. She must mean our foreign teachers living in his building, but this is out of nowhere. Maybe Ameer went to talk to him today and he's lashing out in response? Aya tries to talk him off a ledge. She agrees to come over and tells him not to do anything yet. When she hangs up, we both look at each other. This is absurd. She tells me that he wants to give the school's rental payment back, and have the foreign staff move elsewhere. We begin laughing. Yesterday, we were just talking about how, despite his eccentricities, things were going smoothly with housing this year. And now he wants to evict everyone.

Aya immediately starts listing the people she has to call: the school's financial advisor, the head of the board, the general director who oversees the budget… She pulls over to the side of the road, halfway home, and puts the car in park. While I call Ameer, she starts calling up other landlords in the city – just to see if anything is even available. We also start making calls about where we could move them. Due to fallouts in past years between foreigners – who didn't obey certain

house rules – and landlords, the school's options are limited. Aya makes a U-turn, heading away from her home and back towards the outskirts of town.

The foreign housing unit is located in a small village on the outskirts of the city. It's a five-minute walk from the school, up a dusty hill, which makes it ideal for our purposes. As Aya's car pulls into the single street neighborhood, we can't hear or see any of our teachers. As Aya parks in front of a small convenience store, I notice that the people in the apartments around are looking out their windows at us. Young kids, older women in prayer hijab, some young boys in the street.

We cross the street to the apartment. It's a five-story building, with Waleed's shop and office on the bottom floor. He is in hot competition with the convenience store across the street, and he has already informed Ameer that he would like his tenants to shop exclusively at his shop. Later, when some of our teachers accept an invite to a lunch at the neighbor's house, Waleed storms into Aya's office to complain. She learns then that there is a long-standing feud between the two families that goes far beyond convenience store patronage.

Waleed's office is a single room near the street. A rooster wanders around in the dirt out front, and two of Waleed's sons are kicking a soccer ball around in the dust. As we approach, one of them yells to his father, who emerges from the office.

Waleed gestures us in. His eyes are bloodshot, and he wears dirty pants and a stained white tank top. Ameer is already there, drinking coffee. Instead of the classic Arab teacups, the coffee is served in flimsy plastic cups. One of Waleed's sons serves us, putting two cups together so that we don't burn our hands.

The room lacks a door, and inside the opening it is shoddy and cramped. There is a huge desk at the back of the room that takes up most of the small office. An oversized armchair sits behind the desk. A couch and another chair are squeezed between the desk and the front door, with a low sitting coffee table making it almost impossible to move around the space. The coffee table still has newspaper around the legs to prevent scuffs. There are bookshelves on one side of the room, piled high with files and binders. The room feels as if it is bursting at the seams.

When we enter, Waleed begins an elaborate performance regarding seating. He tells Aya that, because she's the director of the school, she should sit in the big chair behind the desk. He announces that he is a respectful man, and that out of respect he wants her to sit in the big chair. Aya laughs it off and says, "No, no, you sit, you're the one in charge here." For some reason, he continues to make this point that the big chair is for her – refusing to sit. But the tone of his voice

makes me think it's not genuine, it seems like she's the butt of some joke. He has a glint in his eye that just takes the respect out of the gesture. I've seen this look before in men who deal with Aya. She's small, beautiful, and a woman. It's almost as if some find it funny that she's in charge of a whole school.

She eventually sits in a different chair. Waleed's son comes in with more plastic chairs, despite the fact that the room is already completely full of people and furniture. Waleed sits in one of the side chairs, refusing to take the big chair and leaving it empty for the duration of the meeting. He reiterates again that it's as a sign of respect. This façade of respect gets under my skin.

He sits down and we start talking. Behind where Aya sits, a TV screen is mounted on the wall. It is the most expensive thing in the office, I'm sure. It shows security footage. Two balconies. A small circular pool on a patio. It's the inside of the walled apartment. He gestures at it and on one of the balconies you can see a table with a few plastic chairs. That's where your foreigners sit, he tells Aya, and they're far too loud. He says that he told them to go inside if they were going to be chatting, but that they continued to be loud, laughing and not heeding his warnings. At first, Aya thinks he means they were being disruptive at night, but it becomes clear that he's talking about an incident that occurred after school the other day – at 3:00pm. Aya sighs, realizing that he is likely lashing out because Ameer told him he was being inappropriate. So, he's swinging the pendulum the other direction now.

She tries to talk him down and he starts listing which teachers he wants to keep and who he wants to get rid of. He mentions maybe moving some of them into an apartment that he owns across the street. Ameer chimes in, noting that Waleed still hasn't finished renovating all of the apartments that the school paid for earlier in the summer. We still haven't been able to move teachers into the final apartment, and if the staff waiting in Jordan are approved for entry, we'll have a problem. Waleed, chain smoking, shrugs this off saying it'll be done soon enough. He pivots the conversation again and brings up the fact that our teachers are using too much water. Waleed says he's added a water tank to the top of the house, but that they're still flying through it. He gets texts from the municipality daily about overconsumption. Ameer says that they can talk about the water issue separately (Ameer is secretly convinced that Waleed is siphoning off water for his family and blaming our teachers).[22]

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[22] The politics of water provision are a central tension in the city. The dynamics of local service provision is the central topic explored in the following chapter.

Aya is an incredible diplomat, despite the almost farcical situation in front of her. She says the school needs two weeks to find new housing. As soon as she says this, Waleed begins to walk back his demands for eviction. By the time we leave, he says he'll try his best to make it work. In the car, Aya explains to me that he just needed to stand up and reclaim his pride by threatening her. She's used to these showy performances, and she decides the school has nothing to worry about. He needs the rent, and hopefully ranting at us for thirty minutes satisfied his ego. We finally head home.

Aya cooks with the same fury that she does her makeup. She never lets me help. I'm too slow, she laughs. As soon as we get home from work, she strips and puts on her Nike sweatpants - cuffed because they are too long for her short, 5'4" frame - and we sit at her small kitchen table. She wears a black tank top and a "PINK by Victoria's Secret" grey hoodie, half zipped. The hijab cap is off, and her hair is pulled back in a short little ponytail by a green elastic. While we sit and eat and talk, she re-does the ponytail, and you can see that the green elastic is wrapped with tangled hair. We don't always cook, but when we do, we put a lot of planning into it. We scope Pinterest for recipes that look good – Chicken Curry with Rice, Asian Noodles with Peanut Sauce, Quinoa and Black Bean Bowls. We gossip about school, talk about the trials of the day, lament about the cramped kitchen. Sometimes one of Aya's sons will come sit with us. Omar just started college in a town nearby, but he is home often – for money, to do laundry, to help with his dad's business, or just because his school is perpetually on strike. Fares, the 10th grader, joins us regularly. We try to get him to gossip about his friends and the girl he is dating (though it's not "official," that would be socially unacceptable). This cooking time is relaxing, a moment away from the stressors of the outside world.

Today, getting home from Waleed's, Aya is too tired to cook. She calls a local woman who runs a small food delivery business from her home and orders a meal. It's a lucrative business, the woman spends the day making massive amounts of some traditional Arab meal, and women who are too busy to make food themselves can still put a hot meal on the table for their families. Today, the meal is a simple chicken, rice, and potato dish, loaded with olive oil and Arab spices. It's steaming when Aya's delivery guy (a man with a motorcycle who runs errands around town) drops it off.

Aya, Omar, and I sit around the small table shoveling food into our mouths. Between bites, Aya shakes her head. "I told you, a thousand lives a day," she says. "It feels like our coffee this morning was a whole decade ago."

She is visibly exhausted.

Her husband, Zaid enters, and she gets up to make him a plate. He sits next to me, pushes my chair over (with me in it) so that I'm an arms-length away and tells me that he can't sit so close to a woman. I laugh and scoot my chair back to my place at the table. Zaid often acts super conservative in order to make Omar and me laugh. Aya gets annoyed and tells him to be quiet. He asks her about her day, and she shrugs it off, "Same headaches, different day."

"What about your visa?" he asks, "Did you hear from Leah?"

Aya laughs, "You think I had time to deal with my own problems today?! Tell him, Anna, we didn't even have time to breathe."

I corroborate her account, saying that we're still waiting to hear from Leah about the teachers' visas as well.

Aya's visa situation is a bit different from our foreign staff. Though she is Palestinian, she was born in the United States, and therefore carries an American passport. After the signing of the Oslo Accords, Israel recognized the Palestinian Authority's power to administer ID cards and records. At the time, ID cards were granted to Palestinians who either a) in the West Bank or b) abroad but under the age of 16 "provided one of their parents was registered as a resident of the Occupied Territories" (Residents without Status 2013). However, Israel still maintained the final approval of spouses, children of residents over the age of 16, and visitors. In 2000, with the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Israel "froze all updates," and "no longer recognizes the changes made by the PA" to the Population Residency (i.e. applying for and receiving an ID card is largely impossible) (ibid.).[23] Though a batch of IDs were released in 2005 as a "goodwill gesture," by 2008 the application process for new *hawiyas* (IDs) was again at an impasse (ibid.).

Though some of her family were granted IDs in the mid-1990s, Aya was above the age of 16 and residing outside of Palestine. In the early 2005, when the next batch of cards were released, Aya decided against applying. At the time, her American passport allowed her to fly into Ben Gurion airport and travel freely from the West Bank to Israel - accepting a *hawiya* would restrict this access and so she chose to remain on a spousal visa. Each year, she would leave to visit her family in American and then re-enter and renew her visa which normally lasted for six to twelve months. It wasn't an ideal situation, but it worked for her lifestyle. Had she accepted an ID, the privileges that

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[23] Children born to parents holding an ID are eligible for IDs as a default, so long as they register for the card in person before their 16th birthday. Therefore, many American-residing Palestinians send their children back to Palestine before they turn 16 in order to secure this status.

came with her American passport would have been overridden. Over a decade later, she says that this is one of the biggest mistakes she ever made.

In 2017 (this year), in a stunning change in policy, her application for a spousal visa came with the dreaded "West Bank Only" stamp and was only granted for two months. Other spouses she knew were denied visas entirely. Her sister was living in the West Bank on an expired visa after being granted only three weeks, instead of the usual six months to a year. Aya immediately turned to Leah – the Israeli lawyer – who took on her case. Leah's approach to the issue was multi-faceted. First, she made sure that Aya submitted an official application for a *hawiya*. Even though new applications were not being processed, having documentation in the system that you were trying to get an ID was crucial. Second, Leah was attempting to extend Aya's spousal visa for the time being. Neither route was promising.

At the moment, Aya is too afraid to exit the country, worried that she won't be granted re-entry. In all likelihood, she will end up overstaying her visa and living on an expired card until Leah can figure out a better solution. Not only will living on an expired card make it harder for her to enter and exit the country in the future, it also means that she will be stuck in Palestine for the foreseeable future. Trips to America or Saudi to visit family will need to be cancelled. There isn't an end in sight. The alternative? She could exit the country before her visa expires and risk losing access to her family, her job, and her community here in Palestine. This is a non-option for her, and so she will stay. While some may see this as a powerful act of subversion and resistance, Aya doesn't frame it that way. She mourns the freedom that she has lost with this change in policy and feels trapped by her commitment to the school and to her family. Nevertheless, as with so many issues in her day-to-day life, she doesn't have time to dwell on it.

When everyone is finished eating, Aya does the dishes quickly and efficiently while I put away the leftover food. Omar starts the kettle to make tea, though the kitchen is barely big enough for this flurry of activity. It's almost 7:00pm, and so after tea I head down to my apartment to type up notes and unwind. As I exit, Aya is on the phone with her sister Leyla who lives in New Mexico. The two are tied at the hip, and Aya talks to her almost daily. They gossip about family drama, Leyla's issues in America, Aya's headaches in Palestine, and more. I think it's helpful for Aya to escape her little house in this little town in this tough country by talking to someone thousands of miles away.

As I head to bed, I think again about the day. It's just one day, but it was exhausting. This is typical for Aya, and as she said earlier, there's a comfort in being busy. It's sometimes easier *not* to

have time to think about her bigger, more existential concerns - the stability of her life in Palestine, the chance that she'll be cut off from her family in America, the issues she has with husband, her sons' futures, her desire to do more than just run the school. These problems sit in the background. They are there, always, but her immediate attention is consumed by daily demands. During the week, she is barely left with a second to breathe. As I crawl into my bed, I fall asleep almost immediately, getting some precious rest before we wake at 5:30am to do it all again.

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For Aya, the politics of day-to-day life is in the background. Like footnotes in a chapter that only a few readers have time to fully digest, the larger institutions that shape her life are ever present, shaping her options and her relationships, but not in plain sight. She moves through this space supporting, avoiding, and resisting power, sometimes simultaneously. Nevertheless, these choices are not laden with the deep philosophical and ideological consideration of someone who is constantly shifting gears, "buying in," "opting out," "standing against." No one has time for that. The potential impact of each decision, its connection to bigger institutions of power, is hidden in the minutia and mundanity of each moment.

Looking back on this one day in Aya's life, it is worth examining what calling out injustices would realistically look like. We know that Aya cares deeply about Palestine, believes in Palestinian independence, is a strong female leader, and a loving wife and mother. Yet all of this is challenged in small ways throughout her day, and in most instances Aya does not put up a fight. She occasionally engages in the "subversive" behavior that James Scott so eloquently lays out as the weapons of the weak – driving her car without registration, ignoring the Ministry of Education, letting her visa expire – all of which undermine the legitimacy of Israeli power and demonstrate rejection of the Occupation's hegemony over her life.[24] Importantly, Scott notes that this subversive behavior may not always harm the powerful in a material way. Rather, it can also serve to erode the ideological hegemony of the oppressor. Daily resistance is also a symbolic fight, and it is often "conceived and conducted with no revolutionary end in mind" (2008, 349). So, while Aya may subtly subvert the Occupation in small ways day-to-day, she nevertheless largely accepts the status quo and pushes on. What is the alternative?

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[24] For more on Scott's discussion of hegemony see Chapter 8 in *Weapons of the Weak* (2008).

Perhaps, she chooses to drop everything and challenge the Israeli military's decision to deny teachers visas. Perhaps, like the diehard activist members of the "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions" movement she renounces all ties to Israel and all cooperation with Israelis. This would mean dropping her legal team – who are Israeli human rights lawyers – forging ahead in the quest for visas as an independent Palestinian. Evidence suggests that doing so would be unsuccessful at best, and a waste of resources at worst.[25] Cases going through military court are notoriously consuming, and she would likely need to quit her job, despite the irony that the job is the reason she is pushing for these teacher visas in the first place. Challenging the visa decision would also draw attention to her in a way that most certainly would impact her own visa case. Taking political action – be it protest, letter-writing, court cases, or some sort of COGAT sit-in – would undoubtedly mean that Aya would never get a spousal visa again. She would be resigned to a) never leaving Palestine again, or b) leaving and never returning. Ultimately, by taking on this fight Aya would be going down a path in which she (most likely) would be sacrificing her job and her family. So, she chooses the alternative and works quietly with Leah, waiting patiently for teacher approval.

In another scenario, perhaps she decides to address all instances of inequity and class politics that pop up in her life. For this, she would need to relinquish her own wealth and position in society. She could sell her car, though she would then lose the "safe space" in which she blasts her American music and escapes her problems for fifteen minutes at a time. She could sell her nice things – her clothes and makeup – though these are also creature comforts in an otherwise challenging environment. She could make her own dinner, instead of ordering in, though in that case she may not have energy to get through the next day.

But let's say she does it. She attempts to redistribute her own wealth in a stand against Palestinian class structure. At the end of the day, she'd still be from the Kamal family, still married into her position. In many ways, class in Palestine is less about money in the bank and more about historical social status of the family – not so easily relinquished. Aya already employs across social boundaries, she gives her annual *zakat* (charity), and she is constantly trying to recruit new scholarship students into the school. It is difficult to imagine how a single person's daily decisions or protests could topple the deeply ingrained social institutions of the West Bank.

Perhaps Aya could take on the politics of gender. She is deeply opposed to the sexism and misogyny that Waleed represents. She could have stood up to him in the face of his ridiculous chair

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[25] For more on the complexities of the legal system in the West Bank, see Lisa Hajjar's *Courting Conflict: The Israeli Military Court System in the West Bank and Gaza (2005).*

performance, calling him out on his disrespect for her authority. Certainly, he wouldn't have pulled that stunt if she were a man. She could put her foot down, storm out, drop the lease, make his prejudice towards her as a female leader known. She would then be left with the task of informing the board (some of whom are likely just as sexist), finding new housing (the school would likely need to put teachers up in a hotel for the interim), figuring out the finances of renting new apartments (getting the school's money back from Waleed would be an uphill, local court battle, costing resources and time), and more. Again, it could be done. But the injustice of Waleed's demeanor pales in comparison to the pain Aya would face if they lost this housing space.

She certainly *could* have taken action in the face of unjust politics throughout her day. Nevertheless, what I hope to show by laying out a day in her life is how truly difficult it is for an individual to stop and address *every* instance of injustice they see in a day. These issues truly are institutional, and so we must begin to consider them as such. The power of these macro-structures is unavoidable, people build their lives and navigate the day-to-day *within* the confines of Occupation. While steps can be taken to distance oneself from politics or overcome certain obstacles, choices are still made within the constraints of larger institutions of power.

Furthermore, I hope that this chapter has begun to show the true difficulty of tending to the politics of each moment. Politics and power are threaded through our days in small, almost unnoticeable ways. Carefully examined, we can see the political dynamics of small instances, moments emerging in the midst of a busy day – a call from a lawyer, an interaction with a rude landlord, a teacher's oversight on a worksheet. Pulling on any of these threads, standing up and rocking the boat, is a decision that will certainly unravel the fabric of regular life. It is tiring, risky, and potentially dangerous.

While these small moments hardly seem worth the trouble of making a scene, the cumulative strain of these different power structures (and the injustices they produce) on each individual is heavy. As Aya so aptly notes, "Life in Palestine is hard. It's just hard." The impacts *are* felt at an individual level, even if the origins of that feeling are elusive. The politics and injustices of everyday life – when taken moment by moment – seem almost inconsequential. The injustices here are background noise – frustrating, stressful, but ultimately muted by the hustle, bustle, and other obligations of everyday life. While this distance from politics may make small choices to "buy in" or "opt out" less evident or substantial in the day-to-day, overall these choices still ultimately bolster the status quo.

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Chapter 3

BAHDALEH AND THE BALADIYA

Under such conditions…where existence becomes reduced to the craft of day-to-day survival and where one must continually do one's best with whatever is at hand, that is, precious little, the present becomes so uncertain that it devours the future and prohibits thinking about it except as fantasy.

— Loïc Wacquant, "Inside the Zone: The Social Art of the Hustler in the Black American Ghetto" (1998)

What does it mean to "avoid" politics? How can "opting out" of local political processes inadvertently also "buy in" to Israeli power? In many ways – as evidenced by the previous chapter – politics is woven through even seemingly banal, everyday relationships. Besides the looming dynamics of the Israeli Occupation, local government affairs and public service issues also permeate daily life in the West Bank. This chapter begins by detailing some of the more mundane, local political issues that Palestinians face, followed by an examination of how those with relative privilege navigate these problems. Looking at these local-level political dynamics reveals how the navigation of day-to-day issues is both deeply entwined with Israeli power *and* understood by the community as separate from the more "serious" politics of Occupation.

This chapter provides a stronger sense of the beliefs and narratives surrounding politics (generally) in this space. Furthermore, I explore people's understandings of how local politics "works" in the community with keen attention to the history and the daily experiences that shape these understandings. This chapter demonstrates the ways that day-to-day problems of local government culminate into a shared sense of fatigue, annoyance, and dissatisfaction with "politics" and overtly political activity. This sense of despair at the daily level bleeds into a broader sense of futility regarding the possibilities for larger change as well.

Additionally, for many of the women in this upper-class circle, "avoiding politics" often means dealing with daily frustrations independent of traditional or formal political channels. Notably, most did not even consider these frustrations real "political" issues. These issues were the expected and routine failures of local government, a far cry from the serious injustices of Occupation. I show how this attitude, combined with the efficiency and ease of leveraging privilege to solve these day-to-day problems, leads people to turn away from formal channels, keeping local

politics at an arm's length. From the outside, it may seem like this group is sitting out political engagement altogether because they are apathetic or disinterested. Nevertheless, this chapter highlights that what looks like apathy may actually be a defense mechanism against the disappointment, the hopelessness, and the fatigue that comes from talking about and participating in formal political activity, advocacy, or action.

Importantly, I argue that the history of violence and Israeli oppression of Palestinian leadership is crucial in constructing and shaping shared feelings about present institutional shortcomings of the local government. In response to these deficiencies, the middle- and upper-class retreat from and avoid formal politics (a choice made possible by their relative privilege), which further undercuts the authority of the Palestinian government and inadvertently strengthens the status quo power of the Occupation. Looking only at the individual choice to disengage – without holistically considering the history, context, and daily experiences from which these choices and beliefs about leadership arise – misses the crucial ways in which Israeli institutional power has structured the capacities of and attitudes toward local government and politics.

Beyond the historical context of the space, other intersections of power are clearly on display throughout this chapter. Perceptions about what "counts" as politics, frustrations about daily problems, and actions that are and are not taken, look to be the result of a multitude of power dynamics that run along economic, social, gendered, and historical lines. The goal of this chapter is not to disentangle these webs of power (i.e. not to show what is impacted by gender vs. class), but rather to display how these different forces work together and ultimately create a situation in which certain possibilities for a more just future become inconceivable. In the end, political despair, individual withdrawal from "political life," and a resignation that privilege and back channels are the only viable way forward become the norm.

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I am at a dinner party to celebrate the completion of a friend's new home. Her house is located in one of the nicest neighborhoods in the city, an area zoned to prohibit high-rise buildings, which gives it a "residential" feel that is new in the city. The streets in her neighborhood are lined with sidewalks, and a personal garbage bin sits in front of each house, as opposed to the shared steel bins that line the roads of the rest of the city. I take a picture because I've never seen a personal garbage bin here before. Aya laughs at me for being so fascinated by a garbage bin. As we walk up to

the gate, the luxury of the house is overwhelming. There's a water feature as you walk past the outer wall – a pond lit up with calming blue and purple lights surrounded by perfectly pruned hedges – that guides you to the grand front door. The house is majestic. Hind told me earlier today in whispered gossip over lunch that it took two to three years to build and cost somewhere between 2.5 and 3 million Jordanian dinars. This was later corroborated by Aya.

