

The Palestinian's Death

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1.

Death is a single ending. Death is all beginnings.

The human being doesn't die in a manner that suits her or his fancy; rather, the manner of death is contingent, to a great extent, on the characteristics of the social order in which the person lives. For the manner of death, whether it be illness or killing or natural causes, is, like any other form of social practice, a behavioral pattern that derives from the general social order and finds realization within the context of the individual facing death. On this basis, we may pose two questions: one concerns the possibility of studying and comprehending society by examining the dominant and marginal types of death to be found in it; the other concerns the possibility of studying death by examining the disparities between its typical manifestations, thus accounting for the diversity of societies across time and space. Following this logic, I would like to pursue these two questions within a highly specific context: victimhood, martyrdom, and martyrdom operation—all regarded as different modes of death—and the Palestinian society that mandates them.¹

It isn't easy, by any means, to designate the essential features of Palestinian society and its modes of operation as a self-sustaining system. Since it first began to assume a form based on the modern type, this society has been undergoing intensive processes of dismantlement and re-formation, the likes of which have rarely been witnessed in the modern age. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Palestinian society—separately and as part of the larger Arab-Islamic world—has been subjected to continual operations of dismantlement by the Western colonial system in all its variants, the latest of which is represented by Zionism. On the other hand, the Palestinians have been striving to produce themselves as a collectivity through different forms of socio-economic existence. Until 1948, Palestinian society had preserved a central spatio-temporal structure that was, with regard to the interrelations between society and the political entity, a particular variation on the model of the nation-state. This may be seen in the fact that, until 1948, we were able to examine the principal features of that structure by following conventional methods adopted in the research of other societies. However, since the dispersal and expulsion of Palestinian society and the destruction of its central

spatio-temporal and material structure, we have not been able to make use of the same concepts that are current in the study of other societies. This, in spite of the fundamental understanding that the 1948 *Nakba* is the culmination of several socio-historical processes and not an isolated event, a coincidence, or anything of the sort.² There is no doubt that what started as a war evolved, through a concealed intention, into a genocide that destroyed the Palestinian totality in the form in which it existed prior to the war. Palestinian society has splintered into many groups, each of which lives on the margins of another society, clinging to this other while being excluded from its center. In spite of the consequences of the 1948 *Nakba* for Palestinian society, the colonial Zionist regime executes the 1948 scenario on a periodical basis against one or another of the Palestinian groups that emerged from the *Nakba*: namely, the diaspora, the territories occupied in 1948, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Specifically, the Zionist regime targets all endeavors to form a Palestinian collectivity that would possess historical agency and strive to re-inscribe Palestinian agency outside the relational parameters determined by subordination to the dominant regime. In this regard, we may be justified in proposing the following: that the Palestinians, in all the different forms of their social existence, haven't actually emerged from the shadow of the pivotal event in their recent history, the *Nakba* of 1948. After all, the systematic destruction of the Palestinian entity on the material plane is still the primary manifestation of the colonial regime in Palestine. If this condition lingers at the core of the colonial construct, how are we to understand Palestinian society at the moment of its death, considering this moment to be its very definition?

Before going into the details of the Palestinian moment of death, a methodical observation needs to be made concerning the practical manner in which this death may be read and written, as this observation may cast epistemic light on death in general. In the first place, there is now a common understanding that what is read carries the reader along with its logic. Therefore, when reading death, the reader must dismount his or her priority in the reading process and connect as an equal to that which is death, i.e. not as a life that reads death. In the second place, the detachment from the

1. The terms "victim," "martyr," and "martyrdom operator" are the English equivalents of the following Arabic terms, respectively: *Dahiya*, *Shaheed*, and *Istishhadi*.
2. The *Nakba* is the term for the mass expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948 and the establishment of the State of Israel over the land of historic Palestine.

priority of the reader results in the abandonment of the episteme that constituted this priority. This double move starts with the reader occupying a position of humility in relation to the world being read, in our case that of Palestinian death, so that she or he may refrain from the systematic imposition of her or his own world on it. Here language becomes the primary space in which the method or system, superior by necessity, gets transformed into a procedure that leads to the position of humility and the temporary occupation of this position. Here we aren't asking death about its language; rather, we're searching with death for the means it offers for building life. Reducing the method to a procedure doesn't merely lead to the reader's humility toward what is read, but also brings what is read down from the holy and mythical realms to the banal realm of the human and historical. In this regard, the humble reading of death reveals the banality of the life on which the holy and mythical curtain of death descends; death here becomes one of the banalities of life. So let us return to death, in humility.

Death serves as a platform for surveying life, one that reveals to the viewer life's different forms and modes of operation. In this capacity death gains its meaning and, being consummated, dies, endowing life with the size, depth, and myriad dimensions of form and meaning on which it thrives. Therefore, it may be said that the dominant Palestinian variation, where Palestinian society signifies and is signified only at the moment of its destruction and death, does not negate or break with the history of death in life, but is rather the concretely practiced paradigm of this history. However, consciousness of this paradigm is absent from the systematic spaces of modern Arab-Islamic thought, where Palestinian society is perceived as the victim, and from modern Western thought as well, where it is read as a secondary form of death opposed to life, or not recognized in the first place. The fundamental aporia in systematic thought as such lies in the fact that every systematic act of killing is a form that reaches completion or realization only through a non-systematic actualization of the essence of life, i.e. birth. In effect, the systematic condition practices killing repeatedly and unceasingly according to its own criteria as well as the terms of killing itself, both of which decree that killing must fail to accomplish that which seems to be death.

For birth is half of the sphere comprising the totality of life, which sits on, among other things, the eggs of death. And birth is, by nature, iterative in form and meaning. Accordingly, in order to extricate Palestinian society from the condition of systematic killing practiced against it, it may be necessary to cling to what might be termed the iterative, and therefore continually re-inscribable, trajectories of birth. We cannot understand the Palestinian paradigm of death through the presence of the system in it; rather, completely to the contrary, we must walk alongside the essence of life—birth—by opening it forcibly onto the particulars of the act of killing that takes place within it. This initial attempt at explication, which follows the forms and types of death that have distinguished Palestinian society, points to the fact that the stage represented by death is not fixed, but shifting. Moreover, this stage has created its own history, and we shall attempt in this article to determine the principle at work in the historical map of the Palestinian stage of death, hoping to reach thereby another understanding of what the Palestinian form of life is.

This approach to understanding death and life does not merely switch our vantage point, but surpasses it by substituting its own tools for the tools in place. Here we are not looking with the eyes of the individual; rather, we are starting from the exteriority of the boundaries of the collective, and not stopping there at the edge of a schematic totality, but going beyond these boundaries to their decisive event. We are not asking here who died, got killed, or was martyred among the Palestinians in a literal sense, for their Palestinian name assumes a form through the procedure of death which brings them to life, in name, in the archive, that registry which never ceases to grind the wheat of death into life. A massacre is a particular catastrophic procedure, and in the trajectory of its occurrence lies that non-systematic knowledge.³ In this sense death by killing is birth, and stands in contrast to the dominant perception that killing leads to death. Strictly speaking, an assassination is that technique which, when performed, records the birth of what follows from bodies and actions and events that become eligible for the next assassination. Consequently, by pursuing the logic of assassination as a technique, we may understand the situation of a son who desires to win the assassination of his father in order to possess all fathers eligible for assassination.

In the still open dictionary of Palestinian luminaries, a literary genre has evolved from the following textual conclusion: "the manner of a luminary's death = the manner of his life in the present." And the current debate concerning the circumstances of Yasser Arafat's death may be the visible shadow of the essential question: how should Arafat live? That is the definitive question of the stage of death.

The 1948 *Nakba* is a pivotal moment in the history of the management of Palestinian death, the latter being also the management of Palestinian life. For the colonial Zionist regime succeeded in establishing a monopoly over the practice of the Palestinian's death and its administration, so much so that this became the fundamental, and foundational, code in the systematic Zionist procedure. And for reasons related to its history and nature—reasons which we will elaborate below—the Zionist procedure follows an extremely totalitarian operative logic. Accordingly, the practice of the Palestinian's death by the Zionist procedure, at the historical moment of 1948, left no Palestinian, whether literally or metaphorically, untouched, killing the Palestinian materially at the level of the productive body, and socially by dissolving, thoroughly, the nexus of his or her time and space. At the structural level, this moment—in its Palestinian half—became established as a generative loss, i.e. the existence of the colonial regime necessitates the death of Palestinian collectivity. Hence, it was imperative for the Zionist regime to monopolize the management and technical maintenance of loss and its circulation. This general relational structure was entrenched through the regular—i.e. schematic—practice of different forms of collective death against the Palestinians, in a manner that suits the formative contexts in which this collectivity is continually reproduced. From this perspective, the return becomes that constellation of different historical births which Palestinians have been practicing ever since the structure of generative loss was consolidated. In this sense, the return carries within it the procedural steps of the struggle to free the administration of Palestinian death from the iron grip of the Zionist monopoly. The question that arises at this juncture concerns the operative mode of the return and the formal principle of reproduction as they appear at the level of concrete historical reality.

Those studies—and the knowledge resulting from them—that examine the relationship between the form of socio-economic relations within a specific segment of Palestinian society, on the one hand, and the modes

in which this segment expresses its collective self—ranging from resistance and relapse to stagnation and dependency—fail to fathom the structure determining the shape of this collective. For these studies, across the spectrum, don't recognize the structure of generative loss as a primary formative element in the reproduction of Palestinian collectivity—also known, in the idiom adopted in this article, as the configuration of Palestinian births. Hence, these studies regard the Palestinian collective through the theater of life, remaining oblivious to the agency exercised by the platform of death within this collective, their jaws dropping upon encountering the formative half represented by death in Palestinian life. When asking the Palestinian whether she or he desires to return, these studies may ask: where to, how, and what is the price one is willing to pay for it? This systematic question fails to recognize—deliberately or not, depending on whom you ask—that the return is what defines the Palestinian as both a social and economic being. The wandering of the Palestinian, subsequent to the destruction of her or his individual and social, productive body, led, both causally and structurally, to her or his accession to the margins of different socio-economic configurations, beginning with the colonial regime in Palestinian and neighboring Arab societies and continuing to those areas lying beyond them.

