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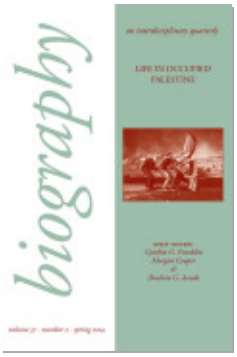
Life in Abu Dis Continues Quietly

Rima Najjar



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LIFE IN ABU DIS CONTINUES QUIETLY

RIMA NAJJAR

For the past four years, I have been working and living in Abu Dis, a small town in the West Bank east of Jerusalem, where I am an assistant professor of English literature at Al-Quds University (AQU). In May of 2004, I managed to return to Palestine on my American passport, after a forced exile of thirty-seven years. I did this by applying for a job with a program run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) called Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN), which provided me with work in the West Bank as well as a series of temporary entry visas, arranged through the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since then, I have worked at two Palestinian universities (AQU and the Arab American University in Jenin—AAUJ), and have been re-entering the West Bank, with a great deal of uncertainty, on a tourist permit extended by the university through the Palestinian Authority coordination office, which acts as go-between with the Israeli military post in Ramallah. Work visas are not possible to arrange, and so far I have been denied re-entry twice at the border and had to battle to get back in.[1] Next year, I plan to retire from my job at AQU, which means I will have no way to stay in the West Bank except as a tourist on a short permit.

In this essay, I describe the circumstances of my return to the West Bank in search of a meaningful way to contribute to the Palestinian struggle. In particular, I discuss how, at the tail end of my allotted stay in the West Bank, social media has played an important role in my own political education at a crucial time in Palestinian history, when taboos are being broken and a new conversation on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is finally taking place. I also explore how I make strategic use of different forms of "life writing" on Facebook to communicate the human costs of the Israeli occupation and to foster resistance to the dehumanizing representations and erasures of Palestinians upon which the Israeli government's continued human rights abuses depend. My Facebook postings reflect the three roles I play in Abu Dis. One is as an

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Abu Dis resident and community member. Another is as a faculty member on the campus of Al-Quds University in Abu Dis, a community distinct from the town community, but one that faces the same challenges presented by the same enemy. Lastly, there is my role as a diaspora Palestinian whose family members were dispossessed in the Nakba of 1948, dispossessed again in 1967, and who continue to experience enforced separation from our homeland.

Until I started using Facebook to advocate for the Palestinian cause, I had never regarded myself as a "political activist." When I was a student at the American University of Beirut (AUB), my claim to activism was confined to establishing a "Speaker's Corner" (Anderson). I was inspired to start this activity after a visit to London's Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park. I naively specified a topic each week on handmade signs with rousing quotations, and posted them all over campus (the first one was "The Population Explosion!"). The idea was for students to gather, listen to, and argue with a speaker. Given the political scene in Lebanon in 1969, the podium was quickly taken over by the student council, headed at the time by Maher Masri, whom I met again on my return to the West Bank in his then-capacity of Palestinian Authority Minister for Economy and Trade. One of the speakers I vividly remember was Leila Khaled, who drew an electrified crowd on October 29, 1970 ("Speaking Out"). She had been released from jail in a prisoner exchange agreement after the attempted hi-jacking of an El Al Boeing 707 in August 1969. I was thrilled to learn that the platform I created, which was suspended in 1974, was revived on July 4, 2008 to "rekindle student activism on campus." In some ways, Facebook functions for me as a podium, much like Speaker's Corner but with a far wider reach and impact. I am lucky to be using social media now at a time when they are empowering and connecting oppressed peoples whose voices were not being heard in the Arab world and elsewhere, as well as providing an increasingly competitive alternative to the mainstream media.

For most of my life, I have avoided political activism. I felt powerless against the never-ending, decades-spanning stream of painful news regarding the ongoing gradual obliteration of Palestine. When I was a student at AUB in 1967, my response to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, beyond giving blood and collecting donations, was to stop listening to the news, which at the time was dominated by the BBC and Voice of America in the Middle East. My withdrawal from the political framework imposed on the Arab world by these media outlets continued for several years, but the alternative, for me, was a political vacuum. More than four decades later, the besieged Gaza strip has been brutally bombarded by Israel for the third time, resulting in the carnage—some are calling it genocide—of Palestinians (Russell Tribunal). But because of social media, this time it is harder for the world to remain silent ("'In our millions'"), or for me to avert my eyes.

My withdrawal from the news media in the past, however, did little to erase what was forever etched in my heart and soul—my own childhood connection to the West Bank, the only part of Palestine I had experienced firsthand. Before 1967, having lost our mother at an early age, my four siblings and I shuttled back and forth between Jerusalem, where we were in boarding schools, and our grandmother's house in Amman. Until my father remarried, we spent a few summer holidays in a rented house in Ramallah that had a large garden with fruit trees—mulberry, fig, almond, apricot—and that is where I have the most vivid memories of my childhood. One of my young aunts on my father's side, Samira, who later married Hassan Abunimah from the village of Battir and is the mother of Ali Abunimah, cofounder of the *Electronic Intifada* and author of *The Battle for Justice in Palestine,* was assigned to take care of her five nephews and nieces (see Figure 1). The school in Jerusalem (Schmidt's Girls College, by Damascus Gate, which was then run by German nuns) and the house in Ramallah, in an area poetically called batn al-hawa (the Belly of the Wind) defined for me the West Bank, until I returned there in 2004, to find it greatly changed. The relatives who in my childhood traveled from Al-Bireh and Jerusalem to check on my aunt and her charges were Liftawiyeh. That is to say, they were from the forcibly depopulated village of Lifta, now lying in ruins on the road west of Jerusalem (Figure 2). My mother's family (Al-Madi), whom I barely knew when I returned to the West Bank, live in Haifa.

Figure 1. Aunt Samira with her sister, grandmother, and Jewish neighbor, Miriam, in Lifta (unless otherwise noted, all photos © copyright and used by courtesy of the author).

Figure 2. Poster by Jews for Palestinian Right of Return, with Lifta in the background.

They are so-called "Arab" citizens of Israel—i.e., Palestinians (also known as '48-Palestinians) who had escaped the Zionist master plan that expelled an estimated 800,000 of them from their homeland in 1948.[2] My mother, before her untimely death, corresponded with these family members through friends in Europe who relayed letters from Haifa to Jordan and back.

When I returned to the West Bank after all these years, my understanding of the political situation there and in Gaza, which I was able to visit while working for an Austrian-funded project on e-learning, was framed by the Oslo Accords (Nakhleh, "Oslo"). My writing at the time for *The Jordan Times* and *Electronic Intifada* (under my married name Rima Merriman) reflected the forms of analysis and advocacy of Palestine dictated by Oslo's two-state solution and what was politically "possible," rather than what was just and possible under international law. After all, my own work at the time with TOKTEN was funded by the Middle East Quartet of donors made up of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia, and they imperiously set such limitations following the lead of the United States. My Palestinian colleagues

and I—not to mention a steady stream of international experts provided by donor countries—were all engaged, under the impossible conditions of Oslo that we constantly mentioned in reports, in "state building" or "capacity building" or "democracy building" or "gender equity building" or "development." At the same time, Khalil Nakhleh's book *The Myth of Palestinian Development* was making the rounds in 2004, and people were beginning to wake up to the futility of "The Roadmap for Peace."[3] So when I met Maher Masri again after all these years, it was to talk about another illusory EU-funded project, e-government, rather than the heady promise of revolution that we experienced at AUB.

The negative impact of the Oslo Accords was pervasive in the West Bank at the time.[4] Through the establishment of various NGOs, Palestinian civil society was scrambling to snatch up as much of the funding pie as possible. Individuals and groups from civil society competed with the Palestinian Authority for funding, and were only then on the verge of issuing a call for a nonviolent campaign of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS[5]) to pressure Israel to comply with international law and uphold Palestinian rights. Since the Palestinian leadership's return from the diaspora to the Occupied PalestinianTerritories in 1994–1995, there had been a systematic process of "taming" Palestinian civil society and deactivating it, and that process has continued to a certain extent to this day. As George Bisharat, a Palestinian American professor at the University of California's Hastings College of Law in San Francisco, has pointed out, "the full creativity and the force of Palestinian civil society has yet to be joined with the Palestinian leadership" (Paikin). After Hamas became the governing party in the 2005 democratic election, I witnessed the transfer of power from Fatah to Hamas at the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Planning, where I was then working on a funded project to advocate for Palestinian children's rights.[6] I also witnessed firsthand how this transfer was sabotaged both by the donors and by even the lowest levels of Fatah employees at the Ministry. A sense of utter and debilitating futility pervaded everything I did in the West Bank at that time, and to a large extent, it still does. As I finalize this essay, children in Gaza as young as seven are living through, for the third time, the traumatizing horrors of Israeli bombings.[7]

My pursuit of a meaningful contribution to Palestine took me next, in 2006, to the Arab-American University in Jenin (AAUJ), a newly established private university in the north of the West Bank, which is funded by diaspora Palestinians. The "American" in the title simply refers to the system of education and not to any institutional connection with the United States. At the time, the chair of the English department, an American with no ties to Palestine, had been denied re-entry into the West Bank at the Israeli-controlled border, and I was hired to take her place. Later, I was to be denied re-entry twice myself, and had to fight my way back in.[8] A surprising incident led to

my move to Al-Quds University (AQU) after I had worked at AAUJ for three years, illustrating another kind of difficulty I encountered in my attempts to make a meaningful contribution in Palestine.[9] The incident involved the violent reaction of a small group of students at AAUJ who objected to my assigning the first part of the autobiographical graphic novel *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi in one of my literature courses, on account of its depiction of representations of God. The images, two small panels that I had overlooked, were not offensive in themselves, but Islam prohibits the creation of images of God and the Prophet Mohammad. Moreover, this was in 2009, when the prolonged aftermath of the 2006 Danish cartoon controversy was still unfolding. The students refused to accept the withdrawal of the text from the curriculum as a sufficient indication that the assignment was never knowingly meant to insult religious sensibilities, and I had to leave the university in the most dramatic manner "for my safety." I was whisked away to Ramallah by a Palestinian Authority police car and "debriefed" at the police headquarters there. The US Consulate (I have dual American and Jordanian nationalities) was notified! I lodged at a hotel for the night at PA expense, and was escorted to the border the following day by PA police.

A few weeks later, I was happy and relieved to be back in Palestine, having successfully challenged my denial of re-entry by Israeli border police by applying to the PA coordinating office through Al-Quds University. I had accepted the kind invitation of then-President Sari Nusseibeh to teach in the English department (Figure 3). Al-Quds University is the only Palestinian university with a presence in illegally annexed East Jerusalem. For many years now, the university has been trying, to no avail, to get recognition from the Israeli Council for Higher Education and its Ministry of Education. As

Figure 3: with Sari Nusseibeh on first being appointed to teach at Al-Quds Unversity.

a result, AQU students, a significant number of whom hold Israeli blue ID cards as residents of Jerusalem, are not eligible for work in Israel because the academic degrees they receive are not recognized there. The training they are getting at AQU in various academic subjects, including medicine, pharmacy, education, and social work, is badly needed among the Palestinian Arab population, and the denial of recognition is just one example of the constraints and obstructions that Israel imposes on Palestinian education in order to preserve its domination in Jerusalem (see Heruti-Sover; Nusseibeh).

