

**Leaving everything behind: understanding the experiences of Palestinian
academics and their families in the UK**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of

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Declaration

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Dedication

To the soul of the person whose kindness and purity are truly missed, my mother, Nahla

To the soul of my first educator, my father, Prof. Tawfiq Elwaheidi,

To my wonderful wife, Nourhan,

To my lovely children: Yazan and Tia,

To my brothers: Mu'tasim and Mu'min

To my sisters: Hayfa', Muna & Huda

To my parents-in-law: Naser and Manal El Helou

To the most wonderful family I have ever met: Dina, Rawan, Yara and Salman

To my Godfather, Dr. Ahmad Khaled Tawfiq

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Summary of Portfolio

Research methodologies for professional enquiry

This was my first module in which methodological frameworks, philosophies and methods of data collection were explored. Being the first module, key concepts and approaches were discussed along with key issues in education, health and social science research. Research questions that arose from my professional practice were evaluated as part of the assignment of this module. The second part included highlighting the application aspects of Tawjihi exams to inquire about the learner experiences against the expectations of the society within the professional setting of school in the Palestinian Occupied Territories.

Social Theory and Education: Key Issues and Debates

In this module an introduction to theories related to education was given. Wenger, Dewey and others were discussed and theoretical perspectives were also introduced including communities of practice on which my assignment focused. The importance of communities of practice was highlighted as a theoretical model of learning through which authentic involvement can be created. The assignment investigated different understandings of how to coordinate communities of practice as a management of ideology of empowerment, and how the community theory could be used in a number of professions. This was introduced through a case study of multinational staff who are working at UNRWA as interpreters and translators

Creativity in practice

In this module, I was encouraged to consider new way to present data. As the first part of this assignment, I produced a clip in which a short talk was given about the negative aspects of the educational system in Palestine as video has been used for long time in the process of both learning and teaching. The second component of the assignment was a reflection on the practice based research component in which a commentary was written to discuss several points including Anna Craft's 'possibility thinking' and justification of the presentation.

Institutions, discontinuities and systems of knowledge

The assignment of this module was mainly about the nature of the analysed discontinuity and the theoretical perspective of this analysis. In this study, social and symbolic construction of personal identity was demonstrated and various forms of data were used including interview. The interview was conducted with the subject whose story was the case study of the assignment. He suffered severely as a result of homelessness and deprivation of belonging. It was argued through this case study that identity, which is basically configured around belonging, is engaged with counter culture as a result of not belonging.

Cultural Practices

In this module a range of cultural practices theoretical frameworks were discussed and explored. As understanding of cultural impact and cultural practices and reflecting upon that was one of the module outcome, my assignment was about the cultural effects of the cultural exchange programs held by the American consulate on the Palestinian students at schools. Three students were interviewed and their lives in Gaza brought into focus. The Arts based method of Zines technique was used in the interviews as a means of ensuring the gathering of rich data. The perception of three subjects of their experience in the USA and reflections on that was discussed; this shed light on their lives in Gaza.

Thesis in context

This module drew upon the other modules we have previously had and provided the first step towards writing my thesis. It helped considering the need for an analytical and demonstrative approach to my research investigation. Through this module, I realised in particular the scope for utilising philosophical perspectives that would help in explaining the situation I want to focus on. This module was the first draft of my thesis first draft proposal. It helped me a lot in giving justification for the techniques I used to investigate the research question.

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Abstract

This thesis presents a critical study of the experience of Palestinian academics living and studying abroad. Two key, interrelated research questions guide the study. First, how does a Palestinian academic living and studying abroad experience displacement from origin? And second, how can these experiences be written about and communicated? The thesis constructs an experimental proposition by refusing to make distinctions between data, epistemological content and myself as the researcher. Situated at a juncture between theory and story, I draw from my own direct experience of dislocation and displacement, using a narrative mode of storytelling as a mode of inquiry which is then intersected by critical readings of supporting theory. The discourse which emerges is a heterodox mixture of narrative and theory which challenges the conventional separation between researcher, data and epistemological content.

This experience is mainly engaged with the theory of the State of Exception by Giorgio Agamben. The study tries to question to what extent Agamben regarding the State of Exception can be applied to the situation in Gaza Strip and the lives of those academics and their families. It deals with this by analysing the day-to-day experiences of Palestinian people, especially Palestinian academics and their families and in this study a Palestinian educator.

The work of Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze and others emerges within this study as a recurrent conversation on the subjects of the State of Exception, bare life, symbolic violence, nomadism, and the rhizome. Just as the narrative voice of the thesis “reterritorializes” the space of academic discourse, so the text shifts between thick descriptions of the spatial conditions of Palestine as experienced by myself and other Palestinian academics and educators and broader critical reflections on the nature of space and subjectivity. Additionally, this textual discourse is joined by a curatorial discourse which frames the events discussed with visual images and objects, the material and visual signs and traces which refract the experience of Palestinian academics living and studying abroad. Questioning conventional limits, the overall contribution of this thesis is to push and experiment with new methodologies of arts-based research which will enable my own subjectivity to present in the data in order for my experiences to be documented.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis originates in a series of personal journeys which, over time, have crystallised into narratives which link the personal with the political. The process of writing has, in a real way, followed the routes and trajectories of a journey from Palestine to the UK. The boundaries between places, as well as the “no man’s” lands of in-between states, provided junctures in the stories: they were places where the pressure to create narrative built up, along with theoretical reflection. What follows is therefore a mixture of first person narrative and theoretical analysis—a mixture which itself is theorised through critical engagements with other voices which have explored the means by which experience is documented and analysed both objectively and subjectively.

The work below presents a critical study of the experience of Palestinian academics and their families living and studying abroad in the UK. It is organised around two fundamental research questions. First, how does a Palestinian academic living and studying abroad experience displacement from origin? And second, how can these experiences be written about and communicated? As will be discussed in detail, answering these questions has required the building of a distinct methodology related to a series of three key stories centring around an extended meditation on Giorgio Agamben’s discussion of the State of Exception (2003). Reaching back into my own experience of childhood, and focussing on the recent past, the stories and commentaries below seek to outline new ways of understanding the experience of displacement and how it might lead to politically challenging forms of knowledge.

1.1 “Leaving everything behind and the theory of State of Exception”

Giorgio Agamben’s purpose in writing about “the State of Exception” is to examine what he calls “a point of imbalance” or the “no-man’s land” between “public law and political fact” (Agamben, 2010, p.1). This imbalance, or no-man’s land, is not a permanent state of affairs but, as its name implies, an exceptional state of affairs originating in the declaration by a sovereign power in response to extreme internal conflict. Indeed, the very phrase “State of Exception” is taken from the German political theorist Carl Schmitt’s definition of the sovereign in his 1922 Political theory in which he explains that the sovereign is “he who decides on the State of Exception” (Schmitt, 2010 [1922], p.34). What this State of Exception declared by the sovereign actually consists of, is a suspension of the law. Herein lies its potential for extreme consequences on those subjects of the sovereign who are ordinarily protected by law.

For Agamben, the State of Exception creates a dangerous space of indistinction in which the sovereign power is free to act in ways which ordinarily would be limited by the law. With the law suspended, the sovereign’s power may become absolute. At the same time, political beings who once were protected by the law may be “abandoned” by the sovereign to “a stripped down creaturely life” without rights or protection (Agamben, 2010, p.2). To understand the significance of this “stripped down creaturely life” in Agamben’s theory of the State of Exception, it is necessary to refer to his earlier work *Homo Sacer* which drew on an obscure definition within Roman law of a figure who, having committed certain crimes, was expelled from society, had his rights expunged and became known as a “*homo sacer*”—he could be killed by anybody with impunity, and yet could not be sacrificed for religious purposes as his life was still deemed sacred (Agamben, 2016). As such, the *homo sacer* was both excluded from the law, and included at the same time. This paradox, for Agamben, is captured in the *homo sacer* possessing one of the two forms of life defined in the classical Greek political

system: he had *zoe*, that is, the bare life that all gods, men, and animals possess, but not *bios*—life qualified towards some end, proper to an individual or group (Frost, 2015, p.56).

1.2 *Homo sacer* and the rights of the citizens

The *homo sacer* is an embodiment of the State of Exception. As a man who is not a man, the body of the *homo sacer* works as a model for the indeterminate space of the State of Exception which—like the concentration camps of Nazi Germany, or the contemporary US facility Guantanamo Bay—is a real, bordered space which stands outside the ordinary coverage of the law. It is these two states of exception—one historical, one ongoing, which form the key examples explored by Agamben. The first establishes the paradigm of totalitarianism in the twentieth century which allows for “the physical elimination not only of political adversaries, but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (Agamben, 2010, p.2). The second produces “a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being”, Taliban members enjoying neither the status of POWs nor the status of persons charged with crimes according to American laws (Agamben, 2010, 3). Such people nevertheless, as the ‘zoe’ component of Agamben’s work describes, still exist and therefore must ‘be’ somewhere, but that because these people lack the qualities of any political identity, this place is also outside the constitutional aspects of any such region, and is therefore by definition, the ‘camp’, such as the detention, concentration, or immigration camp.

As mentioned earlier, a State of Exception occurs during times of political crisis such as situations where there is a serious internal conflict in a state. Such circumstances require the mechanism of a very powerful sovereign who will be deciding on what are to be considered as exceptions. As Agamben (drawing on the work of Carl Schmidt) explains, it was Hitler who most drastically used his enormous power to decree an indefinitely prolonged State of Exception, suspending the articles of the Weimar constitution which would have provided legal protection for those in the population whom the Nazis wished to eliminate.

Hitler declared a State of Exception for an entire twelve years which allowed for legal civil war that allowed him to eliminate any political obstacle in his leadership as well as individuals who tried to overthrow him (Agamben, 2010).

Developing the idea of the State of Exception further in terms of sovereignty, it is important to understand what Agamben means by a “sovereign” power. This involves grasping the paradox (first formulated by Schmitt) that “the sovereign stands outside of the normally valid juridical order, and yet belongs to it, for it is he who is responsible for deciding whether the constitution can be suspended *in toto* (Agamben, 2010, p.35). For this reason it makes sense for Agamben to speak of the “capture of space”—an idea which is particularly important in the experience of borders, territories, and journeys which are described further on in this project.

The State of Exception suspends the normal rights of those whose lives it dominates, removing the rule of law and dictating what people may or may not do—without appeal to any form of accountability. The normal rights of a citizen do not exist at a time of exception. While the State of Exception was historically most starkly and spectacularly exhibited in the prolonged emergency politics of the Third Reich, Agamben has argued that it is also a highly contemporary condition which persists at the heart of the so-called democratic world. In the United States, the normal rights of citizens were, according to Agamben, formally suspended as a result of the “military order” declared by George W. Bush on November 13th 2001, when he ordered an indefinite detention and trial of non-citizens due to suspicion of terrorism (Agamben, 2010, p.22). This trial was to be carried out by military commissions invested with extraordinary juridical power, unlike the military tribunal which is constrained overall by the law of the land and which ostensibly protects the rights of living beings.

For Agamben, a State of Exception is a state in which all the basic rights of a citizen are suspended and an absolute use of power may be wielded with impunity against a subject almost

entirely (according to Agamben) lacking in agency to resist in the absence of law (a point nonetheless contested by subsequent readers of Agamben's work who do claim that the subject of the State of Exception may still exert agency at the local scale of everyday activities (Abujidi, 2009, Pp.290-292). The State of Exception may not originate as an intent but results as an outcome of state policy which requires the government to give more power and more force to its military, and to reduce the constitutional rights of its citizens. The sovereign then determines the period of time that the suspension of the rights will last. At this time the military power has the authority to further exercise their war time authority on civilians, something that they cannot do on normal times. This suspension affected a specific place in a nation, a place which was suspected of conflicts or disturbances and coups to overthrow the existing government. Agamben argued that some groups of people were entirely kept outside the political system (Tuastad, 2017).

1.3 Expanding the State of Exception: the US and Guantanamo Bay

The importance of Agamben's investigation of the State of Exception is not limited to the consideration of the Nazi concentration camps and Guantanamo Bay. Indeed, its importance rests on the fact that it establishes a conceptual framework for analysing many different political situations in evidence across space and time. Since its initial publication, State of Exception has been developed and critiqued across multiple contexts and disciplines, amassing a substantial critical heritage. Agamben's sharp critique of US sovereignty has been particularly provocative. William (2003) has developed the limited focus of Agamben on Guantanamo Bay into a full-scale implication of US foreign policy, extending the space of the State of Exception into a global geopolitical condition for nations subject to US imperialism.

In the case of Guantanamo Bay, the sovereign power is so great that detainees are left with effectively no identity or recognition or protection under the law at all, The US regime went so far as to order the removal of all detainees' records from the United States, expunging

even this legal trace within the juridical system, effectively de-legitimizing any claim they might have to citizens' rights and protection under US law. In such a denuded state it was easy for the US regime to consider detainees as having only a minimum of "bare life," that which, according to Agamben, can be stripped away and even destroyed with impunity (Agamben, 2016). Without a trail of documentation to protect them, it was easy for the US state to charge detainees with any unlawful act such as violating immigration rules or any other criminal act. These individuals tended, therefore, to lack any protection whatsoever, even that of a person charged with a crime in the United States, or that of a POW as per the Geneva conventions. Such detainment leaves one with no legal rights in respect of the law since there is no law to defend them—they are simply left at the mercy of a merciless sovereign who has in fact used his power to suspend their rights even those governing their status as immigrants (Attell, 2004).

The State of Exception is bound together both with the condition of the military siege and with war in general. During periods of war, democratic institutions are nonetheless designed to control and regulate the temporary deployment of absolute powers. Yet, this has led to the wholesale liquidation of democracy. In the Second World War as well as the US's prolonged War on Terror, the legislative powers of parliament have been totally erased in some areas, only later to be modified and changed by the executive power (Overboe, 2007). The practice of modification of the legislative laws is now a common practice, yet it was something that had originally been introduced at a time when states required a State of Exception emanating from a crisis and emergency during war time. The majority of leaders in contemporary society now apply States of Exception as a matter of course, making it central to their style of leadership as, for example, the office of President of the United States has continued to deal with immigrants detained for a short period and whose legal status is rapidly erased (Bigo, 2007).

Agamben observes that, from the late nineteenth century onwards both Germany and Italy instituted States of Exception on a regular basis “for reasons of urgent and absolute necessity,” yet the judgment concerning this necessity and urgency was “not subject to any oversight” (Agamben, 2010, p.17). More and more frequent cases tended to normalise the State of Exception as simply the persistent state of crisis permitting absolute sovereign power. Yet, both Italy and Germany went further by erecting effectively a second constitutional state within the bounds of their existing sovereignty, and maintaining that second state as a State of Exception applied to limited portions of society, defined by race, ethnicity, or culture. The existence of a dual state allowed the government not to apply two sets of laws but rather to entirely suspend the law in regard to some citizens while keeping it in place for others. With that split made, unlimited violence could be perpetrated without any need to answer for it.

Giroux (2006) has moved in a different direction, highlighting states of exception which have come into force within US national boundaries, in particular during hurricane Katrina when a “politics of disposability” prevailed in the Bush administration, raising “existential and material questions regarding who is going to die and who is going to live” (Giroux, 2006, p.171). In this case a natural disaster gave grounds for the declaration of a State of Exception, yet, as Giroux shows, it merely served to frame, in an extreme form, the centuries-old State of Exception in which black women and men had been living under US sovereignty.

The powers behind this kind of democratic and right denial justify their actions and measures using the fact that those detained are not citizens. A case in the United States between Bush and Rasul, where the Supreme Court suspended the rights of non-United States citizens imprisoned in non-United States territory. The court rejected an argument on sovereignty and jurisdiction by the detainees. The court upheld the entire all the jurisdiction rights of the Guantánamo detainee cases (Ojakangas, 2005).