Before we can knock, Fida sweeps open the door, kissing our cheeks and ushering us to a coat room where we can store our things. The room has a large mirror and small stools, perfect for taking off hijab and adjusting your hair and makeup for a female-only gathering. Aya and Manar – a friend we ran into as we walked up to the house – immediately do just this. Next, we're given a tour by Fida and her daughter Amal. The kitchen looks like something out of a Crate and Barrel catalogue – handle-less black drawers that close smoothly with a click, white marble counter-tops, an island, and a stainless steel serving cart in a corner ready with pitchers of juice, an ice bucket, and glasses for the guests.

The dining area opens out to a second-story patio. The flooring of the patio is a dark wood, and the area is furnished with classy, deep brown wicker couches with off-white cushions. A glass railing encircles the sitting area and looks down onto a basketball court that is still unfinished. In the far distance is a view of the sea – a dark, colorless mass beyond the blinking lights of Tel Aviv and Herzeliya. In the middle of this patio, they've transplanted a single olive tree. Fida tells me that the tree was originally on the land, so they paid one thousand Jordanian dinars (about 1500 USD) to have a crane lift it up to the patio and re-plant it. An ancient, sacred symbol of resistance and perseverance, the tree is now the centerpiece of a new, opulent home. There is an indoor swimming pool. Another patio. A Turkish bath. It goes on and on. As we weave through the house, it strikes me how odd it is that this is where I am now. That, just yesterday, I was at an orphanage in another Palestinian town talking to a young boy who was imprisoned for throwing stones. And now here I am, sipping freshly squeezed pomegranate juice around a propane fire-feature, looking over a glass balcony at hills rolling down to the sea.

We crowd into the larger dining room to eat. Fida is known for her cooking, a mix of traditional dishes, salads, and cheesecakes. After dinner, we sit around in the living room on plush, oversized grey couches. Lubna and I joke about how many throw pillows there are. We don't know what to do with all of them, and it's hard to find space to sit amidst all of the décor. It reminds me of my mother-in-law Susan's house in Northern California. The aesthetic is a mix between Crate & Barrel, Cost Plus World Market, and Pottery Barn. The only thing that distinguishes Fida's house

from Susan's is that where Susan has a Bible verse on the wall, Fida has an ornately penned verse of the Qaran.

Zain, affectionately called Zozo, is visiting from Jordan. She's a larger woman, both in size and personality (she's recently blown into town and decided - on a whim - to redo her parent's whole bathroom). She flops down on an armchair and pulls out some fancy cigarettes. They're slim and multi-colored, each one a different pastel shade, all with gold colored filters. She picks one to match her outfit, and says so, offering them to the other women in the group. A few are smokers, but most are not. I notice Mae rest her black Gucci purse by her chair as she begins to elegantly smoke. The clothes, the clutches, the shoes, the make-up, and the cars of these women help construct an overall impression of wealth, style, and social status. Most of their children go to the Academy, so I've known their families for some time. I remember the first time I ever saw Lubna in 2012. She walked into the community center in a pair of True Religion jeans and a perfectly pressed shirt with an air of luxury that I had never before seen in Palestine. After six years, I barely notice unless I'm looking.

The after-dinner conversation at Fida's meanders from topic to topic – the difficulty of parenting in the age of the internet, the *tajweed* (recitation of the Qaran) that they're working on in their religious study group, a car accident Karma's son got into (with a girl in the car!), and the new app that Nihaya's business just launched to deliver food in the city (it's like Uber Eats, I use it all the time). Annoyance with the feral dogs that roam the streets comes up, and Aya mentions my project. Most of the women present know that I'm working on my dissertation – looking at everyday issues like the dogs, the water problems, etc. – and I explain to the others the project. I'd be interested to hear about the things they deal with day-to-day. Immediately, one of the women says I shouldn't talk to them because they don't have problems. She says that there are others in the city who are impacted by "politics", but she really isn't.

"We live well, we're comfortable," she says, "you should look at the people who have real problems, like the people in the camps." She feels that because she doesn't face violence, poverty, or daily discrimination, she should remain quiet when it comes to more trivial issues, lest she eclipse the bigger issues like refugee rights, Israeli violence, or the Palestinian resistance movement.

Noor disagrees with this stance, saying, "But at the end of the day we're not free either." She talks about how, though they all live well here in comparison to many Palestinians, when they travel beyond the borders of the West Bank it's clear how unfair parts of their lives still are. A few women

scoff at her, saying she needs to be more grateful. One brings up a story about her maid's family in the camps, how bad they have it these days.

Nihaya, who had stepped outside before this conversation, strides in off of the balcony, walking into the conversation. She listens for a moment and laughs. In a playful, mocking voice she looks at the group and says, "What are you girls doing trying to talk politics?! Look at you! Are you trying to be a politician or something?! Enough!" Everyone laughs. The conversation ends.

While these women were not wrong in asserting that some issues of insecurity are heightened in other parts of the city, I knew first-hand that the politics of the conflict – not to mention the performance of local governance – does impact their lives. They all know or are related to people who have spent time in prisons, they've all been stopped at checkpoints, and they all require special visas to cross the separation wall and travel to the cities that we could so easily see from the balcony at Fida's house that night. They must deal with water and electric shortages, with poor infrastructure, and with local political tensions. Nevertheless, most are adamant that their upper-class lives could not possible "count" as a reflection of a true Palestinian political experience.

This is a reaction I face again and again throughout my fieldwork. I bring up public grievances – traffic and infrastructure problems, delivery of basic utility services, management of pests and dogs – in interviews and am immediately told that they these are not "real" political problems. When pressed, I am told that that their daily problems are certainly not worthy subjects of political science research given the bigger issues that many face in other parts of Palestine. Despite my insistence that I am interested in talking to a variety of people throughout the city about experiences with service provision and day-to-day frustrations, I am continually told to look elsewhere if I want to see the important political issues, battles, and problems facing Palestinians.

In most cases, I am redirected to the refugee camps or the residents of the Old City – the two most impoverished spaces in the city – and am told that those were the stories I should be writing down. In one case, I am actually chided for talking to someone in the upper class, rather than focusing on the less fortunate in my dissertation. While on my way to have tea with a woman who was well-known in the posh, elite circles of the city, another woman tells me that I am going about my research all wrong. I try to explain that I am interested in developing a more complex picture of the city, but she is adamant: talking with these high-society women was a bad idea. She scolds me, warning that "their thoughts on everything might not be right," their lives may not give

"the real story" of the Palestinian experience. It was not until I reassured her that I was also spending time in the refugee camps that she let it go.

While complaints about day-to-day problems, frustrations, and grievances, are a focal point for conversation throughout the city, it is clear that these issues do not fit cleanly within the broader narrative of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. For many, it seems that broadcasting these issues to the world risks overshadowing the larger abuses of the Occupation. Therefore, when I begin speaking as a researcher – rather than a friend – the conversation is shut down. Throughout this work, it is clear that a separation exists between what "counts" and what doesn't when it comes to narratives of politics, oppression, and resistance. For many, these tensions (and the push for me to focus my research on the more egregious aspects of Israeli human rights abuses) came with a sense that there was only room for one story. If a narrative of politics included things like trash collection or local government snafus, it would inherently be taking attention *away* from more severe abuses like settlement expansion, housing demolitions, or torture of Palestinian prisoners. By confining a narrative of oppression to a single story, many of the experiences detailed in this chapter are left out of the discussion.

Despite their reluctance to speak on politics and their belief that they steer clear of "politics" in general, the women and men in this community *do* face, navigate, and solve these seemingly "non-political" local issues daily. While there is certainly a risk throughout this dissertation of eclipsing the more dramatic or extreme traumas and experiences within this space, it is worth exploring how, why, and with what impact local government issues are relegated to a "non-political" space. These day-to-day problems are crucially shaping attitudes, understandings, and sentiments that individuals hold about political inefficacy, despair, and futility within the city. Daily experiences subtly craft beliefs about the future of the community, the necessity of back-channel solutions, and the possibilities for political change. These understandings – shaped by history, gender, class, and more – carry through from times of mundanity into times of crisis or potential action, importantly impacting individual calculations in these moments. The remainder of this chapter looks at a) how local issues manifest in day-to-day life, b) what responses to these issues look like, and c) the history surrounding local politics. Overall, these stories unearth the deeper connection between governmental inadequacies and larger institutions of power.

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On the way to school today, we almost hit a dog. There are feral animals all over the city – cats and dogs roam in herds through the streets. This morning, as we curve down the steep hill to the roundabout by the school, three dogs play on the side of the dusty road. All are a sandy brown color that almost blends in with the rocky hill. One has ears that poke straight up. As we approach the circle, a darker colored dog lopes directly into the road. It's a female dog. I know because her teats are hanging low, as if she's just given birth and is suckling puppies. Aya veers at the last minute to avoid hitting her, cursing under her breath and wondering aloud why the *baladiya* (the municipal government) isn't dealing with animal control. They are responsible for clearing the city of these threats. She jokes that maybe we need to get guns and do it ourselves.

I know from past years here that this is, in fact, how the dogs are "dealt with." During the fall, every few weeks the *baladiya* will go out at night and shoot the animals, loading their bodies into garbage bags, stacking them on a truck, and heading to the dump. The foreign teachers who live on the edge of town saw it happen a few weeks ago. They are horrified. While it may seem (or be?) inhumane, the issues with the dogs here are complicated. Dogs are not generally seen as pets, due to religious and cultural stigmas against having the animals indoors. Overall, dogs are known to carry disease and are seen as dangerous, feral animals. Aya's sister-in-law, a pediatric doctor, told me the other day that she's seen an increase in dog bites this year. Kids probably provoke them, she says, but still don't think they won't attack you. They will.

There are rumors floating around that the most dangerous stray animals – dogs and wild boar – are rounded up in Israel by animal control, bussed to the West Bank, and let out in the outskirts of Palestinian cities. This is one of many conspiracy theories that floats around the city, and regardless of its validity it certainly adds to the feeling that these animals are a burden, impinging on the possibility of a comfortable life here in Palestine. The tie between this day-to-day frustration and the larger Occupation is present, but always in the realm of rumor. The inadequacy of the *baladiya* to efficiently solve the problem? That's a reality.

Just last week, when I was at a dinner with Lubna and Aya the dogs came up in conversation. "Honestly," Lubna said to me, "I just feel depressed whenever I leave my home. It's the whole environment of this place, the way people drive, the way they ignore the law, the trash, the dogs. I used to go for walks at night, the hills are beautiful, but I don't anymore. There are just too many dogs. It's terrifying." Aya, agrees with her. The whole city is a mess, they conclude. Lubna launches into a story about how her neighbors are building a new villa and "no one regulates" the building. "They just throw the nails and wood in the street!" she exclaims, "I've gotten two flat tires

this week. I can't drive because of traffic and trash, and I can't walk because of the dogs… what does that leave me!?"

When Aya and I pull into school, we are faced with another common woe of Palestinian infrastructure – all of the electricity is out. Aya calls the electric company, and she's told that the whole area will be blacked out until 9am. No explanation is given, that's just what happens sometimes. In many instances, the blackouts are a result of Israeli authority cutting power to the West Bank to punish the Palestinian Authority for unpaid debts (Khoury 2016; Khoury and DPA 2015; Melhem 2020; Nofal 2019). In other instances, the outages are due to things like rain, faulty wires, or glitches in the grid. For Aya, the reason for the blackout is unimportant – for the moment, she needs to deal with the resulting disruption to the school day. The school bells and intercom won't function, the air conditioning will be cut, the lights will be out, teachers won't be able to print materials, internet will be down… the list goes on.

Before addressing these issues, we get our coffee in the dark using our cell phone flashlights and decide to sit out on the playground by the student entrance. As we cart the coffee down the hall, we joke about having a party on the patio. When Ameer shows up, I tell him that we stole chairs from his office for our morning patio party. It's BYOCoffee and BYO*Kursi* (chair), I joke. He gets a small cup and joins us for a sip. There's not much he can do without electricity.

As teachers and students file in, we share the bad news - no lights, no internet, no printing. Most people joke that it's better that way, they can take a break. Several joke that it's because the fall rains have begun, so it's really no surprise. It's true that the city's infrastructure is ill-equipped to deal with the rainy winter. I've seen it year in and year out, big storms wash out the roads and wipe out the electric grid. At this point, it doesn't faze anyone, it's just the way things work here. By 10am the electricity is back and the day proceeds as usual. I never find out if it's a planned outage or a failure in infrastructure.

That evening, I head up to Aya's in-laws house to sit with Teta (Zaid's mother). She is reclined on the green couch in her living room watching some special on the *Mayadeen* channel commemorating the death of Che Guevara. Teta greets me as she always does, with a long "A" sound… "AAAAAAAnnna, *keefik* (how are you) Aaaaaanna?" She asks about me when I don't come, and though there is still a bit lost in translation among us, she is quite fond of me and I of her.

Aya and I go to the kitchen to make the tea. Ranya, one of Zaid's sisters, is there as well, preparing a hookah for her mother. It's the old-school kind, far too harsh for my lungs. Rather than the flavored, syrupy tobacco found in hookah bars, where quick-light coals are placed on a layer of tin foil with pinholes, Teta drinks her *argila* the hard way. Dried tobacco is re-wet and rolled in a small bag before it is crumbled into the bowl by hand. Natural coals, jagged and broken are heated up on the stove in an old tin can before being placed directly on top of the plant. The fresh, dried tobacco sits in a small plastic tub in the kitchen above the sink. When Ranya brings it into the living room, Teta mutters to me that Ranya messed it up. With a groan, the old woman slowly adjusts her body on the couch so she can fix the hookah. Ranya and I laugh that she'll never do anything right. Teta is hard on her daughters, that is her way.

Later, Teta demands we bring her *kenafe*, a decadant, cheesy, syrupy dessert famous in the city. Aya calls her delivery man and tells him to pick some up at a shop. I start a conversation with Teta asking her – between two shops – which is better. "Mine is the best *kenefa*" she says, skirting the question, "No one can make it like I used to make it." She goes on these tangents often, never directly answering a question, but instead talking about the "good old days" when she could walk around and cook. "I used to walk to the city every day," she tells me, "I would move. I was *nasheeta* (active). And I was the best cook. The best cook on the block. Now? Now I am sick. Now I just sit. It's sad." And it is, I think. She stays inside all day on this couch, in this room, waiting for her family to come keep her company and order her *kenafe*.

We get a call back from the *kenafe* place. They've been closed all day because there was no electricity so it will take longer. Teta curses and complains for a solid five minutes. We laugh. "Put it in your dissertation notes," Aya says sarcastically, "These are *real* issues facing the people of Palestine."

Aya would often jokingly point to the annoyances and frustrations of her day and tell me to "put it in my notes." Whether it was her husband hanging up on her, a parent acting irrationally in her office, or the foreign staff complaining about the water shortages, these are the things that plagued her mind day-to-day. And while she wasn't being serious with her suggestion, I slowly realized that these seemingly small issues *were* adding up; they *were* impacting her mental and emotional health; they *were* (perhaps even more than threats of violence) what made living in the West Bank so difficult. Therefore, while the above examples may seem trivial or inconsequential, it is important to consider how these daily frustrations – and the government's apparent inability to

solve these problems – generate a broader feeling of fatigue, hopelessness, and apathy within the city.

In addition to participant-observation and daily field notes, I also spent time in November talking with a number of women directly about their daily routines and their assessment of day-to-day issues within the city. One interview, with a middle-aged, middle-class doctor illuminates the broader weariness and despondence that I saw throughout the community. Below are excerpts from our conversation:

> **Anna:** Okay, so tell me a bit about how you feel living in this city.
> **Dr. A:** *(sighs)* The routine kills *(الروتين قاتلة)*.
> **Anna:** Can you explain that?
> **Dr. A:** I die, I die from the routine. There's nothing new here.
> **Anna:** Do you think many people feel this, or just you?
> **Dr. A:** No, most people experience this. We feel it.
> **Anna:** Why don't you do new things? Change the routine?
> **Dr. A:** *(laughs)* There is no opportunity to do new things.
>
> *We continue talking about the boredom and routine of life in the city. She explains that there is no entertainment, nothing to* do *here. Her demeanor is resigned and demoralized, so I apologize for asking such depressing questions.*
>
> **Anna:** I'm sorry this is so depressing.
> **Dr. A:** What?
> **Anna:** The questions. You seem like you're sad. It's so sad.
> **Dr. A:** *(laughs)* Am I exaggerating though?! Am I exaggerating!?! No.
> **Anna:** Why do you think the city is so dead, so hopeless?
> **Dr. A:** Politics.
> **Anna:** Can you explain?
> **Dr. A:** It's the Occupation, but it's not. It's more than that. It's our government too. But they're pulled down by Israel.
> **Anna:** Do you think you can give me an example?
> **Dr. A:** Sure, take the traffic. The *baladiya* wants to build a bridge from one mountain to another, to ease the traffic problems in the city. But the Occupation says no, they delay and delay the building. The *baladiya* can't do anything.
> **Anna:** Oh yeah! I read about that project.
> **Dr. A:** Sure, but it'll never happen. I don't care what you read.
> **Anna:** Why won't it happen?
> **Dr. A:** I don't know the specifics, maybe the Israelis are worried about terrorism? I just know it's not going to happen.
>
> *We're quiet, she drinks hookah and I frantically jot notes. I feel as if she's getting frustrated with me. Normally, she and I talk freely and she's quite chatty. But now her answers are short, and I have to press her for details.*

Dr. A: Are we almost done?
Anna: I have a few more questions is that okay? They're more hopeful!
Dr. A: *(shrugs)*
Anna: So, let's say you have a problem – like dogs, trash, traffic – a *baladiya* problem. What would you do to solve it? Let's say it's the dogs, what do you do?
Dr. A: What? I can't solve it. I have no money. I'd just stay inside. I can't solve it. *(She seems annoyed at my question, again just turning back to the hookah)*
Anna: Who do you think should solve it?
Dr. A: The *sulta* (the PA), the *baladiya*. I don't know.
Anna: Why don't they?
Dr. A: I don't know.
Anna: Would you ever consider formally submitting a complaint to the *baladiya*?
Dr. A: For what? I don't know. They talk all day on the radio about these issues, it's not like they don't know what the problems are, reporting it wouldn't change anything. They have no money, no power, they can't do anything. It's all empty talk, *haki fadhi* (حكي فاضي).

She is clearly getting frustrated now with my questions, with the subject. I take my notes, she continues.

Dr. A: What do I know. Are we almost done? This is why I don't do surveys. People ask me at the hospital, and I usually refuse. This won't change anything. It's all empty talk.

She gets up and walks out of the room.

While not every conversation I have is so discouraging, I believe that this account captures the reality of how the small issues people face in daily life wear down and squash any hope towards change. This mirrors the sentiments James Scott unearths in Malaysia and John Gaventa sees in Appalachia. As Scott notes, "when the poor in Sedaka talk about combine-harvesters and say, 'It doesn't matter whether you protest or not, nothing comes of it,' they are merely expressing a realistic, pragmatic, view of the situation as they experience it. They have tried to stop the combines and have failed" (Scott 2008, 325).

So too has Dr. A developed an understanding that both local political solutions and larger pushes for system-level change are futile. Day-to-day issues like the dogs or the traffic may not be devastatingly disruptive or painful for residents, but these "background" problems *are* subtle reminders of the failures of local government and the inescapable discomforts of life in Palestine. While historically steps may have been taken to improve government or resist Occupation, nothing has changed. As the routines march on, these daily issues continually reify a shared understanding about the political (im)possibility of a more just future.

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Before exploring the ways that these beliefs are likely tied to the deeper history of Occupation within the city, it is important to look at how the impact of daily issues is felt differently among different groups within the broader community. While some of these public infrastructure and daily issues are universally unavoidable for Palestinians, the problems are not distributed equally across the city. Like in most cities around the globe, socio-economic divides in the population map neatly onto the level of government attention an area receives (Hastings 2009; Lobao, Hooks, and Tickamyer 2007; Morland et al. 2002). The middle- and upper-class are therefore able to avoid or solve certain issues, while poorer areas are left to bear the burden of infrastructural and service problems. Importantly, though existing research is largely focused on municipal resource distribution in the United States, these studies support the main themes of this dissertation – showing that distribution discrepancies across a city ultimately a) strengthen status quo power, and b) deepens the divide between the rich and the poor (Conley and Dix 2004; Feigenbaum and Hall 2015; Lindsey and Teles 2017). Moreover, because areas of residency are geographically separated, those with privilege are often left unaware of the daily difficulties faced by those in lower-income neighborhoods.

In this city, the eastern part of town is notably poorer. There, neighborhoods are nestled in between refugee camp boundaries, and the lines between camp territory and city-serviced areas blur. In contrast, the newer, richer areas of town spread to the west, with copious development and fancy, single-home villas rather than cramped apartment complexes. Though it is well known that poor neighborhoods are notorious hot-spots for things like Israeli night raids or clashes between protesters and government officials, the realities of day-to-day life in these areas are largely obscured from the view of the middle- and upper-class. In many ways, daily frustrations and burdens – for those across the spectrum of privilege and vulnerability – are dealt with individually. These problems are not important enough to make the news, but nevertheless they chip away at people's energy, hope, and motivations to engage with politics. The following story highlights the differences in service provision across the city, beginning to show the cracks and fissures that divide the community from within.[26]

[26] In addition to the experiences recounted in my field notes, I also tracked the activity and comments of a local government Facebook page. There, the different treatment of the eastern and western areas of the city is on full display. People often comment on the *baladiya*'s neglect of the eastern district, lamenting how unfair it is that the needs of the western, more prosperous neighborhoods are always addressed first. While there is not space to include all of these documents in this dissertation, it should be noted that the experience detailed here is reflective of a general understanding that exists within the city.

While Aya rarely finds herself in the eastern part of town, many of the school's employees hail from these neighborhoods. On a cool Saturday morning in October, one of the local social studies teachers – Amar – invites a cohort of female teachers and staff to her mother's house. She is celebrating the completion of her master's degree. While Aya and I are both exhausted from the work week, we can't not attend. Because the invite was extended personally, it would be considered quite rude.

