

**Bodies that walk, bodies that talk, bodies that love. Palestinian women refugees,
affectivity and the politics of the ordinary**

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Abstract

In this article I interrogate what is lost in war and displacement through the memories of elderly Palestinian refugee women who remember through their body and what their body has endured. I want to suggest that their affective, sensorial, bodily memories excite modes of relating to space and place that shy away from the abstract nostalgia for a lost nation, while bringing to light the closeness and concreteness of things and subjects, reviving bodily vulnerability and grief for the loss of the ordinary and the intimate. I focus on women's recollection of their bodies walking, swimming, crossing through an unfamiliar territory with unknown people to reach safety. Taken in their metaphor as "social 'muscles'" (Hardt 2011, 680), as bodily and emotional drives that extend across and blur the boundaries of intimate and social spaces, affective memories can serve as a political horizon that redesigns, in Arendtian terms, the love for the nation as love for the people and for existing in the world (Young-Bruhl 1982).

I have never in my life “loved” any people or collective – neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love “only” my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. (Arendt 2007: 466-467)¹

Introduction: the body and affects¹

It is September of 2013, and as every summer for the last few years I am conversing with a group of Palestinian refugee women in a refugee camp in Amman.² We are sitting in the courtyard of one of the houses and, as I am visibly pregnant, talks perhaps inevitably revolve around questions of bodies and births, marital lives, breastfeeding and childcare. In the lives of the women I am talking to, these occurrences are knotted in long-term experiences of displacement and temporariness, as most of them have been expelled, or fled their ‘homes’ multiple times across their lives. The creation of Israel on Palestinian land during the 1948 war and the 1967 Israeli expansion meant not only their own dispossession but the beginning of an exiled and precarious life where death and life, loss and recovery intertwined as permanent features of their existence.³ Palestinian women lost their babies, children and men, they witnessed the separation of their families, and they were abruptly deprived of their habitual modes of existing and securing their livelihoods, rooted in their homes and land.

Memories of war, expulsion and displacement inevitably provide the frame and the context for women’s recollections, but it is their bodies and the field of affects that often convey the unspeakable of the traumas they were subject to. The notion of affect, as the “name we give to

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those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion” (Seigworth & Gregg 2010: 1; Ahmed 2004), aptly captures the forces and movements, or the paralysis or neutrality, that can derive from the overwhelming nature of events such as wars and expulsions, in particular those that go unnoticed in mainstream historical accounts.

Like other long term destitute and displaced communities, Palestinians have struggled to produce narratives and testimonies that could make visible and legitimize their subaltern histories of expulsion, suffering, dispossession (Pappé 2006). However, in the “nationalist re-writing of history” (Doumani 2007: 17), certain genres and registers have silenced others.

Similarly to modern moral discourse which has dislodged the body, affectivity and emotions from the public sphere, requiring a dispassionate subject to speak in the name of universality and impartiality, nationalist grids have marginalized the “sensuous, desiring and emotional experiences” that tie subjects to what Iris Marion Young defines as the “concreteness of things” (1985: 385).

Rosemary Sayigh - a pioneer feminist ethnographer of Palestinian refugees (1997; 1998b; 1998a) - suggested that there is a need to historicize “the home, gender, and sexuality” (1998a, 167) by registering narratives and actions that have been effaced and which retrieval is essential if we are to fracture national-ist sensibilities and histories.

This article takes on that endeavor by investigating the embodied memories of refugee women and the fields of affects: sensory, perceptual, non cognitive movements, vital forces beyond the realm of knowing which connect bodies to the world (Massey 2005). Seigworth and Gregg’s formulation of affect as a molecular force, a vital emerging movement exceeding emotions, is highly compelling here. Affect can be noticed “within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the minuscule or molecular events of the unnoticed. The ordinary and its extra-.” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 2). Careful not to reproduce a dangerous universalist take on affect (Ahmed 2004), I recognize that bodies are inscribed in power geometries which mark their “affective capacities” in unequal and diverse ways. (Tolia-Kelly 2006:213,)

My use of affect here relates to its power as a metaphor of what “goes unnoticed”, particularly in liberal, nationalist or feminist frames, and its openness to the not always cognitively induced, or politically driven, conducts and ways of remembering (Massumi 2010).

Affect enables the hearing of what Dina Georgis cogently calls the “better story”, stories “that accounts for loss by noticing the enigmas of survival” (2013:18). The women’s embodied stories are “better” stories of survival from war traumas, which were experienced through the body or narrated as embodied memories. They are unexplored stories of bodies’ relations to places, memories of emotions and emotional memories where love and bodily vulnerability feature as central, foregrounding attachment to home while conveying estrangement towards rhetoric of homeland.

Many refugee women who appear in this essay are elderly, not educated and are from a peasant background. They remember through the body and what their body endured. Their narratives and postures convey emotional, perceptual, bodily experiences rather than facts-based narratives. Their memories and their ways of narrating them are inscribed in a plot made of ordinary and domestic interruptions, affective ties and relations, bodily experiences of place and space at times of war. They are “contrapuntal sensory histories” (Feldman 1994: 415) which break through modern, national sensibilities.⁴

In a redefinition of the Marxist insight that love is one of the “senses or organs by which humans relate to each other and the world”, Michael Hardt (2011: 680) suggests that love can be a political notion in the construction of a radically new social configuration. The latter will be based not on property or “having”, but on “being” together through differences. Freed from relations of appropriation and possession, a new concept of love could erase and take the place of the capitalist function of property. Love, in a radically new society, will have the power “to generate social bonds and organize social relationships” (*ibid.*: 681).

