Amerasia Journal

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ramj20

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To cite this article: Eman Ghanayem, Jennifer Mogannam & Rana Sharif (2021) Locating Palestinians at the Intersections: Indigeneity, Critical Refugee Studies, and Decolonization, Amerasia Journal, 47:1, 9-19, DOI: 10.1080/00447471.2021.1981807

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/00447471.2021.1981807

Published online: 17 Dec 2021.

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AMERASIA JOURNAL
2021, VOL. 47, NO. 1, 9–19
https://doi.org/10.1080/00447471.2021.1981807

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Locating Palestinians at the Intersections: Indigeneity, Critical Refugee Studies, and Decolonization

Eman Ghanayem[a], Jennifer Mogannam[b], and Rana Sharif[c]

[a]Comparative Literature, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, USA; [b]Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, University of California, Davis, CA, USA; [c]Comparative Literature and Languages, University of California, Riverside, CA, USA

ABSTRACT

This forum traces the specificity and complexity of the Palestinian refugee. In centering Palestinian subjectivity and the nature of settler colonial displacement, the authors illuminate the contributions of the Palestinian refugee experience to various fields, especially the field of critical refugee studies. As they respond to key concerns in the context of Palestine and its refugees, the contributors interrogate the power dynamics that work to determine refugee fate, situate ancestral knowledge and the revolutionary role of Palestinian women, challenge discursive trends that racialize Palestinians, and illuminate the land-based struggle and the actions and hopes of the Palestinian project of decolonization.

KEYWORDS

Palestine; refugees; exile; indigeneity; right of return; decolonization; gender

Palestinians maintain their status as the largest refugee population in the world. What are some unique features of the refugee status of Palestinians?

Jennifer Mogannam: The Palestinian refugee population is not only the largest (and most probably undercounted) but it is the longest case of unresolved refuge in the world. To me, along with the size of the population, the longevity of the Palestinian refugee condition (73+ years and counting), with a sizable majority of that population (at least those officially counted) still residing in refugee camps, makes the Palestinian refugee case both a unique and integral part of the global refugee question. The Palestinian refugee condition is rooted in Zionist settler colonialism, and through the crystallizing moment of the Palestinian Nakba, May 15, 1948, which is also the day in which the Zionists declared the state of Israel on Palestinian land. Leading up to and following this date, over 73 years ago, the majority of the Palestinian population at that time was dispersed as refugees to neighboring countries as a result of the massacre, destruction, and/or depopulation of hundreds of Palestinian villages by Zionist gangs, literally leaving their homes on foot and with their keys as they expected to return to them soon thereafter. This initial moment of Nakba, and the resulting refuge, has proven to be an ongoing reality conditioning Palestinian existence.

A particular and peculiar feature of Palestinian refugeehood is that it is the only refugee population not served by the UN Higher Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). However, the UN Refugee Works Agency (UNRWA) was established specifically to serve only

CONTACT Jennifer Mogannam jennifer.mogannam@gmail.com Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies, University of California, Davis, CA, USA

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Palestinian refugees and only in specific countries (Palestine/West Bank and Gaza Strip only, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria). UNRWA has no jurisdiction to serve in other countries, which has produced very difficult challenges for certain Palestinian refugees, such as Palestinians from Syria right now, who are in a country where UNRWA cannot serve (i.e., Turkey or Greece) and where UNHCR has no permission to serve Palestinian refugees. These nuanced distinctions are much deeper and include jurisdiction, or lack thereof, to protect and resettle, for example. While this UN relationship to refuge is important for garnering support from the international community and for attaining some basic needs like shelter, food, health, and education, the granting of UN rights and recognition is not the primary goal in the sense that we Palestinians know that an external force, the UN or otherwise, cannot in fact liberate us or facilitate a return to our homeland. We need to go through processes of collective resistance and decolonization that are self-determined by Palestinians and especially refugees, those most impacted by Zionist settler colonialism.[1]

In recent years, there have been efforts to de-exceptionalize Palestine as a way of, on the one hand, combatting repressive practices that contradict freedom of speech and academic freedom and, on the other hand, rejecting the notion and practice of oppression Olympics to avoid comparisons of pain with other oppressed peoples, in particular, other people of color, including other indigenous and refugee communities as well as other Arabs. While these efforts remain ever important, the longevity of the Palestinian case is an important and unique facet of Palestinian refugeehood that must be taken up and accounted for in the field of critical refugee studies. The field of Critical Refugee Studies has many important lessons for all those who study refugees, including those who study Palestinian refugees.