Aya wants to drive, but we're not quite sure where Amar's house is. I had asked Sara and Miriam – the secretaries – the day before and they told me that Amar's family lives in an eastern neighborhood on a hill above Zaatari, one of the biggest refugee camps in the city.[27] After working for a bit Saturday morning, Aya and I set out in that general direction. As we climb the hill above the camp, we slow down in front of a small corner store. A man sits outside on a plastic chair next to a stand of bagged pita bread, wearing a white tank top and brown slacks. Aya rolls down the window and asks if he knows Amar's family or where their house is located. He nods, and gestures forward, up a steep dirt road. We carry on, and the road becomes narrow. It becomes harder and harder to steer the Volvo around the deepening potholes, with stone buildings and dilapidated cars encroaching on us from both sides.

It soon becomes clear we've made a mistake. We are now winding down a single-lane white gravel drive that dead-ends into a squat stone house. The lack of people and activity tell us it's not the right house. Turning around is an impossibility at this point, as both Aya and I could reach out our windows and touch the apartment buildings on either side of the car. A boy at the door of the stone house watches as we struggle in this car that is too big and too fancy for such a narrow, run-down road. Not more than eight or nine, the boy leans on the door frame, thoroughly entertained. Finally, Aya sticks her head out her window and asks him if he knows the family we're looking for. "Yeah, I think they live down in the camp," he says.

Aya rolls up the window and reverses out the way we came. "They're definitely not in the camp," she says, "I'd know. Maybe they were at one point, but they definitely aren't there now." It's true that she has good knowledge about which of her teachers and staff are refugees and where everyone lives – both clear signs of social and economic status. The information doesn't necessarily make a difference to her, but it's good to know if things get hairy in the camps (it is well-known that

[27] Zaatari is the name of a refugee camp located in Jordan, however I use it here in an effort to maintain some anonymity.

the camps face far more violence than the city as a whole, be it family feuds, Palestinian Authority clashes with local leaders, or Israeli raids). She knows who might be arriving late if certain roads are blocked, who may be missing days of school after night raids, etc.

We take a few other roads, Aya cursing under her breath the whole time. "This road isn't better than the camp!" she exclaims, as we inch through the narrow path, "We might as well be driving down the center of Zaatari!" Finally, we think we've found the right street, and we park. We sit in the car and Aya calls Sara, who said she'd send us the address (she didn't). After 20 seconds of muddled, direction-centered conversation, it appears we're still in the wrong place. Aya shifts out of park, and as the car lurches forward a grating noise under the front bumper stops us. We've run over a cinder block. "This is ridiculous," Aya exclaims, "Someone needs to clean up these roads!"

We turn, and eventually find the place, asking again and again. We park on a paved road, next to a walled in house. We walk around the corner, and a vacant lot, next to the walled in house, slopes steeply down the hill. A cascade of small stones cuts through the lot, but it is too steep to be a real road. Along the edge of the wall of the house, there are uneven, concrete steps leading down the hill. The steps are rutted out in spaces, and overgrown plants lace up through the old concrete. Trash has collected between the steps and the wall, plastic bags, old soda bottles, and food waste. As we start down the steps, Aya's stiletto heels get caught in the rusty rebar that pokes through, holding the steps together.

We inch down the slope, and Aya takes advantage of our slow pace and her frustration to give me an Arabic lesson. "This," she exclaims, "*this* is *bahdalah*." "Bahdalah" is one of the most ubiquitous words in this city, and Aya and I have talked about it before. In standard Arabic, the root of the word can be made into a verb, noun, or adjective. As a verb, it means to insult or to ridicule someone. As a noun, it's an abuse, an insult. In its adjective form, the b-h-d-l root is transformed to describe one who is maltreated or oppressed (Wehr 2019). Colloquially, the word connotes disorder, and it is commonly used to describe something that is neglected or a mess (for lack of a better translation, Aya tells me she uses it to mean "shitshow"). In it's amazing versatility, it's also frequently used to describe maltreatment at the hands of Israeli soldiers or border guards – tying together an understanding that these experiences are chaotic, oppressive, and generally demeaning.

Today, on this slope, the meaning of *bahdaleh* could not be clearer. As we creep down the steps one foot at a time, it's a shitshow of local infrastructure at its finest. In front of us, two women we don't know are performing a similar dance, all of us one misstep away from twisting an ankle or

falling down the hill on our backsides. Aya alternates between laughing at how ridiculous the situation is and seriously lamenting the shameful neglect of this neighborhood.

At the bottom of the steps, a large man (clearly one who lifts weights, as evidenced by the muscles bulging through his tight black t-shirt), directs us inside. "That must be Amar's brother," Aya whispers to me, as we slip into the house. Inside, the house is large, and we go down to the bottom floor. Amar's family has gone all-out for this party, and paper ribbons hang from an old chandelier in the living room. Four or five oversized couches are squeezed into the salon. Wooden paneling lines the room from floor to hip level, with the top half of the walls painted with a glittery paint. It's an effect I've seen before, a trend lending false decadence to otherwise shabby quarters. The walls are dotted with framed calligraphy prints of Qaran verses and prayers. Behind me, heavy gold-colored curtains drape from ceiling to floor, blocking out the light. The floor is a cold tile, common in most of the homes in the city.

We eat at round, plastic tables, squished into the room outside of the living room. After, we crowd into the salon and perch on the couches. Most of the women take off their hijabs (there are no men present), and everyone chats idly. Hookahs are set out and tea and coffee are passed around by someone I assume is Amar's younger sister. Eventually, a big speaker is rolled out, someone's iPhone is plugged into the speaker jack, and the music begins. The women - there are about twenty at the event, most from the school - take turns crowding into the center of the room to dance. At one point, Sara clears the floor and performs a *very* intricate belly dance, as everyone hoots and claps along to the beat. When it's time for us to duck out, Aya jokes that I'll need to help her up the stairs like she's an old woman. I hold her arm as we wind back up to the car. We rush so that she doesn't miss prayer, and she notes for a final time how sad it is that the *baladiya* has forgotten the people out here in the east.

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Later the next week, Aya retells this story to a group of friends at Strada, a local café frequented by the middle- and upper-class of the community. The owners of the café have children in the Academy, and we know their family well. It's a higher-class establishment, as evidenced by their espresso machine and the international offerings on the menu (fettuccini alfredo, nachos, hamburgers, and an array of salads). The café is tastefully decorated with black and white framed photos that, combined with the checkered flooring, give it "European" vibe. Because Strada is on

the western side of the city, there are often groups of well-dressed, perfectly manicured women with fresh blow-outs smoking hookah or chatting. Here, I don't face the leers and questioning stares of men that plague me in the Old City or in poorer parts of town. While I know that my privilege affords me a seat at this table, it is nice to be able to relax a bit with these women. I'm thankful for the escape.

I ask why the service situation is so much worse out in the eastern part of the city. The women sit quietly, but Lubna perks up and bluntly tells me that the western area is just richer - they pay taxes and fees, so they get better service. Bisan chimes in, saying not everyone pays their taxes, even in the rich neighborhoods, and that her trash still gets overrun. Lubna rolls her eyes, "Yeah, but we all know that our trash situation is at least better than out by Zaatari." Bisan reluctantly agrees.[28]

I ask if any of them have ever formally complained to the *baladiya,* thinking maybe they use the complaints box or voice their concerns more regularly. Bisan says she calls to complain all the time, the others laugh and say they didn't even know that was an option. Lubna says her husband may call, she's not sure. She goes on to say that she's pretty sure if she were to call some nobody would just tell her that "they're working on it," or that "their pickup will come soon." Aya agrees, saying that they're always "on the way." No matter what it is - water delivery, electrical outages, trash pick-up - the women agree that the *baladiya* will tell you to wait patiently. So why bother calling?

I ask if these service deliveries are scheduled and clear. I know the water delivery is posted on Facebook; But what about other services? Lubna says she has no idea, but she does remember when her family lived in Michigan for a summer. She reminisces fondly, "Tuesday was trash day. I remember that. Everyone had to remember to take trash out on Monday nights." Here? "Here it just gets filthy," she says, "even when they come, the trash men leave debris and waste all around the bins, so the streets are never really clean. The trash attracts the dogs, making that issue worse, and people just get used to it." She shrugs and sighs.

Disregard for public space and services is not uncommon in places where governance is weak, and the *baladiya*'s inability to address the issues is a clear sign of the shortcomings of local leadership. In many spaces of weak governance, elite ties and agendas – rather than general rights for

[28] Here, I focus primarily on group *understandings* of service provision and government efficiency within this community – not on official studies or reports of what the government is doing. For explorations of service provision, Israeli power over local Palestinian infrastructure, the influence of foreign aid, and other issues at the local level, see Al-Khatib et al. 2007; Brynen 2000; Jamal 2009; Khalel 2016; Murrar et al. 2017; Murrar, Tamim, and Samhan 2017; Sabri, Hanyia, and Jaber 2012

all citizens – determine how and when services are distributed (Batley, McCourt, and Mcloughlin 2012). Other studies show that informal or non-governmental institutions often step in when local governments fail (Lake 2014), and still other scholars have spent a great deal of time exploring citizen dissatisfaction as a result of local service failures (Börzel and Risse 2016; Lyons, Lowery, and DeHoog 1992). The sights in Palestinian streets – feral animals, trash in the streets, disregard for traffic laws, etc. – are not uncommon in other localities around the world. In many places, like in this city, private attitudes and opinions about these phenomena, as well as the inability of local government to find solutions, are often quite critical (Wiser and Wiser 2001).

Importantly, the women at Strada all agree that the problem is not just the fault of the *baladiya*. Mae – who has been glued to her phone scrolling through Snapchat this entire time – suddenly chimes in to say that she thinks the *baladiya* tries, but there are just too many people in the city these days. As people in the countryside and camps get a bit richer now that the intifada is over, they choose to move into the city and the government can't handle this influx in population. The streets are too narrow to handle the traffic, there aren't enough government employees to deal with problems, and the employees that are present aren't trained well or don't work hard. It's all *fouda (فوضى)* and *haki fadhi (حكي فاضي),* Bisan says, chaos and empty talk. Overall, there seems to be a general consensus among this group that the problem will persist and that there is not much that can be done.

Nevertheless, there are small steps taken by the upper-class community that mitigate the impact of these daily service frustrations. For example, while water may only be delivered bi-weekly to the large tanks that sit atop each apartment complex, those with means can always purchase more tanks. During dry seasons, when water is cut off for entire districts, those with elite memberships can shower at their gyms or country clubs. Similarly, while some electric outages are unavoidable, some wealthier families have generators (this is far less common however). When I lived on my own, my electricity would go out fairly frequently because I would forget to go down to the municipality to reload my payment card. For those with sustained bank accounts or strong financial reputations, a running bill can be accrued - crossing this time-consuming chore off of the list.

In my experience however, the most common remedy for an issue that is simply intolerable is to complain to Zaid (Aya's husband) and he'll make some calls. I'm never 100% sure who he calls. It's certainly not some public number. I know he has connections with the former mayor and is friends with many of the folks who sit on the city council, so my best bet is that it's someone like that. Or it could be a lower level employee who owes him a favor? This is all conjecture. Regardless,

the point is that if you have the right numbers you can get things fixed with a phone call. Seemingly by magic, puppeteers pulling strings that I, a mere audience member, can't even see.

As much as these women complain about people not following the laws, in many ways they also live their lives beyond the rules - stretching the limits and relying on their known names to keep them out of serious trouble. Like Zaid's private calls, they all have their ways of skirting the formal channels in order to get things done. For example, one night, Bisan shares a hilarious anecdote about a debacle regarding the awning above her balcony in her apartment. Bisan lives on the 8th floor of the building and has a beautiful balcony. Because of the zoning laws, the *baladiya* wouldn't let her put an awning over her balcony, so the tile flooring kept getting covered with bird poop. However, when one mayor stepped down due to public pressure, Bisan took advantage of the short month with an interim mayor and put up her awning. She capitalized on this shift in power and the disarray and now she has the awning! The man who built the building lives there as well and is furious with her. "But what can he do?" she asks, "My husband owns the apartment, and we know the new mayor. Nothing will happen now that the awning is up." She feels sneaky and proud that she finagled her way through this loophole in power and says she has no intentions of taking it down.

Over time, it becomes clear to me that the solutions employed by these women – using connections, asking for forgiveness rather than permission, or leveraging their wealth to avoid issues altogether – are highly preferred to the alternative of using formal political channels. Consistently, throughout my observations and conversations, it was clear that most community members had little faith that the local government either a) would or b) could efficiently solve these problems through institutional channels. Despite local initiatives that *did* take place during my field work (a trash clean-up program for the Old City, a number of road renovation projects, and new policies regarding parking fines), whenever I invoked examples of *baladiya* action I was met with eye rolls, shrugs, and laughter. Many people viewed these projects as "*haki fadhi*" – empty talk – simply meant to give the illusion that things were improving. Others accepted that the *baladiya* was trying their hardest and even making incremental improvements, but still saw local officials as incapable of reversing or remedying the massive problems facing the city and its residents.

With such a widespread, grim assessment of local government capabilities, it is not surprising that many community members viewed involvement in formal politics as not worth their time or energy. In my interview with Bisan, the unsurmountable nature of the city's issues, the lack of

respect for local political institutions, the back-channel nature of addressing "politics," and Bisan's reluctance to work towards any formal political solution, is all on display:

> **Bisan:** Honestly, the lack of organization in this city goes beyond the *baladiya.* It's the people, us, all of us. We just walk in the streets, throw our trash on the ground, drive recklessly. People have awareness of the problems and possible solutions, but they ignore them. They choose to walk in the street, to throw trash on the ground, you've seen this.
> **Anna:** And why do you think that is? Why do people throw trash on the ground one second and complain about the city being dirty the next?
> **Bisan**: They're all born into this city, into the system. They don't have a good education, that's probably part of it. For example, I heard that in Japan, they study from grades 1-5 how to behave, how to go into restaurants, how to act in public, etc. There's no awareness here like that, no education. It's also because people here don't feel that the city is theirs. They have no ownership over the city. They may feel that their house is theirs, so they keep it clean, but the city isn't…
> **Anna:** Do you feel that the city is yours? Do you feel that ownership?
> **Bisan:** Yes of course, but others don't. With people coming in from the camps and villages, and they really don't have the sense of belonging (*intima'; انتماء*). That, and the fact that the *baladiya* doesn't really punish people for throwing trash, means that nothing will change. I hate to say it, but the roads in Palestine that are controlled by Israel, you see them, they're nicer, cleaner. That's because you get fined if you litter. We have to teach this from kindergarten, show people how to clean, how to respect the space. Oh my gosh I went to London and it was sooooo clean! All of these different people, from all of these different cultures and places, and yet it was so organized and clean.
> **Anna:** Why do you think that was?
> **Bisan:** There's a stronger government. Also, people just expect more of one another, they expect each other not to throw trash in the street.
>
> *We talk for a bit more about the responsibility of people, of the government, and of her trip to London*
>
> **Anna:** Can you give me an example of how these things impact you and your life?
> **Bisan:** For example, I don't go out to the city on Thursdays because of the traffic. There are so many accidents. And I don't want to risk it. The ambulances can't get to people because of the traffic, so if there's an emergency on a Thursday night they can't get to you… *(she sighs).* I don't know what else to say. I mean just look at our view here. Look at the trash. This view sums it up! This is life in this city!
>
> *Through the restaurant's large windows, we can look down on the street below. On the shoulders of the road are huge piles of trash, sloping down the hills, some big boxes, blue plastic wrap that looked like it held in freight containers, bottles, small chips wrappers, there is a vacant lot across the street, covered in large boulders and overgrown greenery.*
>
> **Anna:** Can you talk to me about how you deal with this? What your personal solution might be?
> **Bisan:** *(Struggling to make sense of my question):* I don't know, I guess I could go pick up the trash? Is that what you mean?

Anna: I mean, there's this big, huge problem but what can you do about it? Could you go to the *baladiya*? Do you have any personal experience with trying to solve an issue?
Bisan: The *baladiya*? I mean we're talking about huge issues. It's not so simple. Like the parking for example, the problem is that they permit people to continue building huge buildings, with multiple stories and apartments. In other cities they limit how high you can build if you can't provide parking. Here they don't. So, as a personal example, we had someone steal all the parking in our building. Basically, the building owner sold the parking spots to a toy store even though they should have gone to residents according to zoning rules. My husband helped alert the *baladiya,* and he even was part of a lawsuit we filed. The suit went to court, but that was like five years ago. It's just been sitting in court since. Nothing is happening. The owner of the building is close with some of the court people or the *baladiya* people, so it'll never move forward. And this isn't just our situation, this is everywhere in the city, problems just sit unsolved.

We talk a bit more about the number of issues that sit with the baladiya *unsolved. The irony of her complaint about the court corruption doesn't escape me. While Bisan denounces the personal connections that keep the building owner in power over the parking garage, I know that her personal ties also are often leveraged to give her certain benefits – such as with the illegal awning she put up (mentioned earlier). Often, I see people hold contradictory views about using personal ties or back channels to solve issues. When it stands in the way of what you want, it's corruption. When it allows what you want, it's "how things get done." Regardless, there seems to be a common understanding that formal channels are* not *the way to solve issues. As we chat, Bisan continues to offer strong opinions about the way things could be done instead, and so I ask about her own potential involvement in politics, in finding solutions.*

Anna: You have such good ideas, have you ever thought about being more involved in politics? About running for the municipal council?
Bisan: Maybe, but if I try to run, I'll just become a target - people will just try to bring me down, to target me. I don't really like politics for that reason. If I get more involved, people may start to hate me. There's no order to our elections either, no regulation… *(she trails off, clearly finished with this line of questioning)*

We stare out the huge windows. The shop below has a terrace that is just within our sight. One of the tables has the leftovers of a Palestinian breakfast meal on it – hummus plates, salads, bread – and two men are outside. One is washing the terrace floor with sudsy, white, soapy water and a broom. The other looks on. The man with the broom sweeps the soapy water, the food scraps, and the trash onto the terrace stairs where it cascades down onto the sloping street, rushing along like a river.

Bisan: *(Sighing)* See, someone is going to slip and hurt themselves…

While Bisan may not have addressed it overtly, her testimony also demonstrates a subtle understanding that there are much larger structural and historical factors shaping the behaviors and choices of those within the community. Her references to deficiencies in the education system and the transient sense of control Palestinians seem to feel over the space both allude to forces that run deeper than an individual's day-to-day choice to litter or park illegally. These institutional forces are not the focus of everyday people as they navigate everyday problems; for example, frustration with a

dirty street does not immediately provoke an examination of the imbalances of macro-level systems. Nevertheless, histories of injustice, barriers to Palestinian development, and narratives of loss and failure sit in the background of day-to-day life and serve as the foundation of widespread political apathy and belief about governmental inadequacies.

In his work on the acquiescence of Appalachian coal miners, John Gaventa looks closely at how power can shape the ideas and beliefs of the oppressed. He notes that "social myths, language, and symbols" as well as "the means by which social legitimations are developed" are deeply influenced by dominant political structures and are crucial to understanding political indifference or fatigue (Gaventa 1982, 15). Delving into the history and the historical narratives of a space help unearth the indirect ways that institutions of power can shape the broader mindset of a community. Importantly, Gaventa points out that "the conceptions of the powerless may alter [over time] as an adaptive response to continual defeat… a sense of powerlessness may manifest itself as extensive fatalism, self-depreciation, or undue apathy about a situation" (16-17). This is precisely what is seen in Palestine. This idea is also bolstered by the work of Paulo Freire. In citing Freire's work Gaventa highlights that a "culture of silence may preclude the development of consciousness amongst the powerless thus lending to the dominant order an air of legitimacy" (Freire 1972; Gaventa 1982, 18). This "culture of silence" is certainly on display within the middle- and upper-class community in this city, as has been shown throughout this dissertation.

While historical events – continued political defeats, loss of land and neighbors, individual embarrassment at the hands of Israeli soldiers, and more – certainly influence the broader ethos of the space, these factors are not at the forefront of the individual psyche. As with much of the politics in the space, these narratives sit in the background, subtly shaping day-to-day understandings while not overtly consuming daily life or thought. Nevertheless, when pressed or prompted, these shared histories, memories, and narratives may emerge. In the following account, these dynamics are at play. While discussing local politics with Zaid, Aya's husband, I pushed and pushed to get to the roots of his defeatist attitude about politics. In his response, the importance of Israeli power, shared memory, and historical context in shaping present beliefs about politics is on full display.

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It's a cool evening in the winter. I head up to Aya's apartment because my laundry machine is broken so I need to use hers. She and Zaid are in the kitchen, and she invites me in for tea. Fares

sits at the dining room table working on schoolwork, still wearing his school uniform even though it's almost 9:00pm. I stop to chat with him for a bit, he's preparing for a big debate tomorrow between the 11th and 12th graders. The event is being run by the Palestinian cultural club, and the debate will center on violent vs. non-violent resistance against the Occupation. It will be judged by our Palestinian teachers. Fares asks me what I think about violent vs. non-violent resistance. I say that I used to think that when confronting something like the occupation, something so violent, that you had to use violence. Now, I say, I'm not so sure. Zaid chimes in from the kitchen, informing us that violence "won't work" because the Israelis are "too powerful." He goes on to say that non-violence won't work either, and that Palestine needs "to have America or someone else powerful intervene."

Fares and I exchange a look, and I roll my eyes. It's less about the content of what Zaid is saying and more about his general propensity to state his opinions as facts. Fares laughs and sarcastically reminds me that his dad is the smartest politician of them all. We both get up and join Aya and Zaid in the kitchen. As I walk in, I push back at Zaid, knowing he loves contention and argument. "But what if Fares wanted to do something? What if he wants to resist? Would it be more effective to use violence or not?"

Zaid pauses, processing the question. Finally, he sighs and says, "Honestly, there's nothing to do, either way. It won't do anything, and no one actually wants to resist. Everyone knows that neither are going to lead to change."

"Well," says Fares, "that really doesn't help me prepare for this debate." He goes back to the dining room table, hoping the internet will give him a better argument.

It's common for Zaid to talk in sweeping generalizations about what "everyone knows" or "everyone feels." I know it needs to be taken with a grain of salt – obviously there is a large resistance movement both within and outside of Palestine – but nevertheless, these generalizations of opinion are fairly accurate across the people I interact with day-to-day. For most of them, going out into the streets either violently or not is *not* a part of any routine.

As Aya steeps the rosemary tea, I push Zaid to talk more about this supposedly shared stance on the futile nature of political engagement. "Why won't it matter?" I ask, "Surely, if everyone went out into the streets it would do *something*."