1.4 The State of Exception as a spatial condition and bio-political control

In much of the literature which has emanated from Agamben's thought, the issue of spatiality has been particularly nuanced. The State of Exception always leaves a mark, a demarcation, boundary, margin, inscription of some kind. Isin and Rygiel have contributed important work to our understanding of the global spatial forms these states may take in frontiers, camps, and variously defined zones. Crucially, they have also begun to theorise the affective "abjection" which marks the subjective experience of life lived in a State of Exception (Isin & Rygiel, 2007). Where Agamben's work represents a work of philosophical and political theory, others have been able to apply this theory directly to case studies drawing on empirical primary research. Hanafi and Long's research on Palestinian refugee camps is exemplary in this case, demonstrating how the absence of governance structures in the Nahr al-Bared, Beddawi, and 'Ayn al-Hilweh refugee camps in Lebanon has both fostered forms of extremism, but also emergent "economies of morals" to fill the legal void of the State of Exception which otherwise prevails (Hanafi & Long, 2010).

The concept of bare life is the stripping of the most fundamental rights of a living being, which are the political and legal attribute, whose very existence is a clear indication of the sovereign's central power and influence. The courts involved in denying the non-citizens their bare life, went further to ensure that minimal rights were given to the detainees. Sovereign power has a close relation with the nakedness of the bare life of the two detainees from Guantánamo. The detainees suffer house arrest and electronic tagging in some state which is an indication of a bio-political control by some sovereign leaders (Agamben, 2016).

Agamben states that the technology of bio-political control as well as the modern laws is a major reason for the continuation of State of Exception in the contemporary world. The separation of legal cultures from philosophical cultures has led to the fall of philosophical cultures and the rise of legal cultures at the same time (Attel, 2004). The evolution of politics and people's rights has contributed in a major way in constraining the courts and not allowing

them to do what is lawfully acceptable and right to all human beings despite their races or origins.

Leaders in the contemporary culture, even those from democratic states, tend to exercise State of Exception. This happens when they are facing rebellion from some of the people they are ruling or during cases of terrorist attacks. Sovereign leaders use this emergency power to eliminate political rivals and justify it as legal war, a term which will be easily accepted by the majority of the citizens without question. State of Exception is only necessary in times of extreme crisis and should end once the crisis is over (Coleman, 2007).

The legislative power and judicial powers have a say in the daily regulations put in place by the executive arm, thus should also be considered by the executive power before it shifts all the power to itself. Decentralization of power at times where there is no State of Exception should always be there for an efficient and democratic state to run effectively.

1.5 Beyond Agamben: The State of Exception and the context of Middle East

One of the examples of the extended states of emergency that of Egypt. Although the state of emergency is known to be temporary and is a reaction to a danger that targets the state, the state of emergency has lasted more than 45 years (1976-2017). The state was lifted for 18 months in 1980, but it was imposed again after the assassination of the Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat in 1981. It was also lifted for a few months in 2012. Thus, the temporariness of this state turned to be permanent. It is that moment when the rights of anyone who could be considered as a threat to the security of the country could be stripped. At the end of 2017, the state of emergency was extended again for three months.

As a result of the Oslo agreement in 1993, both Palestinian and Israelis agreed on implementing an arrangement that included at that time the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority. The establishment of the Palestinian National Authority was achieved in

two separate agreements. The first was the Gaza-Jericho agreement, which was signed in Cairo in 1994, and the second was the Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement signed in Washington in 1995 (Khatib, 2007). Being denied the right to return, Palestinian people started settling in different Arab countries. The main hosts include Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Syria. About 900,000 Palestinians were debarred beyond the borders of Israel and they became stateless since Palestinian state was not established on pre-1984 Palestine (Todorova, 2014). The governments of those countries have not shown any responsibility for the displacement of the Palestinian and thus the shelters and aids were provided by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). Refugees in the countries above have not had any kind of legal or political fortification. Soon, camps were established for those refugees in the countries mentioned.

It was obvious that UNRWA was not going to guarantee a good quality of life for those refugees. Their civil rights were not recognised in the host countries, Lebanon treated them very harshly (Martin, 2011). Palestinian refugees have never enjoyed equal rights to citizens in terms of possessing properties or moving freely and these segregation practices were always justified by the refusal of naturalisation of the Palestinian people and to make such discrimination legal, governments always pretended that such settlement will harm the essence of the Palestinian cause and will definitely affect the right to return.

In Gaza Strip, thousands of Palestinian emigrants were seeking shelters and a new life. Camps were also established, and UNRWA started monitoring and supervising those camps. However, Israel, as an occupying country, has always been responsible of controlling the lives of the Palestinian people in Gaza and in many cases controlling the work of UNRWA in Gaza Strip. Palestinians, in general, and refugees, in particular, in Gaza Strip have been suffering marginalization for decades by the Israeli authorities who have administrated the lives of people in Gaza following the end of the Egyptian military administration there.

The experience of Palestinians requires a theoretical and political language to describe and represent its specificity, which Agamben's discourse on the State of Exception provides. Agamben's own research is necessarily limited in scope—his focus being on Germany and the United States—yet subsequent scholars have demonstrated the applicability of Agamben's theorization of the State of Exception to alternative political geographies. In order to lay out the grounds of the present research, with its focus on Palestine, it is useful first to become familiar with comparable attempts by other researchers to instrumentalise the idea of the State of Exception in different geopolitical contexts. This will form the content of the following section, in relation specifically to work on Bosnia and Ireland.

1.6 Geopolitical conflict in Bosnia and Ireland and its link to State of Exception theory

The State of Exception is defined in the writing of Giorgio Agamben as an “ambiguous, uncertain, borderline fringe, at the intersection of the legal and the political,” the “legal form of what cannot have legal form,” the “suspension of law itself,” a “no-man's- land between public and political fact,” a “threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism” where individuals are the “object of a pure de facto rule, of a detention that is indefinite not only in the temporal sense but in its very nature as well, since it is entirely removed from the law and from judicial oversight,” and exist therefore in a state where “bare life reaches its maximum indeterminacy” (Agamben, 2010, Pp.1-3). The present section will focus on the two geopolitical arenas of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Ireland as case studies in which Agamben's thought has undergone significant development by other scholars (Gregory & Pred, 2013).

1.7 The State of Exception in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Mujkić argues that Bosnia-Herzegovina “is a state with international sovereignty . . . but without clear domestic sovereignty” (Mujkić, 2010, p.125). In Agamben's account, the sovereign is both within and without the law—yet in the absence of such a figure the entire state exists in a condition of indeterminacy. In the wake of massive conflict in the region

throughout the twentieth century, the zone of the nation state has become coincident not with the extents of a government's sovereignty but with an indeterminate zone, a "no-man's-land," to use Agamben's term. Yet whereas such zones—the camps of Nazi Germany, or Guantanamo Bay—were theorised by Agamben as having been programmatically circumscribed by sovereign powers specifically in order to mark select people as killable with impunity, according to Mujkić's account the State of Exception has become the de facto condition in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Corroborating this is Rivi's argument that since the Dayton Agreements of 1995, the newly formed nation-state of Bosnia-Herzegovina "has been living in a condition of exception as described by Agamben, that of a country 'exceptionally' patrolled by UN forces" (Rivi, 2016, p.73). As such, for Bosnia-Herzegovina, the exception has become the norm.

For Humphrey (2002), the current condition has resulted from the successive failures of previous attempts upon the part of ethnically-defined political groups to form new states circumscribed by racial identity. Bosnians and Croats were identified by Serbs as irredeemably other and, as such, consigned to a realm of existence outside of the law such that they could be de-humanised and eliminated to fulfil a political aim. Such logic clearly conforms to Agamben's description of the prolonged State of Exception initiated by the Nazis. Yet, within the wider context of the wars in the Balkan region and their aftermath, there are warnings over the wholesale application of Agamben's theories to the different political situations that pertain within the territories concerned. Levy, for example, has charged that "Agamben and his more enthusiastic followers lack any proportionality, when they distastefully lump together varieties of refugee camps, Auschwitz, and even gated communities" (Levy, 2010, p.100). The critique here concerns a matter of degree. States of exception may exist in multiple contexts—yet they cannot be blanketed together. The politics behind such a critique of Agamben ultimately challenges the basic helplessness he attributes to the victim. Undoubtedly this holds in many

circumstances, yet as Levy points out, the refugee (as just one example) should not always be represented as the passive victim of biopolitics.

Agamben argues that the State of Exception operates by “at once excluding bare life and capturing it within the political order” (Agamben, 2010, p.9). In order to propose that such states of exception pertain not only to recognised totalitarian regimes, but also to democracies, Agamben highlights the detention of “enemy combatants” by the US at Guantanamo Bay and the indeterminate legal status in which they are suspended. It may be that Agamben selects this case study for its dramatic effect—geared as it is towards a critique of the imperialism of the world’s current most powerful nation state. Yet, this critique can be extended to other arenas. Contemporary Ireland provides a compelling case for developing Agamben’s theory to the de jure operation of a democratic state.

De Wispelaere, McBride, and O’Neill, for example, have highlighted the thinning line between democracy and absolutism in Ireland’s unequal deployment of citizenship rights. The “draconian legislation” of the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill imposes heavy surveillance and social restrictions upon those immigrants whom the government does not deem economically necessary- for example, denying them the right to marry (De Wispelaere, McBride, & O’Neill, 2016, p.54). At the same time skilled workers and affluent members of the Irish diaspora abroad (particularly in the US) are offered advantages through “patriot” acts. The result is that such legislation “allows the state to erase the individual’s legal status at will” (De Wispelaere, McBride, & O’Neill, 2016, p.54). The significance of this observation in the context of Agamben’s work is that where Agamben identifies the State of Exception in extreme situations of conflict, here the State of Exception is found, alarmingly, in the operation of a contemporary democracy.

1.8 State of Exception in Northern Ireland

Much like Bosnia-Herzegovina, it could be argued, Northern Ireland can be presented in terms of a narrative of “the chronic state of emergency,” making the territory at large an “exception to governmentality” (Scarlet, 2014, p.14). In fact, in both the cases of contemporary Northern Ireland and Bosnia-Herzegovina, it could be argued that an “ambiguous, uncertain, borderline fringe, at the intersection of the legal and the political,” has emerged as the result of the exceptional conditions of war bleeding into the “ordinary” conditions of democracy (Agamben, 2010, p.2). As Jones as insightfully put it, “the procedural conditions of exception thought essential to the task of waging the long war against terrorism required an essential shift away from more familiar declarations of emergency” and it follows that this then fulfils Agamben’s prognostication that the declaration of the State of Exception might gradually come to be replaced “by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government” (Jones, 2013, n.p.).

In closing, it could be said that it is this point which defines the most significant way in which the cases of Bosni-Herzegovina and Ireland develop the thought of Agamben on the State of Exception. As democratic nations emerging from violent histories of anti-democracy, they both embody troubling continuities of the absolutism of the state in relation to the individual under the apparent glaze of democracy.

Chapter 2: Palestine as a State of Exception

2.1 Introduction: Palestine as a “camp”

The idea of a State of Exception has proved especially productive and critical in the study of Palestine. Agamben’s theories have found relevance to the legal situation in Palestine, to the conditions in which subjects there experience basic rights (or lack of rights), as well as to the particular spatial conditions in which existence takes place. Given the territorial condition of Palestine as a *de jure* state partially occupied by Israel (itself a proxy of the West), which is also host to a great many refugee camps, the idea of the State of Exception as a “camp” is particularly appropriate to discussing Palestine—as well as Palestinian refugee camps abroad (of which there are many in neighbouring Jordan and Lebanon).

Before discussing Agamben’s detailed theorization of the camp as the spatial expression of a State of Exception, it is first necessary to introduce and position Palestine as a relevant case study. The history of Palestine cannot be adequately summarised here and has been dealt with in great depth from a variety of historiographical positions elsewhere (see Said, 1979; Pappé, 2004; Smith, 2004). Yet, it is crucial to emphasise the history of spatial rupture which marked the experience of Palestinians in the wake of the First World War. Having been administered in a relatively tolerant way under the Ottoman empire, after the fall of the Ottomans Palestine was split into British and French mandates which gradually marginalised Arab leadership in favour of Jewish, and oversaw the attrition of Palestinian control over the land of Palestine, culminating in the split of historic Palestine and the declaration of the state of Israel (Stearns, 2008, s.v. “Palestine”). While neighbouring Arab states—Lebanon, Transjordan, Syria, and Egypt—fought on behalf of Palestine, by 1949 Israel held eighty per cent of historic Palestine. Palestinian refugees were prevented from returning to their homes, their property was destroyed and, as Stearns writes, “from that moment, Palestinians ceased to

exist as a community in one physical space” (Stearns, 2008, s.v. “Palestine”). Thus 1948 is remembered by Palestinians as the Nakba, or catastrophe.

The details of the subsequent Palestine-Israeli conflict cannot be rehearsed here but are well known. What is important is to emphasise the catastrophic spatial effects of conflict and the destabilizing of legal and social structures which have created a permanent State of Exception in Palestine. Before engaging the theoretical interventions which have connected the state of Palestine with Agamben’s notion of the camp and the State of Exception it is useful to recall elements of the actual spatial conditions of everyday life in Palestine.

Above all what must be recalled is the fencing-in and walling-off of Palestinian territory. The border condition of the land exists not only in a peripheral sense around the outer edge of Palestinian territory, but also around the gradually encroaching annexes which Israel has increasingly, and illegally, settled. The physical manifestation of these bordering and annexation exercises lies in the presence of the concrete walls in the landscape, framing distinct territories, and marking the limits of mobility and legal rights of Palestinians. The borders are also punctuated by security checkpoints where heavy surveillance dominates the passage of subjects across the divided territories. Patrolled by soldiers, these boundary crossing sites are heavily militarised, underscoring the fundamentally violent processes which inscribe forced limits on human movement. The border checkpoints are also sites of frequent demonstration and confrontation between Palestinians and Israeli border forces.

Borders and walls are the physical manifestation of the spatiality of Palestine as a camp, yet their highly visible presence is also matched by the less visible condition of legal fragility which requires identity to be continually screened and tested. Carrying identity documents is necessary at all times in public and this simple requirement institutes an inescapable encroachment of insecurity into all public experiences. The identity document itself also, by this means, obtains an even higher degree of importance since it is the means by which the

subject is able to exist as freely as possible within the confines of the securitised camp/state. The amplified importance of documentation inevitably leads to the increased impact of bureaucratic process on individual existence as the relative freedom of mobility implied by documentation remains in thrall to the administrative procedures of the state apparatus.

Camp-like conditions of spatiality exist for Palestinians in the multiple locations they inhabit in the Middle East. Palestinian refugee camps still represent a significant proportion of Palestinian population, amounting to a semi-permanent local diaspora in exile waiting to return home in accordance with the 1948 UN resolution which declares their right to be repatriated (Hammer, 2010). The extent of these camps, and the camp-like conditions of the Palestinian territories blur distinctions between state and camp. The camp takes on and must fulfil the role of the state for its inhabitants, whilst in Palestinian territory the state takes on the nature of a camp.

Within the overall context of investigating the experiences and stories of Palestinian refugees it is necessary to arrive at a conceptualization of what it means to be a refugee and what kind of legal and spatial conditions refugees inhabit. Being a refugee is evidently a “state,” a temporary (even if long-term) experience suspended between alternative states of being. Being a refugee always presumes the possibility of return, or progress, to a different state—which is the citizen, the subject with rights, legal protection, society, and a home. It is partly because Agamben theorised the State of Exception as a *state* which is associated with a particular spatial condition—the camp—that means it is especially well suited to describing the condition of refugees, and the spaces they inhabit.

In order to begin this investigation into how the logic of the camp might be applied to Palestine it is first necessary to set out how Agamben defines what a camp is. His main formulation of the camp appears in *Homo sacer: sovereign power and bare life*, chapter 7, “The camp as the ‘nomos’ of the modern.” In that chapter Agamben approaches the question

“what is a camp?” not by deducing its definition from the events that happened there but instead by asking what its “juridico-politico structure” is—that is, what legal and political structures existed in the camps which allowed what happened there to happen (Agamben, 2016, p.166). By doing this, Agamben claims, he is able to show that the camp is not a mere “historical anomaly” but rather “the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living” (Agamben, 2016, p.166).