Abu Dis, where the largest campus of AQU is located and where I chose to live in a university apartment (unlike other "internationals" associated with the university, who opt to live in Ramallah and commute), is one of three Palestinian suburbs, the other two being Al-Sawahreh and Al-Eizariyeh (Bethany), which are clustered closely together southeast of Jerusalem. They are now cut off from that city by Israel's illegal apartheid wall,[10] which has annexed over 6,000 dunums of arable land from Abu Dis's total land area of 28,332 dunums (see Figure 4). The natural growth of the three suburbs is hemmed in by the presence of the illegal Israeli Jewish colonial settlements—now massive townships—of Maale Adumim, Kidar, and Mishor Adumim, which lie partly or wholly on land that belongs to these villages. Abu Dis is

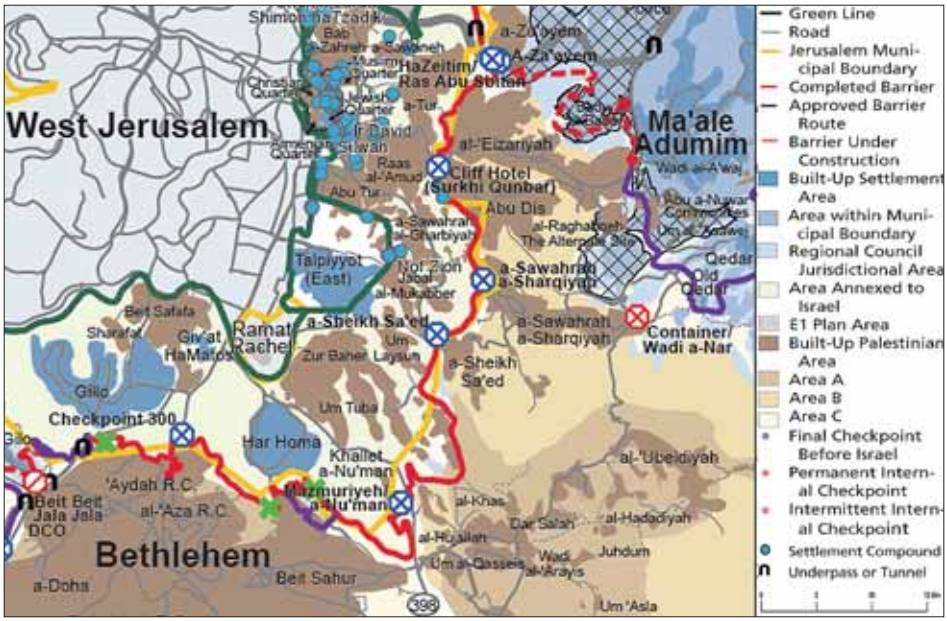

Figure 4. East Jerusalem Settlement Points and Separation Barrier, November 2014 (from the map "The West Bank: Settlements and the Separation Barrier, November 2014" by Shai Efrati; © copyright and reproduced by courtesy of B'tselem/Israeli Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories).

in "Area B," according to Oslo classification, which means the town is under the civil jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority but subject to Israeli security control. Israel has two military posts right in the center of Abu Dis, which provoke constant clashes between the soldiers and Abu Dis youth. In 2007, Abu Dis had a population of 10,782, but many of its inhabitants are away most of the time seeking their fortunes abroad. Families are split in various ways, with some members having Jerusalem IDs and some having Palestinian IDs or Jordanian and other foreign nationalities. The different IDs control who has access to various parts of historic Palestine and who does not (see Tawil-Souri; Visualizing Palestine and McNally). In such a community, it isn't easy for an outsider, let alone a woman living alone, to be accepted. I was prominently visible in the community as I daily walked back and forth from my apartment to campus, about fifteen minutes away. My apartment is in Al Abraj complex, which was originally built to house PA personnel when there were hopes, in abeyance since 2000, that Abu Dis would function as the PA government seat. The building now belongs to AQU and is being slowly remodeled for various uses, including a teaching dentistry clinic. The PA presence in Abu Dis is currently confined to offices responsible for "Jerusalem affairs" and social services (see Hass). In Abu Dis, I was at first an object of curiosity and general distrust in the community, with children calling after me in English or Hebrew, assuming I was a foreigner—a Western Christian or Jew, perhaps based on my living situation, clothing, and uncovered hair.

For many Palestinians, the question "Where are you from?" defies a simple answer, and one is tempted to reply to the questioner, "define the word 'from.'" When I was a graduate student at Indiana University, I replied to the question by simply saying, "I am Palestinian." Sometimes I was challenged on this by Jewish students, who asked, "Why do you say 'Palestinian' when you have Jordanian citizenship and were born in Jordan?" This response always surprised me. Because my Palestinian identity was so indelibly part of my psyche, I could no longer say "Jordanian" and, later on, "American" without feeling like a fraud. I knew and continue to know full well what it means to be a Palestinian; I am still sorting out, even after all these years, what it means to be Jordanian or American—or, for that matter, the hyphenated variety of these terms.

But even in Palestine, the question "where are you from?" haunted me. In 2008, I wrote an essay for the only English language magazine published in the West Bank, *This Week in Palestine*,[11] titled just that—"Where are you from?" The focus of the March issue was Palestinians in the diaspora, and it was introduced by the editor like this: "There are almost as many Palestinians living outside Palestine as there are in the country. Most fled during the Nakbeh of 1948 and still live in refugee camps in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, whereas

others left of their own accord, emigrating to foreign lands in search of fortune and better living conditions in general—material and otherwise." I wrote:

> Even with people amongst whom any conversation initiated by "Where are you from?," if held long enough, will uncover very few degrees of separation, bonds have slackened. Individual energies are, by necessity, focused on survival in the difficult present, and Palestinian collective "memory" is becoming increasingly fragmented.

The farther away geographically one's origins are from a certain community or clan, the more frayed the bond. And there is nothing in the world farther away from the West Bank and Gaza than the Palestinian villages and towns taken over or destroyed by Israel since 1948. "Where are you from?" students and faculty ask me continually. "Lifta," I answer, only to be confronted by blank stares here in the north of the West Bank. Lifta, a Palestinian village only a few kilometers west of Jerusalem, is about to be turned into a luxury residential community for Jews, even as many of its original Palestinian inhabitants, especially the ones who live in annexed East Jerusalem now, are trying in vain to regain access to their homes and lands (see Figure 5).

"Where are you from?" asks the Israeli soldier at the checkpoint as he quizzically examines my American passport. I answer that, as he can clearly see from my passport, I am American. "No, but where are you from?" he asks again. "What do you mean?" I counter, to the discomfort of the driver of the

Figure 5. Collage I used as a cover on Facebook, juxtaposing a photo of my great grandfather sitting outside his home in Lifta in the early 1940s with a 2013 photo of the same building, housing Jews.

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van and my fellow passengers, who are holding their breaths now, wondering what manufactured illegality I am likely to fall under. "Do you mean where in America?" He gives up and satisfies himself by studying my tourist visa again. Should I have explained to this young person hailing from Russia or Ethiopia about Lifta?

In Abu Dis, it wasn't long before the news spread regarding my origins, and I have been stopped, as a result, many times by village men who have worked as laborers in Israel and who recited to me Lifta's boundaries or mentioned people they knew from Lifta, including one person who remembered working in his youth with my own late father, Aref Najjar, an architect and contractor who had re-built the Qalandia airport (renamed Jerusalem Airport by Jordan[12]) and the market and bus depot in East Jerusalem. Lifta is only a few kilometers northwest of Abu Dis, so it wasn't surprising for me to find these connections.

My initial and superficial reactions to Abu Dis were determined by a general sense of harshness brought on by relentless summer heat, polluting traffic,[13] rough narrow streets, graffiti-covered surfaces, overflowing open garbage cans, dust, litter, and dirt-crusted public spaces. This was in contrast to the wide-open spaces surrounding AAUJ and the isolation of that campus. But

Figure 6. My grandfather, Ali Ismail Najjar, my Aunt Samira, and my brother Ali at the Qalandia/Jerusalem Airport in the late 1950s.

my identification with and affection for this besieged and unvanquished small town southeast of Jerusalem and its people quickly grew. In a culture in which a woman who marries outside her extended kinship group is said to have married a "ghareeb" (a foreigner, with the word also denoting "strange"), I was allowed to be part of Abu Dis while at the same time I was considered in many ways strange. It was my camera, paradoxically, that allowed me to get closer to the people around me and "see" this beleaguered town's slow rhythm of life and tenacious persistence, in trade, in prayer, in olive picking, sheepherding, and grass-collecting—activities unchanged for millennia.

From my apartment, I face a hillside of unassuming earth-hugging old abodes that are surrounded by small verdant stands or nestled against jarringly sharp-cornered modern stone structures that had nowhere to go but up (Figure 7). Abu Dis is hemmed in by Jewish colonial settlements on all sides. The hillside changes color and texture with the advancing light of day and the changing seasons. But more than my physical surroundings, most of all, it is the children of Abu Dis who capture the heart, as they peer hopefully into my camera, totally vulnerable and oblivious to what awaits them in the impossible situation Israel has imposed on their futures. The thought often occurs to me that in an alternative history I might very well have lived a similar life of hardship and grace.

Figure 7. View of Abu Dis from my apartment.

VIEWS OF ABU DIS

Figure 8. View toward the hill where the old city of Abu Dis lies.

Figure 9. The old nestled amid the new, typical of neighborhoods and architecture in Abu Dis.

Figure 10. A "hidden garden," typical of the full use of any available space in Abu Dis.

Figure 11. Children of Abu Dis.

The appeal of my photo albums of Abu Dis almost certainly lies in their "mundane and normal" quality. They are everyday images of what I encounter on my way to and from campus or on errands. Only once did I set out with the intention of recording on camera what I saw, and that was when I went to visit a colleague, Fatmeh Adeeleh, whose home is adjacent to the annexation/apartheid wall (Figure 12). The family had just received a notice of demolition, and I walked there early one morning to take a series of photos of the neighborhood as well as of her threatened home. I posted them in an album I called "The Neighborhood of Nightmares," which is what the youths who live there have written in Arabic as graffiti (Figure 13). My friend's final appeal to the Israeli court was turned down in June 2014. In that appeal, the family promised to close the upper storey of the building and never to go up to the roof of the house to look at Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque, the view the building afforded before the annexation/apartheid wall was completed.