"Sure," Zaid agrees, "And then what? You think the Palestinian government would be able to do anything better? To take over? No way. Even if the Occupation stopped tomorrow, we'd be fucked. There's no leadership here, no one to create a better Palestine. So, it doesn't matter."

While I know that Zaid enjoys being argumentative and crude with his language, I also sense that he means what he says. At it the core, few people I've spoken with have any confidence in the leadership of either the city or the Palestinian state to create a more just system in the event that the Occupation could be overthrown. For many, the inability to envision a better life after Occupation renders questions of political action, revolution, or resistance somewhat moot.

Nevertheless, I push him on the question of leadership in the city. I ask why, where are all the leaders? Why isn't he a potential leader? What is preventing a future leader from bringing the city out of this powerless morass? At first, he waves his hands at me, saying it's too complicated, too long of a story. Eventually, I get him to share. This is the history he provides:

> *Back in the 1980s, the Israelis controlled the city and put their Druze soldiers in charge of city administration and functioning.*[29] *While there was a Palestinian-elected Mayor, he was removed because of his pro-PLO politics, and the reins of local government were in the hands of the Occupying forces. At the time, another Palestinian man – we'll call him Ibrahim Abboud for the sake of anonymity – was well-known and liked within the city. He had close personal ties with Jordanian officials (who had previously been in control of the region) and was also respected by Israeli forces. Zaid actually knew Abboud at the time (again, a testament to Zaid's social standing), and said he was an intelligent, charismatic, and strong leader. Abboud's ability to generate respect from so many different factions made him an outstand politician in the city, and many saw him as a beacon of hope, capable of effecting real change.*
>
> *In the mid-1980s, Israeli authorities appointed Abboud mayor of the city. This move (the appointment of a Palestinian to run the city) was unprecedented, and it was seen by many locals as a potential step forward in the quest for Palestinian autonomy or self-government. According to Zaid, when Abboud took over the* baladiya *things began to get done. He improved the city's infrastructure, negotiated with striking government workers (eventually bringing back a largely Palestinian workforce to government offices), approved building permits, solved local feuds, and more. As a moderate, he did not completely shut off contact with Israeli authorities, but neither did he bend to their every demand. All in all, Zaid says, while some people didn't like him, there was no denying that Abboud actually got things done for the people of the city.*

[29] The Druze, while not Muslim, are an Arabic-speaking ethnic minority in Israel.

Unfortunately, Abboud's success in the eyes of many of the city's residents was also seen as a threat to more extreme Palestinian political parties and to certain Isreali factions. Soon after he was appointed mayor, he was shot on the steps of the baladiya *office. Zaid says the specifics of who ordered him killed were always unclear. Most people thought it was a specific Palestinian political party that abhorred Abboud's willingness to work alongside Israeli occupiers. Others thought things went higher up. There were rumors that the hit was ordered by PLO leadership (exiled in Tunis at the time) who saw Abboud's rise to power – which happened independent of any affiliation with or grooming by the Palestinian Liberation Organization – as a threat to their political future in the region.*

In the end, Zaid sadly wraps up, when Abboud was killed it became clear to people within the city that any strong local leader who showed competency and efficiency in finding political solutions was a threat to the Israeli and the Palestinian establishment. He notes that a number of other men, all of whom showed signs of a bright political future, were mysteriously killed throughout the 80s. Eventually, others who may have followed in their footsteps turned away from political involvement entirely; message received.

After that, Zaid says, we lived through two uprisings, both of which did nothing to advance the cause of the Palestinian people, both of which just led to more bloodshed on our side. If there was ever a question about whether or not politics could get us anywhere that should've answered that. The uprisings were stoked by Israel and Palestinian authorities alike, ending potentials for peace, just seeing how many could be killed each day. No one wants that again. No one.

And now? Now, that we have Palestinian leadership back in charge of our Palestinian cities? Ha! Some "prize" that is. It would be a burden for Israel to have to run this mess, for them to have to deal with all the shit: the salary issues, the garbage, the electric. It would be a burden for them to control the bureaucracy of the city in the way they did before. Especially, when it works so well for them to just let the Palestinian Authority muddle through it. With the current system, the PA has *to collaborate if they want to get anything done. This undermines their authority, weakens them, and benefits Israel.*

You ask why there are no strong leaders, Zaid says, returning to my original line of questioning. The leaders were killed, or they left, or they don't want to be involved in this mess. The leadership we do have is trash – kings and queens who love their power and will do anything to keep ruling over their trash kingdom. You know we have corruption, jealousy, pettiness in our politics. They wouldn't let others into their thrones. We saw what happened with Abboud, so we

know to steer clear. Some politicians do really try, Aya butts in. Some of them truly do want a brighter future for the people of the city. Sure, Zaid agrees, but at this point between the corruption in the PA, the mafias that run the camps, and the Israeli grip on all of it… it's all too much for one or two good politicians to get around.

Plus, he adds, since the Oslo Accords the Palestinian government has just been a bloated beast. When the PA took control they gave everyone and their brother a position in the new government. You can't really blame them, but now there's nothing for so many employees to actually do. So, they sit and play solitaire, and drink coffee, and pass the time. Now we've had several generations of a government that gets paid to do nothing. That completely destroyed the ethics of politics in this country, it created a culture of laziness, a culture of not caring. Sure, he admits, some people still mean well, are still dedicated to a deeper political cause. There's only so much any one man can do. With a sigh, he concludes, "You couldn't pay me to do that job. Working all day, knowing you would never get anywhere, would never get anything done."

When he finishes, we sit in silence for a few moments, sipping our tea. Aya shakes her head and says this is why she doesn't like talking about politics, "I have enough negativity in my life already!"

I ask Zaid if he thinks this is all the agenda of the Occupation, to create this culture of despair and hopelessness around politics.

"Maybe," he responds, "But it's also the agenda of the West. You have this in other Arab states too – in Jordan, in Saudi, in Iraq. Whether it's the Israeli Occupation or the American army, or European businessmen… it's all destroyed the Arab world."

Zaid is not a political scientist. He loves to read, in Arabic and in English, and his bookshelves are covered with an interesting mixture of texts: biographies of Steve Jobs and Warren Buffet (his business idols), religious texts, historical fiction about World War II, and a plethora of self-help books. He's well-read, but not an academic. Whether or not his assessment of the situation is accurate according to the mores of the academy is not my primary concern. Rather, what his testimony demonstrates is that the feelings that Palestinians carry regarding politics do not develop overnight. These attitudes do not appear out of thin air, but they are learned, they evolve, growing and changing in response to experiences, to stories, to a lifetime of events. And while it may take some prodding to get into the histories and moments that shape these beliefs, that doesn't mean that

these understandings are not always sitting in the background and serving as a lens through which Palestinians navigate their daily lives.

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Chapter 4

VIOLENCE ONCE REMOVED

It might seem odd that in cities teetering at the edge of the abyss young people still go to class… but that is the way of things, with cities as with life, for one moment we are pottering about our errands as usual and the next we are dying, and our eternally impending ending does not put a stop to our transient beginnings and middles until the instant when it does.

— Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West* (2017)

Ever since I began working in Palestine, people back home have been worried about me. Not because of the trash in the streets, the sub-standard infrastructure, or the inadequate health care options, but because of what they see in the news. It happens the same way again and again. It starts with a family member or friend giving me an incredulous look and shaking their head – "Are you okay?!" they ask. "Was everyone scared?! Be careful! Was it dangerous?" When confronted with such questions, I always struggle to respond, struggle to put my experiences and sentiments into words. My short answer, "It's not like Palestinians live in constant fear of death or violence, I'm fine!" eclipsed a deeper sentiment, my feeling that things in Palestine are not fine at all. On one hand, for me and for many Palestinians around me, life is certainly filled with frustrations, annoyances, and constant reminders of the Israeli Occupation – as has hopefully been evidenced in the two previous chapters. But my daily life is not "dangerous" or "scary" in the way that my friends and family expect. Not everyone lives in extreme poverty or in refugee camps, not everyone faces a daily barrage of rubber bullets or teargas, people do not live in fear of rockets or bombs falling in the streets. Yet on the other hand, even for the most privileged families around me, there seems to be heaviness to life in Palestine, daily tensions and deeper depressions that exist alongside celebration, laughter, and growth.

This chapter builds on several of the themes of the previous chapter. Most notably, the importance of historical context and narrative – this time as it pertains to violence – is clear. Additionally, as with local service provision, this chapter demonstrates the ways that people leverage privilege to avoid the brunt of extreme violence. This avoidance of violence makes life livable, but also distances Palestinians from one another and fractionalizes the community.

In accordance with the broader themes of this dissertation, I demonstrate how violence sits

"in the background," ever-present but not totally disruptive of daily life. Importantly, this allows space for growth, development, and daily routines to unfold – as we saw in Chapter One. Importantly, however, I use this section of the dissertation to delve into the ways that the fruits of daily life (often made possible through channels of privilege), can be quickly jeopardized by arbitrary or unpredictable violence. While most of the Occupation's violence is routine and foreseeable, in the end there is always an element of susceptibility present – even among the "least oppressed" populations within this space. Understanding the ways in which vulnerability lies just beneath the surface of privilege shows that neither of these categories is static or sure. Here, individuals can move from a state of relative safety and stability to one of precariousness and danger is a matter of moments.[30] This shift in positional power, as well as the desire to guard oneself against these changes, helps illuminate why people may be averse to political involvement.

While showing the most recognizable, or most mundane aspects of life is essential to broadening our understanding of the space, it is also important to highlight the ways that real, physical violence *does* play a role in shaping the daily landscape of life in Palestine. This chapter tries to illuminate the complexity of the violence in the West Bank without simply playing into cable news tropes of terror, shootings, and protest. Again, I hope that the picture painted is a recognizable one. While the situation itself may be quite nuanced, in no way are these dynamics of violence - particularly violence occurring in remote, predictable, yet still deeply traumatizing ways - unique to Palestine.

When confronted with questions from friends of family about my safety and well-being, my mother, often present for these conversations, would chime in with her favorite quip. "Well, I certainly feel better about her living in Palestine than when she was on the South Side of Chicago! It's probably safer in the West Bank, but no one really thinks about it like that!" she would interject with a smirk - calling out a general ignorance both to the reality of life in Palestine *and* to the realities of violence in America. I would remind her that I was never in serious danger in Chicago either, nestled in gentrified Hyde Park. Nevertheless, her parallel between the U.S. and Palestine remains provocative to me. As much as the background noise and frustrations of politics are recognizable in

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[30] The elusive nature of identity and social group membership is a central component of the next chapter. In theorizing the complexity of "group" belonging and political resistance, I primarily draw on the work of Iris Marion Young. Nevertheless, other work pertaining to violence and identity in particular can also shed light on these nuances; see Sen (2007).

the first few chapters of this dissertation, I also believe that there *is* something similar going on in communities plagued with persistent violence.

We must be open to this possibility in order to see the patterns uniting systems of oppression through space and time. Indeed, at the beginning of this project I was interested in comparing Baltimore, Maryland and a city in Palestine. When I presented this idea to academics at a 2017 methods conference it was met with serious backlash. I was informed that such a project could never work because the U.S. city was simply "incomparable" to Palestine. I was making Baltimore seem far too violent, one participant informed me. She "had a friend" living in Maryland, and people there *knew* where to go and not go, they lived normal lives, and "bullets were not raining from the sky." In sum, she unknowingly made my point for me.

And so, this chapter begins to shed light on the ways that violence does and does not creep into the lives of those with relative privilege in one West Bank city. While I feel there is serious value in this close examination of what living in a conflict looks, feels, smells, sounds, and tastes like, I also worry that this chapter could become another titillating tale about a land far away. What I hope to convey in these next pages is just how *un*-extraordinary life in proximity to oppressive violence can be. This is not to say that the Occupation is not "that bad." On the contrary. I challenge us to look closely at the subtle ways violence is mitigated, managed, processed, and avoided by any means necessary, to imagine communities closer to home that may face similar struggles, and to recognize and grapple with the larger need for systemic change around the globe.

As with the rest of this dissertation, I do not claim to capture the totality of lived experiences of violence (let alone tap into a single unifying experience that resonates with all Palestinians). Horrible, horrible things that have happened to people in this community are not detailed here.[31] The lasting trauma, pain, and impact of a history of violence and struggle cannot be fully examined in this short chapter. Nevertheless, I do hope to add nuance and complexity to the stories we - as academics - are telling about violence and human security. I hope that these stories, these lived experiences, are at once recognizable and distressing to a wider audience. I hope that in these moments we can see ourselves, see lives that are not so foreign after all, see parallels to our own country, and see people.

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[31] For testimonies of the horrors of Occupation, I highly recommend reading historical accounts of both Intifadas (Alareer 2014; Baroud 2002, 2020; Hammad 2017), reports from Human Rights organizations (Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories 2020; The Tip of the Iceberg 2019; World Report 2019: Israel and Palestine 2018), as well as accounts from Israeli soldiers who perpetrate much of this violence (Breaking the Silence 2020)

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As fall turns definitively toward winter, things remain relatively calm for the upper-class community of the city. The summer heat completely dissipates, and cloudy skies forecast the rainy months to come. Throughout September and October, I've had a close eye on the *baladiya*, tracking goings on about town and interviewing several members of the community. As November swings around, Aya and I hunker down for the winter months, spending more nights indoors with Teta in front of the television.

Teta, Zaid's mother, is somewhere around 86 years old, though no one is exactly sure of her birthday. She was born and raised in this city, marrying her husband when she was 16. Teta and Sido are just affectionate names for grandma and grandpa, but the whole family has taken to calling them by these monikers regardless of relation. Teta is not in good health, sitting day in and day out on a pea-green sofa in her living room. We visit when we can, around three times a week, even just to sit with her. We chatter about local gossip, she asks me why I'm not pregnant, we make tea, we entertain other guests. Teta sits with her legs up on the couch, gnarled varicose veins popping into sight when the blanket she has tucked around herself slips. She wears a nightgown - one for summer and one for winter - and constantly rakes her hands through her thinning but still-dyed hair. When non-related men come in (Jafar the Kamal's handyman, or a friend of her husband, or the gas man, etc.) she pulls on a loose, brown, Spandex hijab. Occasionally, she'll grab for her glasses and read the daily newspaper. Every few hours she slips to sleep, reclining fully on the bed pillow that sits under her left arm. Five times a day she gets up, shuffles to the bathroom to wash, and pulls on the prayer clothes that sit on a bench in the dining room. She prays as most old people do, sitting in a plastic chair rather than forcing her old bones into a full *ruku* and *sajdah* bow.

Throughout all of this, the TV quietly murmurs in the background. During lulls in the conversation, Teta flips through Palestinian satellite channels… Manar to Falastin to Mayadeen. Sometimes it's unclear if she's watching, the volume is often too low to make out. But occasionally, her vacant stare will snap to attention and she'll make a witty comment about something on the screen. I've never been in this living room and seen the TV off. Teta always chooses the channel, unless she's sleeping and one of sons or grandchildren get ahold of the remote. Once, her granddaughters and I watched an American movie late on a Saturday afternoon until she woke up and forced us to switch it back to the news.

As a political science student, I find myself acutely tuned in to stories of conflict, soldiers,

fighting, oppression. I sit with Teta almost daily, constantly asking for her thoughts on the political situation. She steadily steers conversation away from these things, saying politics are always the same, "The Israelis are dogs, the situation is bad, it's been bad, it will continue being bad. God help us." Her favorite response to my serious inquiries is to gruffly, and semi-sarcastically announce: "You know what's new? *Nothing*. Nothing is new. There are four walls around me, I've been here all day, they're the same four walls, and nothing has changed."

The day-to-day life of Aya, her family, and the school, has also settled into a steady rhythm, with little change. While I know that the conflict is an important part of this space, physical violence is something largely I hear about second-hand, rather than something I experience. We go to school, we cook, we go out with friends, and we sleep. Meanwhile, the violence drones on in the background on Teta's television – a families of martyrs in Gaza are interviewed, crying in their living rooms; images of Netanyahu and Abbas are followed by conversations among pundits that no one hears because the TV has been on mute for the past hour; Israeli soldiers and raids and checkpoints flash on the screen only to be drowned out by the more-pressing, lively family conversations erupting in Teta's small living room.

Early one morning, Aya's sister in America texts to make sure she's okay. We look at each other in the comfort of Aya's office and laugh. Aya is not okay for several reasons (visa problems, marital problems, work problems), but physically she is safe. We're fine. What could her sister mean?

After some internet sleuthing over our morning coffee, we find that, apparently, something has happened outside of Jerusalem. A shooting. A Palestinian man who had a labor permit and worked at an Israeli factory went on a workplace shooting spree killing a number of Israeli citizens. Aya had no idea. I had no idea. This is the first we've heard about it, even though we could drive to the site of the attack in less than an hour. It took a text from thousands of miles away for her to clue into the local violence. She notes that if she had been in Jerusalem or on the roads she may have noticed, but the city we live in is somewhat secluded, sheltered from any telltale signs of conflict. Outside the city, the roads between towns are under Israeli control, meaning that when violence erupts, the Israeli army blocks off highways, puts up new checkpoints, rounds up known suspects. But you have to be in the right place at the right time (the wrong place at the wrong time?) to see it or feel it. For Aya, the text about the shooting is something to look up on the news, lament about, and forget about in the face of a hectic workday. We are removed from the known spaces of violence, and so we have nothing to fear.

Nevertheless, the shooting comes up again later that afternoon. Following any violence there is always a spike in the *potential* for more violence, the *potential* for disruption. This is something to have on the radar and plan around. With proper planning, precautions can be taken in order to avoid getting caught in the midst of any new violence. For Aya, the issue at hand concerns a group of students in the school are part of a college prep program funded by USAID. Occasionally, these students are asked to travel to a neighboring city for events, and today they are supposed to head down for a Skype session with an American college as a way to learn about the admissions and application process. Around noon, I get a call from a mother of one of the students, "Are they going?" she asks, "The roads are shut, what's your plan?"

As I should have known, the morning shooting has caused a crackdown throughout the West Bank. My first reaction is frustration. I know some of the students (her daughter included) have been ditching the events of the organization because they find it boring, and I don't want them to have an excuse to miss another session. After hanging up, I go and find Ameer to ask about the road conditions. He always has the inside scoop through some information network that is largely unknown to me. He tells me the main exit of the city was closed this morning (meaning no one could get in or out), but that it opened back up around 9:00am.

I call the head of the college prep organization in the neighboring town to see what she had heard. Apparently, parents have also been calling her non-stop with concerns about their kids on the roads. The Skype event is supposed to take place in the early afternoon, but there is some concern that if it goes long – into the evening – evening roadblocks may prevent students from getting home at night. She and I agree, the kids at our school should stay put. No need to risk getting stuck or harassed on the road by Israeli soldiers. In the worst-case scenario, people out on the roads in the next few days could get caught in the crossfire of responses (Israeli and Palestinian) to the shooting. No one wants to be responsible for that, even if it is a great opportunity to network with an American admissions counselor. The loss of this opportunity is a small price to pay for the security of keeping the violence at an arm's length.

A week later, talk of the shooting has died down. People move on to other, more pressing issues and concerns. Similar to the frustrations and annoyances of daily disruptions due to local governance, violence tends to simmer in the background. It's ever-present but manageable. If you take the right steps (staying out of protests, avoiding roads during moments of tension, paying attention to the news), if you know where to look (checkpoints, roads, camps), if you have the means (you *can* skip the meeting, you *can* stay home, you *can* live in the nice part of town), you can

keep actualized violence out of your day-to-day life. Nevertheless, changes in daily plans, calls from a sister far away, or flashes on the TV screen hover in the background, reminders that the violence is out there. Like the bullet holes from the Second Intifada that still decorate several buildings in the Old City, the horrors of violence in the city leave scars that even the most privileged cannot erase or escape.

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Despite the distance of actualized violence, any news of violence blazes through the community like a wildfire. Importantly, it's not just Palestinian/Israeli conflict that comes up in conversation, but also skirmishes between Palestinian police and citizens, family feuds, and other interpersonal dramas. People love to gossip about such things, whether or not they have full information about the events at play.

One event that makes waves in the community that fall is a shooting that happens at a local apartment building. I first hear about it from a father who has come in to talk to me about his son's suspension. He is uninterested in hearing about his child's behavior problems at the school, so instead he begins to tell me about a shooting in their building. Shocked and momentarily distracted from the meeting's focus, I press for details. He says he thinks it is all a big misunderstanding, an accident. He waves his hand in the air, seeming to brush away my reaction. "It was something small," he says, "some silly building guard trying to test his gun, he was trying to shoot at a rat or something and it went wrong.

Later that night, I'm up at Teta's house with Aya, Teta, Ranya, and Ranya's daughter Mira. It's one of the last warm evenings before the depths of winter rain consume the city, so we sit outside on the patio. Teta sucks on her hookah, occasionally sharing with Ranya, while Aya, Mira and I sip tea. Mira and I sit on the outdoor loveseat with a blanket draped over our laps, and though there is a bite in the air, the plants that decorate the patio are still full and green. Hind storms in (she always makes a loud, rambunctious entrance), and the shooting comes up again.

"Well listen here," she announces, almost comically, "I've got the full story!"

We laugh at her theatrics and she protests, "I'm serious! I talked to some people who know some people who were involved! Let me tell you!"

She begins a dramatic retelling of events, standing in front of the group, waving her arms around as she speaks. Her over-zealous storytelling leaves us all laughing and shocked at the same

time. According to her "inside" source, it was definitely not an accident. The doorman of the building went across the street and when he came back, a man from the building shot him. The man who shot him was a big PA guy (*kabir, min al sulta*), and so Hind is sure that nothing will come of this shooting, the police won't pursue it, he won't get in trouble. In fact, she says… pausing for dramatic effect… the governor announced on the local university radio station this morning that the shooting was an accident. Apparently, the government story is that the man from the building was polishing his weapon and it misfired, shooting the doorman.

Hind perches on the edge of Aya's patio chair, almost out of breath. She leans in closer to us and switches to a whisper. The real juicy part of the story is that earlier that week, the doorman had made an offhand comment to the man about a woman he kept bringing around to the building. Rumor had it that the doorman was referring to a prostitute that the man from the government had had over on multiple occasions. Here, our patio conversation gets derailed as everyone is up in arms – What?! Was it one woman or different women? Who was it? How do you know?? Did the doorman really *know* or did he just allude to something? – Hind is vague with her answers, nodding knowingly at the shock and outrage that now fills the porch. She maintains that there is certainly a woman involved, that promiscuous goings on are intertwined with the shooting, but she fails to provide clear answers to the questions.