Agamben’s detailed account of the Prussian and Weimar juridical systems which laid the basis of the Nazi concentration camps need not be relayed here—as he himself declares, the importance of his interpretation is that it enables the idea of the camp to be applied to modernity in general, not only a single, extreme, historic instance. The notion of the camp which can be abstracted from his text holds, fundamentally, that “the camp is the space that is opened when the State of Exception begins to become the rule” (Agamben, 2016, Pp.168-9). Furthermore, the camp spatialises a temporary suspension of law, becoming a “permanent spatial arrangement” which exists outside the normal legal and political order of life (Agamben, 2016, Pp.168-9). In short, the camp is the physical enclosure within the boundaries of which the State of Exception exists. With the law suspended, the inside of the camp turns into what Agamben calls a “zone of indistinction” where, because of the lack of juridical protection, literally “everything had truly become possible” (since there was no law to forbid it) (Agamben, 2016, p.171). With no law there are no rights and no crime. Whether atrocities are actually committed in such spaces, or if they are, how atrocious they appear, is, for Agamben, beside the point. The ethical disposition of the police—or whoever it is who wields power in the camp—may restrain them from atrocity, but the fact remains that there is no juridical or political restraint. In this sense Agamben is able to list as camps stadiums in which refugees are kept before deportation, or waiting areas in international airports where detainees are held—all of which are spaces in which juridical oversight is suspended indefinitely.

This is the light in which Palestine can be approached as a camp, defined as a zone of indeterminacy in which juridico-political structures are suspended and anything, potentially, is possible. This proposition has held interest from a good number of researchers on Palestine who have drawn on Agamben's theorization of the State of Exception to help explain the Palestinian situation. This has led to a series of readings and re-readings of Agamben's work, testing out its applicability to the Palestinian context, and also developing it as a result to extend its usefulness—as well as to critique it and offer new insights. The purpose, therefore, of this text is to draw on available existing research, both by Agamben and by researchers on Palestine who have been influenced by Agamben, in order to establish Palestine in general as a “camp” which exists in a “State of Exception.” Conceptualizing Palestine as a camp and a space of exception will, in turn, provide a context in which the stories and experiences of Palestinian academics fleeing Palestine, can be shared, spoken about, and understood.

2.2 Review of literature on Agamben's theory of the State of Exception applied to Palestine

In Palestine the State of Exception involves “both the extension of military wartime powers into the civil sphere, and the suspension of constitutional norms that protect individual liberties” (Lentin, 2017, p.2). The suspension of legal norms and the extension of military conditions perpetuate the indeterminacy which, for Agamben, is essential to the State of Exception. This indeterminate state is perpetuated through the continuously troubled relations of Palestine to the other spaces which border it. Specifically, in the case of Palestine, its condition of a State of Exception is inseparable from that of Israel—which has also been theorised as a State of Exception in itself. “Governed through a complex web of emergency legislation, and through practices of exception, emergency, necessity and security and a discourse of Jewish victimhood,” writes Lentin, “the State of Israel may arguably be theorised as a textbook example of what the Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben's calls “State

of Exception” (Lentin, 2017, p.2). Between them, then, both Palestine and Israel constitute states of exception, or neighbouring “camps” whose spatial (as well as juridical and political) boundaries are, in themselves, highly contentious and indeterminate.

In fact, some scholars have argued that there are credible grounds to consider “Israel/Palestine” as a single entity, a form of “settler colony” which is itself “a State of Exception, determined in large part by Israel’s urgent desire to normalise the exceptional status of its regime of occupation in accord with law” (Lloyd, 2012, p.75). From this point of view Israel persistently attempts to define Palestine within the permanent spatial order of a camp in which normality is suspended indefinitely.

Yet, Lloyd has made an important critique of Agamben’s widely accepted notion of the State of Exception as an indeterminate zone where laws are suspended, by instead referring to Palestine as a “*hyperregulated*” state bounded by a proliferating regime “of permits, closures, controls, dispossessions, demolitions, all of which proceed according to a labyrinthine web of civil law and military decree” (Lloyd, 2012, p.75). Palestine, from this point of view, is not at all a zone in which the licit and the illicit become indistinguishable, but rather one in which laws are abundantly in evidence and actively used to transact political authority. Such a situation is familiar to the history of settler colonies in which normality is indeed suspended, so as to institute a prolonged period of emergency government which hyperregulates those inside the camp boundaries. Lloyd is able to refer to examples in Northern Ireland and across colonial Africa to substantiate the claim that within the camp bare life is kept bare by means of hyperregulation.

At a fundamental level, many different scholars have accepted the claims of Agamben that the State of Exception represents a normalization of what was formerly exceptional. Once this is established it then becomes important to attempt to define how—by what means and through which processes—this state is maintained. Parsons and Salter, among others, have

focussed on the techniques and strategies which the Israeli government apparatus continually puts in place to maintain the status of Palestine as a State of Exception, and to detail the constant labour and administration which this requires. For Parsons and Salter it is the idea of the “border” which defines the spatial practices which keep a space in a State of Exception, and, indeed, which define it as a “camp.” Yet, this entails something more than simply describing the territorial boundaries which define the space within which the State of Exception is maintained. In order to understand the border as something more than a simple checkpoint, Parsons describes it with reference to the work of Foucault as a web of “biopolitical practices of mobility regulation” (Parsons & Salter, 2008, p.701). In this sense the border is “thick” with regulatory procedures, a time-consuming, lugubrious nexus in which the full power of the state to prohibit the mobility of the subject is demonstrated.

The border, from this point of view, is a space of control defined by infrastructure, checkpoints, identity documents and a permit system, all of which are conceived by Parsons and Salter as means of enacting biopolitical control over Palestinians and regulating their movement. In a further article, Salter has written even more explicitly about the border as a space in itself which amounts to “a permanent State of Exception” (Salter, 2008, p.365). The border demarcates the state and inscribes the limit of sovereign power. As such it creates the conditions for biopolitical control of government to take place. Wherever these measures of control are enacted, borders are inscribed. Indeed, the border might be considered as the phenomenal manifestation of biopolitics. The border therefore enables to the state to “institutionalise a continual State of Exception at the frontier that in turn performs the spatio-legal fiction of territorial sovereign and the sovereign subject in each admission/exclusion decision” (Salter, 2008, p.365). Agamben’s tendency to privilege the camp as the definitive topological form of the State of Exception is complicated here by a new emphasis on the border—an update to Agamben’s thought which is particularly relevant to Palestine, a territory

criss-crossed by borders. In a sense Salter's focus on the border makes it possible to think of two competing spatial topologies of the camp: it could either be conceived as the extensive area of an indeterminate zone, or else the distinctly inscribed linear frontier or limit that demarcates inside/outside.

Parsons is one of a number of writers to address the theories of Foucault on biopower which developed around his analysis of the population management of modern European nation states and which underlies much of Agamben's own thinking (Foucault, 2014). While for some writers on Palestine these theories can be taken intact, for others there are important developments to be made. Ghanim, for example, has powerfully re-theorised the concept of "biopower" as "thanatopower"—that is, the management of death and destruction, rather than the management of life. To some extent this qualifies Agamben's own description of the camp but insisting more strongly on the horizon of the continual possibility of death which is instituted by the camp—something which is implicit in the word "camp" but explicit in the concept "thanatopower." By claiming that under colonial occupation in Palestine "the lives of subjects are expropriated" she argues that for the subject living in the State of Exception death is continually present like "a permanent shadow" (Ghanim, 2013, n.p.). What is remarkable is that Ghanim, like Lloyd and Lantin, is at pains to explain that biopower or thanatopower is "spatialised," that is, it is inherently spatial in its dimensions. As such it does not operate in a vacuum, or merely on the level of ideology and representations, but is always transacted within particular forms of space, or topology. As Ghanim writes:

The operation of power depends upon imaginative geographies and imaginative others, who are defined/produced through the ongoing demarcation of spatial and symbolic boundaries that separate spaces of occupation as spaces of exception from space of rule and normality. The physical demarcation is the material instantiation of a symbolic/categorical separation between the legitimate political subject of the citizen and the illegitimate political subject (Ghanim, 2013, n.p.).

In her formulation of “thanatopower” Ghanim shifts the emphasis of Agamben’s theory of the State of Exception towards its production of death in the lives of those subjects whose lives are suspended between borders and control points in a condition of bare life within the camp. Death is indeed omnipresent within the State of Exception—as a threat as well as a reality. Yet, Hanafi has also argued that, in the case of Palestine, too much focus on casualties in the conflict with Israel has overshadowed other actions through which the Palestinian state is excepted. Again, this relates to the question of space as Hanafi defines practices of dispossession, occupation and destruction of Palestinian living space as a form of “spacio-cide,” that is, the death of space (Hanafi, 2010, p.106). In this case, Palestine as a State of Exception means a place which is defined by the death of space in its ordinary or normal condition—a space which is dispossessed, colonised, and destroyed, and therefore one in which ordinary life becomes impossible. After acts of “spacio-cide,” Palestine becomes an area in which only bare life is possible. The camp, from this conceptual vantage point, therefore becomes the death of space.

Like many of the writers discussed here, Youssef understands the experience of the citizen as being essential to modern statist politics. According to this view the material conditions of being human are overwritten by citizenship so that the material existence of human experience is conditioned by citizenship and, reciprocally, citizenship is always conditioned by the materiality of human existence (Youssef, 2007). As Lentin reminds us, “the State of Exception involves, on the one hand, the extension of the military authority’s wartime powers into the civil sphere, and on the other, the suspension of constitutional norms that protect individual liberties” (Lentin, 2010, n.p.). Yet, Agamben’s theory here appears incomplete given the absence of a developed discourse on a significant factor in the definition of Palestine as a camp—which is race. With reference to the work of Weheliye on biopolitics and race in the context of the United States, Lentin has pressed the issue of Israel as a racist

state whose territorial, juridical, and political borders are enforced along lines of race. State racism serves to separate people into distinct groups on the basis of assigned (not necessarily biological) race, and to then privilege one group and attempt to eradicate the other (Lentin, 2010, n.p.). Racism in Israel/Palestine thereby becomes implicated in biopolitics, determining the death of some citizens (an example of thanatopower), and more broadly organizing the state “around the distinction between Jew and non-Jew, military and civilian legal systems, enclosure and movement” (El-Haj, 2009, p.30). The association of the camp with “spacio-cide” cannot, therefore, be disentangled from its racialization of space

One of the most important consequences of Agamben’s theorization of the State of Exception is that it has enabled further scholars to revise and extend its reach in relation to new subject areas, and particularly, in this case, to Palestine. Nurhan Abujidi has provided one of the most detailed readings of Agamben in relation to Palestine, using this specific context to develop the singular concept of the State of Exception into four differentiated versions. The rationale for granulating the State of Exception in this fashion is to come to terms with the fractured, and continually changing topology of Palestine—an entity whose borders, territory, and legal jurisdiction have all been in a continual state of change throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In response to the multiplicity of Palestinian experiences—whether inside Palestinian territory, or in exile, Abujidi chooses to speak of “Palestinian space” as a realm of experience that may exist in multiple legal and territorial frameworks (Abujidi, 2009, p. 274). In order to acknowledge the intrinsic spatiality of states of exception, Abujidi uses the expression “state/space,” and formulates four versions of it: the state/space of exile and refuge; the state/space of paradox; the state/space of occupation and siege; and the state/space of urbicide. Each one of these states/spaces serves as a way of highlighting a particular group of Palestinian experiences. The state/space of exile and refuge emerges out of the destruction and disappearance of Palestinian territories, the loss of possessions and life, and the exiling of

many. As a result Palestine, as a whole, has disappeared and now only exists as an “existential and epistemological condition,” or “state of being” (Abujidi, 2009, p.274). The state/space of paradox refers to exactly the same elision of Israel/Palestine described by Lloyd above, a reflection of the disjunction between the two overlapping, yet totally separated worlds: “modern, well-planned Jewish colonies overlooking the strangulated Palestinian urban areas with their vernacular architecture and landscape” (Abujidi, 2009, p.274). States / spaces of occupation and siege are embodied in the topography of the West Bank, where small pockets of land lie outside the main flows and networks shaping the territory—“consequently they appear alien even in their own natural setting, and serve to naturalise the presence of their conqueror” (Abujidi, 2009, p.275). States/spaces of urbicide represent an escalation of states/spaces of occupation, experiencing permanent states of invasion and military control as described by Hanafi, above.

Each of these states/spaces helps to more finely differentiate the spatial conditions of the State of Exception embodied in the camp when the “camp” is thought about as Palestine itself. This is independent of the actual refugee camps which exist within Palestine and beyond its borders. These camps may be considered camps within camps. The sheer spatial stress (what Abujidi refers to as “strangulation”) experienced in Palestine is undoubtedly intensely realised within Abujidi’s work (as in many others’). Yet, Abujidi raises an important concern which has not so far been raised, which is the story of resistance waged by Palestinians to the conditions in the “camp” of Israel/Palestine—a theme notably missing from Agamben’s work, which perhaps too exclusively focuses on the victims of the State of Exception, without attending to their shaping of the reality of the camp through politics or civil or armed struggle. As Abujidi notes, Palestinians’ struggle and resistance “has been powerful and effective” and this also must be considered within the paradigm of the camp (Abujidi, 2009, p.288).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction: methodology as an end not only a means

The methodological approach employed in this dissertation is a strategic part of the argument as well as practically oriented towards the ends of gathering data and analysing it. The methodology embodies an approach towards defining what knowledge is and how it relates to the subject and this is key to the project overall. Methodology is conceived here of as an active component in shaping the overall effects of the research which is not subordinate to the purpose of the main ideas and arguments but is itself an implementation of the key interventions of this project. That is to say, the relationships established in the methodology between myself as the researcher, data and epistemological content are themselves a playing out of the fundamental claims which this dissertation will make. This approach follows in the wake of what have been called “experimental methodologies”, methodologies which aim to “systematically de-familiarise and displace historical objects in a manner which encourages us to imagine, engage with, and make sense of the past anew” (Forrest, 2008, p.11). I also aim to extend this and de-familiarise and displace not only the past, but the present as well.

In the light of this, researcher, data and epistemological content are not treated as arbitrary conventions to help realise more lofty goals—rather they are treated as the processes in which the goals of the dissertation may be realised. In practical terms, what this means is that conventional distinctions between the researcher as a disinterested observer, data as objective facts, and the epistemological relationship between them will be challenged. The rationale behind this challenge is that methodological conventions may instantiate regimes of knowledge and practice defined by borders, just as physical territory and human subjects are, in the world, in some cases, also defined by strictly protected and reinforced borders which allow some figures to pass, while withholding access to others. The definition of

epistemological “fields” makes explicit this analogy between areas of qualitative research and physical territories. In other words, different methodological positions (for example, positivism verses constructionism) occupy different, and frequently antagonistic, ways of understanding with strict boundaries between them.

Foucault referred to the relationship of power to knowledge in precisely this way, arguing that academic disciplines and fields of study were not essential, natural expressions of the way things are but instead institutionally-reinforced orders serving to impose the interests of the state. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explained Foucault’s argument about the purpose and place of knowledge in the following terms:

knowledge was put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others by means of apparatuses—‘discourses, institutions, architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophic propositions, morality, philanthropy’ all of which instantiated ‘strategies of relations of forces supporting and supported by types of knowledge’ (Hall, 1997, p.47).

Methodologies can be added to this list and the claim made that a methodology as much as a field describes a particular configuration of power. Put another way, this means that methodologies are not means to an end but are themselves an end since they operationalise socio-political powers. Thus, by challenging methodological conventions the researcher also challenges discourses and power. There is much at stake, therefore, in the selection and deployment of a methodology.