Their home was demolished in the early hours of September 29, 2014 (Figure 14). I learned about it from another colleague, Randa Abuhilal, who lives in the same "neighborhood of nightmares," and who had messaged me on FB, "Dr, they are demolishing Fatmeh's house. Now." The reason given by the Israeli government was that the Adeeleh family was adding on to the structure without a permit from the Municipality of Jerusalem. The family had acquired a permit from the Abu Dis Local Council before they started renovating the exterior of the existing first floor, which had been erected in 1959, when the West Bank was part of Jordan. The border between the governorate of Jerusalem and the governorate of Bethlehem, which includes Abu Dis, runs through the piece of land the Adeeleh family owns, with the house falling on the Bethlehem side, and the back yard on the Jerusalem side. The Israeli injunction against building on the existing property only came after the structure was already up. Despite the fact that the house itself falls on the Bethlehem governorate side, as shown by the deeds the Adeelehs showed the Israeli court, successive courts in the appeals process ruled that they still

Figure 12, above. The Adeeleh Home; in the backgroun is Israel's Annexation/Apartheid Wall and the former Cliff Hotel, now an Israeli military post.

Figure 13, right. "The Neighborhood of Nightmares."

Figure 14, below. The demolished Adeeleh home, 29 September 2014.

needed a permit from the Jerusalem Municipality.[14] Ironically, the Adeelehs, who are from Silwan, chose to build on top of their property in Abu Dis because they were unable to build and expand in Jerusalem itself, where acqurring a bilding permit is costly and near impossible for Palestinians.[15]

For the most part, though, my photos are of people going about their lives in the two or three streets I traverse daily in Abu Dis, or of gardens and houses I glimpse through open doors. The range of activities I capture my neighbors engaged in never fails to surprise me with its variety and richness—village men burying one of their own at a cemetery across the street from the lower campus of Al-Quds University; baking bread on the sidewalk (Figure 16); building a fire for warmth in winter, also on the sidewalk (Figure 17): collecting grass for feed (Figure 18); conducting a wake in a tent; celebrating the return of a prisoner from Israeli jails; children making a kite (Figure 19); a Bedouin woman delivering cheese on a donkey (Figure 20); sanitation workers collecting garbage (Figure 21), to name just a few. Since I take photos mostly in my neighborhood and tend to meet certain people frequently, some of them have become familiar to my viewers—for example, my neighborhood grocer and his children who help him around the shop (Figure 22), or the group of men habitually sitting on the pavement whiling away the time (Figure 23). The viewer crosses paths with a friendly bearded old driver who obligingly stops when he sees me and grins for the camera. Collectively and individually, these pictures sing many songs and tell many stories of quiet and ordinary events. As one of my readers put it, "What I love about this [album] is that it reminds those of us who mainly see 'newsreels' of Palestine that the vast majority of people are simply trying to go about their daily lives . . . and that's all they really want in life . . . the things that much of the world takes for granted and everyone ought to have a right to."

Figure 15. Mother carrying child in Abu Dis.

As my own political understanding developed, to combat

Figure 16, top. Saj (flatbread) making on the pavement in Abu Dis.
Figure 17, bottom. Making a "kanoon": burning olive tree wood to make charcoal.

DAILY LIFE IN ABU DIS

Figure 18. Collecting grass for feed.

Figure 19. Children making a kite.

Figure 20. Bedouin woman delivering cheese.

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DAILY LIFE IN ABU DIS

Figure 21. Sanitation crew on their daily rounds.

Figure 22. Produce delivery outside Abu Ahmad's grocery store.

Figure 23. Elders whiling away the time.

the intense onslaught of hasbara (a Hebrew word that has come to mean Israeli disinformation or propaganda[14]) found on the Internet, I began using Facebook to communicate in simple, clear, direct terms what I had learned. I write mostly in English, not only because it is the language of international communication, but also because of my own deficiency in my native tongue. At one time, I quoted on my wall from Hatim Kanaaneh's reflections on Susan Abulhawa's recently published volume of poetry: "My cultural exile robbed me of the finesse and flair of my mother's tongue. I must admit though that, unlike her [Abulhawa, who writes in English], I don't suffer any phantom pains where it once sprouted in my heart. It was too long ago." These words resonated with me. It's been too long ago for me as well, and my native tongue was never given the chance to "sprout" in my heart, even before my geographic exile from my homeland that lasted for decades. I feel more ashamed than pained when I struggle with writing in Arabic on my Facebook wall. I hope that the many images I post transcend language and communicate directly to people's imagination.

The response to my Facebook descriptions and images of Abu Dis and its people indicate the various uses that people have made of them. Initially, Abu Dis folk could not understand why anyone would find ordinary pictures of them interesting, but I believe they have come to see the beauty I see in their everyday lives, and my record of that has given them a sense of self-affirmation as well as recognition (Figure 24). Homesick and nostalgic Abu Dis people in the diaspora thank me for allowing them to "visit" Abu Dis in this way, often recognizing with excitement a familiar building or place, or relatives or friends they "bump into in

Figure 24. Showing an Abu Dis sanitation worker the photo I just took of him.

the street." Others in the diaspora see my images as "Palestine," as what their own lost villages and lives might have been—they are images "from the smell of our land," to translate literally the Arabic phrase used. Ramez Hage expressed his nostalgia in this way: "NOSTALGIC AND CAN'T HELP IT! I miss my country, Palestine. The last time I was in Ramallah and Al-Quds was in June 1966, and then all hell broke loose! And I ate ice cream at Roukab! Does it still exist? I also remember Hotel Harb and its beautiful serene gardens. Used to love to play tawleh [backgammon] under the pine trees. Fat chance it still exists." Internationals, on the other hand, delight in the images of a human reality that is different but not far from their own. Vacy Vlazna (Coordinator of Justice for Palestine Matters in Sydney, Australia) expresses this latter viewpoint in a comment she sent me that is worth quoting at length here, as it captures my intention in posting these images[15]:

> I look forward to my walks with Rima through the streets of Abu Dis which has become my village even though I live 14,131 kms away in Sydney, Australia. Rima's camera is my eyes and her sensitivity has transcended what superficially is a virtual experience into a profound intimate encounter.
>
> If I went to Abu Dis tomorrow, I'd easily find the main supermarket, the new falafel shop, the barber, the mechanics, the games shop where the young guys hang out, the girl's school where the boys wait to play soccer, Abu Ahmed's shop where Rima buys her vegetables, the same vegetables that are the first splash of colour in the early morning after set on the street by Abu Ahmed's children. I'd wander with ease around Al-Quds University and its different faculties, its dedicated students and staff who buy snacks from the food vendors at the gates.
>
> On the way I'd recognise and wave to the jolly van-driver with the red kuffiyeh and hennaed beard [Figure 25], the sheikh who checked the water leaks on the school roof [Figure 26], the shepherd who shows off his new lambs [Figure 27], the garbage men whose camaraderie and laughter is infectious, women who warmly welcomed us into their homes and gardens—the living calendars of changing seasons, the myriad school children walking with their arms around their BFF [Figure 28], and my favourite, following the donkey man looking for work here and there and whose strong face, captured by Rima, is archetypal of Palestinian dignity [Figure 29].
>
> And dignity abounds in Abu Dis; in the superb craftsmanship of the stonemasons dusted with hard labour and cement, in the beautiful metalwork of doors and gates, in the honest day's work that infuses the whole village and reminds us, that it takes *sumud* and dignity to live in Occupied Palestine, and that to live is to resist.

Figure 25. The jolly van-driver with the red kuffiyeh and hennaed beard.

Figure 26. The sheikh who checked the water leak on the roof of the girls school.

Figure 27. Shepherd showing off his new lamb.

Figure 28, top. School children walking with their arms around their BFF.
Figure 29, bottom. The donkey man looking for work.

> Abu Dis, strangled by the illegal and obscene Apartheid/Annexation Wall, is a microcosm of all Palestinian villages where beneath the seeming normality of work, school, shopping, play, is trauma and stress which can erupt in the anxious randomness of Israeli military excursions recorded by Rima's little camera and the posters of detainees seized at night from their family bed or the martyrs extrajudicially murdered, displayed in the streets and at the university. Every single person in Abu Dis is soul-wounded by Israel's brutal occupation.
>
> Even the land. The beautiful vista of the Jordan Valley beyond the village is scarred by illegal Israeli colonies and the Wall that mock centuries of Palestinian symbiosis with their land [Figures 30 and 31].
>
> Rima shows us that *sumud*, the courageous spirit of Palestinian resistance, is most apparent in the shy or expansive smiles of Abu Dis villagers and the crux of Rima's photography is to empower empathy; to connect us personally with Palestinian children, mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, to whom we, the privileged free from afar, have a moral responsibility to ensure that they, the Palestinian people, enjoy ASAP their inalienable political and human rights that our governments continue to neglect.

And so, I have become an eyewitness and a chronicler of the mundane in Abu Dis, of the quiet, ordinary ways in which Palestinians in the West Bank live today. Mark C. Johnson, an old acquaintance and activist, recognizes the images of Abu Dis I share as "at once anthropological and documentary, poetic and profound," images that "educate and anger" at the same time. He comments further: "This is a bigger task than Facebook is designed to manage, stretching the medium to its limits. But those limits need to be stretched if we are to understand our complicity in this situation. . . . Many mornings I begin my day with a walk through Rima's neighborhood. . . . Here it is the anemones in the grass, the minarets on the hillside, the children on their way to school. . . . I have not seen Rima since 1968, but many mornings I begin my day with a walk through Rima's neighborhood."

My Facebook images of normalcy, of simple daily routines that can go unnoticed by anyone, including those who live them, are meant to be filed in the viewer's imagination against the stock images of Palestinians prevalent on Facebook: pitiful victims in shackles, victims sitting on the remains of their demolished homes in utter distress, or victims as corpses being wildly mourned; heroic youth with kuffiyeh-masked faces, gracefully hurling themselves through billows of tear-gas smoke amid deadly bullets, flinging stones or tear-gas canisters back at their tormentors. I have heard from activists for Palestine who felt, through these albums, that they were connecting with and "meeting" Palestinians for the first time despite their long years of political

Figure 30, top. The beautiful vista of the Jordan Valley. Beyond Abu Dis, on both the left and right, a Jewish settlement (Kidar) and outpost are visible, marking the limit of natural growth for Abu Dis.

Figure 31, bottom. The Wall that mocks centuries of Palestinian symbiosis with their land.

work. These images are also regarded as another kind of resistance, as endurance or transcendence. As one reader wrote, "They become marvelous episodes of our love for our homeland, as small and as limited as it may be, and our love for each other."[16]

And yet, tragically, the ordinary and extraordinary are constantly converging in Abu Dis, as elsewhere in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. When fifteen-year-old Yousef Shawamreh was shot in the back by Israeli forces while attempting to reach his family's land that lay behind a barrier ("Palestinian Boy"), I had images from Abu Dis to show exactly what he was trying to do—collect grass for the four ewes his family owned. I juxtaposed his image with scenes of shepherding and grass-collecting. When statistics were published to the effect that one Palestinian child has been killed by Israel every three days for the past thirteen years ("One Palestinian Child"), and one Palestinian every 4.2 days in 2014 (Zonszein), I had the perfect photo to dramatize these gruesome figures and create a "meme"—an image plus text that carries an idea and is shared repeatedly. It shows Abu Dis folk, still alive, still enduring, strolling casually back to town after Friday prayer (Figure 32). Similarly, I used the image of the cactus growing profusely in my neighbor's yard in Abu Dis to communicate a message.