The rest of the story is less outstanding. After the tenant shot the doorman, he took him to the hospital. He freely admitted that he was the shooter and never pretended otherwise. Perhaps it was because, as a high-ranking government official, he knew he was safe. Perhaps it was because the actual events are far less sensational than Hind's portrayal. We sit and quietly mull over these possibilities as the bug zapper lights up, killing the last mosquitos of the season.

After a bit, Aya declares that she doesn't buy it. "If there *were* shady women around," she says, "wouldn't other people have seen?" To this, Hind suggests that maybe the doorman was the first to notice, and the man shot him to shut him up. Conversation slowly drifts to the dead doorman's family and what they are owed by the killer. Even if the death is accidental, the shooter takes on a debt to the living family. Hind mentions that she went to part of the funeral earlier that day (no doubt where she picked up most of her intel/gossip), and that the doorman's family was asking everyone to keep pressure on the shooter. Because of his government affiliations they were worried he would get out of having to pay up.

I never found out the "real" version of events. It could match Hind's story. It could be much more mundane. Regardless, the way that information - particularly regarding violence - travels through this community is often like a game of telephone. It's filtered and incomplete. Details are often off, but the reality of the violence sits heavy in the background. There is a quiet understanding that violence happens here. Some of this violence is contained - like family feuds, or shootings at apartment buildings - and it will *rarely* impact the lives of those beyond its bounds. Even if you were to live in that apartment building, there is a low chance that this violence will touch you, that is… as long as you don't bring prostitutes in the front door. It is understandable, and therefore avoidable. This type of violence is fodder for gossip on porches late into the night.

Other violence – like settler attacks or the shooting in Jerusalem – brings with it the risk escalation, one event snowballing into more and more violence. It also brings with it a more arbitrary nature. It's not quite as understandable. In those instances, the game of telephone occurs in hushed whispers rather than showy performances. Conversation is quieter, more somber. With this type of violence, the question of personal safety lingers in the background. Those with relative privilege are armed with a larger arsenal when it comes to protecting themselves against this type of violence – they have the luxury of skipping work for a day and staying off the roads; they have nicer cars, often with Israeli plates; they have the money to leave if things get bad. And who can blame them? With the threat of this violence, avoidance is the name of the game.

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Though violence in the West Bank is largely patterned and predictable, there are times when it shatters the illusion of safety or stability, even among the more privileged communities. As mentioned, when travelling between towns one's risk of exposure automatically increases due to Israeli army (and settler) presence.[32] Nevertheless, thousands of Palestinians travel on these roads daily, commuting to work, visiting family, attending events in neighboring towns. The flow of people and commerce throughout the West Bank is constant.

Aya gets out of town as often as she can. She says she finds the city and its social constraints suffocating. She needs to breathe, and so she drives. Almost every Friday morning (the beginning of the Palestinian weekend), she and I drive down to a large neighboring city to have breakfast with her

[32] For information regarding settler-perpetrated violence see Weisburd (1989) and Byman and Sachs (2012)

sister Reema. We meet at the same cafe each week, a cozy place known for hosting a more international, liberal crowd, but still not fully "Westernized" (i.e. they don't serve alcohol). One of the main waiters there recognizes us now and when we walk in, he often asks us about our drive. We make the drive early, getting out before Zaid or Aya's sons are awake. The city sleeps in on Fridays, so the drive out is peaceful and without traffic.

Today, Aya brought a bag of Christmas gifts for Reema, mostly clothes and makeup. Though both Aya and Reema are observant Muslims, celebration of the Christmas season is not uncommon in Palestine, particularly for American-Palestinians and Palestinians in upper-class circles. While we wait for Reema to arrive, we order food and Americanos and sit at our normal comfy chairs in the back. Reema shows up in cute Uggs and a knit hat in place of her regular hijab. We chat about school (Reema is also a teacher) and about the upcoming holidays.

Several hours later, we head home. As we drive out of Reema's city, Aya and I contemplate going the long way, but instead we turn right and head for the roundabout exit by the Israeli security office. As we get closer to the checkpoint - marking the edge of the township and the beginning of Israeli controlled roads - we see that cars are stopped. They seem to be backed up a few hundred feet from the checkpoint. There are three Israeli soldiers posted, and two of them lean down to talk with each stopped driver. One stands a few yards away, behind a concrete block with his gun drawn and pointed at the line of cars. We inch forward. The conversation between me and Aya fades away as we draw closer, and the car is silent.

After a few beats we begin to discuss whether or not we should get our passports out. At this point, we still both have valid visas - though Aya is weeks away from expiration. The car in front of us - a small white sedan driven by a middle-aged man - pulls up to the soldiers, as we're instructed with a curt, hand gesture to remain about 50 yards back. The soldiers make the man up ahead get out of his car. They have him open the trunk and one of the two soldiers at the car pokes around. There is an ease about the soldier's movements as he digs around the trunk. The apparent calm of the scene is wiped away by a glance at his gun. All three soldiers wear helmets and bullet-proof green vests with huge black boots. After about two minutes they let the man back in his car and instruct him to drive off, simultaneously gesturing at us to continue waiting. "What are they even doing?" I whine under my breath, as the soldier who looked through the trunk talks into the radio on his shoulder. "This is ridiculous," Aya says. We are both tense.

At this point, we've both taken out our passports. We pull up and I put my window down, as the two soldiers approach the passenger side of the car. The third soldier still sits with his gun

aimed and ready, Aya in the crosshairs. The trunk-searching soldier leans down. He wears sunglasses, the narrower cut ones that wrap around into his helmet. Something a Midwestern dad might wear fishing (though they aren't polarized). I can't see his eyes. The air outside is beautiful and clear. A perfect late-fall day. It's crisp, but bright and sunny so I'm not at all cold with the window down. He leans down to me, his sunglasses, low helmet, and high vest obscuring most of his body and skin. Only his cheeks, mouth and nose are open to the sun. This is enough to expose him. He has terrible acne, and the remnants of this hormonal scourge have left his face splotchy red. Though I can't see his hair, I can tell he's blonde because the wispy attempts at a mustache and goatee splash his pockmarked face. The patchy facial hair also reveals young age, and his inability to grow a full beard.

I say hello before he can address us in Hebrew. That, along with American passports drawn and visible, is sometimes enough to get us waved through checkpoints. Not today. Today he asks me in English, "Where are you going?" Aya responds, but it sounds almost like a question. Her voice is a bit higher pitched, a fake voice that you may use on the telephone or with someone you just met. The soldier gestures for the passports and we hand them over. His gun dangles from his shoulder as he takes them from us and opens to the picture page. "Where are you from?" He asks. America, I say. "Where in America?" he asks. "I'm from Washington state," I say, as Aya simultaneously says, "New Mexico". I realize that this doesn't match the info in my passport (which is technically from Minnesota), but it doesn't matter. He doesn't seem to care, and he doesn't look for our visas. He hands back the passports and waves us through the roundabout.

I put up the window cursing. He didn't even care about the visas! "But if we didn't have them you know he'd look," Aya says, voicing a generally shared feeling about the arbitrariness of these stops that seems to come with a consistency of bad luck for Palestinians. I guess if someone really is out to get you, it's not bad luck or paranoia. It's the living nightmare of being targeted by pubescent young men with big guns.

It's hard to communicate the sense of anxiety that these encounters produce, particularly when absolutely nothing happens. Even when the stop is routine, when everyone is legally present, when no one is rude, the adrenaline pulses through my veins, and my stomach ties into knots. There is never a sense that it will be fine, even when 99% of the time it ends uneventfully. The possibility of a more violent alternative – always in the front of your mind due to the uniforms, the big jeeps, the radios, the guns – dances in the background, making our powerlessness in the face of Israeli authority tangible.

As we pull away from the checkpoint, Aya turns up the music so that it pulses through the car. The sun shines brightly and warms my face. We both sing along with to Kelly Clarkson and Ed Sheeran and Harry Styles. It's the same old playlist, but to belt it out as we fly down the highway feels so good. It's a release of the tension.

I know this road like the back of my hand. The rolling hills, the whitewashed school with the bright graffiti, the stretches of fields and olive orchards, the house with the round top, surrounding villages with signs in Arabic and Hebrew, aimless boys in sandals and sweats getting bread on Friday morning, men cleaning their storefronts. And on the crest of so many of the hills sit Israeli settlements. Like gingerbread houses, their sloped red roofs are plopped down above the olive trees. There are Israeli bus stops along the highway, with two kinds of people waiting: Settlers in long dresses and loose trousers, women with wrapped up hair and men with long side curls, or soldiers. At every bus stop people put their hands out to hitchhike because Aya's car has Israeli yellow plates. The settlers terrify me. They're known for their extremism and violence. Often times the Israeli soldiers end up protecting Palestinians from zealous settler mobs. Today, despite my constant attempts to empathize and examine, I am filled with disdain as we cruise by. It's disdain for their leisure, for their nonchalance and casual travel, moving through the West Bank seemingly without a care in the world.

There are other signs of the conflict as we drive. Army jeeps cruise by. They are squat, olive green cars rigged with huge satellite antennas that reach up into the sky. They move slowly, accruing a line of cars behind waiting to pass. Once in a while we also see soldiers on the sides of the road, wading through the tall grass or chatting by a parked vehicle. Today we pass one young soldier who stands alone in a ditch, helmet off, scratching his hair. No one else is in sight. His olive-green outfit is in perfect contrast to the rocky red soil. What operation are they possibly running? What is his life? What does he think of us? What would he think if he actually knew us? What would I think if I actually knew him?! The sun beats down from the vivid blue sky. Blink and I would miss him as we cruise past. Blink and he's gone, an unnoticeable blip on the shoulder. But after a moment like the one at the checkpoint, all of these things come into razor-sharp focus.

These subtle signs of deeper conflict are overwhelmingly present, stifling, and scary. It's violence on the brink, tension simmering just below the surface, always on the verge of erupting. For today, our privilege has kept us out of the fray, kept us safe, there is no "incident". But the tension of the experience is also a reminder that the next time may be different. As with the whispers of Israeli violence noted above, so too do these feelings of anxiety and fear present only in

murmurs – not in open conversation. In writing about fear and violence, social scientists have made note of similar phenomena across different communities plagued by oppression and threat. In these spaces, "sociopolitical violence… becomes deeply embedded within social institutions and cultural conceptions of power and identity; [so that] silences and secrecy may often speak more powerfully than words" (Green 2004, 6).[33] In Palestine, awareness of this violence hovers at the periphery of our lives and routines, a monster just out of view.

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Even when actual violence does occur, it is in sudden flashes. Again, largely avoidable given the right tools. Follow some simple rules: don't go out during protests, avoid the checkpoints, stay off the roads during Israeli crackdowns, stay in your house in the middle of the night. Knowing the rhythms of violence offers a sense of security, keeping the pain at an arm's length. The problem with this formulaic way of living? There's no room for error, no matter how privileged you are. Sometimes, even that privilege isn't enough to keep it away.

Aya and I make a mistake later in the winter. Near the end of the workday, Aya comes to my office and tells me that we need to head down to a neighboring town for a meeting regarding all of the teachers' visa issues. It's a Tuesday, and we don't think twice before hopping in the car around 5:30pm, after evening prayer. The days are getting shorter now, and the light is dim.

We cruise past the mosque and the clinic, listening to music. As we approach the main checkpoint out of the city, the street is stained from tires burnt during that weekend's protests. We've been speeding – probably going around 45mph – but we're slowed suddenly as the road approaches the checkpoint. There are big boulders in the road, also from protests, reducing traffic to one lane. But the slowdown is something more than that, as suddenly there seem to be more and more teenage boys around the car. Because we've been driving so fast, I can't process what's happening quickly. And then I see a kid walking next to the car with a slingshot.

Aya's hand darts out and shuts off the music. She's processing it too. Our eyes widen as our brains catch up to the scene. Aya's hand goes up to her throat and I realize I'm holding my breath. We're inadvertently driving into a checkpoint protest.

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33 In this quote, Green is paraphrasing from Antonio Gramsci's work on violence and power (1971)

"How could we have done this?" Aya says, "How could I have not checked the news?" It's too late to turn back now, we're trapped by a growing throng of young Arab men and debris strewn across the road. Aya starts cursing, "How could I have fucking done this?! How did we not go back roads?!" She only says "fuck" when it's really bad. It strikes me how laughably accidental being caught in this dangerous situation is – if we hadn't decided to go to this meeting at the last minute, we likely wouldn't have ever known this protest was happening. In an instant, our normal immunity to physical violence is wiped away and we find foolishly and alarmingly vulnerable.

We crawl forward, now surrounded by boys on all sides. One kid slaps the rear passenger side of the car. "Do they think we're settlers?" I ask. "No," Aya says, "The saving grace is that we're obviously coming from inside the city. The thing I'm worried about is getting caught in the crossfire." She gestures to the road ahead where a line of five or six Israeli soldiers all shoulder different types of guns. Most of them have tear gas cannons, wide mouthed, aiming up at an arc into the crowd. One of the soldiers points the canister of tear gas right at the kids milling around the car. I look out the window and see a boy cradling two large stones about the size of Magic8 balls. He can't be more than 10 years old. Some teenagers with scarves tied over their faces are lighting tires, which begin to smoke up the air. The thick tendrils of black reduce visibility for everyone, but that's the point.

The tension is palpable, but nothing is happening yet. The line of soldiers must have *just* closed the road a moment before, because as we draw closer, I can see a line of cars forming behind them. Evening commuters from neighboring towns trying to get back into the city for the night. Everyone continues milling around. Waiting. Waiting for something. Waiting for the tension to snap.

I know if the tension breaks, if one kid throws a stone, or advances towards the line of soldiers, then the rubber bullets would come. These guns are also poised and ready, alongside the tear gas cannons. For the first time ever, I am terrified in Palestine. Rubber bullets can kill you, and I have no way of stopping the tension from breaking. We can't do anything but keep crawling forward. The five seconds it takes the car to reach the line of soldiers seems like an eternity. Aya gestures at them through the windshield, asking in a universal sign language if we can drive through. A soldier gestures back that we have to turn around. We can't get out the way we came, but we can take a sharp left on a different road. At this point, we don't care that it's the wrong direction, we just want to be out of the fray.

As we pick up speed heading away from the standoff, we both begin to breathe again. We go around a village to the east, and approach the checkpoint circle from another angle, ending up safely behind the building protest. There are three soldiers on the median next to us as we wait to enter the circle and get back on the correct road. One of the soldiers is dark-skinned, he looks almost like Aya's son Omar. He could be a Palestinian except for the dark green army fatigues and a purple beret on his head. And his gun. He pulls out an oversized iPhone and scrolls through, leaning against a cinder block roadblock. The other soldier next to him is also on his phone, eating a white bread sandwich. Neither look up as we drive by and merge onto the main road.

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In late December, after the Trump announcement, I wake up early in the morning but I'm not sure why. I grope for my phone, sensing that it's too early for the morning call to prayer. As I groggily blink my eyes and register that it's 3:18am, I hear sounds outside. Loud, echoing booms through the valley. This is what woke me. I wonder if they are bombs. My mind begins to race, is this 'it'? Is this how war begins? Trump's announcement came just a week ago and it seems that everyone has been a bit on edge. Could it be that things are erupting?

Across the room, out my window, are the pixelated orange and green lights blinking steadily at me from across the valley – the lights of houses, streetlamps, and mosques dotting the opposite hillside. I turn over and grope again for my glasses, also on the floor next to the bed. I creep to the window, noting that the sounds seem to be coming from the Old City, a neighborhood that sits in the valley to the left of my window, a five-minute walk down the hill. I look out, straining to see down below, as flashes of yellow light-up the sides of the buildings near the main intersection of the city. The flashes are not pure white, but a more vivid orange-yellow tone. They are bright. The light is tucked down below me, in the heart of the city. All I can see are those flashes of light, erupting from below.

The flashes of light are followed by the echoing booms. The booms are bookended by other noises – loud, constant barks from feral dogs, and a rooster, maybe two, crowing at the wrong hour. Besides the flashes of light, I see one or two flares, weak little bursts of light, also coming from the city below. It is the light of falling ash, the trickle of a small burst of firework. I text Aya, who sleeps in the room above mine. She is up as well and sends me a message almost instantly. She doesn't know what's going on but is searching online. I start to look as well. I find it first on the city

Facebook page (not the *baladiya* page but the social site for community activity). People have posted pictures of the Israeli army rolling into town. A photo, taken from a third or fourth story window shows a line of jeeps on one of the main streets.

Is this it? I wonder, *is there a war breaking out? Is this how war breaks out? As someone who studies conflict, how do I not know what war looks like?* I feel a clench in my stomach, a nervous anticipation. I lay in bed, wondering what is coming. It is hard for me to fall back asleep and my stomach hurts. I wonder what morning will bring. Will the city change? I wait. I drift back to sleep as the morning call to prayer sounds. I wake up exhausted an hour later.

Before getting out of bed, I check my phone for updates. There are a few more posts on the city Facebook page about arrests, but when I search for information from news outlets, I find nothing. No mention of the night arrests. I get up and get dressed, as usual. Aya and I drive to school, make coffee, eat breakfast. All normal. Kids arrive. They play on the playground, kicking around a small ball, wandering in groups, gossiping, finishing homework. The speeches about Jerusalem that were scheduled to happen at morning assembly, happen (this is in the week following Trump's announcement about the embassy move). One student reads a poem. A member of the school Palestinian culture club reads a statement condemning the Trump announcement. Then everyone files to class, the day proceeds as usual.

The night's events are discussed in passing in the hallways, in the staff kitchenette, at the main office desk. I sit with the secretaries as we have another cup of coffee, and Miriam tells me that she heard that thirty people were arrested throughout the West Bank in a series of raids. Rashid, the young guy from the camp who cleans the school and runs errands for the office staff, says he think something might be happening, something might be brewing. Others shake their heads and say that it is "same old, same old," nothing will change. I send an email out to the foreign staff keeping them updated. Most of them live at the western edge of the city in the school's foreign housing, so they didn't hear anything, and they have no idea what I'm talking about. Before I send the email, Aya and I discuss whether or not it will unnecessarily alarm them. Is this something we need to worry about? Is this going anywhere? The day moves forward. By 9:30am the night feels like a distant memory, and I am busy with my usual work – student college applications, covering classes, figuring out why the foreign teachers' landlord has turned off their water, etc. I feel foolish thinking something big was happening. It was just a night raid. Everyone around me has heard it happen before.

Later, a teacher who spent a decade in Israeli prison talks with students about the genius of this strategy of night arrests. They are "artists" in war, he says, genuinely impressed by the total

efficacy of the Israeli army. They always enter at night, when the city sleeps, this is key. I agree with him and think about how the sound bombs (those were the flashes of light) will wake up neighbors from their deepest sleeps, when they are most disoriented, most afraid. At the same time, no one coordinates a response because everyone is tucked in their beds and homes, separated and alone, wondering what is going on. The arrests don't occur too close to morning, so everyone can fall back to sleep. Then, when you do wake up, it feels like a distant dream. The raids are timed just right.

The raids continue over the next few months. I often wake up, but over time I don't rise to the window. And each time, in the morning, people go to work and, as they sip a morning coffee the conversation is, "Did you hear that last night?! What happened?" not, "Let's go protest and fight this madness." The invigorating feeling that you have at 2am – the feeling of being swept up in the conflict, the feeling of danger, of anticipation – that feeling passes as you fall back asleep. Before the sun rises, the Israeli jeeps are always long gone, Palestinian prisoners in tow. The targeted families have been humiliated, injured, and disrupted, but the city, as a whole, marches forward. By the afternoon, the day has moved on in its 'ordinary' ways, and one is left with the feeling that, perhaps, you made too big a deal out of things. There is a slight tinge of fear and hatred that remains – you're not totally secure here – but the passion and the excitement of the moment are gone.

This is how you occupy a people, I think. I, myself, am caught in some emotional security gymnastics. Things around me seem fine and boring, so how do I justify my deeper feeling that everything is about to fall apart at any moment? Throughout the winter, it feels like we're always on the verge of 3:00am chaos, followed by 10:00am coffee. But as we slip back into our routines, day-in and day-out, I have other things to think about besides the violence that occurred somewhere else the night before. To dwell on it is to live in the moments that sit at the edge of reality, in the witching hours.

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From moments at checkpoints, to waking in the night, to hearing stories of shootings on the news, the violence of Palestine is ever-present. In studies of other communities (beyond Palestine) facing day-to-day violence and oppression, authors have found similar dynamics at play. Some of the commonalities that emerge from communities affected by insecurity, oppression, and physical violence, include "distrust of institutions of the state; rationalizations for managing violence in daily life; and narratives of fear that appear woven through the fabric of conversations" (Berents and ten

Have 2017, 103). All of these elements are also present in Palestine, as people attempt to navigate the physical threats of Occupation while still maintaining a sense of control and agency over their day-to-day lives.

Importantly, these authors also point out that navigation of violence often comes hand in hand with "positive communal experiences" (ibid.). Violence and narratives of violence are intertwined with conceptions of survival and flourishing within these spaces. In her study of widows in Guatemala, Linda Green looks at how "women refashion social memory and cultural practices, both as a consequence of and in response to the fear that circumscribes their lives" (Green 2004, 6). In much the same way that past political defeats shape community consciousness in Gaventa's mining town, so too do past experiences of violence impact the social and cultural landscape of this city in Palestine.

Like the narratives of political leadership within the city, this history of violence is not focal point of daily conversation, but it certainly lives beneath the surface. Therefore, as someone who has only been in the region for the past several years, it's easy for me to forget that so many in this community have lived through multiple uprisings. Palestine is a young country, and while many of the youth may not have vivid memories of the Second Intifada, this violent history is a centerpiece of family narratives. The importance of this shared history in shaping political beliefs is hinted at in conversations I have with those in the older generation. Indeed, many lament the fact that the youth don't fully comprehend the loss and sacrifice that they suffered through in the early 2000s. Some older Palestinians worry that the youth are therefore out of touch, both in understanding the horror and risk of revolution, but also in connecting with the roots of their Palestinian identity and resistance to the Occupation. Nevertheless, the history of uprising, violence, and grief continually, if even subconsciously, flows through the lives of those around me, and I am reminded of it at unexpected junctures: a reference Aya makes to a road she used to escape to Jordan in the middle of the night during a terrible bombing episode, a side-comment from Hind about how her brother was a human shield, or the stories that began to flow one night at a women's dinner, detailed below.