What's more important in this regard is that the return operates as a pole and pivot around which diverse mechanisms of semantic production revolve, collectively forming that which is Palestinian, and doing so by deriving historical births of return which get practiced by Palestinians everywhere in a manner that suits the different locales and trajectories of their compulsory and voluntary wanderings and migrations. Resistance is a particular historical instance of the many forms of return, and there is no doubt that it managed to carve, and continues to carve, a configuration of Palestinian births with distinct manifestations and features. From one aspect, resistance strives to free the administration of Palestinian death from the Zionist grip monopolizing it, and does so, from another perspective, in order to dismantle the structure of generative loss and create an alternative order of death and life. In this sense we may understand resistance as a transformative form of return, i.e. we are facing a form and practice of reproduction that shifts Palestinian collectivity from the structural moment of generative loss to another state that goes beyond that structure to reach what is borne by its necessarily non-systematic form, i.e. the dissolution

3. The word translated here as "catastrophic"—*nakbawi*—literally means "of or relating to the *Nakba*." Hence, it links the specific catastrophe represented by the *Nakba* to the general catastrophic state of the Palestinian collective since then.

of the regime's monopoly over the administration of Palestinian death. Following this argument, we may observe the particular practices of resistance as concrete mechanisms for the Palestinian's production of her or his collective self, along trajectories that spring from the moment of the 1948 *Nakba*, which continues in the Palestinian here and now. Armed resistance is a concrete mechanism for the Palestinian's production of a collective self, and this mechanism springs from the violent structure of the moment of the *Nakba*, meaning that there exists, in the event of the *Nakba* as well as the structure that got authorized in its wake, a formative logic of violence that is a foundation in the edifice where Palestinian death is administered by the Zionist regime. The inevitability of armed resistance, then, issues from the process of return that seeks to collapse the regime's administration of Palestinian death, an administration operating according to the formative logic of violence.

In what follows, we will observe three forms of resistance distinguished by the kind of death resulting from them, the subject of this death being the individual Palestinian seeking his or her collectivity: the victim, the martyr, and the martyrdom operator. Following the trajectories of these forms, seen as particular variations on the possible forms of return, will enable us to read the structure of the Palestinian return at a level of interpretive detail. This may surpass the knowledge currently circulated concerning death as an ending, thus holding in check the tendency to regard death as an ending; death here seen as synonymous with return.

Among the most significant fruits of this approach in terms of epistemological practice is the question of death as the end of language, of every language as such. The significance of the Palestinian condition derives from the fact that it represents a concrete realization of the death of language and a continually renewed emergence of non-systematic fragments that never cease to recall their absence within the systematic arena. The stage during which these relations took form was print capitalism, of which the commodity represented the paradigm, given that the form of printed language was the hegemonic form that cast aside other linguistic forms, the most important of which was probably the visual form of language. In this regard, it may be said that the return of the Palestinian non-systematically transpired on the bridge of visual language, until the point when the circumstances of the hegemonic order changed, giving rise to commodity visuality as well as the visual commodity, which now lie at the forefront of the capitalist system. How was the form of the victim

fashioned? What are the visuals of the martyr? And where does the end of vision lie, that end which yields to us the martyrdom operator as (in)sight itself?

2.

The chart we drew in the previous section of this essay indicates that expulsion and refugeehood have created a structure that can only be complete with the return, which means that the historical practice of collective death itself bears a configuration of different Palestinian births. The source of these births lies in the structural failure of collective killing, wherein the practice of killing against the collective is repeated by the regime with the aim of achieving the collective's end, but leads instead to the repetition of the collective's births and the creation of a concrete configuration of births that coheres at the pole or pivot of the return. From this it may be seen that re-reading the events that followed the 1948 *Nakba* through the dialectic between the different types of collective killing practiced by the regime, and the types of birth initiated by the Palestinian collective, enables us to elucidate what was heretofore incomprehensible because it drew on conventional methods to study Palestinian society.

There can be no doubt that one of the most important decades epistemically absent in the Palestinian context is that which followed the *Nakba*. The historical and epistemic record concerning the decade of the nineteen-fifties appears to be extremely thin, almost as if it had never been inhabited by the Palestinians. The absence of any attempt to give birth to a collective Palestinian configuration is quite striking here, and several explanations may be proposed for it. From one perspective, it appears that organized killing continued in the mode of massacres; although the most prominent instances occurred in Qibya and Kafr Qasim, these were links in an extended chain. Massacres are a process of formation that works through collective killing, eliminating the corporeal aspect of collective existence so that the collective fails to survive as a collective or, at least, fails to retain its prior form. Alongside these massacres hasty attempts were made to form a collective identity that would be subject to frameworks that eroded the Palestinianness of the collective, such as the refugee camps created for the diaspora by international organizations responsible for managing refugee affairs, the Jordanian and Egyptian identities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, respectively, and the Israeli identity in the areas occupied in 1948. These processes of formation and refashioning were attended, in the same

period, by collective frameworks remaining from the former era, such as the All-Palestine Government, as well as the early beginnings of a few small groups that appeared toward the end of the decade, the most prominent, perhaps, being the groups in the Gaza Strip, who managed to obtain official status.

In light of the dominant conditions of loss and dispersion, at both the socio-material and existential-human levels, it is somewhat difficult to determine, in this period, the types and means of recognition with which the Palestinian collective experienced the *Nakba* and its aftermath. The expressive, literary, and documentary works produced in this period, in various parts of the Palestinian collective, indicate that some attempts were made to search for different tools with which this collective may be observed and framed. Ismail Shammout, for example, tries to develop a visual semiotics for Palestinian refugeehood as experienced by the Arab diaspora and beyond, while Abed Abdi, in the second half of the nineteen-fifties, questions in a visual medium the tangent points that exist between the Palestinian refugee and the collective identities available to her or him in the framework of the colonial system. The literature of this period was more diverse than the plastic arts; many different currents clung to the pre-*Nakba* moment as if the *Nakba* had never happened, converging in the literature of social morality in its patriarchal form, while other currents engaged the *Nakba* and its repercussions through serious attempts to document it with literary and linguistic tools that were in circulation prior to the *Nakba*. In spite of the efforts made by some to render the visual and literary text in a manner adequate to the gravity of the historical event, a distinguished aesthetic literary language remained to be formulated. Naturally, these general currents had the occasional rare exception: Emile Toma represents such an exception in the fields of documentary and criticism.

This period, then, is distinguished by a particular dialectic between the massacre, a collective death that befalls a certain segment of society, and the action of leaning on the past via documentary and testimonial, as well as an initial search for the shape of the future collective. What the *Nakba* and the two following decades produced—a searching, circular motion through the conditions of killing, expulsion, and refugeehood, as well as the refashioning of the collective subject, in all its fluctuating variations—wasn't present in the collective Palestinian scene, then splintered into many pieces. The Palestinians were unable to administer their deaths, and, consequently, their lives as well; instead, all their affairs were administered by several different parties,

the most important, perhaps, being the colonial system in its local version and its global foundations. In retrospect, we may safely say that it took almost two decades for a particular segment of Palestinians to form frameworks of collective Palestinian labor, i.e. to establish a productive body that works, fundamentally, to reproduce the Palestinian collective in itself and for itself, if we may use this evanescent expression. Consequently, it was in the mid-sixties that an influential attempt was first made to recover control over the administration of Palestinian death, and this attempt may be considered to have succeeded in freeing a portion of this administration for the first time since 1948.

The most conspicuous feature of the first Palestinian national awakening since 1948 is the institutional process of gathering and refining what may be termed the collective Palestinian state of affairs. The transformation of this state of affairs into an institutional system modeled after socially, politically, and militarily effective organizations, and its subsequent concentration in the hands of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) at the end of the nineteen-sixties, helped to lay down an infrastructure aimed, fundamentally, at seizing control of the administration of Palestinian death and investing the latter in a political economy of national liberation. The national political economy of Palestinian collective death is, in reality, a kind of translation that turns the structure of the return into a collective birth project that traces trajectories for the voluntary practice of death, through killing or other means, with the ultimate goal of realizing the return. And we may make the following observation concerning this political economy in its full form: the proliferation of death, in both number and modality, leads, in a causal manner, to the proliferation of territorial and social liberation. This means, among other things, that the Palestinian must invest all that she has in her death to be able to liberate all the land and history and present inside her: in other words, to be able to achieve the complete return to Palestine, as well as Palestine's complete return to her.

Examining the structure of this national political economy takes us back to the structural form of the *Nakba* and its function as a primary foundation of the Zionist colonial regime in Palestine; this in light of the fact that the *Nakba*'s structure is based on the complete and irrevocable denial of what is in place at the moment of its formation. This denial may be seen in the *Nakba*'s complete dismantlement of the infrastructures of Palestinian society—material and relational as well as linguistic—and its reduction

of Palestinian society to the above mentioned parts, through the mechanisms by which the Palestinian is refashioned as the non-Palestinian; in effect, this action amounts to the relational murder of one who hasn't physically died. At first sight, it appears that the return, in the context of the national political economy of collective Palestinian death, has followed the same trajectory that was necessitated by the *Nakba's* structural form, albeit in a contradictory direction. In order for us to unveil what appears to be a colonial prison, i.e. the possibility that resistance to the colonial event is a slippery slope that returns the Palestinian to the same event rather than liberate her or him from it, let us pause at the details concerning the operative logic of this political economy of collective death.

In the historical dimension of the chain of events unfolding on the Palestinian stage, death, in all its variants, assumes the primary role in fashioning the collective. This role has its origin in the nature of the colonial regime as a machine that operates on the violence of dismantlement and dissolution, and this nature springs directly from the regime's status as a derivative and extension of the parent capitalist system. For this system pursues a continual process of expansion based on the violent dismantlement of earlier forms of labor and their use values, which it appropriates and reconstructs as exchangeable commodities. The manufacture of death is at the core of the manufacture of the commodity, not external to it or its logic; quite to the contrary, the manufacture of death is the point of departure for the capitalist structure which we see being realized via the commodity. And it is apparent that what transpires at the level of the commodity, the paradigm according to which all other social spheres are re-formed, translates to the sphere of colonial relations between the Euro-American center and its geo-political peripheries. In this context, the Palestinian stage doesn't comprise a concrete commodity as such, or some pre-commodity state, but for several reasons this stage became, during the nationalist period of the Palestinian tragedy from 1967 to 1990, a crossroads in the capitalist network of commodity and death exchange. Accordingly, the logic regulating the nationalist stage in this period of its history is a spectacular one that moves from the location of the administration of death to the space of death itself: Mandatory Palestine.

The 1967 setback represented, to both the colonial regime and the extended Palestinian collective across the

Arab and Islamic worlds, the second peak in the series of events beginning with 1948. On the one hand, the regime achieved full control over Mandatory Palestine, firmly establishing direct regulatory power over the territories occupied in 1948 and 1967, and creating, to this end, relations of disparity between the two territorial divisions by enforcing separate and specific mechanisms of control and management in each. On the other hand, the now complete loss of Palestine and the direct subjection of two-thirds of the society to the Israeli regime caused the structure of loss to be entrenched in the depths of the Palestinian collective; this, in turn, intensified the sharp contradiction experienced by the Palestinians, caught as they are between the pole of expulsion and refugeehood on one side, and the pole of return on the other. The forms of earlier relations that upheld the Palestinian state of affairs between its *Nakba* and its *Naksa*⁴ have been shattered, and their shattering was nothing less than the depletion of their store of a material and social insularity, i.e. nothing less than the spread of the system of the individual nation-state in the Arab world. The incorporation of the Arab-Islamic world into the new system that emerged out of the Second World War reinforced the historical remapping of this world as national entities possessing a sovereignty that can only be described as extremely frail; in this light, the process of incorporation is the proper framework within which the Palestinian *Nakba* should be situated. Hence, albeit in a reactionary sense, the 1967 *Naksa* may be understood as the crowning achievement of this process, due to which nothing remained for the Palestinians, as individuals and as a collective, besides a Palestinianness afflicted by its absence. The nature of the structural separation from the body of the Arab-Islamic totality, i.e. the fragmentation of this body into "nationalisms," fashioned Palestinian "nationalism" in its likeness. A certain form of institutional Palestinian relations has begun to carry the Palestinian state of affairs along the paths and routes of struggle in order to seize the administration of Palestinian death, and the first stage of those relations was marked by the declaration of its own presence, a declaration made with the aim of constituting a pole in the struggle, opposite to the colonial system as well as the Arab-Islamic world, and the world in general.