The prickly-pear cactus is a symbol of the heroism and tenacity of Palestinian villagers who were violently evicted from Palestine in 1948. Traditionally, cactus functioned as a boundary fence that Palestinians kept at the edge of their property. When in 1948 Israel demolished and bulldozed our villages, the cactus grew again and etched out the boundaries of family homes, revealing Israeli crimes in graphic outline. Another image I used to create a meme is of an Abu Dis grandfather, tenderly holding his grandson's hand as he walked him to school one morning (Figure 33). I accompanied this image with a quotation by Cherie Carter-Scott: "Ordinary people believe only in the possible. Extraordinary people visualize not what is possible or probable, but rather what is impossible. And by visualizing the impossible, they begin to see it as possible." This hopeful viewpoint is much needed, because the forces arrayed against Palestinians in the form of a nuclear Israel backed by a superpower make the Palestinian struggle appear impossible. In fact, much of the discourse surrounding "the peace process" is defeatist in that it often references the impossibility of changing the "facts on the ground" (Chomsky). The meme with the grandfather generated an interesting discussion with an AQU student, Sondos Shehadeh, who wondered whether it "romanticized the Palestinians' reality," adding, "I know it is a sort of resistance to dream and work and believe in the impossible. . . . But what if we only live . . . a life of normalized suffering under colonial rule. . . . It just angers me that the only thing that is left for us, (or so I feel) is to talk about how amazingly we deal

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Figure 32, top. Abu Dis residents walking back to town after Friday prayer; for an image of these men on a very different occasion, see Figure 47.

Figure 33, bottom. Abu Dis grandfather walking his grandchild to school.

with accepting our sufferings!" In the end, we both agreed that what gives the message meaning is the authenticity of the visual image (the "Palestinian aesthetic," as the student called it), and that without this authenticity, the words would indeed come across as a platitude or cliché. Rather than normalizing suffering, my images tend to shock, in that they dramatize how the normal and ordinary is suddenly disrupted. One day we are looking at a tailor ironing a pair of pants in his shop in Abu Dis, and the next, we see him being interviewed by the press after his son, Yousef Rammouni, is found murdered/hanged—lynched, it is widely believed—in the bus he drives for an Israeli company in northeast Jerusalem.

The father of Yousef Rammouni, in his tailor shop in Abu Dis (Figure 34); and being interviewed about his son—to his left is Abu 'Alaa/Ahmed Ali Mohammed Qurei, former Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority, who is from Abu Dis (Figure 35).

Yet another example of the juxtaposition of the ordinary with the extraordinary that gives a surreal tinge to life in Palestine is a series of photographs I took from my kitchen balcony in Al Abraj. I wrote the following commentary to go with them:

> At dusk, today, I looked out my window in Al Abraj and watched neighborhood kids play a game. At first, it wasn't clear what they were doing. There were four of them on the roof of this warehouse building adjacent to the girls school, where they usually play soccer at this time of day. It became apparent they were collecting stones and dropping some of them into the courtyard of the school. They were also breaking larger bricks into smaller pieces. Soon, two of them collected a stash behind the wall of the school building, broke the larger pieces by throwing them against the wall and the game started—target practice in each other's general direction. After a while, the teams changed places and the game continued. It's as if they were practicing for confrontations with Israeli soldiers through play. There was never any danger they would hit one another—the distance was too far and the team below always remained behind the wall. [Figures 36 and 37]

By mixing such images of Abu Dis life and narratives of my own life with documentation and resources designed to help people experience and understand more clearly what is happening to the Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank, I believe I have managed to communicate a political message that cuts through the distancing and misinformation[17] built into decades of reporting on the Palestinian tragedy. I am thus engaged in an unfolding form of life writing, one that follows the daily rhythms of both Facebook and the lives I am documenting.

Neil Postman's remark that a medium "gives form to a culture's politics, social organization, and habitual ways of thinking" may very well be true, but when that "culture" is global in scope and the stream of information

Figure 36, top. Children practicing stone throwing in the school yard.

Figure 37. Children playing soccer in the school yard.

DAILY JUXTAPOSITIONS OF THE ORDINARY . . .

Figure 38. Ka'ak man, with new supermarket in the background.

Figure 39. Handyman from Yatta, Hebron working in Abu Dis, taking a break for lunch.

Figure 40. This shop has been roasting, grinding, and selling coffee beans since 1941l the proprietor holds a photo of the old company car in Jerusalem.

. . . AND THE EXTRAORDINARY

Figure 41. Abu Dis children with a poster of their imprisoned uncle—the brother of one of my students.

Figure 42. Abu Ahmad's store, with a poster of his brother, who is imprisoned for life.

Figure 43. Abu Dis children emulating Palestinian heroes.

continuous (as far as Palestinians are concerned, invariably bringing bad news), it's very easy to be swallowed up in the tide and get lost in currents of information that do not distinguish between reportage of drone warfare and a photo of what someone ate for breakfast. I have to admit one of the most popular posts on my wall, one that has elicited numerous and varied responses, is the lighthearted message "from a Omani" that I shared in a status update: "'hi Rima find a palestine girl for me to marry.'" However, there is no doubt in my mind that social media has been effective in helping to breakdown communication barriers set by mainstream media and in changing the nature of the dialogue about Palestine/Israel.[18] The task of focusing that information is enormous and often appears futile, rather than transformative. The change in the conversation has been helped by the fortuitous convergence among social media technology and the rise of BDS, the development of the Palestinian policy network Al-Shabaka,[19] and the work of Ben White in bringing to the fore Israel's apartheid policies and practices.[20] Reasons for optimism began to surface, not least being the renewed insistence that the Palestinian people, fragmented by the Zionist project, are one people with one cause.[21] Oslo and its frame of "ending the occupation" seemed at last to be playing itself out, creating new possibilities for decolonization in all of historic Palestine and the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people.

Joining my own voice on Facebook are the voices of many other Palestinians. In an ever-growing folder, I have words and images of Palestinian activists, politicians, academics, researchers, and writers, young and old, whom I constantly quote. In response to Facebook readers who have asked, "Who do we listen to?", "What if there are many voices?", and "What if the most representative and authoritative in formal terms have outrun their democratic mandate?", I have written the following comment on an album of images of intense faces and gesturing hands in the act of communication:

> In the absence of a legitimate political authority, we look for grassroots, human-rights based calls, like BDS. When you have the time to scan what is being said [in the album], you will find that these voices, coming from diverse backgrounds are basically insisting that no political solution should trample on the human rights of Palestinians and that only a just peace will be lasting.

The folder is a reminder of Nada Elia's words: "Stop calling the Palestinians 'voiceless.' We have a voice, we speak loud and clear. Anyone who thinks otherwise has no ears!"[22] What is important about this folder is that it features the voices not only of well-known Palestinians in Palestine and the diaspora such as Hanan Ashrawi, Mustafa Barghouti, Ali Abunimah, Raja Shehadeh, Susan Abulhawa, Hani Masri, Joseph Massad, Nadim Rouhana, and Salman

Abu Sitta to name just a very few, but also the emerging voices of lesser known young Palestinians such as Alaa Tartir, a youth activist and Program Director of Al-Shabaka, who says: "A major feature of this youth movement is [that] it really does not have borders. Over the last three years, we see a new link between all Palestinians: between the Palestinians in [Israel], between the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and even outside. That feature is a major source of optimism." Through Facebook, I also connect to and feature Palestinians who find themselves embroiled in "controversies," such as artist Rehab Nazzal, whose exhibition in an Ottawa gallery in Canada prompted Israel's ambassador to Canada, Rafael Barak, to publicly condemn the exhibit because it conveyed "stories of Palestinian experience: From the repression of Palestinian political prisoners to the targeting of Palestinian political and cultural leaders for assassination" (Smith).

My most intense engagement of this nature on Facebook is related to what has come to be known among activists supporting Professor Steven Salaita as "The Salaita Case and UIUC Scandal."[23] This scandal was instigated by the Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the UI Board of Trustees when, under pressure from pro-Israel donors, they fired Salaita for expressing, through tweets issued as an individual, his outrage over Israel's most recent brutal assault on Gaza. Still unresolved, this case has made the figure of Salaita a lightning rod for larger debates raging on social media sites that concern "civility," Zionists' new weapon against free speech on US campuses.

The cover photo of my album of Palestinian voices is of Fatmeh Breijieh of Al-Ma'sara, Bethlehem, mother of martyr Imad Breijieh. Her son Hasan, the Coordinator of the National Committee Against the Wall and Settlements, leads a weekly demonstration against the illegal Jewish settlement of Ifrat. Fatmeh is a Palestinian mother-earth figure. She wears traditional dress and speaks with the straightforwardness of Palestinian fellaheen (peasants), whose strong ties to the land have yet to be broken by Israel's vicious regime. I came upon a video of her urging Palestinians to continue to resist. I added her image and some of her words (translated into English) to the photo that I had taken in Abu Dis of a wall whitewashed to cover up graffiti (Figure 44). Here is part of what Fatmeh has to say:

> I have decided to continue to resist until the last breath and to continue to urge people to resist and to teach my children to resist and to lay the foundation for this through their milk. Our roots are fixed here. We, this land, this land, we are from this land. Look at the earth, at the soil; you will find it's our color. Every blade of grass, we know. They do not know anything. They only know to carry weapons and to steal—to steal water, to steal the blessings of our land—everywhere. (Breijieh, my translation)

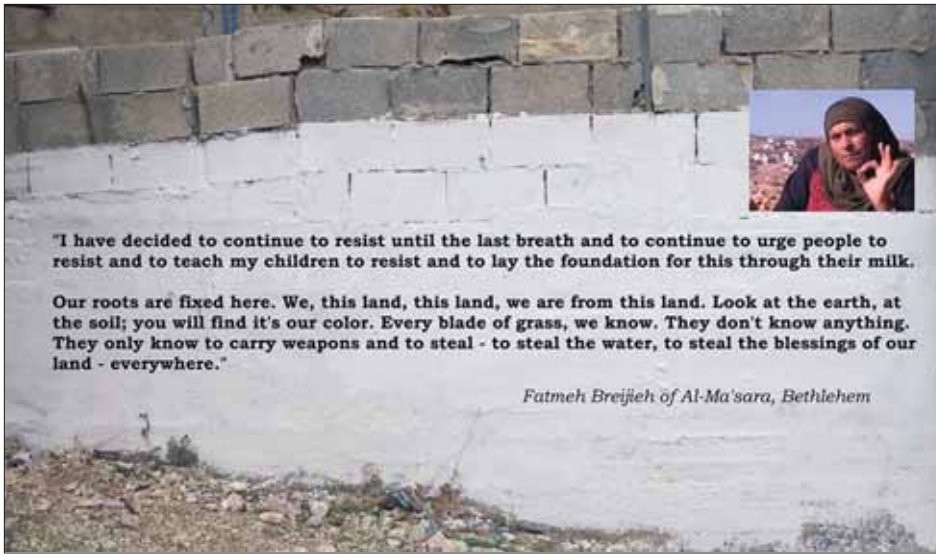

Figure 44. Meme of Fatmeh Breijieh's words and image.