Hardt’s approach to love as a radical political concept offers a stimulating point of departure to think of Palestinian refugee women’s memories as evocative alternatives to nationalist paradigms of existence and co-existence. Yet “love” could be as powerful as too idealized a framework for making sense of the ways we attach to the world. Lauren Berlant’s notion of “attachments” (2011: 686) offers a more nuanced possibility, one that recognizes the structures of inequalities, as well as the variety and ambivalences, of our modes of relating, modes which involve: “proximity, solidarity, collegiality, friendship, the light touch and intermittent ones, and then the hatreds, aversions, and not caring” (*ibid.*: 687), as some of the many forms that compose our webs of affect.

I want to suggest that Palestinian women's affective, sensorial, bodily memories excite modes of relating to, and feeling for, not the loss of an abstract nation, but the closeness and concreteness of things and subjects. Their sharp emotions and affects for their intimate spaces and people, together with their ability to foster new relations of closeness and solidarity in displacement, are eloquent of what Lauren Berlant calls an "infrastructure for proximity": a web of affects that connects people and which, through such connection, both creates and allows for an imagination of a different "habitable material present, or world" (2011: 684). Read through the metaphor of "social 'muscles'" (Hardt 2011: 680) - bodily and emotional drives that extend across and blur the boundaries of intimate and social spaces - affective solidarities can serve as a political horizon that redesigns, in Arendtian terms, the love for the nation as love for concrete human relations and for existing in the world (Young-Bruhl 1982).⁵

Nationalism and the body of victimhood or resistance

Studies on and around Palestinian resistance and memory have privileged a nationalist notion of the political, focusing on how women and men actively resisted in the struggle for self-determination within the public context of demonstrations, battlegrounds, processions, armed attacks. The body, and emotions that evoke the domestic and the ordinary as primary frameworks of affect and action, have not been given significance.

There has been an important and growing research showing how the body has been a central target of Israeli violence (Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Ihmoud, and Dahir-Nashif 2014; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2005: 116, 124), but also a field over which, as a result of occupation and resistance, gender orders are destabilized or preserved (Hasso 2005: 29; Amireh 2003: 758-760).⁶ Particularly in a context where, at least since the late 1980s, the increased physical violence of the occupation exacerbated resistance, martyrdom and defiance as masculine rites of passage into adulthood, families responded by sanctioning women's activism, and their bodily exposure in public, as dangerous and inappropriate (Petee 1994: 44-45).

On another level, nationalist iconography, literature, poetry and political discourse often resorted to gender bodily metaphors to symbolize Palestine as a fertile woman or as an idealized motherland evoking and igniting both familiar and national-ist affects (Amireh 2003;

Kanafani 2008: 304). Such is the case of one of the most renowned poems by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, where nostalgia for the motherly nourishment he received in his childhood blurs in his attachment to the homeland which he was forcibly evicted from, and in whose nest he longs to return, as the concluding verses of the poem “To my mother” recite:

I am old
Give me back the star maps of childhood
So that I
Along with the swallows
Can chart the path
Back to your waiting nest. (quot. in Al Areqi 2014: 37-38)

Other studies have analyzed the body as a site of political resistance. Hasso (2005) looked at how the emergence of the first Palestinian women suicide bombers during the second Intifada defied both the Israeli and the Palestinian social and political heteronormative orders, which opposed agency to passivity, resistance to victimhood.⁷ Lori Allen writes powerfully of the display of the suffering and wounded body as a site of political subjectivation whereby Palestinians objectify their suffering and become political subjects simultaneously, on the “threshold between the human and the inhuman” (2009: 168).

Only rarely has the body been interpreted through the lens of affectivity. Giorgio Curti addresses the politics of memory as politics of war in Palestine in his analysis of the attempt at erasure of the suicide bomber’s body from memory and the affect/effect of the self-blowing body in the occupied space (Curti 2008). If bodies and landscapes are living relations enacted by and enacting emotional attachments to place, the suicide bomber’s body produces a claim through affect, by marking “an indelible presence through absence that cannot be forgotten... until it can (re-)constitute an emotional relationship with landscape and place.” (2008:114).

Aside from this notable exception, most research continues to perceive the body as the subject/object of violence or of resistance. Nationalist imaginaries perpetuate the conflation of agency with bodies that struggle or act in the public arena, or with bodies that mobilize their ascribed gender roles for the cause by, for example, “birthing the nation” (Kanaaneh 2002). Feminist imaginaries, on the other hand, attribute agency to bodies that challenge gender or nationalist orders. In all these frameworks, the domestic and the ordinary exist in opposition to

the “political” instead of as politically productive realms in their own terms, with resistance and the public space framing the legible forms of the modern political subject.

Affective memories and the political role of the ordinary

An important endeavor of some anthropologists and oral historians has been to unmask the power relations inscribed in the work of memory where some voices were silenced and others made authoritative (Sayigh 1998b; Sayigh 1997; Sa’di & Abu-Lughod 2007). Humphries and Khalili (2007) note that history narration has traditionally been delegated to the male kin of the family, therefore women’s oral histories have been crucial in retrieving their otherwise invisible roles in resuscitating family economies and livelihoods in the aftermath of the Nakba and other traumatic war events.

Scholarly work on gendered memories and narratives pointed to how women were never fully complacent to nationalist or hegemonic ways of telling the story (Sayigh 1998a; Sayigh 1998b). This research has in many ways crucially fractured nationalist orthodoxies and instead emphasized the trauma generated by the nationalist imperative to glorify martyrdom through bodily dispositions which required the silencing, if not the repression, of women’s emotions, grief and pain (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2003: 405).