Throughout the period of Palestinian nationalism, the primary preoccupation of those working within it

and on it has been the acceptance of their declaration that they have not died, but are rather striving to recover control of their own affairs. A look at the broad range of collective Palestinian actions of self-expression will indicate that the act of declaring who I am, and publicizing this I to all, comprised the primary collective mechanism that moved the return, through struggle, in the direction of reaffirming the presence of those presumed to have died. The shift from absence to the action of presence encompassed most of the different Palestinian segments, as well as several fields that work to produce these segments as separate and as a dispersed social totality. And so we see Ghassan Kanafani in his literature carrying a scattered diaspora to the edge of a collectivity that rises in history through its action, while Emile Habibi rearticulates the range of possible relations between the segments of Palestinian society living in the territories occupied in 1948, on the one hand, and the regime and the remaining segments of Palestinian society on the other; in a sense, Habibi renders these relations as an acrobatics of collusion with the status quo, one that nevertheless defines the Palestinians as a collective of presence. As for poetry, we see Mahmoud Darwish, the soothsayer of Palestinian culture, securing his place and singing to us the psalms of a mischievous, quarrelsome presence whose joy pours out of death and absence. In the plastic arts we see men standing, women giving birth, a village being woven, as if we are delighted by the bountiful experience of pain from the prison chains planted in arms and bare chests and backs flayed by the painful joy of encountering the land again. Moving to the field of research, we see an example in Marie Sayigh's work on the transition process that led groups of peasant refugees to organized *Fida'i*⁵ action; we also find the research of Sabri Jureis and Elia Zuraik on the Palestinians in the territories occupied in 1948, as well as a good deal of research on the West Bank and Gaza. Against this institutional and performative background, the *Fida'i* rose from the corpse of the victim bearing the wings of the political economy of collective death, as if the trajectory of the return renders the death of those returning a necessary condition for creating the space where newborns may emerge.

And in spite of the diversity of the forms of collective death practiced by the regime against the Palestinian collective in this period, the massacre remained the dividing line that returns the co-ordinates regulating the

relation between the regime and the Palestinians to their origins in the *Nakba*; Sabra and Shatila may be the most prominent of these massacres, but they aren't the only ones of their sort. This period also saw the rise of the policy of targeting the vanguard and leading elites—among them the literati, intellectuals, politicians, military personnel, and resistance fighters—using all sorts of methods and technologies, ranging from assassination and diverse forms of physical elimination to political imprisonment as a practice of social death against the individual and her or his group. One may compare the relationship between targeting the elites and committing massacres to a kind of dancer who moves in circles between two moments or events: targeting the elites through assassination and imprisonment leads to a state of confrontation that facilitates the construction of the massacre as the result of a succession of events in some war or a sweeping Intifada. It is therefore possible to trace the history of collective death against the Palestinians by examining the concrete relationship between assassination, imprisonment, and massacre. The Land Day incident that occurred on March 30, 1976 was, in spite of its more problematic aspects, the crowning effort of a collective movement that tried to delineate the contours of the relationship between the regime and the Palestinians living in the territories occupied in 1948. It was therefore imperative for the regime to kill the collectivity of this movement, and it didn't spare any efforts toward this goal. It may also be seen that the successive assaults on the Palestinian institutional and military assemblage—starting with Jordan, continuing in Lebanon, and concluding always with an immense assault that leaves nothing in its wake—became standard practice during the nationalist period and continued up to the assault on Gaza in 2009. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 led to the almost complete elimination of the institutional and military apparatuses of the PLO, at which point the collective Palestinian action of resistance made a gradual shift to Gaza and the West Bank. Within the experience of the West Bank and Gaza, and what results from it later on, we can find many of the threads that got woven into the topography of the map of Palestinian collective death. And given that this experience marked the conclusion, literally and metaphorically, of the nationalist period, we shall draw on it here as a transitional platform for what follows.

4. The *Naksa* is the Arabic term for the war of 1967 and its consequences for Palestinians and Arabs.

5. *Fida'i* is the Arabic term for "armed struggler."

The colonial Zionist regime has practiced many mechanisms in order to achieve the material and social dismantlement of the infrastructures in place in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, beginning with assassinations and physical eliminations and continuing with collective arrests. Moreover, the regime didn't stop at annexing the land and forcing the Palestinians to work in its facilities. These mechanisms have been, and continue to be, practiced in synchrony, meaning that the massacre doesn't displace the prison, and neither does it spoil the relations of wage labor that profit the regime. To the contrary, it is possible to unveil different aspects of this regime by reinforcing the link between the manufacture of death and the manufacture of the commodity. From the beginning of their occupation, the West Bank and Gaza seemed like storehouses with immense portions of land and labor; this made the regime's mouth water and led it to link the two resources in its calculations. In addition to annexing the land, the regime opened the door to those who had been the land's original owners and farmers to work at the bottom of the Israeli market, thus enabling the regime to profit through four channels: land, labor, new consumers, and the dismantlement of the infrastructure of this segment of Palestinian society.

One of the main focal points in the endeavor to re-fashion the socio-economic structure of the West Bank and Gaza as a component of the colonial structure in Palestine is the administration of collective death in those particular areas. This focal point operates, as part of a whole, according to the same logic of dismantlement dominating the status quo, a logic that aims to re-fashion and to reverse collective death to its original, material condition as a consummated physical death. Here we may propose that the experience of political arrest is among the most important junctures between death and the commodity, given its role in the dismantlement of the Palestinian subject and her or his subsequent reconstruction in a form that speaks the colonial language fluently. And it is not by coincidence that the critical juncture, as a clear boundary between the colonial language and the possible scenarios of Palestinian freedom, is represented by the hunger strikes taking place in prisons. This type of strike—at least in one aspect—is a direct attempt to wrest control from the regime over the administration of Palestinian collective death.

The cumulative Palestinian experience in wresting control over the administration of collective death, and the gradual process whereby the arena of struggle

between the regime and the Palestinian collective shifted to the territories occupied in 1967, ultimately led to the collective movement known as the First Intifada. The fundamental scenario unfolding during the First Intifada consisted, prior to its commodification by politics, of serious and continual attempts to open trajectories of death that bear within them the potential of birth and return, and this scenario eventually developed into a concentrated effort to administer those trajectories. Ranging from the daily management of the neighborhood to popular demonstrations and *Fida'i* military action, and even going as far as the practice of economic self-sufficiency, these different trajectories all rely in principle on the preparation for a direct, material confrontation with the military and economic nodes of the colonial regime. The purpose of these mechanisms of confrontation has been to make room for the construction of potential trajectories of death and return.

It came as a surprise to all that those trajectories got carved through the death of the commodity and its supplantation, however temporary, by the commodity of death in the mode of use value. Like all secondary capitalist systems, the regime exhausted all the procedural technologies at its disposal to recover the commodity and, through the latter, the administration of collective death; in addition, the advanced technologies of the capitalist market enabled the regime to devise ways of practicing a different, symbolic type of massacre. What need is there to kill thousands of inhabitants physically, when one can profit more by transforming them into a human laboratory for testing new methods of collective killing? With time, the regime came to separate the army from the economy and to practice material, physical eliminations against those individuals and institutions involved in armed struggle. It also furnished a new set of technologies aimed at profiting from the socio-economic confrontation, and another geared toward prisons in their role as a state of continual confrontation. More specifically, the First Intifada presented to the regime a good opportunity to maintain the procedures and technologies of collective death available to it, and to construct new ones that facilitate the administration of collective death on a larger scale—in terms of both quantity and modality—as required by new developments in the movement of capital. The new procedures and technologies have played a foundational role in the development of a new infrastructure for the administration of Palestinian collective death, one based essentially on unraveling

the modernist Palestinian nexus of time, space, and the socio-material motion deriving from them, thus resulting in the restriction of the Palestinians' historical agency as a modernist collective. The house arrests, curfews, checkpoints, physical inspections; the open and spectacular assaults against bodies and the breaking of bones; the confiscation and destruction of houses, as well as the arrest of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians; all this is simply a network of practice that works to unravel the nexus between the nodes of the Palestinian social totality in the West Bank and Gaza.

This infrastructure became the ground on which the second stage developed, in Oslo and what followed, a series of agreements that were nothing more than a file in the administration of Palestinian collective death, aiming ultimately to remove this collectivity from the stage of historical action. The new colonial practices of Israel led to the emergence of a collective and keen Palestinian awareness that managed to uncover the crude reality that Oslo was merely a procedure and technology deployed in the practice of collective death against the Palestinians. What many fail to realize in this regard is that the colonial regime adopted the identical logic in its actions against all the different segments of Palestinian society under its control: specifically, I have in mind here the segment that lives in the territories occupied in 1948, although in its case the explicit manifestations of this logic assumed a different shape.

The naturalization of the Palestinians in the lands occupied in 1948 was never a matter of coincidence or a spoil of war; rather, it expresses the resolve of the regime's white colonialism, which cannot cohere without a Palestinian "black" collectivity whose status is reworked as local and authentic. This indicates that citizenship is an apparatus in the colonial regime, and that it isn't a mechanism through which the Palestinian can tear down the status quo in Palestine. Israeli citizenship contains procedures and technologies deployed toward severing the bonds of time, space, and the Palestinian body from the larger Palestinian-Arab Islamic bonds of time, space, and the body. In the case of time, this severance proceeded through the complete economic dependence on the regime and its quotidian realities; in the case of space, it proceeded through the containment of Palestinians in cattle pens called villages; as for the physical aspect of this severance, many different methods were deployed, the most prominent of which is the prevention of movement between Palestinian bodies and between them and other Arab bodies, a process that isolated this group of Palestinians

in the slot prepared for them by the regime. By following the map of Palestinian collective death we can see that this severance of bonds is indeed an assassination carried out against the collective in its capacity as a historical agent. And it may be the case that what we are facing here is a type of variation on the *Nakba*, given that collective death doesn't have a single form, and may be realized through several practical means, procedures, and technologies, although a single principle governs these diverse modalities of collective death. This is the imperative to sever the bonds between the essential elements of a collective—specifically, a collective that exhibits a modernist nationalist character—and these elements may be summarized as the body, space, and time.