The change in the conversation about Palestine can be traced on my Facebook wall. Comparing my posts on Palestine/Israel from January 2013 to those posted at the beginning and throughout 2014 reveals a continuing and dramatic shift in the conversation away from portraying Palestinians as mere victims to a more hopeful message that focuses on the exposure of Zionism as a settler-colonial racist project, one that forecasts the inevitability of its demise. The problem is no longer the occupation as defined by Oslo; activists are calling for the entire ideology of Zionism to be dismantled.[24] In a posting to my wall, Marianne Torres explained why she has cut off the bottom half of her bumper sticker that says, "Free Palestine/End the occupation." She states, "simply calling for an end to the occupation implies that if only that were fixed, all would be well. It wouldn't. We must see an end to the racism that allows one people to believe a state or land belongs only to them." The incredible power of divestment and international pressure are beginning to be felt. More and more people are getting involved. "Until 3 years ago," says Nora Abya, "I didn't even know what was going on in my little part of the country. Now I am learning about Palestine. The power of the people."

Moreover, Facebook is a good medium to take advantage of—and further—the opening of space to engage in productive if difficult dialogue about formerly taboo topics, including the taboo of truth-telling about Palestine in US classrooms, as dramatized recently by the Salaita case and UIUC scandal. Taboos are now being broken having to do with the serious discussion of the Palestinian right of return and the establishment of one democratic

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state in Palestine/Israel.[25] It is now more possible to raise questions about how Jewish identity and Judaism relate to Zionism without being accused of anti-Semitism.[26] Zionism is inextricably related to Jewish identity, and successive Israeli governments have co-opted ethnic anxiety and biblical claims to the land as the only true form of Judaism. Israel has managed to convince most of the world, including many Jews, of its right to speak for world Jewry and to assert, unabashedly, the racist claim that "the land of Israel" belongs to Jews rather than to all of its native inhabitants, Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike. Finding ways to address Zionist constructs and actions without falling into traps of racism and bigotry is something that many Palestinians, including my students and pro-Palestinian activists, have long struggled with on Facebook and elsewhere.

To allow my students to engage in a discussion that both contextualizes and also breaks down the us/them binaries upon which Israel depends, I extend the space of the classroom on Facebook and invite my students to participate there. Given the environment in which they live, my students have a hard time sorting through their natural feelings of anger and bitterness. However, they have come to feel comfortable sharing their experiences on my Facebook wall. Here, for example, is the "life story" of one of my graduating students at Al-Quds University, 'Ahd Nasser Abu Khdair (from East Jerusalem), as she shared it with me on Facebook:

> I posted a status on my wall a few minutes ago, but I don't know why I felt like I should tell u about it. My father was arrested by the Israeli Shabak few days before his BA graduation from Bethlehem Uni; —I was about six years old; I went and received his certification instead. I was wearing a white dress and everybody clapped so hard for me when I went up the stage. A couple years later, he was released. On his MA—my father graduated from our univesity Al-Quds uni—he also was arrested after his last exam, so my younger sister did what I did, and guess who was at the graduation ceremony to hand out the certifications? It was Sae'b Ireqat (irony). Then a year and a half later, he was also released. However, since, he has been in prison for the last three years and still needs two and a half year to be released. My younger sister who graduated a year before me from Bir Zeit Uni is a lawyer now. He [my father] didn't get to see her graduate, and I'm graduating this year and perhaps what made me tell you about it is that our graduation party for the English department is on Wednesday. He won't be there. My younger brother is going through Tawjihi [Palestinian national high school certification exam] next year and will graduate from high school, while my youngest sister will graduate also from Bir Zeit Uni at the same year majoring in journalism and political science—and my dad will not be there too. I'm sorry if it was a long messages I just felt like sharing.

Another taboo discussion that I introduce through Facebook concerns the reaction to any depiction granting legitimacy to Hamas, a Palestinian Islamic

movement committed to military resistance against Israel and accordingly considered by the United States, Israel, and their allies as a terrorist movement. In Arabic, on Facebook and elsewhere—in posters, in ubiquitous wall graffiti—Palestinian use of force is often understood as heroic resistance for the love of God and justice,[27] given the huge imbalance in military power between the two sides ("Hamas"). In the West, Palestinian resistance, especially when Israeli civilians are targeted, is understood as "unlawful violence" or "terrorism."[28] Any use of force by Palestinians is inadvisable, according to this Facebook post in *Haaretz* during the Gaza assault: "2 attacks in Jerusalem in one day . . . are these isolated incidents or the beginning of an Intifada? ~ Palestinians should engage in civil disobedience against the occupation, but not resort to violence." The concept that an oppressed people have a legal and ethical right to defend themselves any way they can (even if they don't have an army to do the job for them) is entirely absent from the frame of discussion. Thus, the Western mainstream media continue to accept, without question, the general Jewish-Israeli view of themselves as, in the words of Shani Tsoref, a Jewish Israeli reader of my Facebook wall, victims "trapped and threatened and oppressed, for reasons of history, acculturation, and vulnerability" by what they call terrorism, and who label as aggression any acts of Palestinian resistance to ethnic cleansing, occupation, and dispossession.[29] With a view to breaking down the fear that exists in many people's minds of discussing evenhandedly Israeli operations related to Hamas,[30] such as Israel's numerous extrajudicial executions of Hamas leaders, I post albums of the traditional rallies that students, including the Islamic Student Bloc (Hamas), hold on the campus of Al-Quds University. The mere showing of photos involving Hamas members on campus normalizes their activities and serves to break down the fear of being associated in any way with a group regarded, whether critically or supportively, by Palestinians as a religious nationalist resistance group but demonized by Israel and the United States as terrorist.[31] When Brandeis University suspended its partnership with Al-Quds University over a Hamas rally held to honor the martyrs of Islamic Jihad, and specifically the father of martyr Mohammad Rabah 'Asi, whose posters had been all over campus the previous week, I was able to refer to images I had posted of that rally that depicted not only people committed to resisting Israel's oppression and occupation through processions representing Hamas's para-military orientation, but also people mourning their martyrs with quiet dignity, and images of young mothers carrying babies dressed proudly in Hamas colors (Figures 45, 46, 47, and 48).

The images that humanize Palestinians and document their conditions under Israeli rule engender an awareness of what such aggressive and well-funded groups are really doing on American campuses—equating Israel and its heinous policies against Palestinians with Jewish identity and diverting attention

Figure 45, top. Hamas rally at Al-Quds University.
Figure 46, bottom. Young mother with baby dressed in Hamas colors.

Figure 47. Rabah 'Asi (left) mourning his son with quiet dignity.

Figure 48. Islamic Bloc exhibition on Al-Quds University campus after the July 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza.

from the real issue in the conflict, which is Palestine and Palestinians. This is evident in comments such as Peter Lake's, who responded to a question I asked on Facebook regarding Zionist blogger Larry Derfner's assertion that Abbas "needs the world to win independence for his nation, and in the eyes of the world, Hamas, with whom he just joined forces, is anathema." Peter wrote: "Hamas is like the IRA in Ireland of the 70s and 80s. They have a political wing with which one can and SHOULD talk. To refuse to talk to someone you perceive as an enemy is to remove all possibility of a reasonable solution. This has been demonstrated time and again in the 20th and 21st centuries." Another reader, Lux Adams, wrote:"You only have to ask yourself, like the chicken and egg conundrum, who came first, Israel or Hamas? Hamas' militant wing has no purpose, no reason to even exist without the presence of Israel. They have no function without Israel."[32] By humanizing Palestinians, normalizing their activities, and documenting their conditions under Israel's rule through photos and captions, I engender responses such as Lake's and Lux's.

Another hasbara "narrative line" I try to counter on Facebook has to do with Palestinian children's stone throwing. Through frequent incursions into Palestinian villages and towns, and the presence of its military post in Abu Dis, Israel provokes stone throwing and then retaliates brutally,[33] as described by testimony that an Israeli sergeant stationed near Nablus delivered to Breaking the Silence, an Israeli organization that collects testimonies from Israeli soldiers and veterans: "We're talking about Area B [under civilian Palestinian control and Israeli security control], but the army goes in there every day, practically, provoking stone throwings. Just as any Palestinian is suspect, this is the same idea. It could be a kid's first time ever throwing a stone, but as far as the army is concerned, we've caught the stone thrower" ("Testimony"). Israel's unconscionable treatment of Palestinian children has been well documented from every angle (see Defense for Children; el-Helah and Itani). Israel's July 2014 assault on Gaza has produced a proliferation of unbearable images of children eviscerated by the bombing that will remain forever seared on Palestinian consciousness ("Death Toll").

Photos of Palestinian youth I have taken in Abu Dis showing children throwing stones at Israeli soldiers document how Palestinian communities, unarmed and under Israeli subjugation, continue to resist (Abbasi). These images are meant to reframe the depiction of these youths as aggressors whose activity justifies Israel's brutal retaliations in the form of tear gas, sound bombs, and rubber-coated and live bullets—as well as in unlawful detention practices and torture ("Torture and Abuse").[34]

Abu Dis youth invariably respond to the numerous incursions of Israeli armored convoys into town by throwing stones at them or by upending garbage containers to use as barriers on the streets and by burning tires to block

passage of Israeli vehicles into their neighborhoods. On several occasions this past year, Israeli armored vehicles were deployed to supervise operations close to the apartheid/annexation wall across the street from the main gate of Al-Quds University (Figure 49)—operations such as demolishing a home, or constructing an even higher barrier between Abu Dis and the township land bordering on East Jerusalem that the wall annexes, or checking AQU student IDs to find and detain students on their lists. Whenever this happens, word spreads quickly among the youth of the town and whoever happens to be within a stone's throw from the Israeli armored vehicles throws stones at them; others collect and break up larger chunks for throwing, piling them up in strategic places. A few AQU students join in, to the chagrin of campus security, and that unleashes a barrage of tear gas, sound bombs, and bullets from the Israeli side, whose soldiers are in full protective regalia. They shoot into the campus, on one occasion deliberately aiming at and shattering the glass doors of a campus building, on another, walking right into campus, guns pointed ahead of them, turning this way and that, in a show of blustering intimidation ("Israeli Forces").[35] Whenever I post images from these events, I am invariably asked by some readers to explain the reason for the activities of the Israeli forces on the scene. This gives me an opportunity to point out, as I have done when I posted a picture album of such an incident

Figure 49. Israeli armored vehicles facing the main gate of Al-Quds University.

taking place, photographed from the window of a class I was in the middle of teaching, that it is the soldiers or Israeli police that provoke the children's reactions (Figure 50).[36] I called the album, "Class, Interrupted."