Here I am however interested in a further project, one that takes it upon itself to investigate the potential of the ordinary as a horizon for a radical political imagination. My emphasis is on narratives that displace nationalist affects by opening up other types of affects nested in the concreteness of ordinary relations, attachments and responsibilities (Militz & Schurr 2015).

The refugee women’s memories presented here are marked by continuous reference to disruptions and ruptures of daily ordinary life, threats to women’s fertility, struggles over childbearing and caring in displacement. Memories stumble on women’s own bodily vulnerability and that of others; they display or revitalize their grief and pain for themselves and their close ones, they convey an “ethic of care” (Tronto 1993) which voices their incessant work of containing the pain and remaking homes creatively. If grief is, as Butler suggests, a *political* process of “disorientation” of the self (2004, 30) that can lead us to be open to considering the vulnerability of others, the recognition of our bodily vulnerability and loss, our precarity, can be the very condition that allows us to bond and tie together, a precondition for remaking the human as a new collective subject (*ibid.*, 49).

But how are we to understand and describe emotions and in particular those of others? I take the view here that emotions involve “both meaning and feeling, mind and body, both culture and biology” (Leavitt 1996: 515). Leavitt suggests that given that emotions are not biological universal responses but culturally and socially specific, the best we as ethnographers can do is to “play on one's own and one's reader's emotions to attempt to convey those of the people under study, not only in their meanings but also in their feelings” (*ibid.*: 518).

The loss of home. Affectivity and memory in the making of space and place

What does it mean to take seriously the notion that “bodies remember” to use Didier Fassin’s evocation? As he argues in his ethnography of AIDS and violence in South Africa (2007), there is no way to know exactly the meanings that the body and suffering have for our interlocutors. All we can note is that narratives and actions we listen to and observe are processes of subjectification, they are ways in which women and men become subjects and live their lives as a story within a history.

Let me turn to Umm Hassan’s words and work of memory. Umm Hassan, a refugee living in Bak’a camp, Amman, is sitting with her neighbor Umm Nasser in the courtyard of their houses as we are conversing about their lives. We are lying on the floor on a couple of thin foam mattresses covered with colorful material, which will become some of the children’s beds at night. Her legs crossed under a wide *thawb* (tunic), her head leaning slightly and a light white *mandil* (veil) slipping down from her head onto her shoulders, Umm Hassan’s posture is common among women her age and status, expressing a long awaited body relaxation and freedom from hegemonic imperatives to embody and convey modesty. Hidden inside her embroidered *thawb*, Umm Hassan’s persona looks monumental. As her body acquires the status of the authoritative narrator, her gestures and movements, her tone and jokes, her tired yet lively eyes convey fragility and resilience, fatigue and strength, the physical burden and yet the high status derived from having given birth to numerous children. Her personal story is unique and yet Umm Hassan’s body, clothing and posture hint at a common experience of displacement, and express the collective predicament of once peasant women, turned into dispossessed refugees in 1948 and many more times subsequently.

Throughout her life, mostly consumed moving across refugee camps and precarious shelters, Umm Hassan gave birth to thirteen children, two of whom passed away soon after birth. Under those harsh circumstances, Umm Hassan’s breastfed her children, her daughters’, and

also the children of any woman who needed it: “Whoever needed to go out to the market”, she says with a proud and self-complacent smile, “brought their children to me to be breastfed!” “I saw it...she breastfed the whole camp”, Umm Nasser confirms enthusiastically.

Clearly, Umm Nasser and Umm Hassan attributed to this bodily performance a heroic status, the expression of a hyper nurturing power that became also an act of intergenerational solidarity among women. In the background of the suspension and violent disruption of gender roles forcibly enacted by the loss of place and space, Umm Hassan extends her nurturing role beyond her domestic or intimate realm, and suspends and reconfigures kin relations in the new shrank microcosm of the camp. There are other spheres in which caring and nurturing roles extend beyond the immediate family and are enacted and unfolded in a network of care and support among neighbors, friends or sisters, simultaneously engendering a collective camp-family ethos. Women unrelated to one another have over the years helped and supported each other in cooking, caring for their children and the elderly, and several other livelihood functions, essentially taking the role of fictional sisters, mothers, uncles and daughters (Allan 2009; 2014). “Everyone keeps their doors open. I sleep with the door open. No one would close their doors here” Umm Hassan was adamant to underline, foregrounding how the camp is symbolically re-signified as an extended family-collectivity.

When the camp-place is reconstituted as home, the borders of privacy, honor and shame are however redrawn analogously. “We used to sleep, have children and eat all in one room” Umm Hassan stated loudly with an embarrassed smile while searching for a complicit recognition of what the curtailment of domestic space meant for her and other refugee camp women like her. With home reinvented in a compressed, crowded camp-place, women often referred to the shame ensuing from consuming acts of sexuality and reproduction in the first place - but also more simply domestic and family business - nearly overtly, exposing them to the ears and gazes of kin and neighbors, an effect of displacement which violated their privacy and mortified their honor.

For several of the women I talked to, a salient aspect of their life as refugees rested in the destitution of place compelled by the shrinking of domestic space. Women’s grief is over the loss of the intimate and private space (Berlant 1998), their agency is expressed in their striving to reinvent or renegotiate boundaries of privacy and intimacy across a space that is constantly curtailed, and a time that unfolds as a series of violent events. Throughout the geography of family separations and shifting shelters, women were creatively engaged in place-making

through transforming the transience enforced by their continuous evictions into the permanence of “home”, understood not as the reproduction of a static identity or nostalgic place, but as a site of dynamic affective, social relations and connections (Massey 1994). Read in those terms, place-home-nation is far from the bound, or allegorical gendered nationalist, notion, which poses women’s reproductive roles as central for retrieving the lost nation and identity. Yet, and further, the ordinary is open and productive of change rather than merely epitomizing the sight of closure and preservation of the past against the violence of the eventful.