The naturalization of this process of severance (i.e. the ideological maneuver that transforms the historical into the natural), in the case of the Palestinians residing in the lands occupied in 1948, succeeded to a great degree. We may even go further to suggest that the collective's sense of its own Palestinianness gained its form through accumulated practices of severance that were later translated as Palestinian in the collective narrative circulated in this segment of Palestinian society, a case in point being the adoption of the regime's glass ceiling, such as the one enforced on the Palestinian architectural scene, as an expression of some Palestinianness. The end of the nineteen-eighties and the beginning of the nineteen-nineties represented an important turning point, as the regime no longer felt threatened in its relations with this particular group of Palestinians, but developed instead a self-aggrandizing sense of power toward them; consequently, it refashioned the rhythm of the process of severance so that the latter would seem less concentrated and intense, and slower than it had been in the past. These changes coincided with two others: the development of new procedures and technologies for the administration of death that rely on the experience gained by the regime in the West Bank and Gaza, and the beginning of a qualitative leap in the technologies of censorship, control, and punishment. In tandem with these changes, or perhaps as part of a wider course concerning the Palestinian state of affairs, the features and details of the Oslo Accords began to crystallize as a procedure in the administration of collective death.

The circumstances of this result concern not only the Palestinians, but more generally the beginning of an age of digital technologies developed in the service of censorship, control, and corporeal punishment of

the soft, spectacular kind, in the Arab-Islamic world and perhaps farther regions as well. This is well-demonstrated in the case of the Palestinian consultants hired by the Americans to assist the Iraqis in setting up election processes under the occupation, not to mention the cement walls and the behavior of the whole groups imprisoned within them, as was visible to anyone flying over Baghdad. One may characterize the final, i.e. current, stage of the Palestinian map of death as replete and saturated with the many categories and spectra of death; indeed, this stage is so sated with death that it either dies the concentrated death of the martyrdom operator or abstains from death through a life that may be described, at the very least, as a game played half-heartedly in the slave-pen.

There is an osmotic juncture between information technology and the infiltration it enables into the most intimate details of the Palestinian's life, and the regime's colonial craving to control the Palestinian and the administration of his collective death. This juncture may be compared to the movement of the registry of Palestinian names from a handwritten state to storage in a digital information bank that contains the most minute details, with their interrelations, concerning the Palestinians, the living among them along with the dead. It may be said, albeit with some reservation, that the process of severance—as a procedure and technology that assassinates the collective by breaking the nexus of its body, space, and time—came to fruition in this period in its conventional modernist and colonialist form. This state of fruition interacted with the new political-technological context whose overt political half was the Oslo Accords; as a result, an altered version of the severance process emerged. The new element in this type of severance was the regime's realization that it could fundamentally transform the nature of the relations between each of its coordinates, turning them into a single unit as opposed to parts of a whole, and in this way facilitating the creation of a numerical inventory optimized for totalitarian control. In their modernist phase, these relations operated on the basis that they were solid and somewhat permanent; hence, collective killing would proceed by targeting a specific area of a material, bodily totality seated in the juncture between the body, space, and time. In the new phase of the mechanism of severance, this bodily totality was no longer perceived as a function of tri-polar relations; instead, it was cast in numerical terms and categorized anew on this basis. So now, when the regime practices its administration of collective death, it targets and

destroys a whole, and not a part of the whole, as was the case in the former phase of the severance process. In this light, one may say that the severance process transformed into the severance of life itself as a comprehensive unit. Life, the life of the Palestinian collective, got shelved as a file in the administration of collective death, after this administration had been part of the procedure for maintaining and consolidating the life of the colonial regime. Here we are facing a process with two intermeshed levels, even though it is possible to distinguish between them analytically.

On the one hand, the colonial regime, as an extension of the capitalist regime, is continually driven to improve the tools, technologies, and procedures by which it administers Palestinian collective death, and progress in the parent system enables it to develop improved solutions to the contradictions that limit its ability to maintain complete control over the administration of Palestinian death. On the other hand, the new phase in the administration returns the Palestinian collective to a national modernism that is deficient in terms of its structural inability to move from one phase to another in response to new technological, economic, and social developments, not to mention developments in the political sphere. In other words, we have here a colonial form of inequality—if we accept this variation of Samir Amin's classic concept—that remains in place and active in spite of changes in the same capitalist, colonial structure. This inequality is nothing new in the general Palestinian context, but in the current period, i.e. from the early nineties up to our present day, it became one of the main pillars in the regime's structure. In an age distinguished most by the practical ability to regulate the speed of transformation and movement from one form of productive technology to another, the loss of this ability leads in effect to the annulment of collective agency, and this may be considered a variation of collective death.

The totalitarian principle that regulates the colonial apparatuses' administration of Palestinian collective death hasn't yet broken with what preceded it; rather, it has developed a specialty in the administrative process based on the historical accumulation of divisions between the different Palestinian groups. As a result, the collective inhabiting the territories occupied in 1948 appears to be different from those inhabiting the West Bank and Gaza, as each of the latter differs from the other. The creation of difference is a regulatory mechanism in the administrative process; in the past it was centralized, and now it is subject to the dominant

totalitarian principle. Once we leave behind the language which the regime offers for thinking about difference, we see that the totalitarian form of administration is being practiced against most of these groups according to a single logic. The main processes currently involved in the administration of Palestinian death, processes that continue at an intense pace, aim for the literal, i.e. material, dismantlement of what remains of the social infrastructures in the territories occupied in 1948, as well as the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This can be inferred from the relations existing between Expressway No. 6 and the Separation Wall around the West Bank, as well as that around Gaza, relations that come into view once we regard Mandate Palestine as a single unit. This literal form of dismantlement accomplishes a return to a (hypothetical) pre-social material state, one that doesn't engage the subject as an owner who mediates between the material state of life and its socio-economic manifestations. Hence, it may be said that the regime's practices aim principally to reverse the material architectural structure in place to a non-functional state, so that the subject loses the footing it needs in order to exercise its agency. So if we take the biological body as the basic requirement for the subject to function, then we can say that this body gets eliminated in the process of dismantling the material architectonics of the will to resist. In this framework, we may propose a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the assassinations that targeted many of the Palestinian leaders and cadres during the al-Aqsa Intifada, and also link them to the processes of dismantlement that targeted the material, architectonic expansion of the different levels of the Palestinian collective.

The material architectonic series, as understood by the regime, is as follows: the individual biological body; buildings; the street; the neighborhood; the camp / village / city, including its environs; residential complexes and their infrastructures, including roads, agricultural lands, and factories; urban-administrative and other centers, along with the infrastructures grounding and linking them; borders and crossings. For the past two decades, the regime has been gnawing continuously at this series by destroying its individual elements, severing the bonds between them, and reestablishing these bonds in the framework of a non-functional material architectonics. From the regime's perspective, all these processes lead to an affective structure wherein the Palestinian collective becomes superfluous, a legacy from the past that no one needs anymore; more specifically, it is a structure that turns Palestinians into

individuals who no longer need their collective in order to survive. This schema authored by the administration of Palestinian death applies to the three parts of the Palestinian collective that are directly subject to the colonial regime. For example, in the areas occupied in 1948, the dwelling used to be the legitimate refuge accepted by the regime as an antithesis to the general material architectonic of the collective, and following this the family was accepted as the arena of effective agency. Now, however, the dwelling is being dismantled and reduced to a cattle-pen of production and consumption with a primitive character, engaged only in basic bodily functions such as eating and copulation, and working on the margins of the regime's market—the purpose of this dismantlement being the destruction of the biological familial body as a frame of reference for the world. In the case of the Gaza Strip, the war of 2009 represents an exemplary crowning effort on the part of the totalitarian mechanism to reduce the material architectonic to a non-functional state, as it facilitated a great extent and variety of methodical destruction in a time period that is rather short from the perspective of the main process at work in the administration of collective Palestinian death.

This totalitarianism, as the main technology involved in the administration of collective death, has been one of the essential features in the operation of the Zionist colonial regime since it first took shape as a historical project, occupying different positions within the regime according to the particular phase of its development. In the earlier stages of the colonial project in Palestine, these features gave rise to un-resolvable contradictions, as the regime didn't have at its disposal any clean technological mechanisms that would enable it to practice the type of totalitarian hegemony that it strives for. This situation forced the regime to search for alternative solutions such as building its own totalitarian ideological structure, reducing Palestinian society to its primary biological elements, completely neutralizing the influence of time's progression on the Palestinians, and so forth. Now that the mechanisms of digital technology have enabled the regime to put its totalitarianism into practice, we can see it clearly managed to resolve the remaining contradictions by legislating them into purely technological solutions. The dependence of the totalitarian mechanism on solutions provided by digital technology intensified its totalitarianism, as digital technology itself has a totalitarian operative logic. This may be seen from the fact that the regime's adoption of digital technology led it to a gradual process of digital self-transformation,

so that totalitarianism eventually became a function of the regime's technological structure itself.

So far, the totalitarian technology of death, by reducing the material architectonic series to a non-functional state, has led to two intertwined phases of collective Palestinian work. These two phases derive directly from the same structural shift made by the regime toward totalitarianism and the regression to the basic material architectonic; the activation of totalitarianism reduced the collective to its basic material architectonic, and while the collective first sought around for an exit and salvation *from* this space, it now seeks these, and even its liberation, *within* it. If collective consciousness was the primary arena of struggle during the earlier period, we may argue that now the space of the material architectonic has become the new primary arena, and that the Palestinians had no choice but to join it. The act of joining this arena necessitates adopting its operative logic, given that the location of any struggle determines the shape of the agents struggling in it. In its non-functional state, the material architectonic requires an intensive circular motion within an immediate sensory materialism that lacks an architectural structure, i.e. that lacks the ability to reach a higher vantage point from which it could survey the general order. This circular motion is totalitarian, meaning that immersion in it precludes the emergence of an event or an action with a different operative logic. In terms of its function, this materialism operates on a logic of depletion, i.e. the materialism of the material necessitates its transformation, through usage, into another state that appears in the capitalist shape of consumption, although the latter is not the only possible permutation and certainly not the best.

The Palestinian collective has created its material event, in a synchronous fashion, within the arena of struggle, either through the complete immersion in consumption or through the complete negation of the material architectonic at the functional level. A type of radical consumption now characterizes the systematic Palestinian condition, so much so that every Palestinian Authority, in order to maintain its sovereign existence, has no choice but to adopt this radical consumption as its operative logic. This logic situates the Palestinian authority as a secondary link in the regime, working as a service intermediary between the regime and a particular group of Palestinians. What is striking is that this type of work is no longer tied to a particular material architectonic; having been thoroughly dominated by the regime, modernist space has become superfluous to

the totalitarian functioning of digital technology. The Palestinian Authority renders material services that are pre-architectural in nature, in the sense that the limit of their functions is their movement along a straight channel between the two poles of the struggle, the regime and the Palestinian collective. Hence, the ones supposed to represent the Palestinian collective became procedural employees within the regime, and this in turn transformed those represented and served into one of the regime's own population groups. Through this scenario the regime successfully annulled the Palestinian collective that had formed during the previous national period, and incorporated it as a procedural functionality within the current phase of the administration of Palestinian collective death. And there is a great deal of irony and mockery of fate here, given that the Palestinians' attempt to recover control over the administration of their own collective death ultimately led them, as both professionals and laborers, along the trajectories of collective death drawn for them by the regime.