On the day after the demolition of Ashraf Ibrahim Abu Sneineh's home, I took a picture of a wagonload of stones that had been cleaned up from the streets of Abu Dis (Figures 51 and 52), and posted it on my Facebook wall

Figure 50. "Class, Interrupted."

Figure 51. Wagonload of stones from the streets of Abu Dis, after the clashes precipitated by the demolition of Ashraf Ibrahim Abu Sneineh's home.

Figure 52. The site of Ashraf Ibrahim Abu Sneineh's demolished home.

as a symbol of "sumoud" (steadfastness—also spelled "sumud"), of the resistance that undermines the Israeli occupation, "an ideological theme and political strategy that first emerged among the Palestinian people through the experience of the dialectic of oppression and resistance in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War" (Van Teeffelen).[37] To highlight the concept of sumoud in the West Bank, especially as it relates to young people's continuing resistance, I posted a photo I took of Al-Quds University students being detained by Israeli forces near the campus in Abu Dis. The soldiers are seen taking away students' identity cards, and the caption states: "Al-Quds University students being detained by Israeli forces in Abu Dis; they take away their identity cards, but can never take away their identity" (Figure 53).[38]

Figure 53. Israeli forces detaining Al-Quds University students.

I followed this with a quotation from the conclusion to Ali Abunimah's book, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*:

> Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians must accept Israel's "right to exist as a Jewish state," is an implicit recognition that the Zionist project can never enjoy legitimacy or stability without the active consent of the Palestinian people. Palestinians have steadfastly resisted granting such recognition because to do so would negate their rights and indeed threaten their very existence. There has never been a more opportune moment for Palestinians to put forward their demands for decolonization, equality, and justice in clear, principled, visionary, and inclusive terms. (234)

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In addition to my role as a Palestinian resident of Abu Dis and a faculty member at Al-Quds University, to many of the few thousand "friends" and "followers" who have by now signed on to my wall to learn about Palestine, my "present-absentee" status in Palestine,[39] to adapt Israel's doublespeak, is also a draw. The cover image for my wall, posted on May 15th on the sixty-sixth anniversary of our Nakba, shows the picture of my great grandfather, Ismail Al-Najjar, sitting on a bench against the wall of his house in upper Lifta. The house is still standing, though much the worse for wear and tear from the splendor it holds in my aunts' minds and hearts. I have juxtaposed this picture of my great grandfather against the image of several orthodox Jews who now live there (see Figure 9). My great grandfather is buried in the garden behind the house, from where the men in the photo are emerging.

On Facebook, I am "from" Lifta, Yerushalayim, Israel, as the mapping-GPS system Facebook uses indicates, and for the duration of the academic year, I am located "near" Abu Dis, Palestine behind the illegal apartheid/annexation wall Israel has built, literally yards away from annexed East Jerusalem. My designation as "from" Israel on Facebook has generated several irate queries from Palestinian readers, who would much rather I had written "Lifta, Palestine" in that slot, not knowing that Facebook forces my hand. It also led to this interesting conversation about ID cards with a Jewish Israeli reader called Jonathan Baum on the wall of Seth J. Frantzman, op-ed editor of *The Jerusalem Post*.

> Jonathan Baum: I noticed that you live in Jerusalem. Do you have an Israeli ID card, by the way?
>
> Rima Najjar: Thank you for checking out my wall and your resultant anxiety about my ID status as a Palestinian.

I then shared with Jonathan a couple of my family photos that were posted on Facebook, one from Lifta and one from Haifa, with information about my family history, and asked him to guess what ID I have or ought to have.

> Jonathan Baum: Thanks for the propaganda, but you didn't answer my question: do you have a Israeli ID card?
>
> Rima Najjar: First read about my family, and see if you can guess, based on that, what ID I have or ought to have.
>
> Jonathan Baum: Look, it's not a complicated question. Either answer it or refuse to, but please stop the bullshit. Your "nakba" pictures really don't move me. I've studied that period.
>
> Rima Najjar: It's my family history I want you to look at, Jonathan—if only to help you with clues for your burning question.

> Jonathan Baum: I'll just assume that you have one, and the hypocrisy bothers you. Just answer the question. It's not complicated. I don't really need to read your sad story. My family has one too.
>
> Rima Najjar: The question is great, Jonathan. It goes to the heart of the issue. What ID do I have as a Palestinian? What are the possibilities here and how can I acquire an ID that will situate me in Palestine, my homeland, if I don't have one? Who controls the Palestinian population registry? As a privileged Jew, can you help me?

The point that Jonathan wanted to make, which I frustrated, was that having an Israeli ID card would mean that I am obliged to show allegiance to Israel, right or wrong.

Among the most popular photographs I have shared, Jonathan Baum's lack of interest notwithstanding, are pre-Nakba photos that I am lucky to possess of my young and beautiful mother in Lifta, holding her first born, my oldest sister (Figure 54), and of my great grandmother with two of her grandchildren and a Jewish playmate, Miriam (no one could remember the last name of her family), posing in the sun in the garden (Figure 1). I have also shared photos of a confiscated piece of land that my father owned in Jerusalem, now fenced in as part of the campus of Hebrew University.[40] A few days before the 1967 Israeli attack on the West Bank, Israeli planes had already reconnoitered East Jerusalem from the air and marked out every piece of land that had no structure on it. Immediately after the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, Israel confiscated all the marked areas and offered Palestinians compensation, which the vast majority refused. Israel then turned around and sold the land to Jewish settlers. Images like these

Figure 54. My mother holding my oldest sister.

provide Palestinians and their supporters with evidence that historic Palestine "existed," counteracting the Zionist myths that deny Palestinian identity and existence. Since my life includes not only a Nakba, but also what Palestinians call in a huge understatement a Naksa—meaning a "setback," to denote the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza—I also post pictures of my mother's and grandfather's graves in Jerusalem (see Figure 55), and share memories of my life there before 1967, in a folder titled "On not being able to visit the dead on Eid Al-Adha":

> My mother died young at the age of 28, having been separated from her family in Haifa practically all her married life. Her father, mother, sisters and brothers could not even visit her grave, as she was buried in East Jerusalem, down the street from the school I attended, by the bus depot, which my late father, an architect and contractor, subsequently built.
>
> Now, it is I who cannot visit her grave or the grave of my grandfather, buried beside her, because my entry permit to the West Bank on my American passport confines me to "Judea and Samaria"—the name Israel gives to the West Bank by way of co-opting it.

Figure 55. The grave of my grandfather, Ali Ismail Mahmoud Kahlil Al-Najjar, in East Jerusalem, to which I am denied access.

> On the holidays, we would leave school to travel to Amman to stay at our grandmother's house. It took less than an hour by car to go from Jerusalem to Amman. Very early in the morning of Eid al Adha, my grandmother would put the lamb meat in a large pot to simmer and take off to Jerusalem to give to the poor and pay her respects to the dead—these graves in the photos, her husband's grave and her daughter-in-law's grave. Then she'd hop in the car back to Amman to attend to her large family and receive well wishers. She is dead now too, but not buried in Jerusalem next to her husband, as she had wished, not in Lifta with her ancestors. May they all rest in peace.

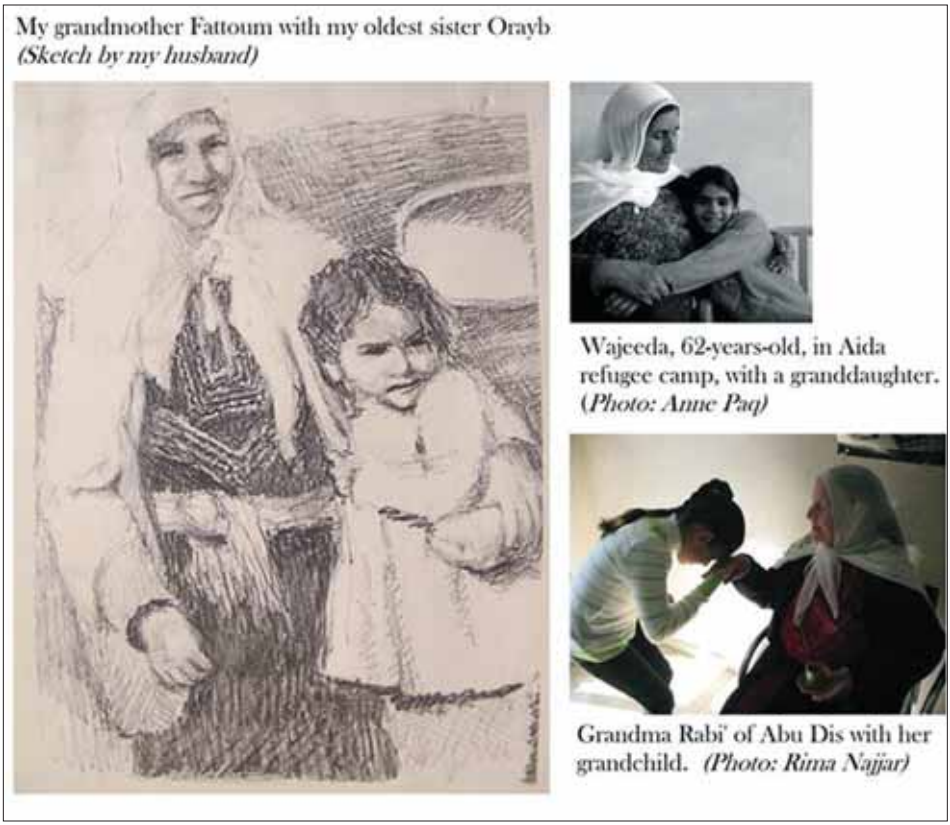

Figure 56. All our Grandmothers.