The commonly understood process of refuge does not fit the Palestinian case, whereby a political or natural disaster (usually in the third world) produces the refugee who then temporarily seeks refuge in a nearby country. That nearby country is a place of waiting, often in literal tent camps and with insufficient resources, for a process of resettlement to the first world by UNHCR. These refugees generally manage to resettle after a period to a Western country while being able to maintain citizenship from their homeland as well. This is not to say that refugeehood somehow becomes resolved upon resettlement, but that process ends with certain stability. This process does not fit the Palestinian refugee experience and the longevity of refuge, 73+ years and counting in refugee camps, without any citizenship, most often treated as second class members of society in their host country leaving their socioeconomic conditions dire, and sometimes (as is the case with Iraq or Syria, for example) becoming second- or third-time refugees with no recognized documentation of nationality. This specificity and those 73+ years of refugee resistance, as well as transformations in conditions, can offer the field of Critical Refugee Studies important lessons and nuances that allow us to critically reflect through similarities and differences in our refugee cases on a more rigorous, encompassing, and generative set of analyses. This here is what my work aims to document and achieve by speaking to refugee modes of resistance and agency.

Eman Ghanayem: One of the significant descriptors of the Palestinian refugee experience is its deep impact on our nation's cultural fabric. For over 70 years, the violence of settler colonial dispossession has splintered us across a nebulous and ever-shifting topography. Most Palestinians live in diaspora – in Arabic, *al-shatat* – and the rest are dispersed across partitioned parts of Historic Palestine, where Gazans, West Bankers, and 1948 Palestinians

(or Palestinians with Israeli citizenship) are regularly immobilized by checkpoints, forced enclosures, and procedural restrictions that further breach our communal bonds. In addition, thousands in our nation continue to live in refugee camps, have no legal documents that could move them across borders, and are denied fair employment and good education. These dispersions create a national existence that is far too complex to comprehend within the bureaucracy of international law, humanitarian relief, and foreign policy – a domineering discourse that scholars in Critical Refugee Studies contend has oversimplified refugee narratives and undermined their insight into the connections between imperial projects and the creation of refugees.[2]

Since 1948, exile – in Arabic, *al-ghorba* or *al-taghreba* – has become deeply engrained in Palestinian consciousness and experience and eventually developed into an ontology of collective displacement. Exile describes the experiences of many refugees who were expelled during the early foundation of the State of Israel, and who were subsequently denied return and entry credentials. Exile also encompasses the constant feeling of being *out of place* and *out of time* that Palestinians experience at different junctures in the process of their self-identification.[33] Whether it is triggered by an encounter with settler colonial violence or when realizing the invisibility, stigma, and controversy attached to being Palestinian, this feeling is a primary and recurrent aspect of our lives. That said, "being refugee" has also been part of how we locate ourselves in the world and relate to one another, and others, across multiple colonial geographies. In many ways, feeling displaced has motivated our cultural inclination to reciprocate sympathy and connect with other refugees and removed peoples. (Rana, Jennifer, and I, among other Palestinian scholars, center transnational and global movements of solidarity of this kind, and their powerful meaning, in our scholarship and interdisciplinary critiques of violence.)

Unraveling the cultural connotations of Palestinian displacement also leads us to gauging the cultural practices that maintained us. One important example is reflected in our reproductive practices. Early Israeli politicians anticipated that by displacing us and growing new settlements, they would be able to create a majoritarian settler society that could outnumber Palestinians. They projected this change to already have happened by now, but this has not been the case. This is because Palestinian women, particularly in village communities such as those my family comes from, were able to reproduce and increase our national numbers far beyond Israeli expectations. It is this significant role of Palestinian women that helped us withstand genocidal agendas, expand our families across the diaspora, and make us into an ever-growing global population that defies erasure.