As Umm Hassan continues remembering and narrating about her past she stumbles on a significant traumatic event, when her cousin and nephew were killed during an attack - sometimes in the eighties she recalls - an operation that failed because one of their companions may have betrayed the others. Her recollection of facts and dates is muddled, her narration does not follow the prosaic, celebratory and factual based genre commonly displayed to account for glorified stories of martyrdom, as the unclear circumstances of their death may have casted a gloomy shadow around this particular attack. Indeed, nobody else I had previously spoken to in the camp had pointed to Umm Hassan’s as a household to visit neither in relation to her status as a relative of a martyr, nor for the nurturing role she heroically extended to the camp-family.

Umm Hassan remembers and narrates of her journey from Jordan to the West Bank, after forty days of the failed operation, to collect the pieces of the dismembered bodies that were left on the site, to bring them back so that they could be given burial. In this act of remembering and narrating, Umm Hassan’s voice shows no particular distress, but her hands and body speak excitingly. Her hands point to and embrace her waist, where the flesh was wrapped in a piece of cloth she used to keep around herself. Memories hesitate, as her hands design in the air the shape of the tree where the body parts of her deceased male kin were found. Next, her body performs the act of picking up one of the man’s boot that was lying on the ground - a ghostly material remnant, which allowed for the identification of the dead by his father.

In her work on violence and nation in India, Veena Das (2007) interrogates the relation between the collective and the subjective, and between genre and the individual emplotment of stories. In her persuasive ethnography, those who experienced violence - whether immediately or through a persistent and actualized “ecology of fear” - did not always feel compelled to tell stories of violence, or when they did, their words had a frozen quality to them, which showed

their burned and numbed relation to life (*ibid.*: 11) Similarly, in Umm Hassan's emplotment the voice is dispassionate, almost numb, unable to utter the horror and death: it is her body that remembers, it is on her body that "the past has made its mark" (Fassin 2007: 175).

One would be tempted to think of Umm Hassan as a Palestinian Antigone, a heroic female figure moved by compassion and kinship to give decent and dignified burial to her male kin, martyred in an unclear circumstance. Yet, there was nothing heroic about the ways in which Umm Hassan herself talked about her tragic journey, neither she recollected it through the prism of martyrdom and resistance. She displayed no lamentation or ululations - bodily gestures that conventionally mark the commemorations of martyrs and resistance heroes, and are part of the vast array of performances inscribed within a nationalist ethos (Petee 1997: 115; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2003: 393). On the contrary, Umm Hassan seemed to present her role in the event as part of her ordinary duties, not dissimilar from preparing food, or fetching water or, as she used to do in the past, harvesting and cropping the fields.

What we experience with the body and through the body is no less constitutive of political subjectivities than liberal agency to protest in public, take up arms in armed struggles or mobilizing traditional gender roles in the context of resistance. Umm Hassan's embodied narrative underscores the incessant and extraordinary redefinition of care in a context of forced displacement, precarity and violence. Her redefined nurturing role contributes to create a sense of the ordinary that sustains life against the loss of place and space and is exemplary of processes of subjectification that take place across the private and the public, connecting the ordinary and the eventful in a life continuum.

The impetus to remake the ordinary in the face of destitution, violence and loss of meaning emerges as Umm Hassan and other women's predominant political engagement. Yet, as we will see next, it is the deprivation of home rather than the loss of the homeland that dominates women's work of memory and sense of loss.

Ordinary temporalities

Palestinian refugee women I talked to witnessed many traumatic moments: the Nakba, the Naksa, Black September, the "war of the camps"⁸ are just a few of the violent events that disrupted their existence. Often, women recollected their life histories, and signalled birth and

deaths of their loved ones, by reference to the several traumatic and violent events that marked and propelled their long term, and still ongoing, exiles.

Umm Wala is an elderly woman who now lives in Wihdat refugee camp in Amman. Originally from Ramleh and twice refugee, her narrative epitomizes the ways in which history and ordinary actualities of life, like births or marriages, are interwoven in one single genre where war and displacement feature as prominent life marking experiences.

My brother and I were born before '48, and the others were born after '48.⁹ One was born in 1953, one in 1969 and one in 1964, I think...Something like that. My sister was born in the 1950s. She was born one year after we left. She was born when King Abdullah [Abdullah I bin al-Hussein, King of Jordan] was killed. And then in '67, we were having breakfast and we heard the Jews' airplanes. I remember. We were having breakfast, and they started their airstrikes.

While domestic and ordinary life passages are deeply marked, crosscut, intermingled and signified by political events, it is the realm of the ordinary that acquires centre stage as the site of women's political subjectivation. The ordinary is not in opposition to, but it is rather the main sight of the eventful. It is the seizure of ordinary existence, which is at once an individual and a collective deprivation, that takes precedence over the loss of the homeland in the narration of erasure recounted by women like Umm Wala .

“We left our breakfast and went on foot from Ramallah to Gerico. We walked a lot. We saw big villages. We saw mountains” she continues, echoing several other women's accounts of their exhausting marches towards safety. War is primarily experienced through a body that walk and it is recounted as a bodily experience. It is the devastating, sudden interruption of ordinary temporalities, which propelled the daunting discovery of an unknown territory through long exhausting marches amidst death and life. In 1967, when refugees flew for the second (and for some, the third or fourth) time, waiting at the King Hussein bridge, connecting the West to the East Bank, and “sleeping” with masses of unknown people, was common. Many women lingered over their startling process of walking for days and swimming across the river Jordan after the Israeli army blew up the bridge, as Umm Wala recalls:

We spent a week at the Bridge, until our turn came and they let us cross. They had put wood on the Bridge so that we could cross as the Jews blew up the Bridge. So they put some wood and we would cross over the wood. Some crossed over the water. It was deep in some places.