In my case, I have succeeded in returning to the West Bank after 1967 only with great difficulty, and my re-entry is always uncertain.[41] I am forced to enter and depart my homeland as a tourist, a painful experience that I have documented and shared on Facebook. My most recent re-entry into the West Bank in mid-August 2014 was bittersweet, as it will be the last time I enter for the purpose of work, which allows me an extended stay, rather than one the length of which will depend on the whim of the Israeli border police. Here is an excerpt of my account of this re-entry as I posted it on Facebook:

HOW I GOT BACK TO ABU DIS

August 17, 2014 at 7:16 am

Dear friends,

I am back in Abu Dis and looking forward to a productive academic year at Al-Quds University. I re-entered the West Bank yesterday after a grueling ordeal at Allenby—but at least I am in! All day long yesterday, it was made abundantly clear to me that I was being let in on sufferance. The terrible thing is that I (and everyone crossing over with me—except the real "tourists" who were in line ahead of me) were being treated badly at the crossing, not because of anything related to "security" reasons, which might have been galling but still rational—I had, for example, deactivated both my Facebook and Twitter accounts just before driving to Allenby. The experience was humiliating in a personal way—as when someone is mean to you just for the hell of it and because they are bullies and wish to flex their power over you. Following is an account I wrote to my family last night upon arriving at my apartment in Abu Dis. Some of you might be interested in how it went:

> I am writing from my apartment in Abu Dis after an exhausting day at Allenby. Before getting to the queue in the hall (which at least is air conditioned) to receive the entry permit, we (large numbers of Palestinians, many with children, on their way back home from a summer stay in Jordan or elsewhere with family) had to run the gauntlet of several queues. The people entering through Allenby are classified in the following way: The majority had (green) Palestinian IDs. A subsection of Palestinians had Jerusalem (blue) IDs. Then there were the "tourists"—including Palestinians from the diaspora like me mingled with real tourists. I fell under this last category and the routine is that, once we get to the visa counter, our passports are taken away and we are asked to wait. Some Palestinians in this category might have close family members with whom they are traveling (like a wife and children or adult siblings) who possess green IDs and are "processed" differently—that is to say, the family is separated with members riding on different buses according to category and being treated differently.
>
> On Saturdays, the Allenby crossing is open between 8–3 for the Jewish weekend. I have always suspected that the Israelis who work there on Saturday are especially rude, because they hate the bum assignment. On the Jordan side, I noticed that many Palestinians wishing to cross were being turned back, because there were more people there than the quota allotted for the hours before lockdown. The convenience of the Israeli administrative bureaucracy at the bridge takes priority over the needs of the Palestinians wishing to re-enter their own country. I got to

the gate that led to the compound at the King Hussein crossing at about 10 a.m. There were people standing there with their luggage and I wondered why they were not being let in. Soon I found out. "What nationality do you have?" "American." "Do you also have a Palestinian ID? A Jerusalem ID?" "I wish, if you have one to give me, I would be glad to take it." "Well, then you would be like them" (gesturing to the people waiting at the gate). They could not enter because already, at this early hour in the morning, there were more people wanting to cross than the Israelis were prepared to process.

At Allenby, the various categories of buses (tourist, Palestinians with Jerusalem IDs and, the lowliest of the low, Palestinians with a WB ID) disembarked and had to go through three tortuous queues in the heat—one to get the luggage checked in through a totally inadequate space for the traffic and the quantity of luggage Palestinians bring in with them. Mountains of stuff. Once people got to the short conveyor belt going into the building to show their passports to the Israeli behind the glass sitting on a dais raised up above the fray, there are barely a few feet of space to maneuver in and it's congested with empty carts, laborers who lift the bags on the conveyor belt and no lines that lead to the booth, just clusters of people. Two mist fans were going but made little difference. From there one passed on to another congested queue in the same area for a preliminary passport check. The Israelis sitting in these booths had sheets with lists of passport numbers in front of them and it looked like they were checking one's passport against the list. Next, people trooped into another long queue in order to pass carry-on stuff through the machine and after that they stepped into the larger hall (where the air conditioning kicks in and where passports are examined and entry permits given out). For a $100 dollars, Palestinians and others can bypass the queues and go directly to the head of the line at each juncture as "VIPs," provoking waves of intense frustration from the non-VIPs.

At the entryway of the hall, there was a queue (for Palestinians only—"tourists" could skirt around this queue) meant as a holding pen until the queues at the visa counters shrank enough to allow additional people to stand there. Very few booths that served Palestinians were open for service; there were as many for "tourists" as for Palestinians, even though the numbers were something like 50 Palestinians to one tourist. People in the pen stood there eight or nine abreast and 15 rows deep in a tight block that would surge forward only to be pushed back time and time again. And then suddenly one man snapped. He started shouting in broken English at the young African man placed in charge of the block—"We are not animals; this is our country we are

entering"—and then to the people around him in Arabic—"Don't you have pride or dignity, let's all make noise." A few voiced half-hearted interjections, and the man went on shouting for a while and the block pushed forward. A European-looking Israeli woman in a suit came to keep the block in check and spoke sharply to anyone who stepped out.

Finally, it was as if a dam had burst and the block found its way to the various queues lined up in front of visa booths. Two or three Israelis promptly cordoned off another square—this time, the ribbon went around the four sides rather than just on the sides. Quickly the space filled with Palestinians as before, and the young African man assigned to control this process acted just exactly as a shepherd dog acts. Some people would go under the ribbons and the man would chase them back in. A couple took off running and he went after them emitting fierce barks. Those who had the courage to resist actually ended up better off. One man, for example, insisted that he was tired of standing and sat down, with his family, in the empty row of chairs to one side of the roped off area, pointing out that they were empty. He argued with the black young man, who then let it go, as he ran to another corner to reign someone else in.

This young man's ignorance is one I encounter over and over in different forms as I travel in and out of Palestine, often trying to account for myself to Jewish Israelis who have been taught a fictional history at school and have no idea at all about Palestinians or about the geography of the "territories" that Israel occupies, whose borders they are "guarding" from its indigenous inhabitants. As I witnessed this exchange, I thought back to a 2013 encounter at a visa booth, with a young Israeli woman (YIW), that I had also posted to Facebook:

YIW: Where is your father from and where is your mother from?

Me: My father is from Lifta and my mother is from Haifa.

YIW: Where is Lifta?

Me: It's northwest of Jerusalem.

YIW: Why did your father leave?

Me: Well, in April of 1948, Zionist terrorists from Irgun Zevai Leumi and Lohamei Herut massacred over 100 men, women and children in Deir Yassin close to Lifta and many people, including my grandfather and father, fled in fear for their lives and when the war was over, the Israelis refused to let them back in. Both my mother and father are dead now.

YIW: What?

Me: Nevermind.

In sharing on Facebook these and so many other personal stories and photos, often of everyday life and the people I know, I hope to help counter ignorance, indifference, and misconceptions—to help shape the discourse that can one day, inshallah, bring a just peace to Palestine. Through depictions of everyday life in Abu Dis that show both the ordinariness of Palestinians and the extraordinary violence that attends/interrupts everyday life; through otherwise putting human faces and stories—including my own and my students'—onto my wall to bring dry statistics to life and/or to counter mainstream media accounts or erasures of Palestinian lives; and through establishing personal connections with those who follow my postings, thus creating a space for productive and respectful and potentially transformative dialogue, Facebook provides a way to work toward a future in which violence and injustice are departures from, rather than constitutive of, ordinary daily life, for Palestinians and also for those now making our lives so unlivable.

Figure 57. Israeli taking a picture of me taking a picture of him and the activities going on behind the wall on the Jerusalem side.

NOTES

1. All borders as well as the Palestinian population registry are under full and exclusive Israeli control (see "Campaign").

[34.226.141.207] Project MUSE (2024-03-29 00:53 GMT)

2. For more on Palestinians in Israel, see White.
3. On the inefficacy of funded research in changing perceptions, see Mayssun Succarie, who concludes,"Only by positioning the actors involved within local, national, regional, and global structures of power, identity, and interests can the problems of over-research begin to be understood and addressed."
4. As Haidar Eid observes, "The Oslo Accords have failed by every measure, simply because they ignored the existence of Palestinians as a people" ("Oslo Accords"). Raja Khalidi, a Palestinian development economist, argues that "a developmental state approach to resisting prolonged colonial domination" is necessary for liberation.
5. For the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, see *BDS Movement*; "Urgent call"; and "Statement."
6. At that time, I wrote a chapter on Palestinian children for the *Greenwood Encyclopedia on Children's Issues Worldwide.*
7. Mohammed Omer observes, "The term 'trauma' itself is not enough to describe what is going on, I am not convinced we expressed the horror. . . . Now trauma is living in us again. Even closing the door of the fridge can scare my daughters" (see also "Urgent").
8. For my account of the first re-entry denial, see "De-developing Palestine"; for the second, see "Catch-22 Israeli style"' (see also Abunimah,"Effective annexation").
9. The incident is mentioned briefly in Bennoune 76.
10. For a short video (17 seconds) of Palestinian youths in Abu Dis breaking a hole in Israel's annexation/apartheid wall and getting through to Jerusalem, see Kzzder. Youth resistance of this nature lands many young Palestinians in Israeli prisons.
11. According to the magazine's publisher Sani Meo, Israeli forces broke into the offices of the magazine on June 22, 2014, and confiscated seven computers, including the servers.
12. Helga Tawil-Souri writes: "Qalandia also used to be an airport. For a few short years in the 1930s this was the only airport in British Mandate Palestine used by the British military (before the Wilhelma Airport—renamed RAF Lydda in 1943, and Ben Gurion Airport in 1973—opened in Lydda, southeast of Tel Aviv); it was also the only airport in Jordanian controlled territories (i.e., the West Bank and Jordan) post-1948 until Amman boasted its own. After the Jordanians took it over, they turned it into a civil airport and renamed it Jerusalem Airport in the 1950s, where it remained under Jordanian control until 1967, after which it was unilaterally incorporated in the Greater Jerusalem Municipal Area annexed by Israel" ("Qalandia Checkpoint").
13. The first community project I initiated upon my arrival in Abu Dis was an attempt to do something regarding the scrapped, unlicensed white vans that functioned as public transportation within the town, including transporting school children. These vans were a source of income for many families after Israel erected the wall separating Palestinians from Jerusalem. A video that my colleagues and I produced explains the pollution problem involved and shows areas of Abu Dis (see reyad3dk).
14. The Israeli high court gives legitimacy to illegal actions and systems implemented by the military in Palestine; see Horton.
15. A report by the Municipality of Jerusalem reveals the discriminatory policies followed in sorting houses with demolition orders. The report indicates that there is an increase in the number of buildings subject to demolition orders, as the number of indictments

for unauthorized construction increased from 710 in 2004 to 1,166 in 2011. The total number of these indictments during this period is 8,441 ("Judaization").