The total negation of the material architectonic at the functional level is the second phase of Palestinian participation in the totalitarian arena of struggle. Before going into the details of this phase, it is worth noting that it coincides with radical consumption: the former and latter are two aspects of the same structure, and upon the realization of each the door is opened for the other to be realized as well. Total negation characterizes the unorganized state of Palestinian resistance, which adheres to the materiality of the collective without the architectonic intermediary proper to it. Total negation, where the regime strives to reduce its target to a primary materiality, involves a complete, a priori annulment of the target's architectonic frame, the purpose being to reshape the arena of struggle itself. It wasn't by coincidence that this phase of Palestinian participation came to be focused in the Palestinians' individual and collective body, given that each of these bodies lies at the heart of the colonial struggle and represents the final refuge for the Palestinian at this stage. And the complete, a priori annulment of the material architectonic proceeds, on the part of the Palestinians, through their complete acceptance of the colonial order, i.e. through the acceptance of the importance and centrality of the object of the struggle, and the subsequent ejection of this object, essentially by its destruction, from the arena of the struggle. The working assumption here is that the regime's ability to practice totalitarianism, by reducing the material architectonics of things to a non-functional state, will be lost, since now this reduction occurs at the

hands of the Palestinians. In the colonial context of Palestine, this reversion to non-functional materialism was attended by the rise of an absolute structure of consciousness that operated as a procedure of resistance aiming to regain control over the administration of Palestinian collective death; this new structure of consciousness eclipsed the historical, as the latter no longer had any utilitarian dimension.

The attempt we made above to chart the map of the Palestinian platform of death, from the *Nakba* to our present day, identifies three phases, both successive and synchronous: the phase of shock and seeking; the phase of nationalism; and the phase of the totalitarian principle. These three phases point to a fundamental structure that was authorized with the *Nakba* of 1948, a structure that still regulates the fundamental relations of the Zionist colonial regime in Mandate Palestine. We have attempted to illuminate the features of each phase in terms of its structural aspects as well as its concrete historical context, and we found that some of these features extend from the *Nakba*, while others derive from new historical and technological developments. The dialectical relation that emerged between the regime's administration of Palestinian collective death and the transformations undergone in the shape of this administration, on the one hand, and the configurations of the Palestinian collective that issued from the regime, on the other, came to determine the shape of the Palestinian collective's life since the *Nakba*. Each phase in the life of the Palestinian collective gave rise to a particular personality of death as a structural solution to its dominant contradictions, such that this personality became a distinguishing mark in the life of whoever practiced it. And so we can see that the phase of shock and seeking gave birth to the personality of the victim, while the nationalist phase produced the personality of the martyr, and the martyrdom operator was yielded by the totalitarian phase. These personalities and subjectivities are signposts on the platform of Palestinian collective death, and we see them at every Palestinian moment and in the ongoing sequence of Palestinian events. In their status as structural configurations that develop dialectically from the different forms of the regime's administration of Palestinian death, these personalities are also Palestinian collective configurations that embark on the potential trajectories of return and birth. The series represented by victim, martyr, and martyrdom operator is a collection of phases in the productive labor of death, a labor that seeks to regain ownership of the

administration of Palestinian collective death as a step on the path of the return to Palestine. Against the background of the processes discussed above, we will now demonstrate in detail how these phases and subjectivities operate as forms of productive labor, hoping thereby to expand our understanding of how Palestinian life is built through its death.

3.

In every Palestinian there are three defining and intertwined forms or phases of death, namely, the victim, the martyr, and the martyrdom operator. Each of these forms may be described as an active socio-historical form of presence with its own particular mode of action. And the action practiced by these forms derives from their status as materially and semantically productive mechanisms of labor, mechanisms that regulate the relations of the Palestinian collective with itself, with its immediate environment in all its different facets, and with the world in general. The accumulated material and semantic production of these three forms comprised a type of colonial production specific to the Palestinian collective; this type of production works through the three forms as simultaneously horizontal and vertical layers that together shape the operative modes of each particular segment of the Palestinian collective, as well as the collective in its entirety. Hence, it may be said that there is a general Palestinian language with local dialects that differ according to the historical context specific to each. At first, we will attempt to specify each of these three forms separately, so that we may relate them to each other as a particular type of production with a specific language. The challenge that follows these steps lies in the question: is there, in these forms of death, an aesthetic sensibility that defines the world from a Palestinian perspective?

At first sight, it is clear that the victim is that form in which the architectonic is successfully reduced to a non-functional state, the victim being caught in a circular motion within the space of an immediate, utilitarian non-functionality. For the victim lives the process of dismantlement as a labor mechanism essential to its self-production; instead of trying to replace or alter the state that resulted from the destruction of what was, the victim announces the event of its own destruction as its defining condition. Hence, the most essential aspect of the victim is the act of announcing its victimhood, and announcing it to the entire world. The admission and announcement of this victimhood lead to the initiation of an ethical-material order comprised of aid, donations,

grants, temporary legal status, and residence in interstitial spaces, all of which function as materially and semantically productive labor mechanisms through which the victim comes to understand itself, its environment, and the world as a whole. The process whereby the structure of the Palestinian victim was formed culminated in the sequence of events that unfolded in the *Nakba* of 1948; in this context, I would like to pause and examine what resulted from these events in order to shed light on the contours of the Palestinian victim, along with the mechanisms of productive labor attending them.

Among other things, the 1948 *Nakba* led to disparities, in both method and scope, in the process whereby the material architectonic was reduced to a non-functional state among different groups and aggregates of Palestinian society. So far, we have addressed the victim as a general form of presence; now we will specify the different approaches, and the disparities in scope and method, involved in the reduction process. In one paradigm of victimhood, we can observe the complete dismantlement of the Palestinian material architectonic series, from the biological body to the borders and crossings at which the collective meets the outside world. In the other paradigm, however, the biological body is preserved, while all or some of the other links in the series are destroyed; this allows the biological body to function alongside whatever functionality remains from the other links. These two paradigms can be distinguished according to whether or not the Palestinian's biological body is dismantled in them, and in this regard they work as a continuum, along which concrete historical conditions may be situated with a view to categorizing them and determining the concrete shape in which the victim manifests itself. The choice to emphasize, as a categorical schema, the dismantlement of the biological body—over its preservation on the level of function—reflects the depth and totality of the catastrophic event that befell the Palestinian collective, where the form of death came to define the form of life. It is not a coincidence that the Palestinians, since then, have been constituted as a socio-economic collective by the continual reproduction of the Palestinian biological body; through this reproductive process new types of collective Palestinian bodies are being constructed.

On first examination, it appears that reducing the material architectonic of the biological body leads inevitably to the demolition of the architectonic series as a whole. The dismantlement of the individual biological

body forces its owner to exit absolutely from the stage of socio-historical events, but this absolute exit is individual, i.e. it concerns the owner of the biological body and not those untouched by the process of dismantlement. However, this absolute exit of agency contributes to the accumulation of agency by the colonial regime itself, or, at the very least, the regime operates on the basis of this equation. The form that arises from this paradigm of Palestinian victimhood operates through its own absolute exit, the latter determining the structure of absence par excellence. The analytical treatment of absence is problematic due to the latter's unrepresentable nature; any attempt to conjure it through language is fundamentally at odds with its presumed operative logic. Therefore absence, as one form of the victim, is made possible by other forms of presence that would have emerged were it not for the absolute exit; in other words, death may be articulated as a constructed part of human life. However, the structure of the *Nakba* would not allow this mechanism of potential scenarios, wherein memory is constructed on the basis of what might have occurred had it not become absent. This is in view of the fact that the demise of the biological body was attended by—or, more precisely, coincided with—the reduction of the rest of the links in the material architectonic series to a non-functional state, one in which the infrastructure of memory, and consequently memory as such, is bound to perish. The figure of the absence of individual Palestinians, as concrete victims, within the structure of the *Nakba* is distinguished by its status as an inextricable absence, the latter being due to the destruction of all the collective material mechanisms available for sensory, symbolic, and semiotic documentation.

The continuing and intensified dismantlement of Palestinian individuals' biological bodies, beginning with the *Nakba*, makes it imperative for us to think about the Palestinian collective biological body and those mechanisms of the colonial regime that seek its absolute exit from the stage of history. We may describe the absolute collective exit as a paradigmatic mechanism for preventing the Palestinian return on two intertwined levels: the actual collective return of Mandate Palestine and the return as a potent, refashioned form of the Palestinian collective. Following this interpretation, we may adopt an analytical approach that views the collective figure of the victim, in its biologically dismantled state, as the dismantlement of all the links in the material architectonic series, and their reduction to a non-functional state. What is striking in this regard

is that the Palestinian collective figure of absence only emerged from its state of absence with the rise of a new form of the Palestinian collective in the mid-sixties. In the two decades following the *Nakba*, we did not witness any schism or differentiation between the absence of the individual figure of the victim's absence and the absence of the collective figure of this absence; one may say that the former, to a great extent, required the latter. The refashioning of the Palestinian collective as a once-again potent power furnished the infrastructure for collective memory, which was finally able to extricate the figure of its collective absence in a definite manner. And so the Palestinian collective figure of absence, as opposed to the individual figure, began to have a potent presence, principally within the record of the utopian return, which is expressed in all spheres of life, the daily and the exceptional alike. The collective figure of absence operates through the different configurations of Palestinian collectivity, a system of relations that conjures the presence of what might have been present, if not for the dismantlement of its biological body and its subsequent absolute exit from the stage of life. And it is possible to follow the presence of the figure of absence by moving from individual dreams to political programs and, finally, literature and art. We can find, in all these different platforms of the record of the utopian return, trajectories of birth and realization that are constructed from what might have been, but which, because of the absence, became itself absent and impossible. In this sense, the first paradigm of the Palestinian victim, whose biological body is being dismantled, approaches the second paradigm; this becomes clear once we move to the accumulation and intensification of the biological, corporeal killing of Palestinian individuals.