Some people drowned...some people used to know where the shallow water was so that they could cross.

The long days of walking as they fled their villages, and the shock and fear for leaving their intimate and familiar spaces to endear into unfamiliar landscapes, is prominent in women's memories and is narrated as an extraordinary and traumatic physical effort. Fleeing to safety features as a daunting physical experience of promiscuity of bodies, of life and death, and the physical memory of the profanation of the sacrality of death, as it is memorialized in the recollection of walking with and through a concoction of bodies, dead and alive. In one case, a woman remembered having to walk along and beneath corpses:

So our grandfather took us and we walked from Jericho to the Jordan Valley. It was horrifying. I remember the walk to this day, we would be walking, and corpses would be strewn along the road beneath our feet. We'd be walking over their bodies, as they died from the warplanes and heavy shooting. Children, men, women...

The experience of being a subject is always the experience of a limit that constitutes the subject's vision of the world. As Das argues in the context of her ethnography of violence and partition in India (2007), although we tend to think of agency as embedded within acts of escaping the ordinary or the domestic, the latter can be precisely the limit through which we see the world and whereby we engage in processes of subjectivation, while the body is the border through which individuals make the world their own.

“It happened in Irtas...”. Affectivity and performative politics

Umm Muhammad is an eighty-three years old refugee woman living in Doha, a neighborhood extending from Dheisheh refugee camp into Beitlahem, in the West Bank. She carries onto her body the scars of the violence and uprooting that happened in 1948 and in subsequent years, as she and her family continued moving from one camp to the next, from one home to another, in search for a safe life. The first time she had a miscarriage was in 1948, as she was escaping from the Jewish militias who were approaching Ras Abu Ammar, implementing the project of erasing the indigenous population (Pappé 2006).

Together with other women, Umm Muhammad had the role of going back and forth to the village to rescue as many items as possible from their houses, and help the elderly escape. Pregnant, she recounted having to carry over her head all the properties she could collect. On

one of these journeys back to help her mother in law escaping, Umm Muhammad felt a deep pain that she endured for two long days, eventually ending in a miscarriage. “It happened in a room in Irtas”, the village they escaped to, Umm Muhammad recalls mournfully, “after we reached Irtas, at night I had pain and lost the baby...”. In the same room where she was losing her baby her sister in law was giving birth. “We were in Irtas in one room, ten people, in one room, and my husband’s brother’s wife was pregnant, and she gave a birth to the baby in that room”, she evoked. As Umm Muhammad recalls, her narrative tangibly conveys the exhaustion that her family’s daily survival entailed during the first critical moments after the forced uprooting:

We lived in Irtas for six months, and for two months in that room. We were two families. Women would sleep inside and the men outside. It was horrible, we were cold, and we would go outside to try to find some food and wood so that we could eat and be warm. Then we left to Dheisheh camp...After we moved to [the village of] Beit Jala...there was no water in the house we lived in...We walked everyday to go and get the water.

After less than a year Umm Muhammad was again pregnant. She recalls: “I was eight months pregnant...and the Jews [the Israeli army] came [made an incursion] during Christmas day, they came to the house we were in...We were almost four families in the same house”. At that time, Umm Muhammad wasn’t home, yet she wasn’t spared injury. “The Jews shot me while I was out fetching the water... here look... this is from the bullet” she told me while lifting her dress to show the scar left by the bullet on her stomach. Umm Muhammad’s memory now flows unrelentingly,

I had another daughter, everyone had left the house, and my daughter was still inside ...she was little... so I came back and took my daughter, before the Jews put a bomb under the house, and they bombed our house... I ran away with her and left everything behind me... they shot me, but I thank God my daughter was just slightly affected by the bullet... I told my husband to take our daughter and leave me there, he left ... I was trying to walk... I would walk and sit a little, because I felt that the baby inside me wanted to go outside me, then I sat somewhere and I couldn’t move.

Now the pace of Umm Muhammad’s narration runs fast and with lucid precision, yet ending with memories of another loss: “...I lost her, she died from the bullet. It was in 1953”, she remembers, mapping on her body the visible sign of the tragic forfeiting of her own and her family’s life as they attempted to reconstruct their home yet again, across their multiple forced

displacements. Umm Muhammad's body speaks and remembers, thereby resisting the "obliteration of the mark left by history" (Fassin 2007: 175).

Center stage is the tragic choice which Um Muhammad is forced to make then, and at further violent junctures, between her husband and daughter's safety and her own. Injured and unable to run away, she choose to be left on her own with the baby she was expecting and carrying inside. It is the meaning of this act and its disruptive power that I would like to move on analyzing by drawing on Judith Butler's notion of "performative politics" (2010), which she developed by reflecting on the work of post WWII political theorists, such as Arendt and Maruyama. Both scholars, Butler maintains, are invested with the crucial question of how can subjects emerge in the aftermath of war; subjects who can not only apprehend it - its losses, reasons and dynamics - but also exit the very frameworks that enabled its occurrence in the first place, bringing about new democratic forms of existence and co-existence. Butler posits that such exiting the framework can happen through speech acts that have performative effects, an instance of which she identifies (2010: 156) in Arendt's final remark in her "Eichmann in Jerusalem" (2006a). Here, Arendt invokes Eichmann's crimes to be judged by humankind – not by national institutions that speak the language of the nation-state, nor by legal procedures and courts which history has proven to be fallible and partial. Arendt's speech act, Butler suggests, is entirely fictional, has no power, but operates performatively, producing an effect: it models fictionally "what a subject might look like, might sound like, [speaking] in the name of a diverse humanity and against those who seek to deny or destroy some part of that diversity" (2010: 156). The speech act remakes the subject of the enunciation, but it also induces a crisis in the framework, "posing anew the question of what can and cannot intelligibly take place within that framework. (*ibid.*, 155).