Another Palestinian tradition that has traveled with many of us is our caregiving practices toward the land. My maternal grandmother's story offers a powerful example. She experienced displacement twice in her life: In 1948, she was removed from Haifa to the West Bank; and in 1967, she was forced out of the West Bank with her family into nearby Jordan. Everywhere she lived, my grandmother planted the same trees to remind her of her childhood home and help her survive new ones. One difficult winter in Jordan, my grandmother's trees were exposed to a heavy snowstorm that endangered their life. She spent a long time clearing the snow off the branches, and in the process, one of her legs was severely damaged, and she was forced to lose it. While still in the hospital, she was maltreated and given medicine that conflicted with her heart disease, and she passed away as a result. My grandmother's story has deeply influenced my understanding of Palestinian refugeehood and its preludes in deep indigenous connections. Her love and care for her trees stayed with her during all her

removals until the very end. As our displacement continues to be stretched into ambiguity, the bond that my grandmother and many other Palestinians exemplify continues to be an anchor that sustains our cultural practices and alleviates our unquenched desire to go home.

Rana Sharif: It is quite compelling to situate such nuances within a Critical Refugee Studies framework that problematizes the intellectual and political parameters of what it means to be a refugee. In the case of Palestine, one cannot escape the institutional parameters set forth by agencies such as the United Nations, nor can we deny the lived experience of decades of displacement. As a result, to better understand the unique features of our status as Palestinian refugees, we must articulate such a "status" as a process of embodiment. In doing so, the intricacies of gender, race, class, sexuality, geography, etc., while being marked literally on our bodies in hosting countries, also reflect generational experiences and processes of displacement, social reproduction,[4] community building, affect, and sociality.[5] The generationality of the refugee experience relies on our elders and our youth to make sense of and reimagine the possibilities of home beyond time and space; this is a gendered, raced, and classed experience that BIPOC women have been undertaking transnationally. For Palestinians, our unique status as refugees must take into account the histories of survival and rebirth in new "homes" stitched together often by women, healers of our communities. The process of "resettlement" is one that is seen as the ultimate end to the crisis of refugeehood. However, as the field of Critical Refugee Studies has intellectually and politically demonstrated, this is not the case. The preservation of lifeworlds and the social reproduction of a displaced community are, I argue, forms of resistance that transcend nationalist discourses and are rooted in the gendered experiences of sociality. Ephemeral as time and space may be, the experiences of Palestinians are not.

Thus, it is insufficient, as Jennifer noted, to rely on institutional definitions to ensure Palestinian liberation or self-determination. These definitions are predicated on institutions of power and ultimately rely on the protracted nature of a *particular* refugeehood. That is to say, such institutions are invested in maintaining a myopic framing of refugeehood. Building on the above, the definition of a refugee claims a linear experience whereby some catastrophe produces the status of a refugee, then prompting resettlement as the ultimate solution to the catastrophe. What this definition of presumed teleological progression fails to account for is the decades of intergenerational traumas of displacement, sometimes multiple displacements, and liminality. And yet, we resist. We, Palestinian refugees, seek self-determination, liberation, and a return to our homeland as a constitutive part of our healing. It is in the preservation, telling, and retelling of our experiences that we locate our liberation and link it to our right of return. This is intrinsic to the process of decolonizing not only the experience of settler colonialism but in the narratives that have, in most cases, come to define our existence in host countries where many of our elders have had to create homes. Nearly 72 years after the Nakba, generations of Palestinians have been confronted with the violence of settler colonialism, but we have also generatively created cultural safeguards to heal from and resist the logics set forth by such violence.

Describe how your work challenges the perpetual link between Palestinian resistance and terrorism. How does this link make the violence against Palestinians incomprehensible? What are the ways in which your work disrupts these narratives?

Rana Sharif: "Terrorism" as a concept emerged in the political service of the "West." It became a transnational image that not only abjectified[6] the "other," but, perhaps more importantly, it necessitated the punitive correction of Black and Brown bodies. In fact, as Amit Rai and Jasbir Puar remind us, this image of the terrorist is a repository through which power operates.[7] We see this really in the hesitation of calling out domestic terrorism unless the perpetrator of that violence is an immigrant, refugee, or a person of color. Black and Brown bodies, namely, men, are often subjected to the material abjection and carceral correction of the image of the terrorist. My work does not make central the figure of the terrorist; rather, it recuperates a Palestinian sociality outside such violent predetermined categories.