14. James North reports: "Hasbara, which comes from Hebrew for 'explaining,' has come to mean chiefly propaganda: concerted and tireless efforts to pressure newspapers and governments whenever they say a word in favor of Palestinians or Arabs, and efforts to swarm websites that make the same mistake. The activity is concerted, organized, and subsidized; and the organized component is partly concealed. Anyone who's seen the regular shift changes in commenters at this site knows what I'm talking about."
15. Throughout this essay, I quote variously from my Facebook correspondents and commentators, including, among others, Vacy Vlazna, Mark C. Johnson, Nada Elia, Sondos Shehadeh, Neil Postman, Adaa Tartir, Marianne Torres, Nora Abya, 'Ahd Nasser Abu Khadair, Shoni Tsoref, Peter Lake, Lux Adams, and Ramez Hage; for their original comments, and additional information, photos, and updates on life in Abu Dis and Palestine, see my Facebook page. [https://www.facebook.com/rima.najjar.merriman]
16. These images also connect us to our past. Vacy Vlazna associated the photo of an Abu Dis man playing his oud in a coffee shop with the diary she was reading by Jawahariyyeh—*The Storyteller of Jerusalem: The Life and Times of Wasif Jawhariyyeh, 1904–1948.*
17. Zionist misinformation taken to extremes manifests itself in such Jewish groups as AMCHA, which alleges that those pledging to boycott Israeli institutions complicit in Israeli crimes against Palestinians "have violated both the letter and spirit of the federal law which funds their teaching and research" (Abunimah, "Zionist group").
18. Social media demonstrated its efficacy during Israel's July 2014 assault on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank by challenging the accuracy of the reporting of mainstream media organizations, such as the BBC and the *New York Times*, accusing them of parroting Israel's PR, and facilitating protests: "Approximately 5,000 protesters brought the roads around the BBC's London headquarters to a standstill on 15 July, forcing the news organization to confront its one-sided coverage of Israel's current assault on Gaza" (Saleem). In another incident, NBC's widely respected foreign correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin, who had witnessed firsthand the Israeli attack that killed four young boys playing soccer on a beach in Gaza, was reinstated only days after being removed from his post in Gaza as a result of an outcry generated on social media. Upon his return, he tweeted: "Thanks for all the support. Im returning to #Gaza to report. Proud of NBC's continued commitment to cover the #Palestinian side of the story" (Heather).
19. Al-Shabaka is "the first independent strategy and policy-related think tank for Palestinians and by Palestinians. A think tank without borders or walls, Al-Shabaka draws on and benefits from the diverse experiences of Palestinians from around the world. Its vision and principles are guided by Palestinian Civil Society's 2005 Call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS)" (Al-Shabaka).
20. In *Palestinians in Israel,* White links the struggle of Palestinians within Israel, who make up 20 percent of the country's population, with those in the occupied West Bank, Gaza, and the global diaspora.
21. The July 2014 Israeli assault on Gaza was meant, among other goals, to sabotage the Palestinian unity government (see Goodman and Maté).
22. Nada Elia is a diaspora Palestinian, born in Iraq and raised in Lebanon. She currently teaches Global and Gender Studies at Antioch University-Seattle.

23. To get a sense of this scandal, see Ali Abunimah's blog,"Watch: Univ. of Illinois top officials challenged on pro-Israel donor's role in Salaita firing." USACBI, numerous academic associations, including the American Association of University Professors, and thousands of individual academics strongly criticized the firing of Professor Salaita on the grounds given by the administration. A petition I organized on Change.org and shared on Facebook and email gathered over 18,000 signatures demanding corrective action on Salaita's scandalous firing. I also used the petition to publicize letters I wrote to Chancellor Phyllis Wise, Chair of the Board of Trustees Robert Kennedy, and other trustees of the board at UIUC ("Petitioning Phyllis M. Wise"; see also "Open letter").
24. On July 9, 2014, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) started a campaign on e-mail and social media that stated: "To end the violence—and truly mourn its victims—we must acknowledge and challenge the root causes beneath it. The occupation, with US military and financial support, is the root cause" (Surasky). A few days later, as a result of being challenged by other activists, including myself, on this issue, JVP dropped the "root cause" slogan in favor of "Hold Israel Accountable." Haidar Eid emphasizes why identifying the root cause of the conflict is so important in the Palestinian struggle for justice: "What Palestine needs from the world today is not just a condemnation of the Gaza massacres and siege, but also a delegitimization of the ideology that produced this policy and justifies it morally and politically, just as the racist ideology of apartheid was delegitimized. . . . Supporters of Palestine must always relate today's massacres to the original sin of colonization of the land which Israel has claimed for its own and the dispossession of its indigenous people" ("Gaza"). Ilan Pappe concludes, "The only reasonable regime for this seems to be one democratic state for all." The two state solution, he argues, died over a decade ago, but Israel continues to look for more Oslos to gain international legitimacy.
25. Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, explains that international law is "clear on the right of any person who leaves his/her home to return to it and the right of all refugees displaced during conflicts (whether compelled to flee under duress or forcibly displaced) to return home. When it comes to Palestinian refugees in particular the UN has numerous resolutions, from 194 onward, stipulating the right of return" (Horowitz).
26. For a discussion of how, to discredit any criticism of Israel, Zionists use the term anti-Semitism to describe both "a form of virulent racism" against Jews, and also any criticism of the Israeli state, see Falk, "Two Types of Anti-Semitism."
27. Religious fervor, specifically Islam but also Christianity, is connected to Palestine's status as the "Holy Land," and especially to illegally annexed and Judaized Jerusalem. The recent call from Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction Uri Ariel to replace Al-Aqsa Mosque with a "Third Temple" provides but one example of how the Israeli government simultaneously engages in the Judaization of Jerusalem while provoking religious Muslims. The situation is just as bad in Hebron and Bethlehem (Israel Video Network).
28. Christian Walter observes, "During the period of de-colonization the famous sentence that 'one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter' was particularly relevant. That is why the approach of international law towards terrorism . . . was characterized by avoiding a general definition and addressing specific issues instead" (11).

29. In a blog he wrote on 9 June 2014, Richard Falk highlights the perverseness of Israel's refusal to acknowledge Hamas as a political actor with legitimate goals and grievances: "In every conflict of this kind, when the dominant side is interested in peace it signals such an intention by abandoning its earlier refusal to deal with 'terrorists' and accepts its adversary as a political actor with genuine grievances and goals. This was true in Ireland in relation to the IRA, and indeed earlier when Israel decided to talk with Arafat and the Palestine Liberation Organization. It was true also in South Africa when the apartheid government released Nelson Mandela, whom we should remember was at the time a convicted and imprisoned terrorist leader" ("Israel-Palestine").
30. The latest assault on Gaza may have begun to change the image of Hamas and other militant Palestinian resistance groups, and to give them some internationally recognized legitimacy (Bergman).
31. In reports in the media during Israel's bombardment of Gaza, we heard on a daily basis about what the US and John Kerry and the "IDF" and Netanyahu and the UN had to say about what was going on, but nothing about what Hamas said. Naomi Wolf, a Jewish-American author trying to raise awareness on Facebook about Israel's crimes, responded to my questioning about this media practice: "There are laws in the US against reporting what a spokesman defined as a terrorist is saying. The NDAA criminalizes giving 'material support' to terrorists and at the trial (where I was a witness) Obama's lawyers said it could be used to arrest Chris Hedges for speaking to people analogous to Hamas, even just in reporting a news story." That's why the US (echoed by mainstream media) calls the capture of an Israeli soldier "an abduction" rather than a "capture." Terrorists abduct and fighters capture (see Reiad News).
32. This comment echoes Vijay Prashad's moving poem "What you Bomb," published in *Counterpunch* on 22 July 2014, at the height of Israel's "shock and awe over Gaza." Prashad writes: " . . . For you Hamas has become a full-stop, an exclamation point, a digression, a shaggy dog, a golden ring, a do-not-go-to-jail card. / Who are you that you take shelter in five letters—Hamas—when entire families are wiped out in your name? . . . Samah, Samah, Samah."
33. A report by the Defense for Children International–Palestine (DCI-P) "found that solitary confinement was used as a form of interrogation and intimidation in nearly 22 percent of recorded cases—a 2 percent increase since 2012. The average length of solitary confinement was 10 days, with the longest period being 29 days. In addition to solitary confinement, the report also found that more than 76.5 percent of Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons experienced some form of physical violence, 74.5 experienced verbal abuse, and 98 percent were not informed of the reason for the arrest. Between 500 and 700 Palestinian children are detained every year in the Israeli military prison system. Since 2000, approximately 8,000 Palestinian children have been arrested and prosecuted in Israeli military courts" (Becker).
34. In 2000, fifteen-year-old Faris Odeh threw a rock at Israeli security forces during a protest near Ramallah against restrictions at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. "Of course I threw stones! Everyone should!" he told reporters who had photographed him. A few weeks later, on November 9, an Israeli soldier shot him to death while he crouched down to pick up another stone, as he confronted the illegal presence of the Israeli army on Palestinian territory. The list of children shot dead by Israeli soldiers in the West Bank is long.

35. Following the 12 June 2014 kidnapping and murder of the three Jewish settlers in the West Bank, Israeli forces raided several Palestinian universities in the West Bank, including Al-Quds University. At Al-Quds, they blew up the door to the room where Islamic Bloc students keep their rally banners and other paraphernalia and destroyed them. For more on these incidents, see Scholars at Risk Network.
36. In June 2006, I published a series of reports, "Portraits of Palestinian Resistance," in *Electronic Intifada* under my married name Rima Merriman, with photographs depicting the families of the four young Palestinian men who were killed in Ramallah on 24 May 2006 as a result of an Israeli incursion. These reports explore the nature and consequences of Palestinian resistance that I am now portraying on Facebook. In the introduction, on 8 June 2006, I wrote: "Most Palestinian deaths . . . are of civilians simply going about their daily lives, getting caught up in Israeli ground and air attacks, Israeli indiscriminate fire and Israeli raids." In 2004, I published another series of reports, "Prisoner Stories," also in *Electronic Intifada*, with photographs of seven families living in different parts of the West Bank who were coping with the tragedies of their imprisoned sons.
37. One of my successful posts on Facebook states:"Two words Palestinians have contributed to the English language are 'intifada' and 'sumoud.' Israel's contribution? 'Hasbara.'" And in another post: "Sumoud means never accepting subjugation or dispossession."
38. Another example of "sumoud" is the story, widely reported on social media, that I posted with the headline THE MOST TALKED ABOUT WEDDING OF THE YEAR: THE MARRIAGE THAT DEFIED ISRAEL'S INVASION OF #GAZA. The story told of a wedding a couple held in a UN school in Gaza City's Shati Refugee Camp. Among the nearly 250,000 people currently taking shelter in over eighty-eight UNRWA schools, their celebration marked a form of resistance to Israel's latest invasion of Gaza (see "marriage").
39. Hillel Cohen explains: "Uprooted from their homes, the internal refugees became 'present absentees.' The internal refugees in the state of Israel are 1948 Palestinian refugees who were uprooted from their villages in the course of the war, but remained within the borders of Israel and became its citizens. They have continuously demanded to be allowed to return to their villages, only to be met by the refusal of successive Israeli governments. For the most part, their lands have been given over to Jewish settlements. While constituting a part of the general refugee problem, this moral, political and practical issue is one of the most concrete expressions of the structural conflict between the state of Israel and its Arab citizens."
40. For information about this feature of Hebrew University, see "Boycott."
41. The following appeal by Jessica Purkiss, addressed to the Right to Enter Campaign in Ramallah, as shared by the Campaign through an 18 July 2014 e-mail, demonstrates the vagaries of the re-entry process into the West Bank:

    "Dear Right to Enter,

    My name is Jessica Purkiss and yesterday I was deported while trying to get back to Palestine and given a 10 year ban after a night in detention. I had a "Judea and Samaria" visa given to me by Beit El in February 2014, stating I worked for an organisation. Previously to this I had been using tourist visas and going in and out every 3 months since November 2013.

> I work as a journalist part time, alongside my other job. When I was questioned Israeli security showed me articles I had written. They said as Israel is a democratic country they are not banning me for my writing but something about me having taken pictures while there.
>
> Anyhow, I was wondering if there were any steps I could take to attempt to revoke my ban?"

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