While the biological body survives in a non-functional, material, architectonic environment, the body returns, through consciousness, to the primary functions that link it to the world outside it. Hence, the body's functionality gets focused in the entirety of its sensory-cognitive system, as both matter and consciousness. Sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste become the key elements on all levels of this body's existence. And so the second paradigm of the Palestinian victim is represented by the survival of the biological body—i.e. by its not being reduced to a biologically non-functional state—while the other links in the material architectonic series get reduced to varying degrees of non-functionality. The reversion of the Palestinian victim to its own sensory-cognitive system, which is a mechanism that registers the victim in life,

helped to affirm the victim's victimhood, preventing its transition from the state of functional collective death to the process of re-constructing the collective. The essential figure of this type of victim operates through the sensory-cognitive system, in particular the material, corporeal presence that gets announced through the audio-visual scene. This system manifests itself socially in the form of the Palestinian standing before recording mechanisms she does not possess, announcing that she is a victim, i.e. that she will not emerge from the condition she is in except by admitting her victimhood; the moment of affirming this admission has extended to this very day. This means, among other things, that the annunciatory figure implicitly accepts the adherence to the body as a frame of reference for the world, the body here being not an agent, but rather a body reduced to its sensory-cognitive system. What is striking in the Palestinian context is the presence of local and international institutions that maintain this type of victim by pigeonholing the Palestinian's existence in a list of essential requisites such as food, water, temporary housing, and vocational education.

Most Palestinians, across their different locations, have lived the victim's condition in the two decades that followed the *Nakba*. Two paths have played a fundamental role in shaping the Palestinians since then: seeking to gain recognition for the crime committed against them and seeking to be recognized as victims. And the colonial regime has concealed the apparatus most essential to its own formation: this is its structural need for victims who would enable it to construct itself as a regime and reproduce itself as such along the axis of time. Hence, the maintenance of the victim and its continual reproduction became one of the main functional nodes in the colonial system; to this end, new victims were provided and current victims were structurally secured in their relational position. Since the *Nakba*, the experiences of the refugees, the diaspora, and those living in the areas occupied in 1948 have epitomized this type of relation between the victim and the aggressor. On the one hand, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was established in an international framework to administer the affairs of the refugees and to maintain their victim status; on the other hand, the colonial regime established military rule to administer the affairs of those who remained under its sovereignty, effectively leading to a continual state of war where the victim's biological body is preserved while her or his victimhood is maintained as the basis for reproducing the aggressor and its regime.

With the Palestinian collective undergoing this type of death, a many-branched, material-bureaucratic apparatus was established that works to maintain this death as a part of the administrations of Palestinian collective death. What is striking in this context is that the collective forms of Palestinian labor that developed subsequently didn't work to negate this apparatus in itself, but attempted rather to appropriate it and manage it in a manner congruent to the inherent awareness of their collective status as the victim with sovereignty over the Palestinian state of affairs. Thus, the annunciatory figure developed into an apparatus that reproduces the collective self as a sovereign victim, one whose sovereignty is focused not in the creation of a mechanism that negates the relation between victim and aggressor, but rather in the elevation of the victim to a victim who possesses the material-bureaucratic apparatus maintaining its victimhood.

The Palestinians' endeavor wasn't limited to the possession of the many-branched, material-bureaucratic system that governs the maintenance of the victim and its continuity, but went further to the establishment of a collective understanding of the self as victim. The economic, social, and cultural presence of this form of the victim wasn't a given; while they lacked a prior socio-material infrastructure, the Palestinians had no schematic conception of the victim. The annunciatory figure effectively became the literal and metaphorical rule that necessitated the reproduction of mechanisms that restage the Palestinian as a sovereign victim, and due to the barrenness on the socio-material level, these mechanisms got focused in cultural fields such as literature, poetry, music, and art, and, to an extent, in journalism as well. In the two decades after the *Nakba*, Palestinian artists and intellectuals have worked diligently to develop a semantic schema for the sovereign victim's mode of operation in the economic, social, political, and cultural spheres. How does the victim smile? How does it experience sadness? Does it walk with the head down, or does it hold its head up high to proclaim itself? Is the head held high, or are the shoulders slumping? Can the refugee transform into a laborer? Where is the peasant? These and other questions were posed concerning the mode in which the victim's annunciatory sovereignty gets practiced. The primary problematic facing the annunciatory figure and its results lay in the relationality between its implicit recognition of the regime, on the one hand, and, on the other, the dependence of its annunciatory modality on the absent figure of absence, the latter being the condition of the former's presence.

In spite of the changes undergone in the form of the Palestinian collective's death, the relational system that was established between the colonial regime, the figure of absence, and the figure of annunciation still regulates a core component of Palestinian collective labor, in all the latter's different variations. The colonial regime, as such, is based on the consolidation of the Palestinian figure of absence, but since the latter is inarticulable, it does not recognize the regime when it recognizes its own absence. The regime requires recognition from its victims, which makes the emergence of the annunciatory figure necessary for its existence. As we clarified above, absence and annunciation are two figures that, while having different operative logics, nevertheless act on the same axis of continuity belonging to the material architectonic series in its non-functional state. The recognition on the part of the figure of annunciation eventually produced a collective voluntary action systematically oriented toward the recovery of the administration of Palestinian collective death. From here the return, and the trajectories of return that issued from the figure of annunciation, acquired a systematic character: the return became something to be performed, i.e. its logic was no longer guided by an event, but became a purely semiotic and symbolic logic, one that accords with the return's development as a structure of recognition that recognizes the criminal regime. It would seem—and this is a painfully reactionary result—that the martyr who uses annunciation has, upon returning, announced the death of the actual return; this made inevitable the rise of the figure of absence that lurks in the inarticulable background and conceals in its absence the colonial regime's denial. The rise of the figure of absence has been marked by the latter's transformation from a compulsory absolute exit to a voluntary absolute exit, and the latter has been borne by the martyr on the paths of the actual return, considered as an event. Now let us examine, firstly, the martyr.

The sovereign victim, in its capacity as an annunciatory figure, has many means through which it could form a Palestinian collective distinguished by its own productive mechanisms of labor. The socio-historical context in which the Palestinian sovereign victim was planted—the rise of the solitary nation-state in the Arab-Islamic world post-World War II—came to determine the forms of collective labor at the Palestinian collective's disposal. This juncture between the Palestinian sovereign victim and the modernist apparatuses for organizing national collectives produced Palestinian organizations that seek

to administer Palestinian collective death as a means toward the actual return of Mandate Palestine and the reconstruction of the original collective in it. These modernist apparatuses for articulating the collective, and constructing it at the same time, operate according to a monopolistic logic of representation. In the first place, they are based on a relation of ownership in which the collective is monopolized; in the second place, ownership, in its regular function, encompasses matter, event, and representation as well.

In the Palestinian context, the PLO was founded by the Arab states, and it was only after several years that the Palestinians themselves controlled it. And the PLO's slogan—"the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people"—was clear evidence of the monopolistic aspect and the struggle over the ownership of the Palestinian collective. What is significant in this regard is that the PLO never managed to impose the total, traditional type of ownership encompassing matter, event, and representation; this type of ownership presupposes the existence of some land that is owned by society and, in turn, marked for ownership by society's owners: the apparatuses that regularly take the form of the state. Nevertheless, the PLO, in all the different factions comprising it, laid the foundations for a Palestinian material-bureaucratic apparatus that works on administering Palestinian collective death. This apparatus works essentially in two parts: the material and symbolic reproduction of Palestinian society in the form of a national collective, and the development of the trajectories of return through armed struggle. There is no doubt that one of the most important axes along which Palestinian existence, in all its different components, was given shape, is the axis of the Palestinian's biological, social, and cultural reproduction; after the *Nakba*, there was nothing left for the Palestinian but her or his bodily self, in which she or he resides as in a house or homeland. It is in this context that Palestinian organizations undertook to maintain this reproductive process and planted roots for a particular type of socio-cultural self that coincides with biological reproduction. The pseudo-state which the PLO landed in Lebanon is probably good evidence of the centralization of the most important Palestinian production process, the reproduction of the self. This preoccupation with the reproduction and maintenance of life, on the part of the PLO and its different factions, was a crucial part of the administration of Palestinian collective death, which could no longer be satisfied with annunciation as its main figure of operation—notwithstanding the status of the

latter as its first launching point. The reproduction of the Palestinian collective was bound to its role as one of the trajectories of the actual act of return, this act being an antithesis to the different forms of Palestinian collective death.

Armed struggle springs from the representational structure of the modernist bureaucratic apparatuses which the Palestinians formed in order to articulate their national collective. This can be explained by the fact that the continual reproduction of the Palestinian collective requires the actual return of the collective, but the latter, as such, only exists through its representation, and it is the PLO that monopolizes the means for reproducing the Palestinian state of affairs, including liberation violence, i.e. the different forms of armed struggle and organized *Fida'i* action. From this juncture, at which the actual return of every single Palestinian was rendered impossible, sprang the order of the *Fida'i* and her or his potential form of death: the martyr.

To choose to die as a martyr is to wrest control from the regime over the administration of Palestinian collective death, even if only in a symbolic and partial sense. The martyr wrests control over his own death to represent the possibility of a collective act of wresting without the latter necessarily occurring as a consequence. The symbolic and partial status of this act of wresting goes back to the material-bureaucratic nature of the apparatus of Palestinian *Fida'i* action, which, as we mentioned, arose out of the conjuncture between the sovereign victim and its annunciatory figure, on the one hand, and the modern nation-state systems, on the other. But the main problematic concerning the martyr is not limited to its representational, symbolic function and the partial status of the collective Palestinian return that occurs through it; to the contrary, these aspects may act as the cornerstones for the path of the actual return. The martyr is a form of death that determines a form of life for the Palestinian, i.e. the life of the return, but it was imperative for the material-bureaucratic apparatuses that administer Palestinian collective death to translate the trajectory of return into their own language. The use value produced by the martyr, specifically, the trajectory of actual return which negates the colonial regime, is structurally unusable by these apparatuses that enabled the martyr's rise as a *Fida'i* who bears witness to himself. For these apparatuses speak according to the logic of exchange value in its commodity stage; they were originally founded to regulate the movement of goods, individuals, and ideas in the Fordist capitalist stage. Moreover, they were fused with the patriarchal structure

of Palestinian culture, which gave them a particular stamp. The political economy of martyrdom operates according to the logic of private ownership, in which the martyr, as a laborer, produces the trajectory of actual return, which then gets translated to exchange values in the shape of symbolic capital, namely the representation of the Palestinian people.

Thus the Palestinian circle of production gets completed in this period of our history: the collective gets reproduced in a biological, corporeal manner and is subsequently represented through the institutions governing this process of reproduction, which join the material-bureaucratic apparatuses administering Palestinian collective death to the Palestinian individuals who shoulder and execute the *Fida'i* labor that includes martyrdom. And in the case when this act gets realized and translated to exchange values in the shape of symbolic capital intended for representation, the value of the institution investing in armed struggle rises, and the martyr disappears. The figure of the martyr's absence is the essential contradiction that cannot be resolved by the Palestinian material-bureaucratic apparatuses, as it continues to circle around the same process of translation, unsettling it and exposing the gaps in its manifestations where the form of Palestinian life and death are concerned.