However, it is important to understand the significance of this gendered imagery that permeates the socio-historical world we occupy. For Palestinians, the image of the terrorist is often the only (constructed) legibility allotted to us. It is as if to say, it is only through terrorism or as terrorists that Palestinians enter consciousness/being. To me, Palestinians are generative agents of their social, cultural, and political worlds. It is in the process of narrativizing Palestinian life-worlds that I locate my work. Rather than relying on or responding to the images of terrorists to tell the story of Palestinians, I look to cultural workers as their contributions set out to decolonize the trope of the terrorists by calling into question the structures of power that produce them, while also texturing the complex ways that they are gendered, raced, classed, and othered as displaced peoples. Drawing on the work of radical feminist writers, I am particularly interested in the ways in which Palestinian cultural makers, namely, women, create and encourage an ethos of resistance and rebellion as they heal through the traumas of displacement, violence, militarization, and racialization.

In my work, I am specifically interested in the articulation of Palestinian life on new media platforms, such as the photo- and video-sharing application, Instagram. I suggest that such spaces are discursive sites of revolutionary possibilities. Centering on Palestinian life, my research shows how Palestinians actively generate conceptions of identity not bound by the determinants of "terrorism." With a complex refugee population, such platforms allow for Palestinians to communicate an experience of their displacement that is rooted in the violence of Zionism and not abstracted by a condition without end. For example, on May 14, 2020, the Instagram account @documentingpalestine posted a simple image in commemoration of the Nakba: a black square box with the word "Nakba" written in white Arabic text in its center. Beneath the image reads a caption in both Arabic and English: "We will not forget and will not forgive and the resistance continues until return, the villages, the cities, the streets and the land await. What are your stories and what are your lands?" This invitation is a call to action. Palestinians are activated to share the experiences of their elders and ancestors; to never forget and to center their legacies in the face of erasure. These opportunities give legibility to those who have been systematically and violently silenced from narrativizing history, experience, and the conditions of power.

Similarly, the Critical Refugee Studies Collective's website does epistemological work. Through the "Story Maps" and "Refugee Archives" platforms, refugees are invited to participate in a preservation of lifeworlds often considered disposable.[8] The platform offers its engagers an opportunity to narrate their complex lives, share stories, and connect transnationally while centering on their unique experiences of displacement and violence. It is in this generative production of storytelling that the experiences of Palestinian refugees and other communities are humanized.

Consequently, perhaps the most appropriate question is one of the refugee agency and resistance. How do we, as Palestinian scholars working in Palestine, center the agency and resistance of Palestinians in such a manner that those characterizations of violence are undercut?

Eman Ghanayem: I am here reminded of an argument the Palestinian revolutionary and author Ghassan Kanafani made in his book *Adab al-Muqawama*, or *Resistance Literature*.[9] Kanafani argued that Palestine's anti-colonial resistance only calcified as a national movement in the 1960s because it took Palestinians almost 20 years to process the 1948 Nakba. Kanafani's statement truly reflects the deep impact of colonial trauma and its debilitating force. It took Palestinians that many years to disentangle what Zionist militias did in 1948: displace nearly 800,000 Palestinians (out of 1.4 million at the time), kill nearly 15,000, commit 70 massacres, raid 774 cities and towns, and destroy 531 of these in full.[10] This list hardly reflects the true scale of Palestinian loss and its length, but it exemplifies the colonial terror that ruptured our lives and, eventually, inspired our resistance. Accusations of terrorism that are often inflicted on Palestinians are an egregious denial of how we suffered collectively and individually for many decades. Our pain is made illegible by the forces that colonize us and repress us, and, as a result, our movement to demand justice is often misconstrued as a transgression.

In my work, I analyze indigenous movements of resistance, particularly in Palestine and Indigenous North America, as always transgressive of settler colonial boundaries and Western humanist values. Like American settler colonialism, Israel maintains itself by continuously mythologizing and stereotyping the figure of the native: the "non-existent Palestinian" echoes the erasure that produced the myth of the "dead Indian." When those natives are visible through their anti-colonial resistance, they are made into "savages" and "terrorists." To reiterate Rana's generative definition of "terrorism," this process of othering is deeply historical and pervasive. It attests to the strong bond between colonialism and racialization. Israelis and Western purveyors who propagate Palestinians as suspects of terror also read our culture as primitive, our speech as uncivil, and our actions as perverse. They do not see us as equal or enough, but as incendiary figures predisposed to crime and violence.

Rather than engage with accusations of terrorism, I instead choose to focus on Palestinian resiliency, particularly in our literature and art, as a psychological and cultural progression out of colonial trauma. I also argue that our resiliency, or *sumood*, represents a type of humanity – an anti-colonial kind of human – that defies what many have described as a Western predetermination of what is human and what is not.[11] The Palestinian human's capacity for love and self-sacrifice and their unyielding strife to protect their community and land, is anything but terrorism. It is by focusing on this non-Western model of humanity that assumptions of terror in the figures of the native and the refugee can be, and should be, disputed and eventually debunked altogether.