3.2 Methodology and orthodoxy

Studies of social science research methodologies have conventionally revolved around the question of whether the world of human society happens to have a fixed reality independent of our conceptions of it (Ashmore & Woolgar, 1989). This question reaches deeply into the history of social science and has contributed to subsequent debates centring around objectivity

and positivism, and subjectivity and constructivism. Within the objectivist and positivist traditions the distance of the researcher from the subject of research and data collected is considered paramount and “assumes that a neutral observer discovers data in a unitary external world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p.365). The objective of positivist research has conventionally been “explanation, control, and prediction, looking for the verification of hypothesis, facts, and laws, thereby accumulating knowledge through cause and effect and generalization,” while any action related to the research is minimised in order to limit the involvement of any activity perceived as subjective and a threat to objectivity and validity (Yanow, & Schwartz-Shea, 2015, p.30). The objective or positivist research philosophy may also be historicised to the late seventeenth century when Descartes first formulated his penetrating and highly influential critique of sensory perception as an means of knowledge, doubting everything except the operation of abstract reason (Descartes, Cottingham & Williams, 2017). The emergence of the absolute sovereign, the first systematic attempts at modern census taking, and the development of cadastral maps for improved taxation, as well as the establishment of new formal institutions for the observation and regulation of language, health, education, crime, and academic knowledge emerged at the same time. Foucault’s exemplary study of the prison in *Discipline and Punish* heralded a new paradigm in which a spatial construction served as the vehicle for an entire system of governmentality to be imposed upon the population of subjects whose lives were controlled within its regime (Foucault, 2012).

Objectivity and quantification are inextricable: it was, for example, accurate quantification of people and boundaries, which allowed the early modern European states to extend their power over their populations. This leads us to understand that objective, quantitative methodologies have origins in distinct political formations, even if they were later on declared to owe more to a scientific instinct for verifiable truths they cannot be considered innocent of potential manipulation by states in ways that subjectivist methods of observation

(at least historically) were not (a distinction brought out by anthropological studies of state power in early modern Europe by, for example, Scott, 1998). Within current academic literature, quantitative research is defined as “the systematic examination of social phenomena, using statistical models and mathematical theories to develop, accumulate, and refine the scientific knowledge base” (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008, vol. III, p.492). The claims of quantitative research in this academic context are precision, objectivity, and generalizable findings on the basis of “hypothesis testing, using large samples, standardised measures, a deductive approach, and rigorously structured data collection instruments” (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008, vol. III, p.492). The subjectivity of the researcher is inevitably, and purposefully excluded from the research process, coded as an interference, an alien particle liable to distort the accuracy and reliability of results with their presence (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008, vol. III, p.492).

The history of objectivity, positivism, and quantitative research is evidently an enormous topic with great complexity and any attempt to formulate it in a neat summary would risk reducing its actual internal variety. In terms of the current research, what is most crucial is not so much the broader history of those terms but a much narrower articulation of objectivity as a hegemonic methodological position which tends to exclude any explicit articulation of the researcher’s own subjectivity or consider itself, as Kuhn and Yazawa have shown, quantitative research frequently tends to exclude any explicit articulation of the researcher’s own subjectivity (Kuhn & Yazawa, 2015). By removing the researcher from the equation, quantitative/positivist research lays claims to form of “pure research” which is not affected by the presence of the researcher and does not factor the researcher’s own position into its analysis and conclusion (Kuhn & Yazawa, 2015, p.293). Any cursory survey of contemporary social science research will reveal that the “I” of the author as a situated, embodied presence is generally excluded in favour of a disembodied voice without a clearly acknowledged position (Martin, 2001; Winch, 2014). The resulting discourse is assumed to derive objective authority

from this standpoint, whereas (as critical postcolonial and subaltern scholars have clearly pointed out) it too often corresponds to a false universalism identical with Western academic hegemony (see, for example, Spivak, 1988). Rather than an explicitly articulated doctrine of objectivity, we are talking more about a habit of mind, a shared agreement to exclude subjectivity.

These methodological characteristics are not merely indications of procedure, they represent the outlines of a theory of knowledge itself, what constitutes it, and how it is produced and reproduced. Auguste Comte's formulation of the doctrine of "positivism" as a privileging of observable facts and relationships grounds an entire paradigm of research within the apparatus just outlined, conceiving of the realm of human society as a field of knowledge which can be accurately inquired into through objective means which maintain strict separations between the object to be studied and the researcher studying it (Comte & Lenzer, 2010). Logical positivism, the claim of certainty as deriving from logical deductions from principle to principle, requires this separation, and is also positioned within the positivist conceptualization of what knowledge and research are (Ayer, 1981). In all such formulations, the subjective represents that which must be excluded in order for the truth to emerge. What is perhaps more pernicious than the ideal of objectivity as a scientific practice is rather the idea of "value-free" research—that is, research which is carried out by researchers who profess to have freed their apparatus from their own values. Cunningham has critiqued this claim at length, drawing on the classic formulation of Weber that:

the significance of a configuration of cultural phenomena and the basis of this significance cannot . . . be derived and rendered intelligible by a system of analytical laws . . . however perfect it may be, since the significance of cultural events presupposes a value-orientation towards these events (Weber, 1949, 81; see also Cunningham, 2017).

It is the professing of “value-free” objectivity in research, with its implicit diminishment of subjective value, which my research questions, moving in a different direction, evading claims of certainty derived from principles and laws, precisely because these are the conceptions upon which the very states which enact oppressive measures against myself and others represented in my research, are founded. Thus, these ideas are pertinent to my study because they delineate forms of discourse, knowledge, and power which I am attempting to question by developing alternative methodologies.

3.3 Transgression of methodological orthodoxy

The geopolitical position of myself as the researcher undoubtedly influences the research and cannot be excluded. Rather than a “value-free” approach to research this is instead an approach that positions itself within a distinct value system, which recognises that values are indeed the very things at stake—the value of a subject, the value of their rights, the value of their experience. In the light of this, the position and approach the research takes is deliberately transgressive in the way it refuses to make distinctions between data, epistemological content and myself as the researcher. The turn towards subjectivism is in part a move to make the object speak—that is, to make myself, a Palestinian, an exile, a subject who has experienced the state of exception, have a voice. The stripping of rights which characterises the state of exception and leads to its lawlessness is in effect the stripping away of a subject to an object which can be disposed of by whatever means. Under those conditions, non-objectivity is a form of survival.

The methodology proposed here therefore deliberately transgresses the distinctions between researcher, data and epistemological content. It does this by locating myself, the researcher, at the critical juncture of the work, restoring the subject to the centre of research from the periphery where it had been consigned in social science research performed from the

relative comfort of Western academies which afforded—with some exceptions—the very *possibility* of objectivity which is impossible from the position of the researcher situated within the state of exception (note key sources in the references discussed above-e.g. Martin (2001) and Winch (2014), originate from within Western academic systems). The role of the researcher depicted in conventional ethnographic studies resonates with some clarity in my own work in that it brings into the foreground questions of subjectivity. Denscombe has called for there to be “a public account of the self that describes the researcher’s self”, a double reflexivity which attempts not to hide the researcher and obliterate their subjective presence but instead to bring that position out into the open and share it publicly as a crucial part of the social contingency of research, contingency which ultimately makes the work more specific and situated (Denscombe, 2014, p.89).

In this way the subjectivity of the researcher, as located and articulated by a range of overlapping contexts, including the geopolitical context, the theoretical context and the personal context of individual experience, functions as both the researcher, data, and epistemological content of the work. In a radical inversion of the logic of positivism, knowledge is not something that is distinguishable from data, data collection and the researcher. Rather knowledge is framed as an intervention in discourses of power, that is, an attempt to shift the boundaries of what it is possible to say about a subject, something that was powerfully demonstrated in relation to the history and culture of the Middle East in relation to the West by Said’s classic *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Knowledge is presented not as objective data distinct from its articulation by a subject, rather it is a gesture within a particular regime of knowledge to challenge the limits of what is assumed to be the way things are. The background to this basis process of re-reading the observable world (both past and present) is strongly set out by the critical heritage of postcolonial theory has, from many different directions offered ways to “decolonise the mind”, that is, to rid it of its inherited assumptions

about what knowledge is, and present alternative narratives situated in alternative places and voices, disavowing the existence of a single, objective position from which to describe the world (Ngugi, 1986). Robert Young's *White mythologies*, for example, is one of the most comprehensive critiques of the "mythologization" of history from the point of view of white suprematism, drawing on critical, philosophical writing by Sartre, Spivak, and Foucault to demonstrate how the colonial world has been constructed in the image of the coloniser, and how postcolonial thinkers have consistently challenged this point of view (Young, 2008).

It is by means of the narrative story, which forms the chief methodological motivation of this project—that data and researcher become inseparable. The narrative account told in the first person makes observation and observer identical: it is always clear that the observations and critiques that constitute my discourse issue out of my own position and perspective. Furthermore, theory is not something that acts as a neutral explanatory tool, instead theory is the means by which knowledge and the researcher are identifiable. Theory is that which identifies, defines and articulates the experiences of the researcher, which is also the data, and the meaning of subject matter that is being studied and presented. It is for this reason that the research takes the radical step of blending narrative storytelling with critical theory. Conventionally held to be separate genres or even epistemologies (that is, ways of knowing), storytelling and theoretical critique and interpretation, within the methodology proposed here, are inter-articulated. Within the stories are episodes of theoretical inquiry in which the work of relevant critical thinkers are included and interpreted because the basis of this project is that any narrative embedded within an individual subject has theoretical qualities and insight which are usually left latent but in this work will be voiced as part of the narrative. In other words, theory is often left by fiction writers to critics and theorists, whereas in the work presented here I take on the dual role of both narrator and theorist.

A similar (but inverse) example might be seen in the work of the historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot whose historical investigations of the history of Haiti are framed and interspersed with personal narratives, reflections, and stories, showing that the work of history is always a process of storytelling (Trouillot, 2015). Even where objectivity exists as a real goal of the research, it cannot be falsely separated from the act of relating it in narratives. In real terms these methodological concepts translate into my own experience as a father, a husband and a scholar from Palestine, with a family, articulated according to the borders that are determined by forces in the geopolitical arena of contemporary history beyond my control, which hold my life in suspension.

Rather than exclude these forces from the research process as so much extraneous matter, they are instead incorporated as the data and epistemological content of the dissertation whose ideal expression is now not the conventional forms of reporting characteristics of the social sciences but instead an alternative device: the story.

Within social anthropology storytelling has been offered as a way to re-route the historical emphasis on positivism and objectivism (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008). Stories do not necessarily or inevitably provide forms of knowledge that guarantee specific certainties as more orthodox methodologies attempt to do, but rather, the story as a methodology poses questions, problematises certainties, emphasises the importance of contingency in relation to meaning, and foregrounds the critical analysis of situated experience over a stable epistemological regime. Writing of the methodological practice of “narrative inquiry,” Trahar states that “all stories are composed in a context, replete with history and with culture. Within that context, certain stories may be favoured over others and will be told in ways congruent with the context” (Trahar, 2013, xi). Narrative inquiry selects stories (fictional stories, or sometimes life stories) told within cultural contexts for study and interpretation and this provides a useful example of how stories can be adapted to scholarly investigation; however,

the present research is not based on describing stories which already exist as cultural objects, but rather in actively using the narrative mode as a means of investigation.

In formulating an approach to situated experience as a methodological strategy, this dissertation avows direct connection to a series of epistemological interventions into, and against, the regime of positivism and the paramountcy of objectivity. Opposed to positivist quantitative studies, qualitative research privileges the insider's (or, "emic") view in contrast to the outsider's (or, "etic") view (Given, 2008, p.249). Qualitative research is also person-centred rather than variable-centred (Ely, 2006, p.329). Qualitative research is, furthermore, holistic, sensitive to the particular and contingent, not rigidly controlled, and steered towards complexity rather than simplification and extrapolation to laws and generalisable truths (Padget, 2008). Indeed, the very notion of "truth" at stake is widely different from that at stake in positivist experimentation. In contrast to the research world described by Padget (2008), in my work it is the multiplicity of world views and perspectives, the multiplicity of truths, the partiality of truth, the semblance of truth deriving from the differentiation of subjectivities which is intrinsic to the project. Whereas Padget describes an approach based on laws and generalities, for my work the qualitative methodology and the individual subjectivity of the researcher or researchers is treated as preeminent in relation to the specific and contingent subjectivities of those who are subjects of the study. These are then all brought into play, rejecting the implication of purity or validity of an ideal point of view from which all differences may be totalised and simplified described by Pernecky (Pernecky, 2016). Padget's and Pernecky's descriptions of positivist methodology are therefore significant in providing foils which highlight the new valuation of subjectivity and contingency in my own work.

My own work carried out at Lincoln University through a Master's in Creative Writing (2013-2014) was crucial in formulating a balance between creative practice and critical analysis—a doubleness which becomes apparent in the interlacing of theory with first person

narrative. Studying within a community of fellow writers encouraged a sensitivity to audience and the critical potential of empathy as a means of establishing intersubjective relationships with the reader. In fact, reading my work aloud (a practice encouraged at Lincoln) enabled me to understand my writing within the long tradition of oral histories—something I was able to connect with in a new way by means of the video narrative which illustrates my stories and which is critically framed in a commentary which follows the three stories below.

3.4 Arts based research

The story as methodology radically inverts the conventional logic of research in the social sciences as it appropriates the strategies of the aesthetic as methods for the investigation of the social. Traditionally the aesthetic might have entered into research as data, but never as an apparatus of investigation in itself (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Art itself used to be studied but it was not something that we can study other fields with. Yet, as a particular sub-field within qualitative research, arts-based research derives its radical nature from the means by which it reverses the traditional order of methodological apparatus and data. Leavy, for example, speaks of arts-based research as “carving out” new modes of research from within the existing field of qualitative research (Leavy, 2015). Recent theoretical and critical discourse on the place of the arts within research has begun to challenge existing notions of what constitutes a methodology. In Wimpenny and Savin-Baden’s edited volume, for example, it is proposed that in arts-based research art is both the methodology and the data (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2014). Visual, verbal, audio, dramatic and performative aesthetic practices are all deployed strategically as modes of investigation and research (Barone & Eisner, 2012). Justifying these new kinds of research practice is essential to the present project because the research will bring together cultural artefacts from a range of genres, incorporating a video which will play a role in reconstructing and capturing the experience of displacement and boundary crossing. Critical arts-based research studies are crucial in this respect since they provide an underlying belief in the power of multiple artefacts to interpret events. Critical sociological accounts of literature are common in the wake of the social turn within literary criticism, and have accorded written language, among other sign systems or symbolic behaviours, a crucial role in the mediation of experience (Kharbe, 2009, 205ff). Yet, critical potentiality of the story as an investigative advice for social science contexts has not yet been fully exploited and research in this paradigm remains experimental, a situation demonstrated by the need for arts-based research studies to

continue to justify themselves and argue for their acceptance in the wider fields of sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

3.5 Creative Writing

For my research, the story offers an ideal vehicle through which to investigate the experiential data of my own experiences of the spaces, regimes, and epistemologies which articulate control through boundaries and which are the subject of my work. In other words, the stories represent the data so my own experience can be documented.

This work inherently transgresses the limits of a single discipline and its limited epistemological framework since the stories I will use deal explicitly with geopolitical events in relation to cultural and legal theory. This approach clearly overlaps with the project of autoethnography in its concern with “the positionality of the researcher and the situatedness of the analysis” (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013, s.v. “autoethnography”). However, it is radically distinct because it is not a study of human behaviour or “ethnos” inherent to a community for its own sake; it is much more about harnessing narratives of the self as a strategy to investigate larger power structures which have relevance outside of the narrow band of my own experience. As Shaun McNiff has demonstrated, the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries and conventions is characteristic of arts-based research, whose constitution is itself transdisciplinary (McNiff, 2018, p.24). As a result, “methods respond to problems in unique and pragmatic ways and are not to be constrained by fixed and sanctioned protocols” (McNiff, 2018, p.24). Unconstrained, arts-based research methodologies hold out the promise of investigation free from pre-determined expectations about the conclusions to be reached, and a particular willingness for fundamental notions to be dispensed with, critiqued, or revised during the course of the research.

Part of the appeal of drawing on theory through storytelling is the possibility of “empathetic engagement” (Leavy, 2018, p.194). Cultivating empathy has begun to emerge as a research methodology. “When we learn about people and their situations,” writes Leavy, there is the possibility of enlarging out understanding of the world. We may become more understanding, tolerant, and open to the needs and perspectives of those with whom we share differences” (Leavy, 2018, p.194). The introduction of empathy into theory through stories is a key facet of this research and in establishing a revised relationship between research, researcher, and reader. Through stories and theories, I am trying to pose questions, problematise certainties, emphasise the importance of contingency in relation to meaning.