One can argue that Palestinian women's embodied memories and sensory accounts induce a disruption of two sets frames: "liberal frames" that locate their agency predominantly within acts of resistance to patriarchal power or colonial oppression, and nationalist "frames" which dignified - and memorialized as worth celebrating - certain ways of being, while silencing the discreet yet exceptionally powerful affective work taking place in the realm of the ordinary.

Umm Muhammad, whose life was devastated by the Israeli occupation and violence, concluded her plot by lingering over how mortified she felt as she had become infertile for several years after being shot:

After this I stayed seven years without getting pregnant. My mother would tell me “You have to get pregnant because your husband is the chosen *mukhtar* [community leader], or otherwise, you should let him marry someone else”. I asked him to go and marry another woman...he was the *mukhtar*, [such] an important man could not be left with just two children.

The eventful in Umm Muhammad’s words is the injury to her husband, rather than to herself. In the nationalist imaginary of resistance, Umm’s Muhammad’s preoccupation would have no place, being unintelligible through the prism of the heroic sacrifice for the nationalist cause. In a liberal feminist discourse, where women’s agency is evaluated against their challenge to ascribed gendered roles, Umm Muhammad’s sensibility would be confined to invisibility or interpreted through the lens of her subordination to patriarchal orders.

Yet, if one of the most devastating effects of violence is indeed the loss of criteria, around what love or heroism or grief or pain are (Das 2007, 7-8), then Umm Muhammad’s act and memory, focusing on safety for her child and husband first, and on her husband’s status later, are precisely an expression of that search for criteria effecting the immediacy of relations of connectedness. Rather than passivity or lack of agency, these acts can be seen as a political effect of love, an act of connection so that life can continue and with it, the return of criteria and context that are deeply and tragically lost. Such acts endeavor to limit the pain and stem from the perception of one’s bodily vulnerability and injury as potentially that of others (Butler 2004). Read through those lens, Umm Muhammad’s act is an expression of “performative agency” (Butler 2010), producing the effect of dislodging the modern liberal nationalist subject of history.

“I write your name my love, on the old walls”. An affective narrative of revolution

Asma is a refugee woman in her early 50s, living in Bak’a camp, in Amman. When I met her in the summer 2012, she was running as an independent candidate for the forthcoming municipal elections. One day, while walking together around the camp, she told me she had been intending to write her life story, but she was emotionally unable to face and overcome some unresolved deep bitterness and painful memories around the figure of her once revolutionary father. In her account, the larger nationalist genre of resistance to the occupation and injustice becomes a personal story of abandonment, separation and sacrifice, the narration of a painful existence that she, her mother and sisters, endured as her father’s affect for the nation determined his commitment to liberation over and above his affect for his close ones.

Asma's recollection of her family history is structured around continuous moving from place to place, following her father's work and militancy, with each move to a new shelter/camp marking the birth of a new sibling. "I was born in Bab Touma [Damascus, Syria] in 1957, my younger brother was born in Qunaitra [Syria] and the other one before me was born in Ramtha [Syria]". However, in those years, the regime established by Hafiz al-Assad was persecuting any internal opposition perceived to threaten its rule, and as a communist militant, Asma's father was in its sights. "When the persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood and the communists happened in the 50s in Syria, my father fled Syria and escaped to Lebanon" Asma recalled. At the same time, her mother was giving birth to her younger brother. "He [her father] later returned to Palestine to live in Fawwar camp [Hebron, West Bank], where his own father was a refugee" Asma stated drily. Her brothers died prematurely: her younger one, Ibrahim, died "right after his birth...very soon after", and her older sibling Adel, when "he was two and a half years old", she recollects overwhelmed by the memory of the grief her mother had to bear in the absence of her husband.

Throughout our walk through Ba'ka camp, Asma recollected her family's erratic movements between refugee camps. Once we reached home, while sitting on her sofa and having coffee, she showed me with intense pride a picture of her mother, portraying her in her young years, in a short-sleeves shirt and colorful skirt, looking content and free. While steering at the photo in her hands, Asma changed her attitude abruptly, her expression now looking grave, as if another image of her late mother had come to inhabit her thoughts. "Everyone says their mother is the most beautiful of mothers - but really my mother suffered in her life" Asma aired, before letting out her feelings about her mother's acute suffering throughout the resistance and revolutions years. She was "young and she had a personality", Asma uttered nostalgically, "but her suffering went even beyond what the average Palestinian family went through".

Separated since they left Syria, Asma's father couldn't easily reunite with his spouse and children, who were temporarily living and waiting for his return in Balata. When Asma's father fled to Lebanon, her mother moved with the children to live with her extended family, who had fled to Balata refugee camp (Nablus, West Bank) since the Nakba. There, they waited for Asma's father return from Lebanon. From Lebanon, where he had fled, Asma's father fled to Iraq and then back to Lebanon. It was Asma's mother who kept moving to rejoin her husband just to be separated every time by the ongoing, overlapping revolutions and conflicts

burning in the region, eventually leading her also to imprisonment, as Asma recounts: “Once he returned to Lebanon from Iraq, he was captured and imprisoned, [and] my mother was dragged along with him. She had left us in Balata and joined my father in Lebanon”. Finally, she said concluding the tale of her family’s wandering,

he then officially left the communist camp and returned to Al-Fawwar camp in Palestine, at his father’s house. So his cousin came to collect us from Balata and we went to live in Fawwar camp. At that point, there was just me, Ibrahim and Adel had died, but my mother had soon Jumana – we were two girls.