Jennifer Mogannam: The term "terrorism" was especially championed and propagandized in the US to mobilize support for the Zionist state and more decisive action by and growth of the US military in the aftermath of the heavily critiqued Vietnam War.[12] These characterizations of the assumption of this term actually have nothing to do with acts of violence or injury and death of civilians, as the definition would prescribe. If it were so, it would not be the Palestinians, Arabs, Iranians, or Afghans as the almost exclusive figures of the terrorists today, or even the most common figures. Rather, state-sponsored forms of "terror" would most widely fit the definition, especially in service of imperialist interests. U.S., Russian, Chinese, Israeli, and other national militaries are prime examples of state-sponsored militarism against civilian populations who do so for broader global control and power in areas like the global arms trade, surveillance technology, and natural resource extraction.

My work disrupts the Palestinian resistance–terrorism dichotomy by challenging commonly understood notions of violence, by situating them within the Zionist settler colonial process and structure, and by uplifting Palestinian agencies and self-determination. It looks specifically at the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon and its reproduction as gendered in relation to the powers it seeks to free itself from. The revolution is a period of self-proclaimed struggle by the Palestinian people and institutions between 1968 and 1982 and the time when the Palestinian emerges as a global image of "terror." My examination includes everyday women as well as iconic women like Leila Khaled, whose resistance has played a role in the global framing of both freedom fighters and terrorist discourse. I look at the various methods and strategies of Palestinian resistance praxis as tools for actualizing liberation as well as how those praxes empowered various bases in their quotidian resistance, particularly, but not exclusively, women.

In my work, I look at the quotidian practices and discourses of revolutionary women and men, how women's labor is both essential to and gendered in value in the revolution, and how they locate gender liberation within the national liberation frame and through these revolutionary activities. These methods, tactics, and strategies of revolution were assumed worldwide at the same time – the mid-twentieth century – especially through resistance practices like armed struggle and other modes of popular, sector-based organizing. I deconstruct the binary assumptions around violence and the tensions between national liberation frameworks and feminism through the lens of statelessness and refugeehood. The characterization of terrorism generally misconstrues deep understandings of violence and elides relations of power, colonialisms, and empire through the global racialized logic of domination. As such, I prefer not to engage the concept directly so as not to reinforce its discursive power.

My research, including some forthcoming articles and my book project, serves to normalize Palestinian agencies in resisting colonial violence as decolonial praxis and offers power, nuance, and critique to various themes, including armed struggle, militancy, resistance, and revolution, as well as internal dynamic reflections on questions of gender, age, and class. A central theme in my work is the critical interrogation of decolonization and decolonial praxis for stateless refugees who have indigenous claims to a land colonized by Zionist settler colonists; thus, I examine the co-constitutive nature of refuge, indigeneity, and statelessness to the Palestinian identity and transnational nation formation. Palestinian oral narratives offer people's documentation of the diverse experiences and understandings of the Palestinian revolution and recount the significance of mass engagement in practices

of self-determination. It is by elucidating Palestinian pride and liberatory praxis on their own terms, as opposed to or in conjunction with dominant power articulations of their struggle that I believe we can begin to create alternative narratives that combat hegemonic tropes like terror that get automatically inscribed onto our national community.

How does the return emerge as a central issue in Palestinian refugee identity? How does the return become part of a larger project of decolonization?

Eman Ghanayem: What we have outlined so far is the complexity of the status of Palestinians as refugees, and a major part of that is the Right of Return. The return of Palestinians does not only entail the return of the Palestinian people but also the return of Palestinian lands, the recognition of Palestinian histories, and reparations for lost lives and livelihoods. Return, or *al-awda*, is an integral part of Palestinian culture, politics, and hope. Palestinians hold on to their right to return and centralize it in liberation movements because it would finally create the kind of life that they had no access to for decades: a life with a knowable past, a self-governed present, and a positive future. Decolonization requires a true recognition of all that was lost during Palestine's long colonial history, a recognition that would entail transformative justice and real amendments. For Palestinians, *al-awda* encompasses our decolonial philosophy. It not only serves as a political talking point but it co-constitutes our culture and imagination.