Stories are methodologies. This is the proposition I am putting forward under the terms of this thesis. The stories I present connect to the stories of other writers in wider and wider circles around me, stories which encompass both fictions and theories. Stories are also themselves theories. Despite being narratives of my life, my stories are also places to engage with theories, to test them against real life experience, and to find the limits of what they are able to explain. To that extent stories are also epistemologies, since each story is itself a new way of knowing. Foucault defined epistemology as the study of “epistemes”, fields of knowledge codified by ingrained practices and norms which tended to emanate from an apparatus of power presiding over that field and disciplining its contents into conformity with a governing norm (Foucault, 2013, p.191). Usually the kind of knowledge (the “epistemology”) embedded in research data is considered different from the kind of knowledge, or epistemology, which defines the researcher and the research process. As Hughes, writes, “every research tool or procedure is inextricably embedded in commitments to particular visions of the world and to knowing that world” (Hughes, 1990, p.11). But I am trying to collapse these two distinct epistemologies and say instead that there can be no true separation between them. The epistemology of the story is also the epistemology of myself as researcher and writer of that story.

One way to describe this methodological position would be “autoethnography”: “an approach to doing and representing social research that uses personal experience to create a representation of cultural experiences, social expectations, and shared beliefs, values, and practices” (Adams & Jones, 2018, p.142). An autoethnography effects a radical re-centring of the researcher in the middle of overlapping geopolitical and theoretical contexts. Data, data collection, and data analysis become inseparable within the medium of the story itself. Yet, again, as stated above, this is a critical and theoretical study into the experiences of displacement and the states of exception which result, not the “ethnic” history of a particular group of people. Whilst a critical analysis of my subjectivity within my research is a key part of the research methodology, this does not mean that I am the research goal. That, instead, lies outside of my own story and this necessitates and justifies the experimental interweaving of stories with theories which will be found in the work that follows.

It is useful in that respect to add a note on the process of composition of these stories. Together they represent the consolidation of a lengthy period of writing and reflection in many different places, under quite different circumstances, and often by disparate means. While the ultimate assembly of these fragmentary origins has taken place within a relatively fixed and stable academic environment I have gone through many separate operations. This has involved gathering and sorting my own notes collected ad hoc throughout my journey which were composed sometimes with only a vague sense of the form in which they would eventually take shape. These fragments have then been interleaved with my readings in theory so that a sense of dialectic has emerged through which my own experiences are submitted to the theoretical speculations of critical writers, which in turn has reflected back onto my own process and enabled me to edit or expand my own thoughts. The process of composition has also been played out through a broader engagement with non-text-based media essential to the documentation of experience. In some case this relates to specific objects which have become

carriers of meaning in their own right (my passport, for instance), or images (especially photographs). In dealing with these artefacts I have worked more in the manner of a curator than an author, assembling, organizing, and arranging the images and objects in order to map out and visualise my experience before committing it to words. In this sense the text does not represent the entirety of experience, but rather the guiding thread or connective substance that ties everything together into narratives. At the end of the stories I reopen my creative output to non-text-based media through the incorporation of a video piece, for which I provide an additional critical commentary.

3.6 Stories, education, identity

Stories as methodology and stories as epistemology change what education within this context now means, occurring at the juncture of critical experience and situated epistemology. This is a radically transgressive model of education because it confuses and confounds the conventional boundaries which have been setup to protect the supposed purity of each academic discipline and its corresponding orthodoxy. This view of education furthermore challenges orthodox constructions of what education itself is assumed to be, namely, a formal institutionally prescribed and validated processes that leads to certification, access to certain markets of opportunity, and which frequently justifies systematic discrimination based on class, race, gender and other forms of identification (ideas widely represented in the critical literature on education, for example Kassem, Mufti, & Robinson, 2006). To that extent the education system serves the interest of social reproduction and maintains an exclusionary effect on social groups already marginalised by the system without offering a truly egalitarian opportunity to address systematic inequities.

The destabilization of conventional epistemological regimes embedded in disciplinary formations and standardised methodologies also has an effect on the way that identity itself is

understood. The stories which will feature within this research project are in many ways centrally concerned with the production of identity—how identities are produced and reproduced both through the physical territories that subjects pass through, or are confined within, as by the epistemologies we have at our disposal to construe them with. Corresponding to the positivist position on the truth of the external world being singular, fixed, and subject to control, verification, and immutable laws, identity itself is also understood to be essential and innate, policed by inflexible classificatory boundaries. Yet, as a scholar and educator from Palestine I know too well how these classificatory regimes adversely confine the subject within rigid systems of law that restrict access to change and mutability. Conditionality, not fixity, is rather the more accurate representation of being within geopolitical realities and it is finally therefore through a methodology which permits contingency that the complex experiences of subjectivity can be more freely investigated. It is for this reason that an arts-based research methodology focussed on stories has been selected for this research.

3.7 Stories and ethics

The stories which constitute this research narrate a series of experiences and journeys of myself and my family over a period of time and across multiple geographies. While these stories are framed as “my” stories, they are also “our” stories in the sense that they record and document the life of a family involving multiple generations. In contrast to the majority of participant-observer immersive studies in anthropology, I, as researcher, am not foreign to the community in which I have worked (for example, the immersive anthropology of de Sardan in de Sardan, 2013). The key ethical issues in participant-observer anthropology have revolved around the problematic fact that the researcher is not “of” the people whom she or he studies and is therefore liable to “rupture” the community by their sheer presence (Hamilton, 2016). Objective social studies entail objectification: issues of ethics emerge where the researcher

risks exposing communities to the gaze of outsiders without having at their disposal and adequate means of consent (Plemmons & Barker, 2017). Clearly I have consented to myself to represent myself, having determined that the inevitable exposure of my life and experience to a level of scrutiny is necessary for a better picture of the experience of a Palestinian academic to be portrayed. Where other friends or non-family members appear in the stories it has not been necessary to specify any factual details about their identities and they are to all extents and purposes anonymous. If this were an “objective” study deploying “quantitative” facts many details would have to be divulged of my journey and that of my family, potentially exposing their lives to public scrutiny in ways that would raise ethical problems. I have chosen to not present such details as a forensic documentation of our experience has not been the aim of this work. It has rather been to analyse through narrative and theoretical reflection moments of direct confrontation with the state of exception, whilst protecting the individual members of my family from overt exposure.

Change in the political situation of Palestine is not without risk. It is at such a time of unstable history that the ethics of individual experience and the state of political crisis must be seen alongside one another. Alternative approaches might have been to investigate more aggressively specific institutions or bodies who have served to institute the state of exception, but I have judged this too dangerous an endeavour. I have instead put forward the above argument on the nature of subjective versus objective research in order to substantiate the basic ethical claim that the documented experience of an individual subject represents, in however limited a form, a means by which the ethic-less state of exception may be contested.

The following chapters will now present the three stories which constitute the main research of this project: “A stranger in my home town,” “An unforgettable day,” and “Life in Chester.” Each of these stories stands alone in its own right, while they also read as a group of three, exploring common themes and concerns, as well as their shared approach to methodology described above. The production of these three stories has followed three major transition points in my own experience: my early experience of displacement upon leaving Kuwait as a child, the death of my father, and the beginning of a new life in the UK. If the first two narratives explore systems of deconstruction, the third explores a system of reconstruction. Their arrangement is chronological though their development is circular: while they illustrate a progression of time the issues they investigate do not develop in a linear fashion. Instead they return and recur, enabling the three stories to serve as three distinct angles of approach to a common problem. While they can also be read without the critical introduction of the previous three chapters on literature and methodology, it makes sense to present them now in light of the earlier work which, it is hoped, will elucidate their inner construction and contribute positively to their interpretation in a fuller context. Following the three stories I present an additional research intervention, related to the stories, in the form of a video piece, along with a critical commentary which teases out its relationship to the foregoing work, and bringing the research findings of this project to a conclusion.

Chapter 4

Story 1

A stranger in my home town

My identification, the small green paper, which may mean nothing to any British person, is one of the most, if not the most, important documents in my whole life. I was born in Kuwait and, as such, I did not have the right to obtain the identification of my home country because I was not born there. Those who are born outside Palestine are not entitled to have an ID and struggle for years to get one, provided that they apply to the Israeli authorities in a process that may last 10s of years. They struggle for an identity provided by the state. In a world where so many people now struggle against the state—against its oppressive individualism of the human subject, against the disciplinary regimes, against the identities it imposes—we were desperate for its recognition. We are caught between this desire to have our identities recognised by the state and, as Agamben (2013) has explained, a contrary desire to exist as a community of belonging without resorting to identity which is too easily co-opted by the state. Without our IDs we had, in an important sense, no identity. At the time this led us to desperate attempts to attain it—but as I reflect now I consider something else: that without IDs we had also become free of identity: we were a community of beings without identities.

In fact, I find passports a most interesting kind of book, and I am someone for whom books mean a lot. In fact I could not make a sense of the events I have lived through and

the stories I have heard if it were not for books. When I was in Kuwait, I began to study and over time I became a researcher, a writer, a teacher and an academic. This vocation has stayed with me wherever I have gone. When circumstances forced me to leave my place of work and travel, I carried on thinking and reading following what philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call “Lines of flights” in my mind, crossing over territories both imaginary and real. The landscape is stratified, Kuwait, Iraq, Palestine and the UK; all of these places are marked with the channels and paths of my journeys and the obstacles I have faced. As I reflect on these landscapes, I begin to find that mind is also a landscape striated by lines of travel, fight and experience. My passport is a book that tells a story, but there are other books whose writing has also marked my journey and I would not be telling my story completely if I did not refer to them. To cross the borders of a country, I need a passport, and to cross the borders of mind I need books. This story is about both.

I would like to begin by framing the story I am going to tell. It is a story about myself and others close to me, but it is also a story about a particular kind of subjectivity in the world which is in an important sense against, outside of, or excluded by the world. By “the world” I mean the state, the governing apparatus of the nation. Born in one state yet belonging another, while at the same time unable to live properly in my home country, I did not fit into the kinds of community which states prefer to deal with. Giorgio Agamben (2013) has written that every idea of community sets criteria of exclusion as much as criteria of inclusion. Every individual must have a definite identity because every individual must be identifiable by the state. Identity is not—or at least in Agamben’s view, is not, a positive quality, trait, or value which we ought to celebrate in ourselves and each other but more like a brand that makes us available to the operation of the state apparatus.

Belonging can be thought of as kinship, as ties of blood, family, loyalty, security, and so on—but belonging to the state, though it may connote or confer these myths, is fundamentally about being co-opted into the state’s regime of identification. But my story is about being outside such processes of identification, or rather, existing on the boundary between states and identifications—a boundary where the power to identify and disidentify are revealed and experienced. The radical part of Agamben’s idea about identity is not what I have described here; it is rather the escape route he provides out of the state’s co-optation. What if we had no identity? What if we were simply a “whatever,” an “anything,” resistant to identity? What if we could not belong, if we were pure singularity, if we could not be assimilated to a larger whole? With no identity there is no belonging, and with no belonging there is no society. And “as such,” Agamben writes, the “whatever” singularities “disavow the logic and workings of sovereignty.”

So, let me begin in 1992, after the geopolitical turmoil of operation Desert Storm, my father decided to leave Kuwait and travel across the North West border to Iraq, despite having a very good job at the best university in Kuwait. Because of the support of President Arafat showed to the Iraqi people during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, the Palestinian people in Kuwait began facing a lot of pressure to leave Kuwait where more than 750,000 Palestinians were living within its narrow borders. Our lives were caught up in a political atmosphere that was far outside of our control. The border around is became palpable, and this limits under which we ultimately lived, which are forgotten in ordinary life, began to feel real. Because of the pressure we felt from the Kuwaitis, especially the government, we decided to move to Iraq where we lived subsequently for four years. Our options were limited at that time; most of the families left to Iraq, Yemen and the Sudan.

I still remember that I cried a lot when we arrived at Safwan, the crossing point between Iraq and Kuwait. It was an intensely personal experience for me. It felt traumatic to leave the place in which I had grown up and enjoyed so many of the formative experiences of my life up to that point. There was a little I could say to put my feelings in words. In the absence of words, I cried. I was 16 and had that feeling of going to the unknown. My father drove to Baghdad, the capital, and we went to a house that was rented for us by a friend. It was a really spacious house especially when you compare it to the flat in which we used to live in Kuwait where Palestinians did not have the right to own properties. We went to explore the city the next day.

We were amazed of the magnificence of Baghdad. We spent the whole day walking and enjoying the monuments of Baghdad. I could smell heritage in the streets of Baghdad. We did not know how ancient the city was at that time. Our daily life was very simple. It was the summer holiday and we had nothing to do, so we kept going to restaurants, cinemas, stadiums and parks. Things were very cheap for those who came from Kuwait. One Kuwaiti dinar was 3.3 US dollar and 1 dollar was more than 400 Iraqi dinar. To understand this in a better way, we just need to know that before the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi dinar was 3.3 US dollar.

It was tough to settle quickly and make new friends but because of the large number of Palestinians who travelled to Iraq, we started our new life by being introduced to Iraqi people through Palestinians who had arrived to Iraq before we did. Iraqi people received Palestinians in general in a very good way. They welcomed us as they have been sympathising with the Palestinian people for many years. As for my family, our Iraqi neighbours were really kind. They started visiting us the next day we arrived and they

offered help in teaching us many things. Their enthusiasm in explaining almost everything in the area was really overwhelming and very touching. One of the families brought us lunch for 3 consecutive days, and when we tried to tell them that they did not need to do that, they said that refusing their food meant that we were not interested in being their friends. They were very generous, and the food was a symbol of that friendliness and kindness.

We were different and yet the same, displaced, but made to feel at home. Since this time, in the other places I have travelled, and within the other communities I have lived, the power of this acceptance by the Iraqis appears more and more special. Like anyone who lives in a condition of dispersal from their origins, I asked myself the question which Toni Morrison has stated so aptly: “in what direction, at what distance . . . might there be a ‘home’ of safety and dignity for the peoples of historical drift, political degradation, and cultural displacement?” Finding acceptance is not easy. Difference and deference slip into one another. As a guest the views of the Other must often be deferred to, even when they are unacceptable. As Homi Bhabha says: “we defer to get along” (Bhabha, 2003, p.163). But this apparent means of sociality can store up tensions. If in my deferral to the pluralist norms of a country I act out of desperation, if I “defer to your authority, your experience, without assenting to it, so also do you, ‘with all due respect,’ clear the ground, and your throat, for a conflictual or contentious engagement of terms that may disrupt the more consensual conversations of mankind.” But with the Iraqis there was no tension in our deference. We were treated as equals in a community beyond the small borders of nations, we were able to express ourselves fully, to talk, to disagree, and discuss and to share in

each other's lives. This changed my idea of home. We were not at home, but in Iraq we felt "at home."

In a sense through all these travels and displacements from one place to the next we became nomads. It was not that we went out and wandered in the desert, but our relationship to space changed. We were deterritorialized. We were, that is, ejected from the order of nations, borders, territories and all the rights that derive from identity with them. But we were not spaceless. The words of the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari put this puzzle well: "the nomad reterritorializes on deterritorialization itself" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2017, p.421). Losing our rights to officially demarcated land in one way we reterritorialized ourselves within the smooth, unmarked spaces of the landscape. "The nomads are there, on the land, wherever there forlovedms a smooth space that gnaws, and tends to grow, in all directions." We were officially territory-less—but we found ways to inhabit spaces nonetheless, occupying whatever marginal space we found ourselves in, in between the territories of others. And we made our lives there. "The nomads inhabit these places; they remain in them, and they themselves make them grow, for it has been established that the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2017, p.421).

There are two kinds of nomads, and I felt like both of them at different times. I saw myself as both Noyes (2004) nomad, who wanders free as he describes a person with choice and freedom. In other words, the super-rich nomad, the nomad who is free to go anywhere they please, at any time, to do anything. Everything is open and available to them, there are no barriers, no restraints, no objections. All they need to do is follow the pathways of their desires. On the other hand, Sutherland's (2014) nomad does not travel out of desire;

it represents the refugee who travels out of necessity: having nowhere to go they must always be on the go. My nomadic existence felt as if it was located somewhere between these two extremes, moving now closer to one, now to the other, always in a state of becoming. When I say that I am close to Noyes nomad, I refer to the days I have spent in the UK, where I can move and travel freely, at least in Europe. Since I have legal residence in the UK, the process of travelling is stress-free. The second kind was obviously experienced when we were forced to leave Kuwait and then Iraq. It was not out of desire at all, and even before that, my father left to Kuwait in 1960 to find a job to feed his family, his parents and his brothers and sisters, who depended on him for their living.

