

her conception of “relationality” is at the heart of an ethical project that presupposes a political project that is founded in reconceiving the individual subject: “The kind of relationality at stake is one that ‘interrupts’ or challenges the unitary character of the subject, its self-sameness . . . something happens to the ‘subject’ that dislocates it from the center of the world; some demand from elsewhere lays claim to me . . . even divides me from within, and only through this fissuring of who I am do I stand a chance of relating to another” (6).

In the prose poem “A House Fallen,” Darwish speaks of everyday dispersion that amounts to a dispossession where the severing of relation is that of being and home:

In one minute, a lifetime of a house ends. . . . A mass grave for primal matter prepared for meaning. . . . A house murdered is the severing of things from their relations and from their names. . . . Every being suffers . . . the memory . . . of a scent, of an image. . . . And slain too is the memory of things: stone, wood, glass . . . scatter like remains of beings. Cotton, silk, linen . . . torn like words unsaid. . . . Dishes, spoons, toys . . . all break like their owners . . . dried tomatoes and okra, rice, and lentils, crushed just like the household. Rental contract, marriage certificate, birth certificate . . . torn apart like the hearts of their bearers. Pictures, toothbrushes, combs . . . swept off like family secrets, displayed in the open and in ruins. All these things are a memory of a people emptied of things . . . everything ends in one minute. Our things die like us, but they are not buried with us!⁵⁶

Dispossession

What Palestinian art reveals is a condition of dispossession, but as Butler so poignantly argues, dispossession is the predicament of those who endured loss of home, of loved ones, of place, of land, of “the very condition of belonging to the world,” as Darwish has written in the *Journal of Ordinary Grief*. Elsewhere Butler writes that dispossession is the predicament of those who have lost “citizenship, property, and a broader belonging to the world.” For her, it is both “what happens when

populations . . . become subject to military violence” and “a term that marks the limits of self-sufficiency and that establishes us as relational and interdependent beings.”⁵⁷

She recuperates dispossession as “responsiveness,” a possibility for resistance and a necessary condition for justice and for solidarity, in the ability of the self to *respond* to the other, to be decentered, and to be carried away to an elsewhere, to form an alternate collectivity:

The predicament of being moved by what one sees, feels, and comes to know is always one in which one finds oneself transported elsewhere, into another scene . . . in which one is not the center. And this form of dispossession is constituted as a form of responsiveness that gives rise to action and resistance, to appearing together with others, in an effort to demand the end of injustice. And so we take up the question of *how to become dispossessed of the sovereign self and enter into forms of collectivity that oppose forms of dispossession that systematically jettison populations from modes of collective belonging and justice.*⁵⁸

This is a fruitful understanding of dispossession that wrestles it from a “logic of possession, a hallmark of capitalism, liberalism, and humanism,” where dispossession describes resistance, opposition, and a response to “disenfranchisement associated with unjust dispossession of land, economic and political power, and basic conditions for living.”⁵⁹

Butler grounds ethics in relationality and not primarily in the subject or its actions. Ethics is privileged as a “relational practice” that responds to the other, an “ec-static relationality,” “a way of being dispossessed from sovereignty and nation in response to the claims made by those one does not fully know. . . . From this conception of the ethical relation follows a reconceptualization of both social bonds and political obligations that takes us beyond nationalism.”⁶⁰

What the artists after Darwish reveal through their art is both aspects of this dispossession, the decentered, diasporic subject who actively allies itself in active struggle with others, who enters in relations with others against those violently enforced. Art becomes an intervention, whether

willed or not, in calling into question practices of power that lead to collective conditions of dispossession as well as the struggles of resistance against it. What they affirm is a belonging against collective dispossession, one that can no longer pretend to be grounded in identity but one founded on solidarity and on struggle with all dispossessed. If practices of state dispossession have been grounded in identity, then the art itself finds new ways of resisting the logic and the historical reality that ensues from it.

As the work of Suheir Hammad shows, an effect of continued dispossession is dispersion, which faces such violence with poetry, with a belonging that remains open, barely able to be articulated but a horizon to be sung. In engaging the poetry of Darwish, she creates her own unique expression, from Arabic to an English inhabited by the Arabic, from lyrical verses to spoken-word performances. Dispersion proves innovative and already at work in any creative endeavor. Likewise, the poetry of Liana Badr and Ghassan Zaqtan speak to this experience of dispersion in the first chapter of this book. In the second chapter, loss is highlighted. Loss establishes a relation to another's poetry, to other people who have endured loss. Across the dispersion in geography, forms, media, experiences, and languages, there are commonalities. The three filmmakers discussed all present life under occupation, and yet the visual language of all three is highlighted as part of an aesthetic project that innovates while it dissects a collective experience of daily loss.