One popular saying in Palestinian culture is "بكرة بنحررها" ("we will free her tomorrow"), sometimes phrased as "بكرة بنرجعها" ("we will return her tomorrow"). Here, the temporality attached to return is also key to understanding the concept's significance. Tomorrow means immediacy and tenacity. Though the political how-to of return has oftentimes polarized our community and allowed for foreign brokers to encroach on our vision, it continues to serve as a cultural gathering point that joins Palestinians at home, in camps, in Israeli prisons, and across all parts of the diaspora.

It is important here to state that, for Palestinians, and indigenous resistances generally speaking, decolonization goes beyond the metaphors of liberation and return.[13] As important as they are for our cultural sustenance, when observed uncritically, these metaphors can inadvertently be used to obscure the urgent need to end colonial violence. Palestinian scholars like Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, to reference one of many examples, have argued for important interventions that could extend necessary protections for vulnerable Palestinians, women, and children who are presently exposed to direct settler violence.[14] Decolonization is – and if not, should be – deeply invested in interventional practices, alongside social and political changes, that could safeguard Palestinians from constant harm. Issues that plague our communities in Palestine – obstructed movement, lack of access to proper health care, administrative detention and the detention of young adults and children, extrajudicial executions, limited access to water, and severe surveillance among other problems – constitute priorities and first steps to continuing a decolonial agenda that can ultimately culminate in eliminating our colonization and reinstating our homes and freedoms.

Jennifer Mogannam: Refugeehood serves as a daily reminder of the necessity for return, with the Palestinian refugee camp being the most notable site of this reminder, as well as of fostering a communal culture around this question. The camp has become a temporary

home, and a communal and familial space, but only to the point in which decolonization has becomes actualized. Without the continuity of the intergenerational consciousness of the necessity for return – return of people, of land, and of so much more – our struggle could not carry a project of decolonization to its fullest potential. Attempted erasures and exiles of Palestinian refugee camps, their peoples, and their production of consciousness (i.e., Yarmouk as of late or Tel al-Zaatar historically) have aimed at liquidating the Palestinian refugee "problem." By erasing the physical space of the camp and its embedded community, these acts attempt to erase the collective consciousness of the Palestinian refugee, while the Western world offers pathways to citizenship as a method of relinquishing claims to return.

The notion of return and its relinquishing are reflected in the eventual rise of the national bourgeoisie from the revolutionary ranks in the past 25 or so years, who shifted the Palestinian liberation trajectory from an anti-colonial struggle to a state-building project. While many of the official Palestinian leaders embodied the student, working, and middle classes, their continuation of leadership through the revolution and into solely diplomatic strategies being forced at the hands of the colonizers and imperialist powers has allowed for their ascendance into the political and economic elite classes through state-building attempts. The adoption of state frameworks on disappearing slivers of Palestinian land, crystallized through the Oslo Accords of 1993 and its subsequent establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the attempt to establish statehood through neoliberal, capitalist modes under occupation, reflect further the erasure of return possibilities and a complete betrayal of the Palestinian refugee. As such, the return framework is not just rhetorical.

The return framework is a necessary reminder of Palestinian refugee life, steadfastness, and survival.[15] A reminder to our collective consciousness as a people that we cannot participate in exchanging parts of our transnational community for others. The refugee right of return, in my opinion, is the most crucial component for encompassing the full scope of the question of Palestinian liberation and self-determination as a collective. Return is *the* symbol and actionable principle of the Palestinian refugee struggle and a vision of what liberation must envelop.

Rana Sharif: Motivated by works of Fanon and others, decolonization is understood in this context as the complete evisceration of the (settler) colonizer's systems and structures. In the Palestinian case, this also means dismantling any system that seeks to deny people access to space and place, which requires both immediate and material responses as well as longitudinal interventions. As a Palestinian, this means the sacred right of our return is inextricably linked to the project of decolonization. For me, personally, to return means the right to the space and place of my community and tribe; it means an opportunity for intergenerational healing; it means the possibility to build a community beyond the violences of settler colonialism; it means access to the totality of the land, from the River to the Sea.