If the state of the nomad were to have a shape it would be the shape of the rhizome, the root which is defined not by its stable position in the ground tying it down but instead by its linear proliferation in all directions simultaneously. It is this infinite complexity of extensiveness that saves the rhizome from the experience of trauma. When the principal root “has aborted, or its tip”, it could be the tip of identity, of belonging, of fixed citizenship, “has been destroyed, an immediate, indefinite multiplicity of secondary roots grafts onto it and undergoes a flourishing development.” I don’t know if we were flourishing, but we were proliferating. Our movements were like rhizomes, in response to being cut off we developed other connections, we went underground, we spread out in every direction, we found new ways to connect.

On August 16, 1996, we decided to return to the Gaza Strip. My brothers and sisters and I could not believe that we were able to return to our home town. It was something impossible for us to imagine. However, we applied for permission from the Israeli authorities to visit Gaza for 30 days and were granted it. Our movements had become

subject to a higher power and we were intensely aware of this form of state control, directly experiencing how harsh discipline can act through the “soft” measures of bureaucracy. We were nomads at the mercy of geopolitical conditions, with little sense of personal liberty.

I was so naïve in thinking that the first thing I could do would be to go to Jerusalem. Due to the fact that we were born in Kuwait, we did not have any memories in Gaza, but we were eager to visit Gaza and see the people there. We did not even contact our relatives when we were in Kuwait and Iraq. However, we were so excited to see and visit every single metre in Gaza. We have always had that feeling of being proud to be Palestinian and we have raised many questions about Palestine when we were children. We always wanted to see those people who are fighting and resisting with stones. The respect and appreciation we saw in the eyes of non-Palestinian urged us to know more about our homeland, the land that we have never seen. I, myself, was 19 at that time, so I was really eager to meet those people. When we were children, we used to imagine Palestinian people as knights and heroes who cannot be beaten. Partially, it might have been due to the international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people when Kuwait celebrates this day on the 29th of November. Everything turns to the Palestinian flag that day. Our friends wanted to know more about Palestine and the Palestinian cause. We used to feel very proud when we started to tell them about Palestine. It could also be because of both family and identity again. I became 19 and I do not know what the word “uncle” means. I have never met an uncle, an aunt, a grandfather, grandmother or cousins. These words were vague for us. We were confused when a friend said that he or she went to visit his or her uncle. This could be strange for many people but for me, it was one of the reasons that motivated me to see Palestine. As for my father, he used to say that we cannot live anymore as guests in other

countries. We need to live in our country where nobody could ask you for a guarantor and where you can own your own property. We needed to live in Palestine, where we would not feel different or isolated.

We left our home in Iraq despite knowing that we would not be able to return, nor that we could stay in Gaza, nor that it would be possible ever to return to Kuwait. We all have that feeling of uncertainty. Often this uncertainty is prolonged by waiting for papers and articles to arrive, to be approved, to come through. Many people know this prolongation of uncertainty by waiting. In the Palestinian refugee camps people wait without end. In detention centres asylum seekers wait almost indefinitely. People on trial wait interminably for their cases to be heard. It is difficult to wait. Your life is no longer your bare life, the life of your flesh and blood, it exists out of your hands in the form of a few pieces of official paper, waiting somewhere for approval so that you can move on. But the wait continues.

The time waiting is spent as a time desperate for recognition. This is surely part of what it means to be a minority: to not be fully recognised, to be marginalised, to be on the periphery, eclipsed by the majority. It is the greatest frustration to exist in this in-between state and it has followed me around wherever I have journeyed. In all my experiences I continue to run up against the fact that no matter how “multicultural” societies claim to be, no matter how inclusive, respectful, or embracing their rhetoric, they cannot help but ultimately remain closed to outsiders. I mean ultimately closed, fundamentally and essentially closed, despite all appearances and assurances. Why is this the case? Why are communities so inflexibly sealed against the other? It is surely, to follow Homi Bhabha’s (2003) critique of Charles Taylor’s idea of “multiculturalism,” that “whole societies,

however universal their aspirations, are fundamentally imagined to be national or societal cultures in which it is impossible for the migrant or minoritarian culture “to conceive of their options outside of the national, even nationalist frame.” So while I waited for recognition desperately I also pondered whether recognition could ever in fact arrive. Could I ever be recognised fully when I am displaced?

If I wanted an answer to that question a vigorous one would come from someone who knew well what it was both to be accepted and rejected by another culture: Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) In search of answers to how and why cultures recognise, or do not recognise others, I found Homi Bhabha again rehearsing what Fanon said: “For the culture of authenticity sponsored by the colonial State produces archaic, inert institutions . . . patterned like a caricature of formerly fertile institutions . . . a cultural mummification that leads to a mummification of individual thinking” (Bhabha, 2003, p.177).

Eventually, during a time when these questions were filling my mind, the papers come back and the period of waiting is over. When this happened to me I had the feeling of insecurity mixed with being excited to see my homeland for the first time. I was thinking of my life and how a decision could change everything, a decision which was also far outside of my control, which demonstrated the working of a far-off, ultimately powerful state system which had my life in thrall. We had spent years in Kuwait dreaming and building our future and in a second we needed to start again from zero in Iraq where we believed that we would be able to start again. When we established strong relations with people in Iraq and started to see new beginning, the decision to return to Gaza was made. In Gaza, a new beginning had to be made. I do not know how many years are left in my life to have such a number of beginnings.

It was strange feeling to live in your country while you know that you are breaching the Israeli law by staying for more than 30 days. It also felt perverse to be in one country but still subject to the laws of another, as if you had become suspended in a zone of uncertainty about your own legal status. Palestine was so real: it was the location of my origin, the place to which I had been taught to look towards as the source of all my identity and the identities of my family and friends, nothing could be more real, embodied in the streets and buildings and ground of the place. And yet, it was also unreal. Whilst I was there, in the place of my origin, I was also entirely at the mercy of an absolute Israeli power. I had returned home to find the comforting and familiar, everything looked and felt just as I had in my imagination but actually, nothing was really the same, nothing would be the same ever again. Everywhere we are watched, and our movement is limited and controlled. Everywhere we go we face checkpoints. Our IDs are asked for. We are looked on with suspicion. We are subject to the gaze of armed police, and reminded at every turn here, in your home, the place where we are supposed to feel safe, literally anything can happen to you. For now, the armed police and border guards tolerate your presence, they deal with you briskly but neutrally, but you know that the peace is only kept at their discretion and that at any moment they might, if they choose, exert an unlimited power over you. This is not home; this is a camp.

As the philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2008) describes it, the camp “is the space that opens up when the State of Exception starts to become the rule. In it, the State of Exception, which was essentially a temporal suspension of the state of law, acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that, as such, remains constantly outside the normal state of law.” With the law suspended, the inside of the camp turns into what Agamben (2016) calls

a “zone of indistinction” where, because of the lack of juridical protection, literally “everything had truly become possible” (since there was no law to forbid it). With no law there are no rights and no crime. Whether atrocities are actually committed in such spaces, or if they are, how atrocious they appear, is, for Agamben, beside the point. The ethical disposition of the police, or whoever it is who wields power in the camp, may restrain them from atrocity, but the fact remains that there is no juridical or political restraint. As shocking as it still appears, it was for these reasons that Agamben saw an absolute continuation between the concentration camps of Nazi Germany and the stadiums used for containing refugees across contemporary Europe. In both, life is reduced to its bare state, and anything can happen. And that is where we found ourselves, in a situation where the exception was becoming the rule, where time was bleeding into space and something we thought would last for a short while was stratifying into spatial boundaries that we could not escape. It is to this situation that Agamben gave the term “catastrophe” (Agamben, 2010, p.57). Here the State of Exception no longer means a temporary state, a different space, a measure from which the state of affairs will soon draw back and return to juridical normality, or when the “outside” will return back into the “inside.” The State of Exception is instead a prolonged emergency without end, “a zone of absolute indeterminacy between anomie and law in which the sphere of creatures and the juridical order are caught up in a single catastrophe” (Agamben, 2010, p.57).

But what other options did we have? Almost none. As a kind of a collective punishment, just because of being Palestinian and because we decided to return and stay in our land, we were not issued IDs and accordingly could not get passports. We were more than 50,000 Palestinian and we were living there with no identity. We could not travel

anywhere and many of us died because of not being able to travel even to the other part of Palestine to be medicated. We were caged and confined mercilessly. We could not even determine our future. We were closer to detainees. I did not have permission to cross lines imposed by the Israeli authorities.

Instead of being bounding limits surrounding spaces of freedom, borders became space itself. Everything was a border. Space itself was a continuously inhabited border condition through which you could not pass. After every border there were other borders, as if space had become an infinite succession of boundaries through which, try as we might, we could not pass to freedom. Those lines, borders, were even in my mind, as if the camp had become an interior landscape, a stratification, striation, channelling, marking, demarcation of my own thoughts, and whenever I saw an announcement about a scholarship to study abroad or a holiday, I felt extremely hopeless. Now, the 50,000 become more than 100,000 according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), and only very few of them were able to obtain IDs through the acts of an unpredictable Israeli legal system.

One of my close friends could not travel to Slovakia although he was granted a scholarship from the faculty of medicine because he did not have ID. Although he is the head of the dermatology department in one of the hospitals in Gaza, he could not forget the moment when he told the university that he could not travel because of having no ID. I remember when he wrote to me telling me how sad he was. There are many stories about people who could not travel to be treated or work spread all over Gaza. Some of them appealed to President Arafat and President Abbas but in vain. It is all about the mode of the Israeli government. Indeed, even if an ID was obtained, it still did not guarantee that a

Palestinian could travel or move freely as they remained subject to out of the ordinary Israeli laws. These laws, which can be classified as emergency laws, created a Palestinian State of Exception. The laws of ordinary life had been suspended, rights and privileges had evaporated. Anything could be done to you without punishment. Agamben (2010) “suspension” of legal norms in which “anything is possible” is here; we are Agamben’s subjects, stripped to a condition of bare life, subject to harm and punishment from a controlling state which operates without impunity.

I, myself, started considering this flimsy green plastic piece constituting my passport as equivalent to hope and future. It was the thing that could determine my future. My hopes were strongly linked with this plastic piece. As frail as it was, it still symbolised for me a condition in which I might be protected by law, where law might still exist, where it might be the source of a justice that could still be believed in. Wherever that passport existed, whenever it was attached to my person, I could not (I thought) be reduced to “bare life.” I could not be suspended in a zone of indistinction, a State of Exception. Not everything could happen to me. The existence of the state and of law is so dispersed and abstract but holding my passport in my hand I felt, however vainly or naively, that I belonged. It was hard to believe that this rectangle thing represents freedom for tens of thousands of people. I knew that, and I was upset that my freedom is connected with something that neither I nor my country could do anything about. When the Hamas government won the election in 2007, I believed that I would never get an ID because there was no contact between Hamas, as a resistance movement, and the Israeli government.

The whole issue was about law, how it operates to protect the rights of some, and suspend the rights of others. I missed many opportunities to travel and work because of my

lacking an ID. I was struggling to prove that I was a Palestinian living in Palestine. It was a really bitter feeling. Some of those who came by means of permission having been granted from the Israeli authorities could not even marry because many families preferred not to marry their daughters to someone who has no ID. This is of course regardless of the fact that the people who had no ID were well known among the society; most of them came from reputed families and a great percentage of them are doctors, engineers, scholars and teachers.

It was a kind of pressurising the Palestinian people and a practice which put such psychological pressure upon us as though someone were telling you that you do not fully exist by yourself and that your mere presence is not enough to represent you, instead, you need this paper document to represent you and testify who you are. We came to Gaza Strip in 1996, and I needed to have a bank account after graduation when I had my first job in 2003. You can represent yourself physically, but again you need this piece of paper to be recognised. One day I needed to open a bank account to receive my salary from the Spanish organisation with which I was working as a coordinator. Since the HQ of the organisation was in Jerusalem, there was a need to transfer the money. I went to the bank to open an account, the employee there asked me for my ID. I gave him my travel document, which was normally used as a proof of identity. Surprisingly, he said, “Sorry Mr. Muayyad. I cannot process your application”. I told him that I am Palestinian and I live in Gaza; I needed an account. It was in the interest of both the bank and myself. However, he apologised saying that these were the orders of the administration and he could do nothing. I wanted to look in the mirror at that moment to see if I was transparent. I did not realise until that moment that things are so complicated that you cannot do your daily tasks. The

same thing happened several times whenever I wanted to have governmental documents. I started believing that I was a symbol of emptiness and worthlessness.

If violence is simply understood as physical brutality then I did not suffer direct violence from the Israeli state in Palestine. But violence fractures and splinters through so many more kinds of human experience, not all of them with visible physical signs. It is again Homi Bhabha (2015) reading Frantz Fanon who has to me most poignantly explicated the nature of violence. Violence is physical, but it is also aggression, hostility, cruelty, alienation, psychic manipulation, and a violation of others' rights. If violence is conceived like this, and if it is understood to be constitutive of the postcolonial environment, then I suffered violence at the hands of the Israeli state. If the violence was not physical it was symbolic, at every possible opportunity I was humiliated by the bureaucracy and laws which Israel had put in place to restrain me, and many others like me. I had not given my assent to Israel, and since any state which does not manufacture the consent of its citizens proceeds to coerce them by force into doing what it wants them to do, I became subject to coercion. I could have thought that this violence represented a power over me, but through reading Hannah Arendt (1969) I came to understand that in fact violence was the absence of power. As she says, "violence appears where power is in jeopardy." Power, at least political power, is in dialogue, in consensus, in shared decision making which empowers the people and, through them, the state which represents them. But as Grinberg (2011) explains, "violence is a unilateral imposition. Violence can destroy political power, but cannot build it." At the same time violence cannot be thought outside of those who perpetrate it, and this is how Grinberg really changes everything because he

perceives Israel to be the embodiment of violence. That is how I experienced it. Israel was a re-presentation of violence, not just in one respect but in many.

This kind of violence leaves no immediate physical trace. It is not spectacular like beating or a gunshot – often it is not even visible at all. But this is worse: no one even sees the violence. Invisible violence: its weapons are the documents, the identity card, the regulation, the waiting list, the bank clerk, surveillance systems. It is done in the name of law and order. Israel had become a specialist at this. It had internalised the militarism of the police into the operations of the state bureaucracy, and many people suffered. Everything was surveilled. Israel had become a surveillance machine. As Zureik, Lyon, and Abu Laban (2013) have written, surveillance has emerged in Israel out of a legacy of colonialism which rendered the native land to its Orientalist gaze in order to control it. If it could be seen, watched, measured, it could be controlled. After the withdrawal of the colonial state, a replacement came in the form of Israel. It was a different system, but the violence of it was systemic. This means that whenever I was able to read, or to think about reading, or to write, even to write like this, I was able, in some small but for me highly significant way, to escape from surveillance. It was like I was writing my own passport.

In 2012, I was able to get my ID when 2000 names were announced to be granted IDs. Some of the applicants do not even remember whether they applied or not. It was just that Israel decided to grant one of their rights and this was granted to a limited group of people among thousands more who were denied that which for millions of people elsewhere is a basic right. For the outside world, it was a gesture of generosity and kindness. Yet, for Palestinians, we knew it is another sign of treating us like slaves. Your own rights are determined by Israel; this includes your national ID. To make that so clear,

this right was granted for exclusive persons whom were chosen by the Israeli authorities. This act showed the world that Israel was following law by considering the humanitarian needs of people in Palestine; however, it confirms the power and authority of Israel at the same time. This was the perverseness of the situation in which I found myself forced to be glad about the arbitrary operation of a foreign state power in my life. I struggled to comprehend the nature of their gesture. Their treatment of us always felt illegal, the opposite of law. This is the paradox of the situation. Laws are supposed to protect you and to be above any one single agent. But here laws were constantly hedging us in and limiting the very freedoms they are supposed to protect. I felt like the subject of illegal laws.