However, their reunion did not last long, and Asma’s father soon left them again, pulled by another Revolution - this time he left to join forces in Algeria’s anti-colonial struggle against France. Prior to leaving, Asma recounts that her father “completed his *tawjihi* [high school certificate], but soon after he left us to go to Algeria to work as a teacher and to join the revolutionaries there. It was very harsh for us” she recalled enraged. “We stayed in al Fawwar, my sister and I, and my mother followed him to Algeria. She returned pregnant with Ameera” she added laconically, another pregnancy weaving the space and time her displaced family lived through, pursuing her father’s wandering.

“This was in January 1967, when she had Ameera,” Asma continued, “it was the year of the Naksa.” Back then, Asma was only ten years old, but as she recalls, she was out protesting: “I still have a scar on my foot till now” she said pointing at her injured feet, bearing the indelible mark of this violent event. “My mother was very scared and she thought it would be a repetition of 1948 and the *blad* [country] would be closed again, and we’d be in one place and my father in another”. Out of this actual fear of permanent separation due to borders shutting forever, Asma’s mother decided to leave the West Bank and move to Jordan with her children, first to Wehdat refugee camp, and then in al-Bak’a camp. Her mother was not with them in the new displacement: “Even when we left, my mother didn’t come right away. Al-Naksa was in this month [June], but she only came in August...” Asma recalls bitterly, hurt by the memory of the multiple separations and the inevitable sense of abandonment:

Jumana finished high school and married, I went to a college and graduated but he didn’t support my education. He did not educate any of us...That is why we all stood against my father... He left her again, and he left us with her too. He left five of us girls.

Palpably, Asma can't but think of the years of resistance and revolution as times of grief and suffering as if the actualities of colonialism and anti-colonialism turned, in her memory, into eventualities of separation and abandonment. Revolution was her father's main sight of affect, while her mother was obliged to juggle between her spouse and her children, knotting affective ties and responsibilities between camps and across borders endlessly, moving in search of some security for her family in the face of violent events. Her powerful affective narrative of revolution ends with her declaration of sorrow:

Then the summers would come, and my father would return, and along with his return he would bring all the revolutions, of the whole world. Our house would be on fire. But he wouldn't sit or spend time with us. He'd come from Algeria for forty or forty-five days, and we would never see him. This is the reality. I would like to write down my memoir, but I'm not able to write because of this sorrow, because of this heavy stone. I have an urge to write, but I am stuck at this feeling of anger.

Now Asma's father has aged, he returned to live in a refugee camp in Amman, they started to talk again, he supports her political work, and when they meet occasionally, Asma tries to awaken his memory about the love song he used to endlessly play on the rare occasions he was visiting home, in what seems like an attempt to trace an emotional connection to bridge their past distance. "I have this memory of this radio that was always with him and the radio would play that Fairuz song – *I write your name my love on the old walls* - but he doesn't remember it anymore."

Conclusions

Affective theory embraces the Spinozian insight that we don't yet know what the body can do (Seigworth & Gregg 2010: 3), what forces or movements beyond emotions unfold in the connectedness of bodies to the world.

Palestinian women's embodied memories incarnate and transmit contrapuntal accounts, a sensory experiential set of narratives and emotions by subjects who cannot or would not want to access the more universal, text-centered, mentalist language of historical facts. The body and emotions convey a "perceptual option" (Feldman 1994: 406) of the horror of war and displacement that refuse to be translated into texts or facts. Their embodied agency, which focuses on the ordinary, the domestic, bodily vulnerability and grief, is condemned to a

permanent stillness within modern political paradigms of the subject which conceives of agency in the public sphere as the only intelligible way to act politically.

In Palestine too, the “semantic legitimacy” of bodily, affective and sensory experiences, and their ability to find space in public representations, was curtailed by a construction of the modern political subject which required the “repression of manifold perceptual dispositions” (Feldman 1994: 406; Young 1985). Both perceptual sensory bodily registers and memories which are not inscribed in nationalist frames are banished, curtailed or de-legitimized by nationalist-driven factual narratives that privilege words and facts that could be reproduced, disseminated and made intelligible to wider audiences through a culturally mediated language.

Diana Allan makes an interesting and relevant remark when, in describing the traumatic memory of Palestinians living in refugee camps in Lebanon, she observes that the authority and authenticity of memories of dispossession are inscribed in “stories of extreme suffering, and where the voicing of pain has itself come to be seen as an empowering act” (2007: 256). Similarly In the numerous conversations with Palestinian women refugees of the Nakba and Naksa generations, memories lingered over their bodily vulnerability and traumas but also focused on the deprivation of domestic space and intimacy, compromised sexuality and feelings of shame. Moreover, refugee women’s memories vividly resuscitate the sense of physical fatigue endured through the endless and exhausting marches to reach safety across unfamiliar landscapes. They recall the process of abandoning the domestic and venturing into the unknown as an embodied feeling of a loss of home, of self, of sense.

Most women, with few exceptions, have been married off, gave birth, faced death, miscarriages and separations in displacement, sometimes navigating between camps as well as across countries, in an endless and ongoing attempt to find security, contain precarity and protect or recreate affective ties, through solidarity and care (Allan 2009; Halilovich 2013).