A few months after the Trump announcement, things simmer down. War does not erupt. Violence does not spill over into the daily lives of most Palestinians. As winter slowly draws to a close, Aya and I try to get out more. The weather is warming as we head to a dinner party across town. It's a group of women that I have come to know well over the last few years, most of them wealthy but working. The conversation at dinner is lively, interrupted by people passing plates to get

more of this or that, of people asking for a fork or knife, of tea being served, dinner plates being cleared, and cakes being cut. The table is big, and it's hard for me to keep up with all of the conversations at once.

At one end of the table, Fida who is sitting between Karma, Bisan, and Mae, mentions something about work the *baladiya* is doing. I tune in quickly and hear her say that it's a shame one of the council members is being treated so poorly. I happen to know that this particular council member is Fida's sister. Fida goes on to say that people are being incredibly mean, writing her messages on Facebook, and even stopping her in the street to complain. "She doesn't even take a salary," Fida says, "she just gets some small stipend each month!" At the opposite end of the table, Lubna leans over to Manar and whispers under her breath, "Well, the city will always be trash no matter what they do. They should take it all down and start over. Salary or not." Before I can get a word in edgewise, everyone has moved on to talk about Mae's coconut cake.

After we finish dinner, we head back to the veranda sitting room and talk more. Nihaya, the host of tonight's dinner, begins telling us about her daughter, who studied abroad in London last summer. She's still abroad, and Nihaya talks about how difficult it has been having her eldest out of the house. "You know," she says, "She was in London during the bridge attacks this summer! I almost made her come home after that."[34] Nihaya shares the story with horror, saying that her daughter was on the subway, they didn't know what was happening, she came up out of the station and the streets were empty. The people who were on the streets were silent. Everyone was walking so quickly, and someone in the underground had told them to run. They took refuge in a hotel, when someone let them into their room.

The women in the room nod and make mournful and disapproving *tsk* sounds as Nihaya recounts the events. When she finishes, Lubna chimes in, "The scariest part is knowing that anything can happen at any time, and not knowing what to expect." Nihaya agrees, "The streets were filled with fear, can you imagine? Horrifying."

This conversation transitions into a conversation about fear here in Palestine. Organically, the group begins sharing stories about their experiences during the Second Intifada. Some of them were in the city throughout the uprising, some left and then returned ("My first night back was filled with gunshots," Aya says, "all I could think was what a mistake it was to come back to Palestine!"), others weathered the war from Jordan - staying away from their Palesitnian homes for five years.

[34] For more on this event see the BBC's report of events (London Bridge attack: What happened 2019)

Different women have different stories and many chime in and share. Interestingly, the mood is not traumatic or morose. Rather, there is laughter, horror, and attentive listening on all fronts. They talk about the beginning of the fighting – disagreeing on the month and year that things started to happen. They talk about different buildings that were bombed, the boredom of being stuck at home. Aya says when she came out of her house after one of the first nights of bombing, she thought the whole city would be gone. But it wasn't.

"We heard the bombs and guns all night. It was hard to tell what was being hit, and there was fear that your neighborhood could be next, but you never knew. When I went outside the next morning, the street was still there." she says.

Others disagree with her assessment that it wasn't that bad, that things were "still there." "The old city was in shambles," Mae says, "Our corner store was gone!" She tells a few stories with her usual gusto and everyone listens, laughs, and frowns at the right moments. She talks about how the soldiers came and occupied her house because her husband was seen as a threat. It wasn't during the main part of the siege, but it was still overwhelming. At the time, Mae was in the process of renovating the house and she was afraid the soldiers would mess up all of her construction work. She says she gave the teenage Israeli troops specific instructions not to step on her rug, and she watched over them as they folded it up carefully so as not to dirty the design. She mimes the boys folding and we all laugh at her making the guys with guns do what she wants. "It wasn't all smooth," she notes, "one of the soldiers went into the bathroom that was being renovated and peed in a hole. I screamed at him and scolded him for acting like such an animal, but he just laughed at me."

One night, while the soldiers were still in the house, she says she fished out an old phone (the Israeli's had confiscated their phones and computers upon entering) and called the press. She stayed on the line just long enough to say, "This is Mae and there are soldiers in our house," before quickly unplugging it again. When members of the press corps showed up the next morning, the soldiers left.

Karma shares that soldiers also took over her building. "What did you do," Aya asks. "What could you do?" she responds, "I was quiet, and I waited. They used my husband as a human shield to search the building, apartment by apartment. Eventually they moved everyone to one floor, and they used the other floors as lookout posts to see the city. We sat together for days and just waited. It was so unclean. I never want to be that close to my neighbors again," she laughs.

Aya and Lubna joke with one another about a trip they took to Eilat – an Israeli resort town on the Red Sea – during the siege. Others exclaim in glee and awe, What?! How did you get there?

How did you manage that?!

Lubna, a twinkle in her eye whispers, "We took a bus from the settler village, and they didn't stop us. We wore all of our Western clothes, and no hijab. We were so bored we had to get out!" They giggle like schoolgirls at the memory of these (quite dangerous) high jinks.

This story of illicit travel leads to other stories about roads, checkpoints, and traffic stops. Lubna is reminded of something that happened last week, when she was stopped at a flying checkpoint.[35]

"The soldier looked in the back, saw my twin boys, and brought them cookies!" she says, incredulously. We all laugh but react with shock. "Did your boys eat the cookies?" someone jokes, "or were they poisoned?"

"Oh, they ate them straight away," Lubna laughs, "they loved it!"

Mae goes on to tell a story of how she tried to get through a checkpoint without her ID (*hawiya*) once and was stopped. She couldn't figure out how to turn around on the narrow road, even though the soldiers wouldn't let her through. In the end, she caused a traffic jam for at least 20 minutes.

Bisan tells of a time she was going to Israel with a Samaritan driver. They stop at the main checkpoint on the main road, she gets out to go through and show her permit, he drives through (Samaritans are allowed to travel freely into Israel). Apparently, as he drove through a soldier gestured for him to pull to the side of the road to have his car checked, but he either ignored or didn't see this order. On the other side of the checkpoint, Bisan got back in the car they drove off, into Israel. About five minutes later, Bisan's phone rings; it's a call from the checkpoint telling them to come back! Somehow, the soldiers had her number, knew she was in that car, and needed the Samaritan driver to come back for his check!

"It was so funny," Bisan says, "I was afraid I'd get into trouble, but it turned out to be my driver! They're the ones who never get searched. For once, I was the good guy!"

Finally, the conversation turns for a moment to current events. Despite the increase in violence from the Trump embassy move, the women reassure me and each other that they are relatively safe. "Honestly, you're probably safer here, than outside of the country" Manar says to me, "Nothing will happen for this country from inside. The city will be calm."

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[35] "Flying checkpoints" are temporary stoppage points set up by Israeli soldiers on roads between Palestinian towns. They pop up from time to time and appear more randomly than the permanent stops at the entrance to each city (Wales 2005)

"Enough politics," someone says, and everyone laughs and starts bundling up to go – it's almost 9:00pm. As we pack bags (and hijabs are donned) the group schedules a coffee at Mae's house next week. We thank Nihaya, and head down the stairs and out into the dark street. Women split off, heading to their cars. There is a bite in the air, the last hints of winter weather.

Throughout the evening, I'm struck by how the women talk of the violence, the Second Intifada, their own struggles and mishaps, all as if I'm not there. They aren't sharing these things as instruction for me, or a lesson on the city, but because this is what you do when you're with a group of friends – you let things out. The stories are not as filled with horror and trauma as I expect, even if the content warrants it. I don't think anyone is really dwelling on these stories, rather they come up organically, a natural part of life here. In the end, this shared evening also leaves me a bit more mindful of what is beneath the surface of so many of these women's lives… the times when violence could not be kept at bay.

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Though violence is a central topic within political science, most studies tend to focus on overt and extreme forms of political violence such as rebel/insurgent conflict, violent state repression, torture, or civil war. These studies have unearthed important understandings about the relationship between violence and political activity. State violence is commonly used as a tactic to exclude "threatening" actors from taking part in political life (Bromley and Shupe 1983; Gamson 1975; McAdam 1982), or to further exclude already marginalized communities from participating (Earl 2003; Piven and Cloward 1978). Similarly, while torture or insurgent conflict may spark some reactionary political activity (Beggan 2009; Carey 2006; deMeritt 2016; Francisco 1995), violent tactics also tend to have a dampening effect on participation in public, political life (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Lyall 2009; Payne 2005; Tindale 1996) while simultaneously delegitimizing the authority of the violent perpetrator (Schlichte 2009). Certainly, these general trends hold for the case of Palestine. Israeli violence eliminates active political figures and is widely effective in subduing the larger population who wish to avoid uncertainty, insecurity, and physical harm.

Expanding on such studies, these stories from Palestine demonstrate that even indirect experiences of violence have deep-seeded effects and contribute to trauma felt throughout the community. Privilege – something not well-explored in previous work on political violence – can be leveraged as a precarious protection against most violence *if* overt political participation is also

avoided. Even so, positions of safety are often unstable, and vulnerability waits in the shadows for almost all Palestinians. This, combined with historical experiences of violence and lasting trauma, is a key factor in understanding how ongoing violence impacts a community more broadly. The looming precarity of insecurity, particularly for those whose everyday lives are adjacent to violence (not centered on violence) also has potentially large impacts on a community's overall belief and participation in formal political systems. Overall, the stories of this chapter suggest that our theories about political violence should a) be expanded to include those who do not suffer immediate harms, b) seriously take into account the lasting historical effects of violence on political participation, and c) consider a spectrum of vulnerability across a population when weighing the impact of violence on a community.

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Chapter 5

POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE

Hope is like the sun. If you only believe it when you see it, you'll never make it through the night.
— Leia Organa, *Star Wars: Episode VIII* (2017)

This dissertation began with the question of why – despite wide-spread desire for social justice and political change – structures of oppression are so difficult to dismantle. The stories and theories of the first four chapters weave together an account of how power sustains itself by looking closely at the ways in which daily life unfolds in spaces of conflict. I highlight the ways in which the chaotic rush of everyday obligations, the beliefs held about politics, the back-channels of privilege, the anxieties of past trauma, the desire for stability and growth, the shadow of violence, and more, all come together in ways that lead people to collaborate with, avoid, and subvert macro institutions of power. Ultimately, small but consistent decisions to "buy in" bolster the status quo, while at the same time people are actively living their lives (growing, changing, laughing, crying) under systems of oppression.

This final chapter turns back explicitly to questions of resistance. How do the contradictions, complexities, and nuances of life complicate our understandings of what resistance looks like? Of what types of resistance may be likely, or even possible? How should the subtleties of daily life – unearthed throughout this dissertation – impact or shape our approaches to resistance? In a normative turn, I begin to think about not just "what is," but about what could be. If we seek to upend the structures of oppression and injustice that surround the globe, how might we use the insights of this dissertation to rethink our approach to institutional change?

I purposefully avoid ending on a prescriptive note or offer a clear path to re-structuring power around the globe. As this dissertation has shown, power weaves itself through our lives in complex, often paradoxical ways. Powerful institutions are as much a part of our flourishing as our oppression, and we must acknowledge these tensions in any attempt to confront injustice. I therefore start this chapter by looking closely at how different people confront power in different – and often contradictory – ways. On an individual, day-to-day level, risk of loss and feelings that nothing good will come of resistance (dynamics that have been on display throughout this

dissertation) clearly impact decisions to engage or even *hope* for change.

Next, I look at how the stories of the more privileged Palestinian community do not map neatly onto the macro-narrative of Palestinian resistance. In many ways, their struggles and problems pale in comparison to the issues faced by their less privileged Palestinian neighbors. As has been shown, these social and economic differences fractionalize and distance community members from one another, making the generation of solidarity within this space difficult. This chapter highlights how the need for a single, powerful narrative shapes spaces of activism and revolution, leading to the idea that there is a "right" way to stand up, that certain lifestyles make you a "good" Palestinian, and that only some stories are "worthy" of voice. This not only eclipses the full range of experiences that unfold within the space, it also washes out the complicated nature of individual lives and leaves broad swaths of the population feeling disconnected from the broader struggle for Palestinian liberation.

After looking closely at a scenario in which these complexities play out, I conclude the chapter by thinking about how we may account for these dynamics in our approaches to social justice and our quest for positive change. I argue that an exclusionary vision of revolution combined with personal feelings of political despair create a situation in which hope for institutional change dissipates. People are simply unable to envision different institutional arrangements or see a viable alternative to the status quo.

Rather than offer a clear idea of what these alternatives might look like, I instead advocate for a re-stimulation of the political imaginary, a "bringing back" of hope and political promise. I suggest that the first step in this process is to simply acknowledge the complexity of life within oppressive spaces. Glossing over or ignoring these intricacies in our attempts to rectify broader injustices fundamentally undermines the possibility of system-wide change. Better accounting for the full spectrum of life that exists under systems of oppression creates space to cultivate hope, to advance ideas about social justice, and to generate potential institutional change. Ultimately, this will require acknowledging that flourishing and oppression occur hand-in-hand, that human relations and day-to-day lives seriously complicate the nature of all-out revolution, and that looking towards institutional (rather than individual) shortcomings may provide better, if more elusive, paths towards change.

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As winter begins to bleed into spring, Aya and I sign up for a series of "open-swim" sessions at the local university pool. There is a specific time for women to swim, and even then, you have to have connections to get into the session (and pay 120 JD for the seven weeks!). Somehow, Aya has talked her way into the private session (*dowra*) for women in the Pharmacists Union. When I ask for clarification on how she got in, she brushes it off saying, "I don't know they just let me in." I assume that I'm able to tag along as a foreigner, no questions asked. We both talk about swimming as an escape from the stressors of school, of conflict, of Palestine. The pool is clean; the locker room is (relatively) clean. Aya talks about it as the only time during the week that she can "forget that [she's] in Palestine."

On our second day of swimming we get to the pool and head down to the ladies changing room. After greeting a few women, Rowand, the lifeguard and coordinator of the *dowra* comes down into the locker room – phone in hand, still on the line with someone – and tells us we probably can't swim. Apparently, the head of the University is in his car, on his way to come for a private swimming lesson, so everyone needs to clear out the pool. The women are outraged. Can we swim for a bit? They ask. Without an answer, everyone rushes up to the pool deck to try to get a little bit of swimming in. On our way to the stairs, Aya turns to Rowand and says, "Try to stall his car!"

We get up to the pool and several women are already swimming. I hop in and do about four laps before the commotion starts. R whistles and says "*Ya sabaya* (*hey girls*), he's here, we need to go." There is immediate protest. "What is this!?" "No! We're not leaving" "This is *ridiculou*s, we paid!" One particularly boisterous woman with a golden swim cap shouts, "Let him come, *ahlan wa sahlan*, welcome! He can join me but I'm not going anywhere." Some of the women laugh, but I'm not sure she's joking, she seems more angry than humorous.

Aya starts to get out of the pool. "Are you going?" I ask. "I don't want to make trouble," she responds. The women around us tell her not to get out. "Don't go," they say, "if we all stay, what can he do?" Meanwhile, Rowand has whistled a few more times. M and I get out, and M makes a comment like, we need to get to the showers quick. We walk over to the stairs where a group of women has gathered, watching the pool, Rowand, and the stairs – not wanting to leave, but definitely not wanting to be the front line of the protest. A few of the women in the pool are arguing with Rowand, but I can't hear them over the echoing noise of the pool. I'm standing next to a young girl, pale, dark haired, with braces. "I don't want to leave, but I can't let him see me like this" she says to me, gesturing at her one-piece and bare arms and legs. There's still a bit of joy in it though, there is an excitement to the tension and boisterousness in the air generated by the shouting women

in the pool.

Aya gestures at me and we descend the stairs. I feel so bad for leaving, she says, but I don't want to get Rowand in trouble. This is the second or third time she has attributed her actions to Rowand's wellbeing. Once downstairs, we decide not to shower, but we go into the toilets to change. When we come out, more of the women are downstairs. Everyone is asking everyone what's going on, and one woman begins a rant about how she is going to post a long blog on Facebook about this. The woman in the gold swim cap is screaming at everyone who got out of the pool first. "If you would have stayed," she says, "what could they have done!?" I try to gather my things quietly, but my locker is right in the middle of the crowd. Another woman joins her in scolding us, and then tries to convince everyone to get dressed and go sit in the bleachers to watch the man swim as a silent protest. Rowand finally gets command of the small, cramped locker room. The man apparently will be doing private lessons on Saturdays and Tuesdays at this time – the exact day and time of the women's *dowra*. The women moan and the potentially incendiary Facebook post is brought up again.

I slip away, and Aya and I quickly exit. "What will happen to our class?" I ask as we walk up the stairs. "I'm not sure," she says, "I'll call Rowand later. I just wanted to get out of there, but I didn't want them to yell at me." I am quiet, but she goes on, "I can't make trouble," she says, "They barely let me in the *dowra* in the first place." As we drive home, she elaborates saying that she knows the man who is coming to swim, and he's not a bad man. I can't imagine him doing this, she notes, it must be some mistake, he must not have known that we paid. She goes on to say that, she was one of the last ones let in, so if she makes trouble it will be very easy for them to kick her out, "I can't lose swimming!" She immediately also recognizes her cowardice and – without my prompting or input – relates it to the larger occupation. "It's all the same," she says, "when you have something to lose you won't make problems. It's the same when I get special permits and pull strings to get a visa and travel to Israel. I shut up." She notes that everyone wants someone else to be the protestors, someone else to put everything on the line. "I realize it's horrible," she says, "That we want the people in the camps to go risk their lives because we have too much to lose… that's crazy." She sighs and drives home in silence.

The women in our *dowra* get moved to other swimming times the following week, but scheduling remains a problem. After two weeks, swimming is cancelled after several women write a harshly worded letter to the dean of the University. When Aya finds out she is furious that she lost her swim time, and mutters under her breath, "If they [the women] had just shut up they [the

authorities?] would have forgotten about us and I could have kept swimming," she tells me sadly, "I just don't get why [those women] had to make a big deal out of it. I told you this would happen."

I think often about this scene. Some of the women desperately try to quiet the conflict, push it aside, so as not to lose the little privilege and comfort they have. They are blamed by the more politically active for their lack of solidarity. Later, the women who are loud are blamed for attracting the attention of the powerful and baiting a punishment. The different reactions of these women work against one another, they are mutually exclusive, they lead to internal conflict. Everyone is feeling a sense of frustration and annoyance. Everyone wants to let it out, to channel it, to move forward in a way that benefits the group.

As the story above shows, however, when confronted with power we often let things out at the individual, rather than institutional level. In all of this, rather than blame the man who wanted to swim, the University as a whole for having restricted women's hours, the city for not having other pool options, or the Occupation for making life so depressing we needed swimming in the first place (I'm only partly kidding), the women blame one another. Perhaps this is not so surprising. It is easier to understand the dynamics of conflict in terms of the people and events that are close at hand, rather than really look at the overwhelming nature of institutional power at play. On a larger level, things are so complex, so complicated. Broaden the scope and all of the sudden things don't make as much sense.

Furthermore, there is not a narrative that captures this particular problem in relation to the larger structures of power within the space. It is not as simple as the glaring injustice of house demolition, detention of Palestinian activists, or Israeli land grabs. These women are privileged. Is swimming really that important in the scheme of things? Nevertheless, as the next section will show, decisions to "buy in" or indulge in luxuries within spaces of oppression often invite other threats or anxieties into life. Though the availability of certain indulgences is only made possible through privilege, the fact that people still opt for these moments – despite the risks, the moral contradictions, or the sacrifices required – speaks volumes about the need for respite within oppressive space.

As I have argued throughout this text, we must consider privilege and vulnerability as a fluid spectrum rather than a static category. Taking seriously the desire to escape and ease vulnerability at even high costs requires rethinking our understanding of resistance in important ways. Requiring a complete relinquishment of privilege or comfort as a prerequisite for resistance to power is both

unrealistic and fundamentally misunderstands the transient nature of privilege in these spaces. Before turning to the importance of recognizing these contradictions, I look at several examples of what these tensions "look like" as they play out in the lives of this community.

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Before the Trump announcement, before Aya's visa expired, before the winter violence entered the city, Aya and I had one of our last trips "out" of Palestine. Later, we'd look back at this trip longingly. At the time, we didn't know it would be our last time in Israel; the last time we were reckless enough to cross the border wall without proper permits. Eventually, the crackdowns on visa restrictions and visa expirations made us realize it was too risky. In some ways, we took these trips for granted in the years leading up to the visa restrictions. Whenever we were overwhelmed, stressed, anxious, or just tired… we would head out. "We need to breathe," Aya would say, and we'd load into the Volvo and drive. These trips were our temporary escapes from the stifling nature of the Palestinian city, the school, the trash, the checkpoints, the community. Made possible by her blue, American passport, Aya claimed that these trips gave her the energy and vitality to make it through the days, the months, the years, she'd spent in Palestine. They allowed her to flourish.

On the day of our last trip, Aya comes into my office while I'm meeting with a student. Zaid was going on a work trip, she announces, and at the last minute he was granted a permit to travel out of the Tel Aviv airport. He needed a ride, so we would be driving him to the airport, and then we would go to grab some food in Tel Aviv. It's nice to get out of the city. It's like you don't realize that you're suffocating until you get out and take a deep breath. Then it hits you how starved of oxygen you really were. It's sort of like, once I'm in my apartment here, I don't notice the mold or the mildew feeling. Then I go out on the patio, I'm hit with the sunshine, and I think, Oh … that's nice.

After school we clean out Aya's car. We don't have time to wash the outside, which is too bad… it's easier to cross the border in a nice car, the soldiers at checkpoints are less likely to stop you. The quick profiling of cars, drivers, and passengers by these soldiers is overt; the fancier you look, the less likely you are to be sneaking across the border. Zaid comes to meet us at the school, and we head out on a back road.