The waiting without end in sight, followed by a sudden and unexpected change, indicates something about a significant element in our lives: time. To take the example of the refugee camps: time is not working there, it is suspended. It is not subject to the ordinary changes and possibilities of everyday life, but goes on in a kind of vacuum, cut off from the time of life outside both eventless and yet subject to sudden and unpredictable ruptures. This is exactly what is happening to the Palestinian people. We cannot plan for even one day. Everything is unpredictable. Whenever I have a look at the calendar, I always know what this means. In Palestine, it is impossible to say, "I will do this and I am planning for that next week". This is impossible in Palestine. Because of suspended rights, even going to an event in Gaza or simply visiting a friend is not guaranteed. It is as simple as that. I vividly remember when I got a visa to the UK, which is very complicated process for Palestinians. However, I still needed to apply for a permission from Israel and another one from Jordan. I was rejected three times before being approved and for several months I was neither rejected nor approved. It was being processed for 6 months. They never tell you

that you are rejected; you just keep waiting and after a few weeks, you know that you need to renew your application. I was counting days and even hours and time was very slow. At certain moment my family and friends told me to forget everything about that issue. Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot"(2010) was in the back of my mind all the time. It was one of the first plays I read when I started my first degree in 1998. I do not know why this particular part is always in my mind:

“Let’s go.”

“We can’t.”

“Why not?”

“We’re waiting for Godot” (quoted in Graver, 2004, p.34).

It might be because of the conception of suspension and waiting in which we have been living for years. It could be because of the fact that in 1998, I was unable to travel or move and I did not know when I was going to be granted an ID. I still remember the question of one of the best professors I have ever met when he used to ask me about my plans and why I did not travel. I used to answer: “I cannot; I am waiting my ID.” In other words, even having this paper which apparently represents you does not guarantee that you will pass or travel. Another clearer example of that I was then called by the Israeli authorities and told to leave the next morning. A mixture of feelings overwhelmed me. That night, some rockets hit, and there was some firing and shooting. Again, everything was suspended and I could not travel the next morning so awaited another call which might ask me to leave. I was called and asked to leave the next day. I had few hours to say goodbye to many people. A very limited time to arrange for a 3-year journey.

We knew that such thing would happen, but when it happened suddenly and after 6 months when we had started to feel despair; it was as if I was waiting to be shot. We went quickly to my father to tell him that we were travelling the next morning. I wanted to stay longer with him, yet I had to be quick as so many arrangements had to be made and so many things to be done. I had that feeling that I might not see him again, but I had to hurry in order not to miss that chance. We went to my wife's aunts and uncles, then we went to my brothers and sisters after midnight. We were trying to prioritise things and go to people who lived close to each other but we could not see everyone. We did not sleep that night and we called those whom we could not go to visit.

The whole issue was more complicated than having an ID or a passport to travel and carry out daily life activities, the struggle to attain a passport is nothing less than the struggle to attain civil existence. For us, the background to that struggle was one of nomadism, of wandering between places, deterritorialised from home. In this nomadic world, with my photo and biometric data imprinted in it, the passport represents my power to exist, to be recognised, to have status, to enjoy rights, to be allowed free passage. It is therefore the most dangerous of documents: because if it is taken away, everything is lost.

Chapter 5

Story 2

Unforgettable day

I did not think that holding a book would cause all these feelings; I did not think that holding some old papers or a photo of someone's handwriting would evoke such feelings. However, this happens whenever I start reading this book and those papers. They are related to the worst day in my whole life. The day when my father passed away while I was doing my best to make him proud of me; the day when I felt that I am still a child although I am 42. I read, heard and watched a lot about knowing the value of things when missing it, but I have never thought of this until my father died. This book is a collection of poems that my father wrote during the last 30 years; some of them are even older. As a professor of Arabic, my father was fascinated with language and spent days and nights writing poetry. A few months before travelling to the UK, I decided to publish all the poems he wrote. I started collecting all the papers he wrote. Some of them were yellow and almost torn. The smell of cigarette wafted out whenever I start reading those pages. I collected everything he wrote and started typing and editing that. His handwriting was really unique and I felt honesty and sincerity in every single line he wrote. His feelings about the subject matters he wrote about were smoothly conveyed to me and this is how I believe it to be realistic and honest.

As I recall the passing of my father I also recall one of his most poignant poems, which was composed on the death of my mother. An Elegy to My Um Mu'tasim summed up the lifelong devotion of my father for my mother after her death from diabetes. The two

of them had met when they were both still young and shared their lives together—the sense of the passing of time is one of the most arresting aspects of the poem with its transition from youth to age. It was characteristic of my father to be able to move between the particularities of our earthly existence—holding hands, caring in sickness and health, walking in the garden—to the eternal aspects of the divine and the hope of meeting again the loved ones who have departed. It was a difficult time for my father, to endure the sickness my mother suffered, through which she became weaker and more confined, but he accepted his role as care-giver and never lost his adoration for his soul mate. For me, as I read it, considering my father’s legacy I can see that in some way what I am writing now is also an elegy—a short story, not a poem, but that is my way. This is one of the reasons we write—about people, about places—because we are distant from them. Even though they are inaccessible we still somehow believe that language has relevance.

The evocation of an absent presence in photographs and texts is strong. The pages (see p.100 and the accompanying video) were held in his hands, the light in them once reflected from his own body. Those things were really there. When I see them I experience what Barthes described as the “punctum”, the puncturing moment when you suddenly become aware of this presence (Barthes, 2012). Barthes began his reflection on photography in the wake of the death of his mother. For him, photography is bound up with death. This has helped me think through these images of my father. The essence or specific character of photography is what Barthes called a “that-has-been”, “a certificate of the presence of something that is past”. A photograph weaves together presence and absence, present and past. The nature of the medium as an indexical imprint of the object means that any photographed object or person has a ghostly, uncanny presence that might be likened

to the return of the dead” (Iversen, 2007, p.114). I have that photograph with me as I write this, finding the image and my writing to be inseparable records of a “that-has-been.”

I spent more than 6 months doing this job and every time I finished and printed several pages, I used to go to him and he starts reading and making some comments about this word and that line, which should be intended and this space that should be bigger. I tried many times to convince him that the layout of the pages is the last stage but I still remember that he kept asking for changes whenever he found something wrong.

The book was 220 pages, which is coincidentally the same number of my house here in the UK, but I can confirm that we printed more than 2000 pages so that he could review everything. He did not feel comfortable when he was reading the pages on the computer; that is why I needed to print the pages and mark the changes and then modify them and print them again to show him.

Usually, I finished work at 15:00 and straight after work, I used to go to him and spend a few hours there so that I could finish and print the book before travelling. Travelling itself was pressurising me as nothing was guaranteed, and I could be asked to leave at any moment. I used to work harder on Fridays and Saturdays because I know that the Israeli authorities do not call those days. I kept going to the publisher and the designer so that work could be done on time. I remember that I handed him the first copy two days before travelling. I brought him my copy and asked him to sign it a few hours before travelling.

My father was an academic, and he published many papers as a professor of Arabic grammar and eloquence. He worked at the University of Kuwait, University of Saddam, Islamic University and Aqsa University. Although we were enjoying life in Kuwait, the

feeling of homesickness was overwhelming him, and we could see this in his words and gestures. We were surprised, as we were still young at that time, that someone could leave Kuwait, where he had a good position to leave to the unknown. However, one of the things that characterised him was his ability to foresee the future. In many cases, we were looking at each other when he used to say something and we thought that he was pessimistic or that he exaggerated. Yet, after some years, we could realise that most of the things he talked about had already happened. This includes being forced to leave Kuwait. Of course, he did not expect that Saddam Hussein would invade Kuwait but he used to say that we would leave Kuwait soon. It might be his experience in the countries where he spent his life working with people from different nationalities, and of course it was his intelligence. I am not saying that because he is my father, but the stories I was told by his friends confirmed this belief.

I was surprised that he did not often narrate these situations to us, but as I mentioned earlier, being silent most of the time was the main thing that characterised my father. His main trait was patience; he was very patient to the extent that sometimes we thought that he did not care. I remember a situation that was told by one of his colleagues when he was appointed as an educational supervisor in Kuwait when he was the youngest among all the other staff. One of his Egyptian colleagues did not like the idea of being supervised by a young Palestinian man, and he kept trying to embarrass him. One day, my father was talking about a certain topic and that person tried to have an argument with my father, who was very quiet. Suddenly, the other teacher struck the table and pushed the notebooks that my father was correcting. All the notebooks were on the floor and surprisingly to all the staff my father did not say anything. He just stood and bowed to collect the notebooks. I

could not believe that anyone, in our eastern society, could do a similar thing. After a few weeks, that teacher apologised to my father and said that he tried to prove that my father was not qualified to supervise a group of older teachers but he realised that he deserved that position. What is really remarkable is that the teacher became a close friend of my father and visited us several times. One day, he wanted to tell us about how he first met my father; we pretended not to know the story so that we could hear it from the teacher himself.

While writing about him, I cannot stop thinking about the conception of displacement that he used to talk about. He used to remind us that we were not living in our country, and we might be forced to leave at any moment. He always highlighted the fact that we are directly and indirectly affected by the political situation around us. The idea of uncertainty was always there when he talked to us. It was only gradually that I began to understand how his sense of uncertainty was always related to space, the uncertainty of a kind of space which is ambiguous, a borderline, a fringe, an intersection, neither fully here nor fully there. When I say “space” I mean literally a location, but I also mean that all spaces are always political, philosophical conditions too. Agamben speaks about “points of imbalance between public law and political fact” (he is quoting Saint-Bonnet), or “ambiguous, uncertain, borderline, fringe[s] at the intersection of the legal and the political” (this time quoting Fontana) (Agamben, 2005, 1). It was through my father that I began to grasp the complexity of the thing we refer to when we talk about occupying a space with uncertainty. It is perhaps only by experiencing uncertainty that we come to realise that space itself cannot be taken for granted, that it is never fixed, stable, or secure for anything more than a moment. I suppose it was my natural reverence of my father, his appearing both always somewhat distant, yet also so near and loving, that made me think

of him as a kind of sovereign. It is difficult to explain this reverence. I saw my father both in the light of the world and also as being outside the world. Again, I found, much later, in the work of Agamben a kind of language that was able to articulate this paradox in which my father appeared to me. “*Being-outside, and yet belonging,*” Agamben writes, “this is the topological structure of the State of Exception, and only because the sovereign, who decides on the exception, is, in truth, logically defined in his being by the exception, can he too be defined by the oxymoron *ecstasy-belonging*” (Agamben, 2015, p.35). I am not the only one who has noticed Agamben’s fascination with the “topological” uncertainty of belonging (Murray & Whyte, 2011, Pp.65-6). But I feel that my father *lived* this uncertainty—like the sovereign Agamben described—he both belonged to the world I was (and am still) a part of but was also outside of it. This is the meaning of ec-stasy.

One of the things that I learnt from him is not guaranteeing what I already have and work hard to secure other alternatives. I found it strange when I was young to absorb this idea. We were living in Kuwait with a good job and the situation in Kuwait was really stable. When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, people were affected in different ways. However, the people who have been suffering until this moment are the Palestinians. Some countries benefited from what had happened such as Syria and Egypt. Others were temporarily affected such as Yemen and Jordan. Palestinians were the only people who have been suffering until this moment.

My father’s position, his position in time and space, his metaphysical, philosophical position, was decentred. He did not inhabit a centre. He, and all of us with him, were living away from our centre. The centre was always, I began to realise, present to him, but only in the form of an absence. The centre was elsewhere, it was where we were not, it was

somewhere to which we might one day return but on whose periphery we were forced to live for now. It is perhaps for this reason that I have come to understand a certain sympathy between my father's character and disposition as I remember him and the lives and work of those philosophers who have written most poignantly about "decentring" from the position of their own exile or displacement. Jacques Derrida is just such a philosopher, a French-Algerian, a man who experienced life at the periphery, and the uncertainties that develop there. It was Derrida, for me, who conceived most poignantly of "a subject not anchored to structure, to formal 'presence,' but one that occurs in the in-between spaces (between subject and object in the representational corridors of a dismantled and defamiliarised grammar" (Brott, 2016, p.49).

Whenever I want to feel my father now, I just start reading the papers written by him, not the book. I do read some poems from the book especially the ones about my mother but the feeling I have when reading his handwriting is different. I can still smell him and feel him. I can remember all the moments of commenting, arguing, discussing, reading, listening, standing, eating and drinking as we did all these things during the process of editing the poems. He used to sit and read while I was standing behind him waiting his comments. He was a heavy smoker who had never puffed his cigarette. He just put it in his mouth and when finished he replaced it by another and another. I remember how my eyes were burning because of the smoke, yet I could not say anything. It was not just that in my culture, I cannot ask my father to stop smoking even if this harms me. This is completely different in the UK and in the West in general, but for me, I was happy doing that and I have never regretted doing similar things. It was something inside me and it was asking me not to ask him to stop doing something he likes. When I left and as soon as I

arrived home, my wife asked her typical question: “Have you started smoking?” I just smiled and said, “I did not and I would never”. It was the only thing that I did not want to imitate my father in.

I was in France that day, and I decided to check my Facebook although I do not do that very often when I am on holiday. I was stunned when I found a post in which the university was lamenting my father’s passing. It is impossible to describe that moment. I will never forget that morning. The children were asleep and my wife was preparing stuff to start our day. I said to myself that there must have been a kind of misunderstanding. My father cannot die before seeing me with my doctoral degree. I promised him that I would be back as soon as I could, and this was the main thing that urged me to finish as quick as I could. I still remember the last night when we went to him to say goodbye and to sign the book. I believed that the time I spent with him was not enough so I went again the next morning, and he asked me to leave so that I could travel. I remember when I kept calling him whenever I passed crossing point in Gaza, Jordan and when I arrived to the UK. Although I have a bad memory, I can still remember every single word he said and every piece of advice he had given. I tried to be strong, and I did not want the children to feel that I was sad. I did not cry at that moment and I knew that I would burst at any time, but I did not want that to be when sitting with the children. We went to the swimming pool that morning and I was sitting there while they were playing and swimming. Suddenly, all my feelings turned to tears. I cried and cried and cried. I covered my face with newspaper so that nobody could see me. For more than an hour, I was doing nothing but remembering him and crying. I did not know how much I love him until that moment. I thought I knew but I did not.

It was also at that moment that perhaps the first time in my life I experienced what Heidegger called “the being-towards-death” the authentic realisation that death itself is constitutive of all of our being, in fact that death is the thing about us which is most authentic. Sitting by the pool, burying my head in the newspaper, crying, I felt my own being thrown towards death and felt poignantly and painfully my own father’s being thrown towards death too, and the feeling that we are all disposed to living out an encounter with what Heidegger calls “*das Nichts*”, nothingness (Malpas & Solomon, 2005, p.89). Nothingness, I thought at that moment, nothingness is what being is.

What hurts me even more and made things worse was being unable to attend the funeral of my father. I was willing to sacrifice anything to have a final look at him. To travel back to Palestine, I needed to apply for a permission from Jordan and another one from the Israeli authorities, and this could last forever. Even if you get the required permissions, the possibility of not being able to return to the UK is very great. In Palestine, a funeral happens within three days and three days are not enough for processing my application. I will keep asking myself why a person cannot attend the funeral of his or her father. I cannot understand how Israelis could speak about human rights when people are denied this basic rights.

It is at moments of crisis like this that you realise what the really important basic structures of life are, or at least this is what it was like for me. In the midst of everything else that was happening in life suddenly death intervenes, and you have no greater, more simple, and more basic wish than to be with your beloved before they depart the world. Is there anyone who would not sympathise with such a wish? Is there anyone who would deny you the right to complete this act? Though I had committed no crimes I was indeed

denied this right—not explicitly, not outright, but in the lugubrious bureaucracy of the militarised state. In Roman law it was the norm to openly declare an enemy of state as “*hostis*”—a public enemy, a figure “radically deprived of any legal status and [who] could therefore be stripped of his belongings and put to death at any moment” (Agamben, 2005, p.80). My prohibition from visiting my father one last time felt, to me, as if I were being declared “*hostis*”, a public enemy, radically deprived of my rights and the anger, and humiliation, and bitterness of this judgment upon me is something I must continually take with me.