The martyr doesn't return, but becomes completely absent as is the case with the first paradigm of the victim, the figure of absence. The martyr doesn't operate on the basis of the absolute, compulsory exit; rather, she or he chooses to be the price for establishing the path of return that denies the colonial regime. The collective will to choose, which stands at the core of the order of the martyr, in itself symbolically denies the authority of the colonial regime over the administration of Palestinian collective death; thus the form of the martyr's death determines, through representation, the form of a collective life, in this case a national collective life. However, this process of representation doesn't resolve all the contradictions borne by the martyr: specifically, absence and the complete, actual return inherent in it.

Since the *Fida'i* bore her or his military ammunition and personal weaponry in the middle of the nineteen-sixties, they have been an arena in which all Palestinian social contradictions meet and get transformed into the state of the Palestinian glorious and sublime. And for three decades, until the end of the First Intifada, the martyr didn't inquire about her or his absence; rather, the material-bureaucratic institutions absented this absence through a sharp separation between

the actual martyr—as an event of return—and her or his glorious, sublime presence, circulated within the limits of the Palestinian cycle of production. The material-bureaucratic Palestinian cycle of production triggered its semantic motion via the relationality that exists between the act of martyrdom, as a form of actual return, the representation of martyrdom as the production cycle's own symbolic capital, and the establishment of a dividing line between the two, through the transformation of the martyr into a glorious and sublime apparatus.

This ideal image of the figure of the martyr opened the door for many variations on the figure; the martyr became a circulated form of death that could be attributed to people who haven't worked as a *Fida'i*. In the beginning, this figure was attributed to anyone killed in a confrontation with the colonial regime, e.g. in demonstrations, prisons, etc. Subsequently, the figure was circulated as forms of death that didn't transpire in a confrontation with the regime, such as death during work or in traffic accidents. This mass circulation of the martyr's value is due, on the one hand, to the latter's role in constituting symbolic capital, and, on the other hand, to what may be seen as the development of a false direction in *Fida'i* labor, especially as compared to other forms of collective Palestinian labor.

Perhaps the most tragic aspect of the martyr's plight is the wide gap that formed between the martyr as an actual event of return and the bureaucratic processes of representation and circulation that took her or him as their object. This gap came into sharp focus after the colonial regime's invasion of Lebanon, which resulted in the collective exit of the Palestinian material-bureaucratic apparatuses from Lebanon, and the Sabra and Shatila massacres that followed. The frequency and manner in which martyrdom was repeated—literally thousands getting martyred with the unbearable ease of programmatic killing—exposed the material-bureaucratic apparatuses to the light of day, particularly as concerns the contradiction posed by absence, which these representational apparatuses cannot extricate and resolve. In this context, the experience of the First Intifada played a contrasting role in the beginning, as it witnessed the process of killing the commodity and its circulation by returning to the Palestinian collective and constituting it anew, with a view to furnishing the trajectories of an actual collective return. The moment at which the juncture with the material-bureaucratic apparatuses of the PLO occurred gave rise to the process whereby nascent Palestinian collective labor got translated into circutable exchange values: perhaps the most

prominent evidence of this is the stormy debate that took place between the different leaderships of the Intifada, over whether the goal of the Intifada should be liberation or statehood. For several reasons the debate was resolved in favor of statehood, and Palestinian independence was announced in Algeria in 1988. With this, the actual return got supplanted by the symbolic, partial return, and the order of the martyr, as the bridge of return over the abyss of absence began to collapse. The figure of absence returned at the moment when martyrdom collapsed as a possibility of actual return, and this figure manifested at many social, political, and cultural junctures until it crystallized as the figure of the martyrdom operation, the latter being a labor mechanism that produces the trajectories of actual return. These transformations would not have occurred without the rise of new material-bureaucratic apparatuses in place of those developed by the PLO during the prior phase of Palestinian collective labor.

The dialectic that arose out of the structure of the *Nakba*, in which the colonial regime strives for the compulsory, absolute exit of the Palestinian collective as a means of establishing its own total and final presence, reached one of its climaxes in the beginning of the nineteen-nineties. After the First Intifada, and in contradiction of its spirit, we witness the annulment of Palestinian collective action, the action that was represented by the material-bureaucratic apparatuses of the PLO. This process, to a great degree, extended from the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the early stages of the project of fragmenting the regional Arab nation-state, a project demonstrated by the US-led alliance's invasion of Iraq. In a striking synchrony, the internal Palestinian, regional Arab, and international contexts all interacted to consolidate the Oslo Accords as a set of procedures and technologies developed to administer Palestinian collective death, and relying for this purpose on the demolition of the Palestinian apparatuses of national representation, the latter being limited to the partial administration of Palestinian collective death by the Palestinian national collective. This demolition process relied essentially on the acceptance of the regime as a legitimate agent in the administration of Palestinian collective death, and the gradual diminishment, as a result, of the legitimacy of the new bureaucratic apparatuses represented by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and of their ability to even participate with the regime in the administration of Palestinian collective death.

This turn of events made the time ripe for the regime to attempt to rid itself, once and for all, of the Palestinian

collective, by reducing it to residential aggregates placed under its sovereignty and managed by new employees working for the regime as per the Oslo Accords. Among the most important, initial manifestations of this new context is the legitimization of the re-severance of the body, both imaginary and actual, of the Palestinian collective, its parceling into new parts within what has remained in a dismembered state since the *Nakba*.

The second manifestation is the fact that this re-severance made it possible to target the individual Palestinian body, on the immediate biological level, as a means of targeting the collective Palestinian body. Initially, this proceeded through the elimination of these bodies via the technique of assassination, which became the main weapon in the regime's arsenal. Secondly, these bodies were targeted through the re-construction of the daily living space they occupy, a space constituted through such activities as reproduction, drinking, eating, and motion through time and space. The operative logic of this re-construction was the reduction of the Palestinian collective to small groups preoccupied with their immediate material environments, i.e. their biological bodies. After all these organized processes—the formation of the PNA as the end to the possibility of representing the entire Palestinian collective, assassinations, the reorganization of daily living space according to a logic of reduction—a binary structure was produced for the administration of Palestinian collective death. On one hand, there is an actual figure of absence for the Palestinian collective, in its national and other forms; on the other hand, there is a celebratory, hollow figure of presence that celebrates absence in the guise of presence. These processes forced the Palestinian collective on all levels to go back to the individual body, and subsequently the collective body, as a final refuge from its confrontation with its old, yet constantly renewed, fundamental aporia: an absence that never ceases to be present in many forms since the collective's initial catastrophe, the *Nakba*.

Martyrdom operation explicates the figure of absence that lurks at the foundation of the collective Palestinian experience, and in doing so it recovers for the Palestinian collective the crucial element in its existence, or non-existence, or to be more precise, the element crucial to the administration of the collective according to the logic of its actual return. The figure of martyrdom operation comes out of the figure of the martyr, i.e. the former contains the latter, attempting thus to resolve its fundamental aporia as a self-representation that denies

its founding absence. The martyr who carried his or her military ammunition and personal weaponry, intending to establish the trajectories of actual return through *Fida'i* labor, situated his body as the price paid in advance for the realization of this goal. In this manner the martyr separated his or her body from the fighting tools they bore, shaping this body into a value that bears within it an active will striving to establish the path of return, and aspiring to return and lead those whom it represents on the path of return. For the most part, the *Fida'i* didn't return, although the wait for him or her was charged with the hope of this return, and of the collective return as well. The absence of the *Fida'i* in the very act of his or her martyrdom precipitated a crisis in the order of representation and circulation, which in turn necessitated the rise of the absent in the guise of the glorious and noble martyr.

A solution to the crisis presented itself in the form of the martyrdom operator, who was composed a priori from the stuff and figure of absence itself, and chose his or her own biological body as fighting tool in place of ammunitions and weapons, this body essentially expending itself as a means of combat. The martyrdom operator joined together material, tool, and mechanism, thus rendering the absolute exit and absence inevitable on the road to actual return. The resolution, in this manner, of the martyr's problematic via the figure of the martyrdom operator, necessarily altered the systematic junctures representing its target. Thus, the martyrdom operator didn't target the military and economic representatives of the colonial regime; instead, she or he sought to return the arena of struggle to the biological colonial bodies, the latter being the concrete bearers of the regime. The martyrdom operator exits, literally and figuratively, as the body of his or her collective—a body always eligible for the compulsory, absolute exit—to enter the colonial body, removing both his or her own body and the colonial biological body from the stage of historical action, absolutely and voluntarily in the former case, and forcibly in the latter.

The act of recovering agency for the figure of absence, by voluntarily applying this absence to the self and the regime, inheres the grammar of the *Nakba's* fundamental structure and the exercise of volition within this grammar for the purpose of negating it. This process of negation proceeds through the practice of the same grammar and the concomitant exhaustion of its logic, namely the administration of the antithetical collective's death. The martyrdom operator does not only seek to control the administration of Palestinian

collective death; what distinguishes him or her is that she or he seeks, in addition, and as a means toward the former goal, to control the circumstances of the colonial collective's death, and the system regulating these circumstances. Thus, by exhausting the logic of the colonial regime in Palestine, the martyrdom operator actually bears the possibility of negating the regime and of transitioning to another phase of the Palestinian collective's death and life. It is safe to say that the primary concern for most of those involved in the colonial project in Palestine is the fact that the colonial regime's demise has become, due to the structure of the *Nakba* itself, a real historical possibility.

The absolute, voluntary exit from the structure of the colonial regime, a step that attempts to transcend the regime by resolving its fundamental contradictions, manifested in the figure of the martyrdom operator a socio-historical constituency with distinct features that succeeded at codifying the structural interactions into apparatuses of resistance with executive dimensions. From the beginning, this constituency took the form of new Palestinian Islamic organizations that became the actual social incubator, after inheriting the organizational-political legacy of the PLO and its factions. The Islamic organizations furnished the foundations for the third phase of organized Palestinian collective action to develop since the *Nakba*, and buttressed it with the construct of the sacred, adopting the latter as a general perspective on the world and translating it into a particular organizational procedure that serves as a working principle in the general, quotidian, historical sphere. This enabled the development of a practical ability to engage the absolute, specifically through the voluntary exit from the regime's structure, i.e. the absolute occupies the organizational structure of the sacred as a crucial complex within its function as a socio-historical apparatus. Importantly, these transformations during the third organizational phase of Palestinian collective action cannot be isolated from the processes that reduced the Palestinian collective to its body. In addition to understanding these transformations through a logic of continuity, we need to see them as a moment of structural transformation in the colonial regime and the apparatuses by which it administers Palestinian collective death, for this moment bears within it the decline of Palestinian national action and the rise of Islamic action. The depth of these transformations, virtually a critical climax in the historical development of the regime, returned the collective to the sacred as a leaning

post that helps it cope with its continual fracture as a collective. By thus understanding the different mechanisms and processes that determine the structure of the martyrdom operator's figure, we may claim that the absolute exit involves a historical variation in the figure of the martyrdom operator. However, as an approach to collective Palestinian resistance action, the absolute exit may assume other figures in the future, figures that both contain the martyrdom operator within them and surpass it in the direction of emancipation, doing so by resolving the fundamental contradictions of the colonial regime in Palestine.