Palestinian art, in chapter 3, like the voice of Darwish, has dispersed internationally and has found a public forum that political voices have not. The extraordinary accomplishments of artists such as Mona Hatoum, Sharif Waked, and Emily Jacir present us with a prolific production that is rich with experimentation and preoccupied with the experience of dispossession, whether of the homeland or of the domestic home or of the body. The openness of Palestinian art to new forms of being together, of belonging, of resisting have appealed to many others who are in solidarity or who simply have taken notice of its force, innovation, and vitality. It challenges the rigid distinctions of local and diasporic and has ensuing implications beyond aesthetic considerations. It creates new ways of belonging in its struggle against effacement.

In music, the fourth chapter, the hip-hop Palestinian bands, whether from Gaza or “from 1948” or from Ramallah, have incorporated this political American form in its origins to address youth grievances and to protest the dispossession of their youth in their homes, and have claimed it as their own. Inspired by the great poets of Samih al-Qasim, Tawfiq al-Zayyad, and Mahmoud Darwish, they created an expression of struggle and of survival, both ruined in its traditional forms and vibrant. The proliferation of such musical groups in the Palestinian territories and in the diaspora, as in Palestinian bands in the United States, speak to a common grievance and a common resistance to an experience of dispossession that continues to inflict its damage.

Palestinian art in its broad meaning may be a space of refuge for politics in a seemingly depoliticized age, as Jacques Rancière has argued in *Dissensus*. It is a living example of the artificial opposition between politics and aesthetics and shows their complex relationship, whereby art gains greater force given the historical impasses before it.

In “Colonization of the Imagination” Steve Sabella argues, following Fanon, Césaire, and others, that colonization is also that of the imagination and of the mind and not just of the physical forms of body and place, which “subjects people to a severe mental and physical paralysis that restricts development and obliterates all notions of personal freedom.” For Sabella, exile becomes one of the ways of attempting to counter colonization and regain freedom, to “re-conquer my imagination, until I reached my states of Euphoria (2010) and Beyond Euphoria (2011).”⁶¹ It is in this sense that Palestinian visual art, and other forms of art, have been critically important, politically as well as aesthetically. It becomes incumbent to wrench language, whether poetic or visual, from the hegemony of a tired language about Palestine.

Palestinian visual artists like Tayseer Barakat, Tayseer Batniji, Raeda Saadeh, Larissa Sansour, and Steve Sabella are among the artists who are reclaiming imagination and creating against an occupation that has been physically brutal and corrosive, locally and globally, and hegemonic in discourse and images. In this sense, the rural portraits of Tayseer Barakat are no longer the nostalgic landscapes of the past nor the deformed ones

of the present, deformed by an occupation that inflicts violence not only on the people themselves but also on nature, on trees, and on space. The natural and humble beauty of the villages is also violated by this continuous occupation. Barakat's images, however, recall this beauty and this violence at the same time.

Raeda Saadeh's "Conquering Space" alludes to this violation directly, in portraying the subject as physically constrained. Here, the visual imaginary becomes a way to liberate from the occupation that confines one's space and movement, specifically in calling this "conquest of space" into question and doing so through humor, so that one's subjectivity escapes from the constraining and imposed paradigm of occupation. In the image of the installation, a woman stands outside a house with an open entryway; as if undecided about going in or leaving, one foot stands next to a suitcase and another is stuck in a block of cement. The image calls attention not only to physical constraints on movement but also to the inability to fully claim a home and forge new roots elsewhere in exile.

In Steve Sabella's haunting work *In Exile*, images recurrently depict a somber but meticulously constructed exile. Each image seems to repeat and proliferate images of houses or apartments, as if they are settlements or homes artificially constructed and imposed. The images are imbued with the dark colors blue and gray, brown and black, as we see in the image *In Exile 1*. In *In Exile 2* spaces are surrounded with barbed wire. As Sabella once proclaimed, "I stitch my wounds with barbed wire." The "reconstitution" of self is paradoxically one of violent suturing that has not been able to rid reality of barbed wires, at home or in exile, but remains liberatory. With light emanating from the inside of these interiors at night, the images are not without a sense of hope. Despite the dark gray, blue, and black, the flutter of interior light suggests movement nonetheless, perhaps a breakthrough from all limitations.