As usual, the ride starts with a big debate about where everyone should be sitting in the car. Aya tells Zaid that he should be in the backseat, behind the passenger seat. That's where he's the

least conspicuous. He protests, saying, “I have a permit! I’m totally legal! I should be up front!” Aya insists that it doesn’t matter, the point is to not get stopped at the checkpoint at all. If he’s in the front, we’re more likely to get stopped because he looks like a Palestinian guy. Then it doesn’t matter if he’s legal, because she and I aren’t. Aya and I still have “West Bank Only” stamped in our passports, so these trips are technically breaking rules. At the time of the trip, Aya’s visa hasn’t yet expired, so it’s not the *worst*-case scenario.

We’ve crossed before on these visas, even though they are technically supposed to keep us out of Israel. We take back roads and travel through the smallest checkpoints, rather than the large entrances located on the main highways. In order to staff the main checkpoints, Israel contracts out to private security companies who are particularly harsh in their enforcement of policies – stopping every car. On the back roads, we are still greeted by teenage IDF soldiers who wave us through most of the time without checking documents. Once, a young female soldier did stop Aya to check her passport, but she didn’t even notice the “West Bank Only” stamp, and Aya still got through. Getting stopped isn’t the end of the world, but still. We will play dumb, acting like we didn’t know it was off-limits, and they make a note of it somewhere in some computer system that we tried to break the rules. Once Aya’s visa expires things will be different. Then getting stopped could mean getting detained. Or worse, deported.

We drive about five minutes, arguing about the seating arrangements, and when we’re barely out of the city, Aya pulls over. Zaid needs to drive at least until we get to the checkpoint because he’s getting carsick. She says he’s just whining; he threatens to actually throw up. They switch seats and we move on. Technically, this is also illegal. Because the car has yellow plates and is registered with Aya’s American passport, Zaid (a Palestinian ID holder), is not allowed to drive it. Aya tells me that they got stopped one time, in Haifa when Zaid had a business permit to travel to Israel. Zaid chimes in to tell the story, saying “Aya saved my butt! When we got pulled over by the Israeli cops, she just started gabbing in English, ‘Oh shoot honey, we forgot the passports at the hotel in Jerusalem!’” He laughs remembering the scene.

As the road winds through the countryside, we chat about how beautiful the landscape is. “I have some land over there,” Zaid tells us, pointing to a hill about five miles outside of the city. “Can’t you build me a new house there!” Aya exclaims. Zaid explains that he probably could, but he’d need a special permit because the land is Area B, with security matters under the purview of the Israeli Defense Forces. The roads around it are all Area C, which might cause some problems, but

it's buildable.[36] We drive on.

The roads wind away, and there are huge rocky hills, dotted with olive trees all around us. Here and there we see sprawling settlements. I ask if one small cluster of houses is a settlement, and Zaid says, "What! No! You can't tell!?! That's a village. The settlements look so different." And they do. Normally, I'm good at telling the difference. There are a few signs. One, the houses in a lot of settlements have sloped roofs, looking far more like American architecture than the square buildings of the Arab villages. The other way to tell is the water tanks. Settlements tend to have white water tanks perched atop their houses, while Arab villages have the black tanks. The settlements are part of the landscape, but also a constant reminder of the Israeli presence in Palestine.

As he drives, Zaid can't stop talking about how happy he is to have this permit to travel from the airport. He says that he feels free. He feels like a real man. That it makes a world of difference. He's giddy. He's tells me that he's currently in the process of trying to procure a "Businessman Card," a BMC, that would allow him to travel more freely without always having to wait for a permit. As one of the most successful importers in the city, he is eligible, though the exact requirements for the card are based on a mixture of policies and connections. Your business has to a certain size and reach a certain level of success (something around a million shekels per year), you have to submit an abundance of personal paperwork to the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, you have to pay a series of fees, and you have to pass certain screenings that verify you aren't a threat to the Israeli state.

In discussing it, Zaid says these standards are worth it for the freedom of travelling out of Ben Gurion airport. Without the permit or BMC, he is required to travel via the Allenby Bridge through Jordan, making a potential three-day business trip turn into a five-day business trip. To be able to go out for a conference just for the weekend is huge. He says that if he gets a BMC, he'll be free. "It'll be a whole new world," he tells me, shaking his head, "It will change my life, my business, we'll just be in a much better spot." I ask if he feels guilty submitting all of these papers, all of this information, all of this money, over to Israel. "Why would I?" he asks, "It's not like they don't know

[36] As noted in Chapter 2 (p. 46) "in the mid-1990s (before the Second Intifada), the Oslo Accords effectively divided the West Bank into three Areas (A, B, and C) with varying levels of Palestinian autonomy. All of the major Palestinian cities – Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, etc. – fall in Area A. In these areas both civil and security affairs are dealt with by the PA. Alternatively, Area B contains most Palestinian villages, rural communities, and refugee camps. Area B is under the civil control of the PA, but Israel remains in charge of security. Finally, Area C (about 62% of West Bank land) is under full Israeli control (Haas 2012; Oslo II: Annex I 1995)."

everything about us already. And if it's going to make my business stronger? Give Fares and Omar something to inherit, something to keep them in Palestine? If it makes staying here possible? What is there to be ashamed of?"

Once we get past all the settlements and villages, nearing the border, we pull over into a big, empty, gravel lot. Aya returns to the driver's seat, and I move up front. As Zaid takes a seat in the back, he grumbles about the fact that he thinks he could pass for Jewish. He doesn't look *that* Arab, he insists. A surface-level profiling is what will determine if we're stopped or not, and my dark hair, fair skin, and native-English make me the best candidate for the front seat.

As the checkpoint comes into view in the distance, Aya takes off her hijab, stating aloud that Allah allows women to take off hijab if they feel the head covering will bring them harm. I'm not sure if she's saying it as a reminder to us or to make herself feel better. When we'd cleaned out the car earlier at the school, I had found her old hat in the trunk. It's a brown straw hat with a short brim around the whole circumference of the hat. For years it had lived in the glove compartment and was known as the "settlement hat," because we thought it made Aya look kind of like a settler. Looking like a settler was sure to get us waved through the checkpoint, so she puts it on, and I stash her hijab in the glove box. I take off my scarf and sweater so that so I'm just in my t-shirt. In Palestine, I tend to dress more conservatively, but that may be a give-away about my city of origin to the eyes of the soldier ahead. So, I strip down, Aya lets her hair out, and Zaid slumps down in the back seat. No one told us to do these things, and there's no real way to know if they actually make a difference. The whole experience is incredibly nerve-wracking, and it helps to feel like we can control the little things.

We approach the checkpoint, it's a small one. There are were two young men standing outside the guard house, one darker skinned with a beard, both in their olive-green uniforms, holding their big guns. Aya yells at Zaid not to open his mouth, and as we inch up, she and I fake-talk and gesture maybe too excitedly. The drive up is always the same, no matter what we were talking about previously, when we round that last bend to the checkpoint it is clear that our focus is only on the soldiers ahead. Aya says, "Just keep talking and look like we're having a deep conversation," when ironically, we almost always *are* having a good conversation until we see the small hut appear on the road ahead. I lean over and turn up the music. It's Sia again. I'll always associate that with riding in this car, but also with our performance, with our checkpoint game.

Aya begins to put the window down, but I say not to. There's a truck a bit in front of us and we find this somewhat relieving. If there's a truck, it's probably an Arab; if it's an Arab the soldiers

will probably spend time checking him, and then go easier on us. We're still trying to pretend like we're talking, but we're all hyper-aware of the actions ahead. We debate how wide to open the window as we roll up to the young men. And then we are in front of them. In a half-second, the soldier nearest the car raises his hand from his gun, a subtle gesture, almost imperceptible. He waves us through. It's over.

We cruise by, without even coming to a full stop at the checkpoint. The boy outside has no idea the relief in the car. We're through. We're in. But we're only part way there because we have to get into the airport, and that checkpoint is harder. When we get closer to the airport we go through the same routine. We tell Zaid to shut up. We fake talk. We get through. Afterwards, Aya reflects that things are always fine in the end. We're probably building up the whole experience in our heads, she says. Maybe we're just crazy. Then she takes it back. No, if she does slip up, if she does get stopped, they could refuse her visa renewal, she could be separated from her job, her family, her life. That threat is not imaginary. It is a constant burden.

After we drop off Zaid, we go up to Herziliya to get some food and check out the beach. It's less crowded there than Tel Aviv. The sun is setting when we arrive, but it is still worth going. Aya is sad that we can't soak up the sun, but we find a small, beach-front restaurant, split a hamburger, and sit on the beach. The café furniture is discolored, stained from sitting outside through the seasons. As I wiggle my toes in the white sand, I notice that the beach isn't particularly clean. There are half-buried cigarette butts and trash strewn across our path.

Nevertheless, as we sit, watching the sun go down, something feels lighter. The carefree way people stroll down the beach. The casualness with which they order food and sip cocktails. Aya and I both feel it, this sense of calm, of relief. We chat about how we can deal with the work at the school, we could deal with the teachers being denied visas, we could deal with the trash and the dogs and all the chaos… as long as we can get to the beach. If we could go to the beach every night? Aya laughs, "Then my life would be so easy!"

But we can't get to the beach every night. After this trip, we won't go again. Despite the anxiety of the trip, the stress of the checkpoints, in a few months we long to put our feet in the sand, to breath the ocean air. We try to find other ways to unwind. We visit Aya's sister Reema more frequently. We go on more drives in the countryside. But it's not the same. The openness and freedom of driving to the sea is unmatchable.

As we sit quietly, I wrap my sweater back around my shoulders. A cool breeze picks up. It's

getting dark. We sip our juice and look out on the darkness of the ocean in front of us. "They don't even know," Aya says. At first, I have no idea what she's talking about. I look over and see her looking calmly at the people walking along the promenade. A young couple, no older than our teenage students. An older woman walking a tiny dog. A man on the phone, still in his business suit. "They have no idea what it's like in Palestine. They get to live their lives without thinking about it. They can ignore the Occupation and just go about their day. And I can't blame them. I would too if I could."

"Really?" I respond, "You think you would ignore it if you could? Isn't there something awful about that? About living so close to the horrible injustices of the Occupation and not doing anything about it?"

Aya laughs, "Isn't America the same? You can't fix all the problems of your country, Anna; I can't fix the problems of mine; and these people can't fix the problems of theirs. I wish they would. I resent them. I envy them. I'm frustrated. But isn't that the world? People doing what they can to live their lives? Trying to get by? Trying not to get weighed down by the heaviness of it all?" She sighs and squints, looking into the expanse stretching out in front of us.

Is this a story of subversion? Or a story of submission? Do our trips to the beach prop up the Occupation by subduing the urge to rebel, supporting the Israeli economy, and legitimizing Israeli presence in the space? Or is our manipulation of the rules slowly chipping away at Israeli authority structures throughout the region and giving Aya the energy to remain in Palestine? The contradictions present in this scenario are just one example of the complexity of potential resistance within Palestine. In this story there is absolute privilege, but there is also a new form of vulnerability as a result of the privileged choices Aya makes. There is the oppressive, stifling nature of Israeli control of movement. But there is also our refusal to follow these rules. In this instance, the key binaries of this dissertation – privilege and vulnerability, oppression and resistance – are completely intertwined.

Returning to the idea of the "patriarchal bargain" that was raised in Chapter One (Kandiyoti 1988), the example above clearly demonstrates an acceptance of the status quo power in order to reap certain benefits. On one hand, by simply travelling to Tel Aviv, Aya makes a choice that many Palestinians view as tacit acknowledgement of and open economic support for the state of Israel and Israeli power in the region. Yet on the other hand, even as she "buys in," she is ignoring the rules and bureaucracies at the foundation of the Occupation's power.

The reality of life choices is that they are complex. Interaction with systems of oppression and power do not fall simply into categories of "outright rejection" or "complete compliance." When we begin thinking about strategies of resistance, it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to create a "one-size-fits-all" recommendation that encompasses these tensions. As an example, after Trump's election an anonymously published Op-Ed detailed one person's commitment to resisting the administration from within (I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration 2018). While many saw this piece as "nothing short of a coup in progress" (Opinion | 'Anonymous' vs. Trump 2018), others denounce the idea that resistance from inside is anything more than a myth to help those who are complicit with the administration sleep at night (Heer 2019).

More often than not, it seems our choices are not so calculated one way or the other. Rather, subversion and submission often occur simultaneously. In another example, one of my former students, Jasser, participated in a program called "Seeds of Peace" which brought together Israeli and Palestinian youth in a summer camp. Founded by journalist John Wallach in 1993, the program seeks to foster dialogue between communities in conflict in order to "[shift] attitudes and perceptions and [build] respect and empathy" between the groups (About Seeds of Peace 2020). Nevertheless, many Palestinians regard the program disparagingly, seeing it as a collaborative effort to sedate Palestinian resistance. The program, they argue, ignores the "historical context of the situation in Palestine… that of colonialism, apartheid and racism, a situation in which there is an oppressor and an oppressed" (Giacaman 2009). This creates a false equivalency between the two sides, dangerously obfuscating power dynamics that must be confronted if any real "solution" is to be reached.

Jasser is not particularly interested in this debate, and he is drawn in by the program's perks. Not only does he get to travel to Maine for a summer camp, but he also receives an extended permit to travel into Israel upon his return to Palestine. The permit lists the purpose of travel as "in defense of the state of Israel," which Jasser finds completely laughable. "I didn't participate so that I could learn how to like Israel or so that I could be convinced to work together with Israelis," he says, "I did it so that I could go shopping, go to concerts, have fun." There is no doubt that his participation in the program and subsequent travel into Israel bolsters the status quo. It legitimizes the organization and the Israeli state, it may have subtle effects on his beliefs (even if says it will not), and by spending time in Israel he contributes to the economy of the occupying government. One misstep, one opinion voiced against the Occupation and these privileges would be taken away. Yet at the same time, his blatant rejection of the program's purpose and manipulation of program perks to

make his life a bit better could also be seen as a point of agency and resistance. Perhaps, because life is a bit more tolerable with the ability to escape the West Bank, he'll stay in Palestine when he grows up, raising a family, building on the land, his mere presence in the space a testament to his right to exist as a Palestinian.

Rather than get wrapped up into the "rightness" or "wrongness" of these choices, of their support for or hindrance of a broader resistance movement, I suggest that these stories point towards the fact that, in the midst of oppression and hardship, people seek to make things a bit better for themselves if they can. While this point alone is not particularly striking, it becomes far more poignant when we also consider the larger institutions of power that structure these daily choices. As these stories show, opportunities for relief seem to exist only *within* the constraints of the status quo. In many ways, the unjust nature of the Occupation lies not only in the ways it robs individuals of life, security, or liberty, but in how it creates a system in which individual or community flourishing and growth *necessarily require* engagement with and navigation of Israeli power structures. With this, the binary categories that often make up our rhetoric of resistance (defiance/compliance, vulnerable/privileged, dissidence/silence, action/inaction) cannot capture the reality of what is happening in these spaces. I will return to these ideas at the conclusion of this chapter, offering several ways we may fruitfully "rethink" resistance, but this point leads to another common theme: the need to expand the scope of what "counts" as an experience of oppression or injustice and to address the multi-faceted views about what type of resistance is best.

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Late in winter, Aya's visa expires and all of Leah's attempts to renew it are denied. Aya decides to stay in Palestine illegally on an expired visa, as leaving would likely mean she won't be allowed back into the country. Leah is taking the case up within the Israeli court system. In the meantime, Aya and I worry about what this will mean for our teachers' visas. While things came through smoothly this year, it seems like Israeli policy is slowly trying to push out any foreign workers, spouses, or volunteers. It is happening quietly, with a few hundred visas impacted at a time. This is crippling for Aya's mental health, as being here illegally simply presents more risk. It makes our trips to visit her sister Reema tenser and we start going less frequently. The existential threat these subtle policy shifts have for the school is almost too difficult for us to discuss.

One day, in early spring, Leah calls with an update. While things aren't moving through the courts with any real urgency (in fact, Aya's case is just sitting there at the moment…), Leah does have a connection with an Israeli journalist/activist who is interested in generating some attention for the issue. Leah thinks that this could be a good thing. Getting the story of Aya and the school out into the media could force the court to address the broader visa issue. Aya is hesitant. Calling attention to herself and to the program could have the opposite effect – she could be kicked out, teacher visas could all be denied, everything could be shut down. Is it worth it? Taking a chance on fixing the situation could make it far worse… how could she live with herself if that happened?

"It would be fine if it were just me," she says, "But the school? Osama would kill me. The amount of work he and the board have put into this place would be destroyed. All of these families, all of these students, these teachers. I can't have that on my conscience, on my shoulders. I don't want to carry the weight of all that!"

In the end, she agrees to a meeting. Leah and the journalist – Dalia – will come visit the school next week. This is alone is big commitment. Leah, an Israeli citizen, has never been to the city or the school before. She's excited, but a bit nervous. Israeli citizens are not supposed to travel within Palestinian Authority controlled areas, for their own safety. Large road signs leading into the city warn that once they enter, Israel can no longer protect them. Dalia has travelled throughout the West Bank frequently. She is a leftist and prominent, pro-Palestinian activist, attending protests, political events, community gatherings, and more. She is not known particularly well within Aya's city, but in the neighboring town she has a cadre of Palestinian friends and colleagues. She will drive them, and they'll come directly to the school. While we certainly won't broadcast their visit, we don't expect that they'll face any problems.

On the day of the visit, Aya wakes up nervous. As we drive to school, she tells me that she hasn't informed Osama about Dalia's interest in the school yet, and she's not sure how to broach the subject. He prickles enough at the fact we have an Israeli lawyer, so we both imagine that – activist, pro-Palestinian, lefty, or not – he won't approve of an Israeli journalist coming into our space. The problem is, he might find out through the infamous Palestinian grapevine. Dalia knows prominent society members within Osama's social circle. If she talks to them about meeting with us, it could get back to him. In the end, there's not much Aya can do about that. She'll call Osama as soon as she can.

When we get to the school, we kick into high gear cleaning. Aya goes back to her office and I organize mine, getting the college board up, clearing out old files. Of course, we want things to

look their best, to make a good impression. In the main office, the staff catches on that there are guests coming, but neither Aya nor I specify who it is. No one pries, but when Sara asks me, I just say that it's a friend of Aya's.

Dalia and Leah arrive together around 11am, and we usher them straight back into Aya's office. Umm Ameer brings us a tray of coffee, eyeing both guests with interest but not commenting, and when she leaves, we all make small talk. Dalia asks Aya about her head covering, wondering if she is ever mistaken for a settler (because Aya doesn't wear a more traditional hijab). This prickles me. Who is this woman to come in and judge Aya's dress? Aya laughs though, and says no, unfortunately she doesn't get special treatment. Next, Dalia takes out her computer and begins to ask questions about the school, about the city, and about the visas. Aya and I exchange a look, is this "on the record"? I'm sure everything is fine because Leah is there, but it's starting to feel more official. Aya talks about the history of the school and about where we are now. She turns to me to verify certain things, but Dalia never even looks my way. She is clearly uninterested in my thoughts on anything – this is all about Aya.

Umm Ameer comes back, this time with tea, and Dalia types and types. She's hunched over her laptop in a chair next to Aya's desk. She hasn't taken off her black wool coat, and it stretches to the floor. It's a bit warm for such a coat, I notice. She's a larger woman, imposing, she has a "presence" about her. Her short greying hair curls around her ears and just licks the nape of her neck. She wears perfectly circular, plastic spectacles, with a teal frame and black stems. They make her look a bit like a tortoise or a character out of a children's book. But her demeanor is anything but soft. She is gruff, rough around the edges. She speaks English with a thick accent that doesn't *quite* give away Hebrew as her native tongue. Her Arabic is wonderful, better than mine, but still accented.

As she takes notes, she tells Aya all about the different "angles" they could take the story. When we discuss the critical thinking and active learning that is central to the school's mission, she calls it an "indictment" of the Palestinian Ministry of Education's rote curriculum. Aya and I exchange another glance. I know Aya agrees, but we can't anger the Ministry – they have the power to take away the school's license to operate, and technically we shouldn't be teaching our own curriculum without offering theirs as well. Dalia asks why other people don't push back on the Ministry, if it is so widely believed that our teaching methods are working better for student engagement and learning. Why don't citizens stand up? "You know the expression," Aya says, "*Al balad fadhiya* – the city is empty. There aren't strong activists here." Dalia brings it up a few more

times throughout the conversation, she seems confused about the complacency of the city, about why no one is doing anything. Each time Aya shrugs, reiterating that there is a lack of hope, a lack of ambition in this city.

Dalia asks about our student body. When she finds out we offer scholarships to students from the camps, she is clearly interested. She asks if Aya will take her to Zaatari. Aya looks at me, and again I know we're thinking the same thing. Whenever foreigners visit – potential teachers, people from the American consulate, journalists, etc. – they are always most interested in the camps. I know that it has become a bit of a pet peeve for Aya, this focus on one aspect of the school, of the city. We're more than that, she repeats each time, when they leave. But she also understands that this is what gets the school donations, what brings people to the city to help. While we may have a dire need for new air conditioner units, it is fundraisers for our scholarship program that bring in the big bucks. People want to help the poorest of the poor, Aya says, or at least the people they see as the poorest of the poor.

Aya tells Dalia that she doesn't really have time to go out to the camps, but that if Dalia wants to, she can go with me the following week. We have an after-school program that a group of Academy students run, teaching English in one of the camp's community centers. I'm just their faculty advisor, it's a completely student-led initiative. We go out once a week and our high school students do after-school tutoring for elementary aged camp kids. Dalia says she'd love to join. She'll email me.

We go out to a local restaurant for lunch and Dalia talks on and on about how she's lived in Gaza, how she was kicked out by Hamas, how she stayed with the former head of the PFLP, how she visited prisoners, and more. I find it all a bit much. She's certainly an activist, there's no denying that. And her media coverage – in a prominent Israeli newspaper – as well as her political participation are all supportive of Palestinian causes. But it all feels a bit performative, this laundry list of names and political events and struggles.

She starts to talk about how things are changing in a nearby town, the place she spends most of her time. She says, "the bourgeoisie have to prove that they're opposed to Occupation, so they protest me and want to kick me out of their city because I'm Israeli." Aya nods, knowingly, though I think about how this is the exact position Osama would take. Are the elite men and women of the city wrong for wanting to cut off all ties with Israeli aid or collaboration? On one hand, they're probably the people with enough privilege that they can *afford* to relinquish Israeli assistance. But

Dalia seems to think they are all just putting on a show as well, that they are foolish to push her away.