Closely to the black South Africans described by Fassin (2007), for whom apartheid was their field of experience and the end of it the horizon of their expectation, Palestinians have recollected, made sense of and narrated their stories as part of a larger cosmological order of dispossession and national liberation. Such dramatic large historical and material actualities are inscribed in both material and subjective experiences of their present. But as women remember and talk, they produce a performative effect that shifts the boundaries of the legitimate stories to tell: affective memories powerfully dislodge factual based Histories.

The body is both the subject and the map of the perceptual emotional narratives of violence and destitution. Far from being inscribed in political or national charts or genres, both the bodily sensorial perceptions and the words and narratives of refugee women articulate and underscore the urge to restore meaning in chaos, violence and terror. Their memories bring to light a long term, invisible work of compassion, connection and, sometimes, solidarity among exiled as well as a constant endeavor in remaking homes in displacement. When traumas are uttered through linear and coherent narratives, like in Asma's case more prominently, women's genres disrupt revolutionary tropes. Rather than producing narratives aimed at supporting the truthfulness of facts, or the revolutionary and anti-colonialist heroic plot, women's narratives express their subjective feelings, emphasizing the primacy of the immediate realm of affective ties over ideological or abstract imaginaries. They cry out their pain and anger towards the affect for the nation, as resistance and revolution meant the increased vulnerability of mothers, spouses and children. Embodied memories and women's narratives voice their individual pain and the deep resentment towards both the violence of colonialism and the primacy of revolution over affective ties and responsibilities.

If, as Michael Hardt argues in conversation with Lauren Berlant, love "makes central the role of affect within the political sphere" (Berlant & Hardt 2011), the focus on Palestinian women's affective and emotional memories of war and displacement opens a space for the transformative power of affectivity. Butler crucially foregrounds the question of who is "the subject who can take responsibility for building a future" in the aftermath of wars, asking:

How does a new subject emerge, contingently, that is, non-deterministically, from the ravages of war? Is a subject possible who might now traverse the splitting between public and private, becoming the very site of that transversal? (2010, 155)

Palestinian refugee women's memories push us to interrogate the domestic and the ordinary, and the realm of affect, as spaces that trespass the conventionally distinct zones of the personal and the political, inspiring a different social and political transformative project (Hardt 2011).

These accounts are unequivocally needed for a more nuanced understanding and representation of the effects of war and resistance on people's lives. Apprehending war and violence through embodied memories and subjective, emotional, articulations should be crucial for imagining a different kind of future and existence.

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Endnotes

¹ Hannah Arendt's position on love and politics is complex and nuanced. While in some of her speeches she argued that "politics is the application of love for the world" (Young-Bruehl 1982), in other instances she suggested that love is the most a-political, if not anti-political, force: "Because of its inherent worldlessness, love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world" (Arendt 1998: 52). Further, in a letter exchange with Mr. Baldwin, Hannah Arendt appeared to have suggested: "In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy" (Arendt 2006b).

² The paper is based on fieldwork conducted in Lebanon, Jordan and the West Bank between 2010-2014, among Palestinian refugee women of different generations, but predominantly elderly women who have experienced either or both the 1948 and the 1967 wars between Israel, the neighboring Arab states and Palestinian resistance fighters and factions. It is part of a wider project conducted with Dr Sophie Richter-Devroe, that investigates imaginaries of rights and return among Palestinians refugees across Lebanon, the West Bank and Jordan. We travelled several times a year to the fields and collected more than a hundred interviews with refugees across gender, generations and social and political backgrounds. We attended political and cultural events, social and political meetings, commemorations, sat in ordinary people's homes within and outside camps.

³ For Palestinians, the 1948 war which led to the establishment of the state of Israel, is known as Al-Nakba (the "disaster" or "catastrophe"), as it caused the expulsion or displacement and dispossession of most of the Palestinian population (Pappé 2006; Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007; Masalha 2008: 123–124). The 1967 Six Days War is known as Al-Naksa (the "setback"), and it resulted in Israel's seizure and military occupation of all land that was left of historical Palestine.

⁴ According to Feldman, "Contrapuntal sensory histories can be recovered from the scattered wreckage of the inadmissible: lost biographies, memories, words, pains, glances, and faces that cohere into a vast *secret museum of historical and sensory absence*" (1994, 415).

⁵ Hannah Arendt's position on love and politics is complex and nuanced. While in some of her speeches she argued that "politics is the application of love for the world" (Young-Bruehl 1982), in other instances she suggested that love is the most a-political, if not anti-political, force: "Because of its inherent worldlessness, love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world" (Arendt 1998: 52). Further, in a letter exchange

with Mr. Baldwin, Hannah Arendt appeared to have suggested: “In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy” (Arendt 2006b).

⁶ Both Amireh (2003: 758-760) and Johnson (2007: 617) noted that among Palestinians, the disruption of the gender order brought by the first Intifada was reflected in a conflation between women’s sexual immorality (i.e. ‘promiscuity’), and men’s risk of being seduced into collaborating with Israel. Therefore, men were invited to exercise self-restraint, and reinforce their control over women.

⁷ Hasso argued that Palestinian women suicide bombers/martyrs defied both the heteronormative emplacement of their bodies as means for the biological reproduction of their nation, and Israeli gendered assumptions on women’s natural harmless-ness.

⁸ “Black September” indicates the 1970 war between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was headquartered in Jordan, and the Hashemite monarchy. It resulted in the death of several thousands of people, and the expulsion of the PLO leadership. The “war of the camps” (1984-89) occurred during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). Following the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon (1982), the PLO leadership was pushed to flee the country, while the Palestinian camps were repetitiously attacked by different Lebanese militias, killing thousands of residents.

⁹ The expression “Palestine [19]48” indicates the territory that corresponded to the British Mandate until expiry of this latter and establishment of the state of Israel.