The victim, the martyr, and the martyrdom operator, as figures of Palestinian collective work, still represent this work in all its various manifestations across the many locations of the different Palestinian groups. The nature of the relationship between these three poles has changed, so that, for example, the figure of the victim appears at times and dominates with its presence the other figures of collective work. However, as we have seen, the rise of a certain figure also entails its inclusion of the other two figures in a particular form, one that fashions the rising figure and what may emerge subsequently from it.

If we can agree that the victim operates by accepting the non-functional reality to which it has been reduced, that it demands to be recognized as a victim, and further to have this recognition announced, and that it does all this in order to obtain demands by means of which it can maintain itself as a victim, then at first sight it would seem that the victim accepts the regime's ownership of the administration of Palestinian collective death. And yet the victim that demands to have its victimhood announced has transformed, due to the accumulation of victims and the evolution of demands, into a sovereign victim. And the sovereign victim is the one that gains possession of itself after it dies, i.e. it does not enter the arena in which the administration of death is contested, but rather lingers in the moment of death and invests in it, without having a real horizon of possibility in terms of confronting the regime.

At the moment when the collective organizes itself into material-bureaucratic apparatuses such as organizations, parties, and institutions, the sovereign victim transforms into a national collective that operates through representation and assumes the form of the martyr, the latter being a form of death that gives shape to the life of the national collective. The main problematic lies in the fact that the national collective operates by means of the mechanisms of representation,

so that the figure of the martyr becomes symbolic and partial, incapable of subsuming the colonial contradictions in their entirety, particularly the figure of absence of those who got scattered in the thick of the struggle—and many Palestinians still walk on the path of this figure of absence.

The individual martyr disappears, thereby throwing into crisis the collective one, and creating a movement within the latter in the direction of explicating absence, a movement that coincides with transformations in the Arab regional and international contexts; this leads to the literal and metaphorical collapse of the material-bureaucratic apparatuses bearing the martyr. The severance of the actual and imaginary Palestinian body into many parts, the re-organization of daily living space for each of these parts, and the assassinations amplifying in quantity and quality—all these inevitably called into presence the figure of absence. In the beginning, the socio-historical constituency of the figure of the martyrdom operator took the form of Islamic organizations that had inherited the PLO's organizational structure and buttressed it with the axis of the sacred. This axis enabled the translation of the voluntary, absolute exit into an organizational, procedural operation that could be implemented on the ground. These operations cannot proceed without first taking shape through a particular language, taste, and aesthetic perspective, and so we would like to summarize this article by posing the question of how the contours and working methods of these operations may be delineated.

4.

The basis of Palestinian collective productive labor, in its three figures, lies in the Palestinian reproducing him or herself—materially and biologically, socially and culturally—and wagering this reproduction on the struggle to recover control over the administration of Palestinian collective death from the colonial regime. These figures have produced a general Palestinian language with local dialects: the dialects of the victim, the martyr, and the martyrdom operator. It should now be apparent that this language rests fundamentally on the reproduction of the relation between the body of the Palestinian tragedy and the means available for reproducing the trajectories of the return. And this language works on constructing collective meanings as well as behavioral and emotional codes that bridge the gap between the actual event—the 1948 *Nakba* and its repeated occurrence since then—and the attempt

to establish a figure of collective labor that seeks to negate what resulted from the *Nakba*, as well as to realize the return by wresting control over the administration of Palestinian collective death from the colonial regime in all its different institutional manifestations. These material-bureaucratic and linguistic means of formation bear within them, as a matter of course and in comparison with similar historical experiences, a sensory palate and aesthetic perspective. So the question becomes, how can we delineate the contours of the sensory palate and aesthetic perspective of Palestinian death? And would this delineation help us understand the mechanisms by which the Palestinian expresses death as his or her defining condition, determining his or her identity through this expression?

It might seem at first sight that the figures of absence and the victim do not possess a sensory palate or aesthetic perspective, as the latter depends on a type of reflexive consciousness that settles in, or issues from, certain material-bureaucratic apparatuses. For the figure of absence is a non-reflexive condition par excellence, one that draws on the event as an antithesis to the material-bureaucratic apparatus. As for the figure of the victim, its consciousness is limited, even when reflexive, to the sensory order of cognition which helps it in its struggle to survive and to keep from slipping into what it perceives as its absence. On the opposite end to this systematic relation between reflexive consciousness and the material-bureaucratic apparatus, many literary, artistic, and other expressions can be found that yield a sensory palate and aesthetic perspective; it appears that reflexive consciousness and the apparatus attending it are merely one variation of the possibility of constructing a palate and perspective. Thus we see that absence is present in the incompleteness of the collective form, its presence floating as if it had no socio-material ground beneath it, due to its random, constantly shifting, anxious motion. The victim, on the other hand, relies on the senses, which function in a state of immediate, embryonic presence, so that concrete vision and orality become the foundations of the victim's sensory palate. These two mechanisms of sensory labor—random, anxious motion and the reliance on vision and orality—together fashion an aesthetic perspective that determines the shape of the world, searching for a material, formal solidity that is immediate and complete, and in principle brimming with content derived from the ground. This form of return isn't temporally limited to the two decades that followed the *Nakba*; it can be seen in diverse cultural configurations up to the present time.

The refashioning of the Palestinian collective in the shape of a modern, representative national collective, complete with material-bureaucratic apparatuses that stand at the heart of *Fida'i* labor and the figure of the martyr, necessitated the centrality of the printed text. Hence the development of a particular sensory palate that shapes the figure of the martyr draws on the collective imaginary primarily through the textual connection, encompassing narrative, visual, and auditory texts alike. This type of connection joins the discursive, representational level to the concrete whole perceived in an immediate sensory fashion. The Palestinian collective doesn't see the *Fida'i* martyr, and this is contrary to the case of the victim, for whom it was imperative to see and hear the self; rather, the collective imagines the martyr and reconstructs itself by observing his or her imaginary, auditory, and narrative features. As a result, the aesthetic perspective became transformative, one that negates the victim's former mode of being in order to set the collective up as a self-sustaining entity. And so you see men and women working in the fields, and observe the sun emerging, a hand breaking its chain, beautiful girls growing toward fertility, a young man carrying his rifle and leaving his hovel in the camp to work on the paths leading to the return, and so forth. The aesthetics of negation-transformation is modernist par excellence, and its translation into a Palestinian context always suffered from the stable patriarchal structure, on the one hand, and the random, shifting, anxious motion arising from the figure of absence at the core of the Palestinian experience, on the other.

It may be said that this aesthetics of negation and transformation did not engage the stable patriarchal structure thoroughly and in depth, but rather worked through it, and at times—to an extent—the patriarchal structure deployed this aesthetic perspective in a manner suggesting that the stability of patriarchy is itself an act of negation and transformation. As far as absence is concerned, the perspective of negation and transformation relies on presence as perceived through the logic of the patriarchal national collective and the commodity; the national nightmare of the Palestinian is to become absent. Hence, absence continued to shape the Palestinian context through its very absence and, once perceived, its status as an absence would be automatically absented from consciousness.

The absolute, voluntary exit lying at the foundation of the figure of the martyrdom operator entails a certain vacillation between total sensory presence and the total absence of this presence. On several levels, the

martyrdom operator recovers immediate, sensory presence for collective labor after this presence had been absented through the representative function of national labor. This act of recovery adopts the socio-material body as a frame of reference for emancipatory Palestinian collective labor, using the body as its material according to the latter's logic of dissipation, so that it may resolve the regime's fundamental contradictions and thereby dismantle it, yielding presence in return for absence. The aesthetic perspective arising out of this figure contains the aesthetics of negation and transformation, and the transformation of the regime remains until now an essential axis around which martyrdom operation revolves. However, this transformation moves from total presence to total absence in an attempt to reach an absolute presence that negates the regime in its entirety. In this sense the martyrdom operator takes us from the banal and relative to the exceptional and absolute, and the aesthetics of complete, absolute negation treats the world as a passage, given that if the world transforms it would break with what it currently is and become a completely new, different condition. The martyrdom operator hasn't yet managed to disseminate his or her logic, since the absolute, voluntary exit remains on the immediate level of the body without having reached other social and cultural spheres. And it may be the case that the absence of a socio-historical constituency for this kind of aesthetic perspective is what obstructs the latter's dissemination, since dissemination contradicts the logic of the figure of absence itself.

We have chosen to summarize this essay via what we termed the language, sensory palate, and aesthetic perspective of the different forms of Palestinian death, the latter serving to determine the forms of Palestinian life. This form of summary doesn't seek to welcome or celebrate death by praising its different languages, sensory palates, and aesthetic perspectives, but seeks rather to call attention to the profound entrenchment of death—as a formative, structural principle—in Palestinian life. The totalized nature of death, in its function as a standard for the definition of life, has prompted us to erect it as a platform for surveying life; by examining the nature and history of the platform of Palestinian death, we specified the primary characteristics of the colonial regime in Palestine: the administration of Palestinian collective death in the direction of the Palestinians' absence, i.e. their collective exit from the stage of modern history. We have distinguished between three fundamental

stages or phases through which the Palestinians work to establish the figure of a historically present collective, notwithstanding any differences that may arise from phase to phase in the form of this presence. Through this continuous history, the accumulation of events of death and their spectacular effects, and the consolidation of structural working mechanisms in the form of systematic apparatuses that yield the diverse types of killing, the structure of the *Nakba* has been deeply engraved, even biologically, into the socio-material body of the Palestinians.

This process of engraving is diverse and multi-layered, and we have attempted here to illuminate its primary nodes and the ways in which the Palestinian collective has dealt with it, i.e. the different ways in which control over the administration of Palestinian collective death was wrested from the regime; following this, we attempted to engage the Palestinian role in the engraving process. This process and related processes lie at the foundation of the Palestinian social system, in that this system is essentially based on the Palestinians' reproduction of themselves; to this day, the fundamental contradictions—those related to death and life—haven't been codified as a method of production and a value system that can transcend the dialectic of life and death that developed in the colonial context. The language of the Palestinian social system characteristically bridges the gap between the dead body of the tragedy and the trajectories of return potentially available for reviving this body; thus, this language is a crucial element in the Palestinian collective's reproduction of itself. Considering the sensory palate and the aesthetic perspective, it may be said that they propose possible solutions, or indicate the impossible in order to translate its form and subsequently establish trajectories of return; this return may lead back to the individual body, in the victim's case, and to the collective body in the cases of the martyr and martyrdom operator. Hence, the Palestinian dies so that she or he may live, and cannot live except through his or her death; the Palestinian's eye / I becomes, in effect, different forms of absence.

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