When Dalia and Leah leave, Aya and I sit back down in her office. "Well," Aya says, "I think that went well?" She looks to me for confirmation. "It was tiring," I say. We sit. After a few beats, Aya responds, "I have no idea what's going to happen with all that. But I don't even know if it matters one way or another…"

"The article?" I ask, not sure if she is talking about the specifics of this visit or about the whole situation in Palestine more generally.

"Yeah, the article," she says, "What is it going to do in the big picture? Get me a new visa? Okay, for how long? Until it's no longer a top story and then they deny me again?"

On the car ride home, we talk about it a bit more. I comment about my mixed feelings, not sure if I like Dalia, but also not sure if I get to have an opinion – I'm a foreigner too, after all. Aya says that Dalia is known for doing good work, that she probably has good intentions. "I'm not really sure what her end goal is, though," she adds, "What does Dalia get out of all this? Does she just love Palestine that much?"

We talk about how the board might react if an article is published. Some of them are more prominent members of the "Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions" movement, meaning they boycott Dalia's newspaper and think it's wrong that Palestinians are working alongside her. I say that maybe I shouldn't be here either, my government isn't exactly doing great things for Palestine right now. Aya tells me to shut up, she says she has no idea what's right or what to do, but that for the time being we'll just keep moving forward. She texted Osama earlier, but he never answered. He'll find out soon enough. When we get home, we go our separate ways, and both take a much-needed nap.

A week later, Dalia visits again. This time she comes alone. Osama is now aware of her interest in Aya and the school, of her desire to write an article. He has agreed to talk to her about it, so she heads to his office first. Aya waits anxiously at the school, peering out into the rain as the winter slowly fades away into spring. When Dalia arrives, she doesn't give us any details about her conversation with Osama. Aya will have to call him later to see what he thinks. School staff members are definitely interested in who she is and what she's doing at the school. Last week, after she left, Ameer came into Aya's office and casually mentioned that he "saw the guest typing in Hebrew…" He lets the comment sit in the air. It's a way for him to acknowledge that she is Israeli,

without directly accusing Aya of bringing an Israeli visitor to the school. Aya shuts him down with a wave of her hand, not answering the question implicit in his statement.

This time, Dalia wants to spend more time out in the school. She wants to speak to students, parents, teachers. She wants to observe classes. Aya says she wants to give Dalia a full picture, but we certainly curate the experience a bit – sending her to our best classes, having her talk to the most upbeat parents and students. At one point, Dalia comes out of a 5th grade room and starts to discuss a bulletin board of Palestinian figures she saw on the wall. The board, crafted by the Palestinian social studies teacher, includes a picture of Dalal Mughrabi. A former member of the PLO, Mughrabi was part of an attack on Israeli civilians, and she is seen as a martyr and hero by Palestinians but condemned as a terrorist by the UN and Israel.[37] Aya takes a quick inhale – she clearly forgot that the board was up. Dalia goes on to say that she doesn't mind one way or another, but we'll need to take the picture down if the article moves forward and a camera crew comes to take pictures of the school. It's too polarizing, not the right image for the story.

After school, Dalia joins me and a group of students as we head to Zaatari camp for English lessons. The entire time she sits in the back of the room, writing frantically on her computer. I don't tell the kids who she is. It's dangerous for her to be in the camp. If camp residents were to find out about her origins, I'm not sure what they would do. They certainly wouldn't approve. It puts me on edge that she's with us.

Afterwards, in a taxi back to the school, some of the students ask me about her. Mona, a gangly junior, still sporting braces, notes that it was "really annoying" to have her banging around on her computer. Dawoud, a senior, chimes in that the woman (Dalia) made some weird comment to their group when they were lesson planning after the Zaatari students left for the day. "She had all these suggestions for us, and I was like, 'Who the heck are *you*, lady?!'" The other students in the car laugh, but look at me questioningly, wondering if I'll give them any information on the guest. I don't.

We find out from Osama that the board doesn't fully approve of this article, as expected. They've agreed to let her write something up, but they are asking for final say over the product she hopes to publish. Dalia is not fond of this arrangement, arguing that "that's not how journalism works," but she agrees to it for now. She pushes on with the story but stays out of the city.

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37 For more see her Wikipedia page (Dalal Mughrabi 2019)

Over the next few weeks, Dalia and I email back and forth. While she isn't interested in me or my thoughts on anything, I have all the financial documents for our foreign staff budget, and this is important to her story. She wants to include information on how our legal retainers, court fees, emergency flight purchases, and staff funds have changed due to the visa issues. Ultimately, the international program is hemorrhaging money due to our difficulty in securing visas. The bulk of the school's operating budget (small already, due to our non-profit status) is diverted to dealing with Israeli red tape, and Osama and Aya are doing everything they can to keep tuition low.

In a response, she alludes to work that she's doing in another community nearby. She writes in an email to me that afternoon:

2:18 PM

Dear Anna,

Thank you so very much. Will get to it later.

See you on Monday!

Still have to do some convincing work (Dr. [name redacted])

Another frustration today: went to a Bedouin community, [name redacted], to write about Israeli plans to demolish their school. But the headmaster and teachers would not talk to me. Ministry of education [sic] instructions: no interviews to Israeli press.

The lawyer is Israeli, and I am writing in coordination with him…

They re-checked and the answer remained.

Idiots. It emphasized so strongly the difference between schools.

I sit back after reading the email. The way she speaks of this other administration, calling them idiots… it makes me incredibly uncomfortable. It highlights her strong opinion that there is a "right" way to protest, a "right" way to resist, and blocking her access is certainly *not* the right way. While I'm no fan of the MOE, I also understand the desire of some Palestinians to boycott Israel, to cut off contact with Israeli activists. How can she, someone who has worked to support Palestine for decades, be so judgemental of this hardline position? Or am I overreacting? As someone who has lived in Gaza, lived through invasions, lived through bombings and seiges and curfews, has she "earned" this right to criticize?

Also, is it necessarily a good thing that she sees the schools as so different? Maybe Palestine Academy should be taking a tougher stance in the face of Occupation, following the lead of this

Beduin school! The Academy is clearly not as vulnerable as the Beduin school – nowhere near being bulldozed – and yet Aya still justifies collaboration with Dalia by saying that the school has "nothing to lose" at this point. But maybe it does. Maybe the board members who are resistant to Dalia's help are right, and "good" Palestinians stand up to and reject Israeli power in all shapes and forms.

Two weeks later, Aya gets a call from Leah. The lawyer is furious. Apparently, Dalia had contacted Leah and told her she was done with us, done with Aya, done with the school. There wouldn't be an article, we were a waste of her time. I'm shocked. "What do you mean?!" I ask Aya. "Apparently," she says, "the board didn't want to risk including the visa information in the article. They didn't want to invite criticism from the Israeli authority, and so they were only going to approve her writing a sort of 'PR' article about the school. Something to boost our image." In the end, Dalia refused these conditions, yelling at the board that PR wasn't the point, the point was to make the injustices known. Leah was upset because she had brought Dalia to us, promising a good story.

"Why was the board so adamant?" I ask.

"They're terrified," Aya says, "Scared that if we make ourselves known, if we rock the boat, that it'll haunt us. I'll get kicked out. Teachers will be turned around at the border. It's a risk, for sure. I get it. But it sucks. Because I might get kicked out anyway."

I talk to Osama later, and he reiterates that he's a bit afraid of the attention. If the headline reads, 'School threatened by Occupation,' then it either it shames the Israeli authorities into helping our situation or they crack down even further to shut him up. There's no way to know the outcome. "Maybe they can write about someone else," he says. And that's the last we speak of it.

In the same way that people were quick to offer opinions about what "counted" as politics – suggesting that the plight of those in the camps was far more worthy of study than the day-to-day issues of the middle and upper class – so too did judgement abound when it came to resistance efforts. Within politically active circles, ideas about whether or not resistance should occur alongside Israeli support were strong and divisive. Some, like Dalia, clearly feel that change was possible if Israeli and Palestinian activists worked together. Others, like the board, believe that fully renouncing Israel and connections with Israeli support was the only way to truly stand up to power. These two paths do not even begin to engage the debate about violent vs. non-violent resistance.[38]

[38] For more on these debates see Allen 2008; Kaufman-Lacusta 2011; McKinlay, McVittie, and Sambaraju 2012; Savir 2016; Thrall 2018

In talking to Palestinians about the best way forward (if they even believed there was a way forward…), I found an intolerance existed between resistance narratives. Conviction that one path would produce change often came with an inherent skepticism or contempt for other approaches. Much like the oppression narratives explored earlier, beliefs about revolution and resistance, particularly within a more political, activist community, tended to require steadfast support for a singular model.

What impact do these divides in thinking about resistance have on the possibilities for change? At the simplest level, like with narratives of oppression, they alienate and fracture Palestinians from one another. As soon as Leah was employed as the legal representation of the school, many board members felt that Aya was not acting as a "good" Palestinian – not doing her part to resist Occupation through full rejection of the Israeli state. More importantly, these limited ideas about what "counts" as valuable resistance wash out the complexities of action and behavior seen throughout this dissertation. As has been shown, daily life operates along a spectrum of behaviors that buy into, avoid, and subvert Israeli power. Sometimes, a single action may simultaneously reify and undermine the constraints of the Occupation.

Conceptions of revolution that proffer a set of requirements for behavior – suggesting that there is a best or even solitary way to change the system – are unable to account for these nuances. Without these nuances, Palestinians are often unable to see themselves in these stories, unable to envision how they are part of the broader movement. Resigned to the political despair that envelops their lives, they do what they can to survive, to build meaning and family and love in a difficult space. How might we go about undoing the damage of these washed-out, flattened narratives of Palestine? How might we encompass the complexity and tensions of the space in our understandings of oppression and resistance? How might we reimagine possibilities for change within this space? The final section of this chapter begins to tackle these questions.

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One night, Omar (Aya's older son), Zaid, and I are having dinner in their kitchen. Aya is off at some meeting, but she's left us chicken and rice and potatoes.

As we eat, Omar brings up one of the teachers at school who was recently arrested by Israeli forces. Omar is a former graduate of the Academy, and so he knows the teacher personally. The man is well-liked among students, and so it surprises me when Omar says, "It's his own fault, he

shouldn't have been posting stuff online. He knows Palestinians don't have freedom of speech. You think his family is in a better position because he talks politics? And gets sent to jail? No, people do better here if they just forget politics." When he speaks seriously (though he is known to exaggerate the truth, egg people on, and stir the pot, just like his father), he furrows his dark brows and puckers his mouth a bit. His eyes are also dark, and he – like his father and brother – has the long eyelashes that give his face a softness. I goad him a bit, asking where his patriotism is.

"We don't want politics, we just want to live," he replies.

"But couldn't you all live better lives if you join together and end this Occupation?" I ask, "If you start a revolution?"

"Revolution?!" he exclaims, "What revolution?! With what, rocks?" He looks to his father, "Tell her the story baba, the story you told me about what happened on Faisal street during the Second Intifada." Zaid joins in and recounts:

> *In the days of the Second Intifada, when the city was under siege, there was an Israeli tank making its way down Faisal street. A young boy, maybe 13-years-old, was standing in his doorway. He picked up a rock and threw it at the tank. The tank stopped, and a soldier got out. At the time, I thought the kid was a goner – that he'd be arrested, or worse, shot on the spot. Instead, the soldier walked over to the child and stood next to him facing the tank. "Watch," he said to the boy, and he proceeded to aim his machine gun at the vehicle and rain fire down on the tank. The bullets ricocheted off, ringing through the street. "See," the soldier concluded, "The gun does no damage. So, what do you think you're doing with those rocks?"*

When Zaid finishes, I sit quietly, picking through my chicken, reflecting on the story.

"See," Omar says, certain that Zaid has just helped him hammer home his point, "Why would we ever have a revolution? We're kidding ourselves if we think we can do anything to stop the Israelis and their tanks and guns."

"That's not the point of the story at all," Zaid chides, "It's not like Palestinians are dumb. We know that a rock won't hurt a tank. The point is to make it clear that they're not welcome here. To show that we disapprove. To remind Israel that the Occupation is not acceptable. That's the point."

After some reflection, I think that this story and the seemingly contradictory interpretations of Omar and his father, encapsulates a many of the central tensions of seeking change within

Palestine. The story showcases the futility of being Palestinian in this space, of facing an oppressive power that is so much larger than anything you can possibly confront on an individual level. As this dissertation has demonstrated, that sentiment is built throughout the community day-to-day; the sense of political hopelessness is overwhelming. But Zaid's anecdote also demonstrates the embedded understanding that the Occupation is unjust, that expressing anger, standing up (even if it doesn't *matter*) helps preserve a sense of self, a sense of one's Palestinian-ness. The hopelessness, while making it difficult to see future political possibilities, does not eclipse the underlying steadfastness and grit of the population. While change seems impossible, surrendering completely to the whims of Israeli power is also not an option. So, where do Palestinians go from here?

In many ways, this dissertation has shown that a full rejection of Israeli power – life without any collaboration or cooperation – is largely impossible for the majority of Palestinians. Institutions of power are threaded throughout daily life in a way that links possibilities for growth, comfort, and relief hand-in-hand with the reification of Israeli power. A revolutionary call to action that requires all Palestinians renounce all connection with Israel, fails to see the intricate ways in which systems of power are deeply woven into the community. It is certainly not as simple as boycotting one journalist or refusing one permit. Furthermore, we must take seriously that a renunciation of power also requires the renunciation of many of the privileges and amenities that make life bearable for people within this space. Without a clear path to success or continued certainty of their way of life, it seems quite unlikely that people will choose an unpredictable future over the tolerable, meaningful lives they've crafted for themselves within these difficult environments.

Simultaneously, however, we must recognize that even those who may find ways to resist "within the system" – by starting a school, by publishing an article, by slipping across a border undetected – play an instrumental part in holding up the status quo. By "buying into" or "avoiding" politics they may be making their lives livable, sustaining the will to resist, and carving out spaces for growth and flourishing within their communities. But their actions prop up the system of power, sustain institutions that they find abhorrent, and fail to deliver any crippling blows to Israeli power overall. It is a paradox of selfhood, a contradiction of action and identity, *and* it is a reality for so many living within spaces of oppression.

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Rather than weigh-in on this debate or offer some sort of "best practices" for resistance, I choose instead to conclude this dissertation by taking a step back. How do these stories complicate our existing frameworks for understanding resistance and political mobilization more broadly? Before prescribing a route to social change, how might we build a better foundation to support more comprehensive participation across a community?

First, the stories above highlight a potential shortcoming in current trends of activist culture. Namely, social movements centered on "calling out" or "shaming" those who stray from a pure adherence to the principles of the movement *are* having an exclusionary impact on political participation. Several scholars and activists have noticed this dynamic in other spaces as well. Loretta Ross, a black feminist scholar noted for her work on reproductive justice theory notes that modern progressive movements are troublingly taking up the mantle of discrediting one another – a tactic that was often used by organizations such as the F.B.I. to break down solidarity and sow discord (Ross 2019). She recognizes that "call-outs are justified to challenge provocateurs who deliberately hurt others, or for powerful people beyond our reach… but most public shaming is horizontal and done by those who believe they have greater integrity or more sophisticated analyses. They become the self-appointed guardians of political purity" (ibid.). By targeting the shortcomings of those who may be potential allies in the fight against injustice, movements are whittled away and broken apart.

These dynamics certainly seem to be at play among Palestinians who may not adhere to the most "politically pure" lifestyles in opposing Israeli oppression. While I believe it is necessary to recognize the contradictory nature of their actions and beliefs, it is also important to ensure that they maintain a sense of belonging within the Palestinian community more broadly. What appears to be lacking in the stories above is a broader sense of political belonging or authority among the middle- and upper-class members of Palestinian society. Restoring this sense of political voice requires a more welcoming activist community and a call to mobilization that is not built on righteousness or blamelessness.

Though social movement scholars have long explored the dynamics that undergird mass political mobilization, these studies have rarely focused on the nuanced differences in beliefs, practices, and lives of those *within* a community. Instead scholars have looked at structural factors such as economic strain or urbanization as well as psychological motivations or emotional triggers (McAdam 1982; van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2009). More often than not, these studies look at "mass mobilization," and treat a certain population as homogenous in its experience of oppression. As the stories above demonstrate, this is an inadequate approach when it comes to

developing an understanding of political participation or resistance. Palestinians certainly do not all experience oppression in the same way. Rather, we must look at the varied experiences within a population, as well as differences in individual experiences across time must be acknowledged. Furthermore, we must carefully consider the impact of other intersections of power such as economic class, gender, or social status. Finding a way to see these differences without using them as justifications for excluding those with relative or momentary privilege may encourage broader participation in the fight for justice in Palestine.

The connection between the size of a movement and its success in generating political change is an established relationship within the resistance scholarship (Sifry 2019; Stephan and Chenoweth 2008). Therefore, it is imperative we generate a more inclusive framework of mobilization that is able to absorb disparity, difference, and even transgression within the mobilized population. Moreover, newer scholarship suggests that while decentralized movements may have a less clear goal or message, they are also more likely to use intersectional language and attract a broader array of diverse participants (Kauffman 2018). Following these findings, it is unsurprising that many in Aya's social circle do not feel a sense of ownership or acceptance into the Palestinian resistance movement – particularly given the narrowly-focused narrative of Palestinian oppression and the gatekeeping of activist leaders that has plagued the movement's history.

What I find more troubling than concerns about "how to resist" or "how to generate revolution," is the lack of imagination or expectation regarding what a more just future would even look like in Palestine. Overall, I believe that the stories and themes of this dissertation are best equipped to address the underlying hopelessness and political despair that runs throughout this space. Before calling people to action, before generating political engagement, we *must* be able to reimagine the political future, to envision a world beyond the current structures of power, and to believe that social and political justice is possible.

In conclusion, I believe that this dissertation has shown the importance and the potential of ***recognition*** as a lens through which we can reinvigorate our conversations around resistance, revolution, and justice. Within political theory, the struggle for *recognition* is often related to subaltern social movements fighting not just for material equality, but for an affirmation of identity. As scholar Nancy Fraser notes, "injustice is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication," culminating in cultural domination, nonrecognition, and disrespect (1996, 14).[39]

[39] For more on the theoretical foundations of a politics of recognition see Fraser and Honneth 2003; Honneth 1995; Taylor et al. 1994 ; for other work that touches on these ideas in tangential but important

The idea of recognition, of affirming and acknowledging difference between social groups and individual identities, is essential in crafting a more inclusive and realistic vision of justice. Iris Marion Young notes that – with a politics of recognition – justice is not only a world with more equal distribution, but also a world in which we have "the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation" (2011, 39).

How might this idea of ***recognition*** be expanded and elucidated in relation to the stories, experiences, and narratives emerging from this dissertation? First, there must be a recognition that individuals can be simultaneously privileged and vulnerable, oppressed and oppressive, safe and threatened. While recognition scholarship focuses intensely on recognizing certain social groups, this dissertation show that we must also recognize the fluctuating, elusive, and dynamic ways that individuals identify with and fit into these groups. As Patricia Williams notes in her exploration of her own blackness, "I felt myself slip in and out of shadow, as I became nonblack for purposes of inclusion and black for purposes of exclusion; I felt the boundaries of my very body manipulated, casually inscribed by definitional demarcations that did not refer to me" (1991, 10). Young similarly recognizes the tensions between individual identities – which are constituted in part by group meaning – and social groups, cautioning against essentializing an individual to a group-trait or "reifying collectivities" (2011, 44). These tensions have certainly played out for Palestinians throughout this project, often leading individuals to question their place in the broader narrative of politics or resistance and to feel alienated from fellow-Palestinians.

By recognizing difference, particularly *within* an oppressed group, we may begin to create the space needed for communication, cooperation, and imagination regarding future possibilities. Simply acknowledging, sharing, and broadcasting the complexity and nuance of life within oppressed spaces, allows us to see parallels across Palestinian experiences as well as across oppressed populations around the world. In her address on the danger of telling "single stories" about people and places, Chimamanda Adichie recounts a story about moving in with an American roommate who knew very little about her Nigerian background:

> *[My roommate] asked where I had learned to speak English so well and was confused when I said that Nigeria happened to have English as its official language. She asked if she could listen to what she called my*

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ways see P. J. Williams 1991, 2016; Young 2011 .

"tribal music," and was consequently very disappointed when I produced my tape of Mariah Carey. She assumed that I did not know how to use a stove. What struck me was this: She had felt sorry for me even before she saw me. Her default position toward me, as an African, was a kind of patronizing, well-meaning, pity. My roommate had a single story of Africa. A single story of catastrophe. In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to her, in any way. No possibility of feelings more complex than pity. No possibility of a connection as human equals.

She goes on to discuss the multitude of stories that make her African, Nigerian, a woman, and an individual. She says:

> *All of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me. The single story creates stereotypes. And the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story… I would like to end with this thought: That when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.* (Adichie 2009)

In many ways, this mirrors accounts, sentiments, and experiences unveiled throughout this dissertation. Stories of Palestine that focus only on the refugee problem, only on prisoners, only on violence or protest or rock throwing, fail to capture the fullness of life within this space. The realities of Palestine become inaccessible to those abroad and foreclose the possibility of connection within and across various communities. These connections and communication are essential to building hope, to stimulating the political imaginary, and to paving a path for resistance and justice.

Finally, while acknowledging and spreading these nuances, complexities, and "real life" stories may begin to address issues of recognition at the individual and community level, it is also important to maintain focus on institutions of power as the locus for change. As this dissertation has shown, people in spaces of oppression are often overwhelmed and inundated with the chaotic rush of *living life*. Expecting, judging, or placing the onus and responsibility for change on one person's decisions, one person's shoulders, fundamentally misunderstands the ways that institutions of power structure our lives and choices. Calls to revolution that disregard the flourishing, growth, and success that takes place within systems of oppression fail to recognize the reality of people's lives and the reality of what would be sacrificed in revolution.

While this dissertation does not end by illuminating the "best way" to proceed with social and political change, I hope that the value and importance of looking at, seeing, and appreciating the lives of real people is clear. In many ways, I am advocating that we start again from square one; that we step back, take in the nuances of our lives, the complexity of our experiences, the contradictions in our actions; that we acknowledge the privilege, vulnerability, and power that surround us all; that we see flourishing intertwined with oppression; that we appreciate the messiness of humanity and that we use it to cultivate hope and imagine a brighter future as we set out on a quest for justice around the world.

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