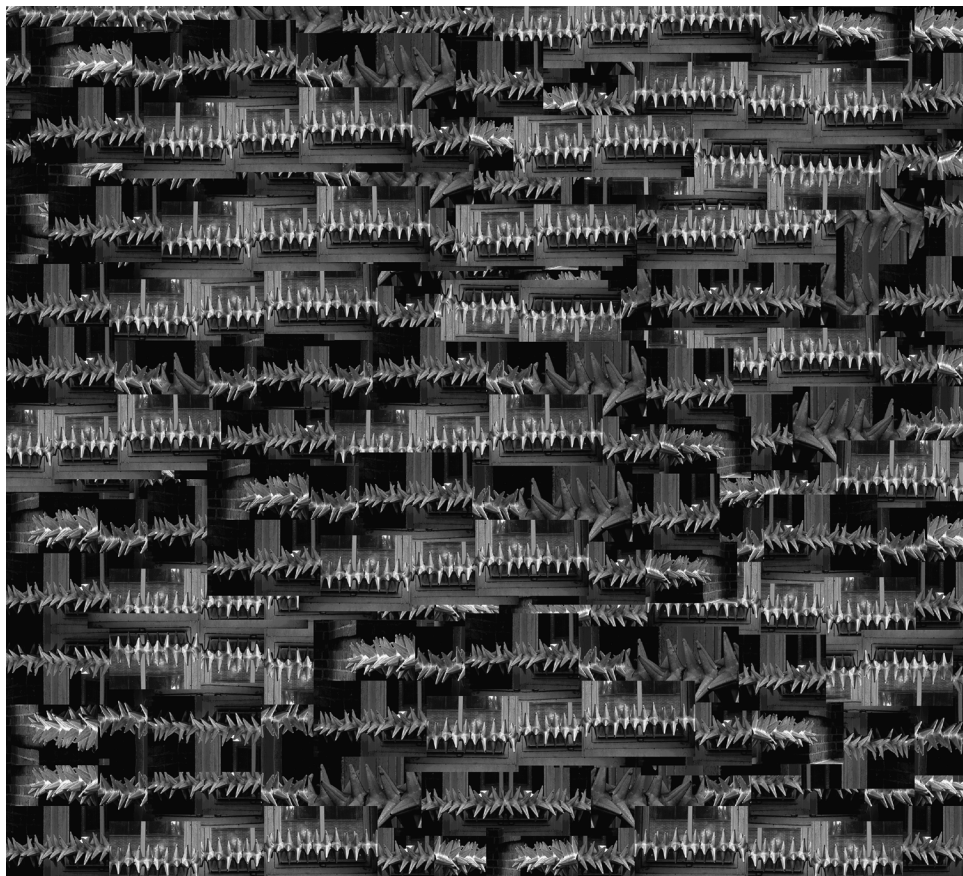
Mona Hatoum's *Turbulence* recalls the marbles of childhood, an insouciance of play and connection to a place that has since turned to transience, disconnection, and disarray, shared with so many others, a collection of instances of beings and nonbeings. One more loss, one more devastation, and everything the image suggests is asunder again. When



1. Steve Sabella, *In Exile 1*, from series *In Exile*, 2008, series of five works, lambda prints on aluminum, 136 x 125 cm each. Ellen Auerbach Prize 2008 of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, Germany. Reproduced with permission from Steve Sabella.

Palestinians meet today in the diaspora, it is as if they constitute such a collection.

Tayseer Batniji's series of destroyed houses in Gaza just after the Israeli attack "Cast Lead" (the end of 2008 to the start of 2009), pictured and displayed like ads in a real estate agency, emphasize the toll of dispossession. The image, however, is not without subversive irony. It confronts the viewer with the reality of what it is to lose a home, which is unfathomable, in a visual language, a cultural practice, and an economic exchange that



2. Steve Sabella, *In Exile 2*, from series *In Exile*, 2008, series of five works, lambda prints on aluminum, 136 x 125 cm each. Ellen Auerbach Prize 2008 of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, Germany. Reproduced with permission from Steve Sabella.

are familiar. It showcases what has been irrecoverably lost, with no insurance, no exchange, no going back. It recalls Darwish's poem "A Murdered House," in *Athar al-farāsha* (The butterfly effect). I translated the poem's title here as "fallen," since these homes are demolished, but the term mitigates the violence of the original.

This is an art of dissent that crosses over political impasses and renders what has been muted and excluded legible and public. Art and politics interrupt the framing of perceptual space, creating difference and



3. Mona Hatoum, *Turbulence* (detail), 2012, Clear glass marbles $1\frac{1}{16}$ x $157\frac{1}{2}$ x $157\frac{1}{2}$ in. (4 x 400 x 400 cm) © Mona Hatoum. Photo: def image. Courtesy Galerie Max Heztler, Berlin/Paris, and White Cube.

challenging consensual forms of power, where art allows the subject to appear and where politics allows excluded speech to emerge. This art compels a response and calls for reflection on the act of interpretation at a time of devastation. It is an act of intervention in the present, a critical act of listening and of dissension.