The right to return is neither proverbial nor abstract: there is a land nestled between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea to which our decolonization is oriented. For all Palestinians, whether internally displaced or in the refugee camps of Syria or Jordan, or "resettled" in the United States, we all know *that* Palestine, the Palestine of return. The land is our compass and citational index; our hyphenated identities only exist in relation to it. It

is perhaps best articulated through indigeneity that Palestinians are linked to the physical land. The right of return promises a place of healing from the past and the possibility to look toward a future. The right of return thus forces a reclamation of land, identity, and self-determination through transgenerational healing and liberation. By returning, our elders can show us the land of their parents and retell the stories of a stolen time; our parents can heal the scars of militarization, occupation, and their subsequent displacement; and we, their children and grandchildren, can learn the ways of our land. Our return represents not only an action but also the moral barometer of decolonization. It grounds us in our steadfast commitment to self-preservation and determination. Our return to it is the only way decolonization comes to fruition in its entirety.

It is with a sense of unquestioning urgency then that the right of return be centered on all aspects of Palestinian liberation and actuated. The protracted nature of displacement central to refugeehood reveals a condition of life that is marked by anguish, loss, and trauma. Within the context of a perpetual state of refugeehood, Palestinian existence is fleeting and transient. The land, therefore, offers a sense of permanency and stability, a place where we may rest our heads and, in a restorative way, conceive of futurity. And for the future of all that is Palestine and Palestinian, *we shall return*!

Notes

1. Note on the use of "we": Throughout the piece, we, the contributors of this forum, employ a collective "we" that is rooted in Palestinian indigeneity and our connection to the land of Palestine. It is in our commitment to decolonization, the right of return, and to centering the land of Palestine in our works that we utilize a communal "we." While we remain cognizant of the multiplicity of Palestinian experiences and the disproportionate ways we are differently displaced and harmed, we see great benefit in emphasizing how settler colonialism affected us all and produced a collective agenda for liberation. This collective "we" is also a gesture to the creation of a collective Palestinian narrative and identity through the Palestinian movement as a strategy of resistance, one in which the refugee and the peasant play a central role in inspiring and framing our movement.
2. Yên Lê Espiritu's study of U.S. discourse around Vietnamese refugees establishes that critique, which I believe applies to the Palestinian case. See "Toward a Critical Refugee Study: The Vietnamese Refugee Subject in US Scholarship," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (2006): 410–13.
3. I derive the expression that Palestinian are out of place and out of time from Palestinian French historian Elias Sanbar in his essay, "Out of Place, Out of Time," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 16, no. 1 (2001): 87–94.
4. See, for example: Neferti Tadiar, "Life-Times of Disposability within Global Neoliberalism," *Social Text* 21, no. 2 (115) (Summer 2013): 19–48; and Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *The Massachusetts Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1972): 81–100.
5. See for example: Lisa Taraki, ed, *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006).
6. Here, I draw on Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject to suggest Palestinian bodies are constructed, and consequently represented, as abject in an attempt to demonstrate their existance as disrputive of "identity, system, and order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
7. Puar and Rai, "Monster, Terrorist, Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots," *Social Text* 20, no. 3 (72) (Fall 2002): 117–148, 119.

8. See note 4 above.
9. Kanafani, *Adab al-Muqawama* (Beirut: Rimal Publication, 2012).
10. Ola Awad, "The Conditions of the Palestinian People via Statistical Figures and Findings," *Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics* (May 11, 2017), http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=1925.
11. Sylvia Wynter's scholarship greatly inspires this critique of the category of the human, specifically her pivotal essay: "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being / Power / Truth / Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.
12. Melani McAlister, "A cultural history of the war without end," *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (2002): 439–55.
13. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40. Tuck and Yang's widely circulated article speaks against abstractions of decolonization in the context of Native struggle. This approach resonates with Palestinian scholars and activists who strongly defend the right to resist colonization and obtain the right of return.
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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Eman Ghanayem is the 2021–2023 Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Comparative Literature at Cornell University. Her research examines Palestinian and American Indian literatures, and the larger context of indigenous and refugee narratives, through a framework of interconnected settler colonialisms and comparative indigeneities.

Jennifer Mogannam is a UC President's Postdoctoral Fellow in the Departments of Anthropology and Gender, Sexuality, & Women's Studies at UC Davis. Her research examines twentieth and twenty-first century Palestinian and Arab transnational movements and third world solidarities, with an eye for analyzing movement praxis for liberated futures.

Rana Sharif is currently completing her doctoral degree in Comparative Literature and Languages from the University of California, Riverside. Her research explores the method and medium of new and digital media in the context of Palestine.