I wanted to see my father and kiss his face and hands. I wanted to apologise for not spending much time with him. I wanted to tell him that I would soon get my degree and make him proud of me. I wanted to ask him about many issues to which his answers would be really helpful. However, I could not even see him. Why? Because I am Palestinian and I do not have the right to return to my home country. I do not have the right to move freely; I do not have the right to say goodbye to persons whom I love. Telling my children about the reason why we could not see their grandfather is also unexplainable. If I want to tell my children the real reason, I might harm the security and safety of the state of Israel. My children could be considered as potential terrorists in the future. At the point in my life at which I needed the security and rights of a citizen most, at a point when I needed a beneficent state to support the welfare of myself and my family, I was denied them. It will not come as a surprise to anyone who has become familiar with the political thought of Hannah Arendt that the state so often fails at the moment when it is most needed to protect the basic rights it supposedly exists to protect. “The conception of human rights,” she states (in a passage also key for Agamben in explaining his own theory of biopolitics) “based

upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships—except that they were still human” (Arendt, 1994, p.299). As Agamben reflects on this passage, “in the system of the nation-state, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man show themselves to lack every protection and reality at the moment in which they can no longer take the form of rights belonging to citizens of state” (Agamben, 2016). How much I wished for the right to move freely at that moment! The right to visit my home country with my children and to be able to return to where we were afterwards.

My children of course were unable to understand and I was unable to explain. How can such a thing be explained? Its inexplicability in the eyes of children, like the inexplicability of death itself, is impossible to remove. I could not explain what it meant that their grandfather had died, nor could I explain why we were unable to go home. My children used to talk to their grandfather and recite things they could memorise; they could narrate some stories, verses of Holy Quran and rarely some short poems. When they ask innocently, “Why do not we call our grandfather as usual?” I have no answer. I could only say he died. This leads to a series of questions for most of which I have no convincing answers. The only definite thing is that we are being punished for living in what I can only conceive of as a “camp,” a “State of Exception” in which the ordinary rule of law and norms is suspended and anything can happen. A state where you cannot enjoy your basic rights and where you are reduced to live as “bare life” in a “no-man’s land between public law and political fact, and between juridical order and life” in a “threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism” (Agamben, 2005, 1 & 3).

Our life became a series of unpleasant surprises due to the situation of life in Gaza Strip. I became really concerned that a similar thing could happen to my wife as she cannot travel to see her family. Her parents wanted to come last summer but again they faced the issue of permission and closure of borders. It is true that her parents are still young, but as everybody knows, you cannot anticipate death. When we first left Gaza, we were certain that the situation would not last forever and within few years everything would improve. However, things became even worse than the day we left. People receive no salaries and electricity is available for less than 4 hours every day. Life in Gaza is deteriorating socially and economically and it seems that the worst is yet to come. I found it a little strange to start thinking about my father and end with talking about life in Gaza. However, separating between personal life and life in general in Gaza is almost impossible. Even academically, and when one lives in the UK, where one should enjoy life without restrictions and make the most of the academic life, the political situation is still affecting us as Palestinians. Last week, one of my friends who is doing his doctoral studies in Scotland, called me and he was absolutely upset. He told me that as a part of his research he needs to go to West Bank and Gaza Strip to collect data from managers at one of the biggest Palestinian telecommunications companies. After coordinating for a few weeks with the managers, he was shocked to know that he cannot get a permission to travel to either part. His supervisor has been very cooperative, but the fact that he should be the one who conducts the interviews made things really bad. He considered other options including interviewing them via Skype but due to the electricity problem, this will not work. Other options include conducting the interviews by other persons, which is not a scientific option at all. He has

been suffering psychologically for the last few days due to this problem which was created just because he is Palestinian and cannot go to his homeland.

“One of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics,” writes Agamben, “is its constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from what is outside” (Agamben, 2016, p.131). What he was experiencing, and what I have continued to experience, is this “constant need to redefine the threshold.” Both of us feel the “disquieting elements” Agamben speaks of, interruptions to the continuity of the state, problems at its borders, which it attempts over and over at every opportunity to encompass in its biopolitical regime. Death is not a release from this biopolitical power since biopolitics is targeted at the “bare life” the “*zoe*” (in Greek) which all men, animals, and gods possess. “bringing to light the difference between birth and nation,” Agamben continues, “the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain—bare life—to appear for an instant within that domain” (Agamben, 2016, p.131). My friend’s predicament emblematises the presuppositions of the political domain, his struggle for free movement and access to communication exposed the grip which the political domain holds over his bare life.

When he told me his story asking for advice, I remembered the situation in which I could not travel to attend the funeral of my father. Regardless of the difference between both situations, they resulted in huge psychological pressure which affected our study negatively. We began to feel that we were having our rights stripped away. Other scholars from different countries will never face such an issue. Their focus will always be on their studies. I know many scholars from different countries, and I have not heard a situation where a scholar could not return to his or her country because of the regulations of another

country. I share many things with one of them. We were awarded HESPAL scholarship for both Master and doctoral studies, and we have been to the UK twice. His father died just a few days before travelling to the UK. We were teaching at two different universities in Gaza. I studied in Lincoln for my MA and he studied in Lancashire. I remember when we met for the first time in a meeting for HESPAL scholars in London where we shared our thoughts as a group of Palestinian academics. For those who live in the West Bank, things are a lot easier regarding travelling. For people in Gaza, it has been almost impossible for all the scholars to return to Gaza during their studies. It is even more difficult for the new scholars to leave Gaza and they suffer a lot in order to leave. I always connect this situation with the situation of my father who could not apply for his PhD for 10 years because of the political situation in Egypt. Because of this, all Palestinian were prevented from entering Egypt for many years. It was almost impossible to get a visa for studying in Egypt at that time and the degree of my father was delayed for more than 10 years. In 1990, he got his PhD and just 2 weeks after that, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. He did not even enjoy promotion or any other incentives. This was part of our suffering as Palestinians and as academics. The degrees my father had and his experience and certificates were in one hand and being Palestinian was in the other hand. This split between birth and nation could not be resolved fully in the eyes of the state, nor in the eyes of those within the state who worked alongside my father, who were still unable to grasp how such a thing might exist.

I have not been to Gaza since his death, but I am certain that the house will not have that smell again. My father was like a hand that holds some sand. He was holding the sand tightly and when he died, the sand spread everywhere. In the east, this is the importance of

father. Luckily, I kept all his drafts at my flat and I sent for them, but God only knows when I will receive them.

The first person who contacted me that day was one of my closest friends with whom I spent four years at university. Muhammad has had a tragic story. He was living in Saudi Arabi where he was born and he came to Gaza in 1997 to study at one of the universities in Gaza since he could not study in Saudi Arabia. Muhammad used to travel every year to renew his residency and update his status there. However, after the second Intifada in 2000, he could not travel due to the closure of boarders imposed at that time by Israel. He was in his final year and he had four modules to pass out of more than 50 completed. Yet, his residency there was about to expire and he needed to travel to renew it. Boarders were not accessed easily and he knew that if he travelled he would not be able to return and complete the remaining modules. He needed to travel and needed to stay. It was the toughest decision ever. Those days were really hard and I remember he lost a lot of weight in just few weeks. Finally, he decided to leave and renew his residency and until this moment he has not been able to return to Gaza to complete the modules and at the same time he could not join any of the Saudi universities. He registered for a diploma and he started from zero to get a certificate to work. All his efforts for more than four years vanished because of not having any options as a Palestinian.

Muhammad, too, was experiencing the stripping away of his rights. The more stripped away your rights and work and life becomes, the more bare they are, the more reduced to simple, bare, animal life. One could turn again to Agamben and read in his work the narratives of stripping away that accompany the stories of the Jews leading up to and including the Nuremberg laws that stripped away all but their minimum definition as

citizens (Agamben, 2016, p.132). The terror which we feel as academics is the terror of this stripping away. If it is first our access to research second it is our access to free movement, third it is our access to family—it is this cumulative politicization of every aspect of life, however apparently neutral or private, that according to Agamben characterises *both* totalitarian societies and democratic ones (Agamben, 2016, p.121). But we know that there is still more to strip away, and it is the fear (which is increased by our knowledge of history) of the further stripping away of our lives until we are “considered to be nothing” that is so difficult (Agamben, 2016, p.135).

Many lives are woven together in this story of bare life. As my wife helped in typing and editing the book of my father, and as she is a postgraduate student as well, my wife became part of the story. She used to ask my father about many issues in her study, and she was really interested in the things he used to highlight. We were mesmerised whenever he started to speak. His experience was unusual and his stories were a group of lessons. In each situation, we found wisdom. He was working hard to afford the needs of our house. My eldest sister travelled to Syria and my eldest brother travelled to the USA. It was a lot of money to gain and spend on a nine-member family in exile where one needs to manage his or her needs. My wife had a similar situation in which she suffered a lot as she could not attend her sister’s wedding. I am not sure if this kind of feelings is the same for people in the UK, but I believe that eastern people are very sensitive and bad memories may last forever. My wife was planning for the wedding of her sister and she was responsible for all the details of the wedding. Surprisingly, just a week before the wedding our permissions were issued and we were asked to leave. We tried to postpone leaving for just few days so that she could attend the wedding, but the answer was no way. We were already late and

we would arrive in June while studying started in October and for us there was no harm to stay for few days. Yet, we were told that if we did not travel the next day, we would risk being banned to travel forever. She was coordinating all the details on the mobile and she spent the first week in the UK calling and arranging the event. Luckily, we managed to watch the wedding via Youtube with special complex arrangements with the English family we were staying with. We were sitting together and they, kindly, served juice in special glasses so that we felt that we were among the attendance. At that time, I could see tears in my wife's eyes, and I could not tell if the tears were because of happiness or bitterness that she could not attend.

Weddings in Palestine are very special occasions where preparation and celebrating may take a long time, and they are the most important thing for many people. It is not only for the bride and groom. It is also for their parents and brothers and sisters. In Palestine, many problems are solved because of attending a wedding and many others are created by not attending a wedding. The importance of weddings is significantly important in Gaza in particular. Regrettably, the wedding of my brother-in-law, Nourhan's brother, is in July and again she will not be able to attend the wedding of her only brother. The children grew up and they keep asking about the wedding and what they should wear. Attending a wedding is something that does not need to be argued and discussed except for Palestinians. We should sacrifice many things to attend and this does not necessarily guarantee being able to attend the wedding of the ones you love.

When we sit and talk about the most powerful experiences we had had, we talk only about those two situations. Paradoxically, the occasions are death and wedding. Yet, the effect is the same. We are prevented of practising the rights that may lighten our pain and

make us happier. We are punished for nothing and in Palestine, in Gaza in particular, everything is possible since it is not a state; it is a camp. Actually, the biggest camp and prison in the world. Leaving Gaza was really hard and behind us we left almost everything, but also living in a different culture makes things more obvious to you and to your family. Now, we are trying to enjoy every single minute in the UK because we know that soon we will return to the camp.

And so in response to these exceptional states of unfreedom, these barriers, this experience of bare life, I am writing this story about my father and for my father. These thoughts are for him, meaning, in the words of Derrida speaking about the death of his friend Roland Barthes:

that I think of him and about him, not only of or about his work. 'For him' also suggests that I would like to dedicate these thoughts to him, give them to him, and destine them for him. Yet, they will no longer reach him, and this must be the starting point of my reflection; they can no longer reach him, reach all the way to him, assuming they ever could have while he was still living (Derrida, 2017, p.35).

An Elegy to My Um Mu'tasim

To your soul I sail my greetings,
The one whose heart has but care:
In Darkness and Light, she held my hand tight,
Shared she my downfalls and showed patience,
Spoke only of what she deemed good,
Her face, so pure and white, when we first met
And where life broke us to pieces,
Her smiles defeated all misfortune,
A young man was I and she kept me fresh
An old man I became, but she
A mother more:
If sickness snitches my body,
So I pray – day and night: May the Lord
Our days together – O! So precious,
And so were we a happy couple
But how dark was the day,
Pain and tears and hushed cries
So fragile she became –
A doctor after another, with hands so clever
She, thus, stayed in pain all night
So I swore to be her guardian

On wings of love and sincerity.
The love of my life, my dearie.
In richness and hardships, she took my side.
And only said to me the sweetest laughter;
And was always the kinder.
“Oh,” my heart bounced, “so tender”;
She, so heartfully, put them back:
And her heart fearlessly fought!
So when she turned grey, I kept her so as well.
Left me not so dread -
A glamorous star – my savior.
her healing touch brings comfort;
Keep her safe.
And in laughter, so joyous.
And full of life, the two of us together.
When her eyes saw the light never after:
And her heart so sick and tumble.
So helpless she felt:
But none was able to heal her.
And her days were not much different;
And the eyes she had – no longer.

A servant and a cane, I pledged to be both

No feelings of boredom nor hate

She, so loved, took my hand

How could I, then, leave her when

I send my prayers every night

My eyes see no sleep and my mouth never stops,
“May she see again,”

Slowly I kneel by the side of hers,

I am here where I will always be

My heart, so full of grief, bounces weakly for her

She is patient – and kind – and sweet

Such distress would break others apart,

When death comes, who shall fight?

We are all the servants of God,

On a day when regret shall be of no worth

I embraced our destiny and patiently observed as it
comes

Knowing not death is about to be here;

I, so alone, became, for no one else kept me
company.

And I am here in sorrow as I cry our memories out.
Yet, be sure and know,

And slowly I helped her
As she moved around our garden.

Took over the heart of mine:

When I could not move or stand.

She needed me the most?

To the Creator of the worlds
“May she see again,” I repeat on and on.

And her body so strong become.

And kindly I approach her heavy bed:

Near your heart and your soul.

But her heart, so full of belief, bounces strongly for God.

And stronger than I will ever be.

But “It’s a test”, I told her still.

For those before us are all dead.

To him we shall return –

And only the good will win.

Praying that you would be healed

You – left.

You – left.

Your memory will never fade;

It will linger in me so long as I breathe.
To where she goes, my prayers be,
“O, where my Nahlah resides,
The grave of her body, be
Of the land’s greatest riches.
O, the drops of rain drop
And water her bed of flowers.
O Lord, do forgive
Her slips and falls
For she is the purest and the kindest of us all”.

Chapter 6

Story 3

Life in Chester

It was another memorable day when we first arrived to the UK. In discussing the travelling of our journey and how exhausting it was, I am now talking about the most important period of my life. The days I spent in Chester, particularly the first few days, affected the rest of the years I spent here in Chester. The beginning left its impression until the end. The effect of these days includes my small family, Nourhan, my wife, and my two little children: Yazan and Tia, who were 5 and 3 when we arrived. “Migration throws objects, identities and ideas into flux” (Mercer, 2008, p.7). There are so many experiences of migration, of exile, or estrangement, whether forced or voluntary, beginnings or endings, but in my experience, as I suspect in others, moving as indeed thrown objects, identities and ideas into flux. This is the story of that flux. But there are migrations and migrations. In one sense the migrant, the exile, the stranger is a romantic figure, a lone explorer discovering the vast immensity of the world, absorbing it into their sublime experience. This is not my experience. My experience rather is that of what Edward Said has described as “the unhealable rift forced between the self and its true home” (Said, 2001, p.173). As a result of this rift life is lived in a strange state, indeed, a state of estrangement, in which one is never at home, and home exists only as an idea, a memory, something that can be recalled at times in stories. This story, therefore, is a story of estrangement.

It was the first time to travel for my wife and children, and they were terrified when the plane took off. We were looking at each other but saying nothing. I read and heard a lot about situations when one does not believe that something is happening, but I always thought that authors and even directors may be exaggerating, yet when we were speechless and when we let our eyes say it all, I realised that passion is much powerful than reality; dreams are stronger than life itself. What we were living at that moment was a dream. We had been struggling for years and living in a series of wars and crises. We were unable to live a normal life with the basic rights that everybody enjoys all over the world. We were under what Agamben would call “a state of siege”, our rights and freedoms suspended under an indefinitely prolonged State of Exception (Agamben, 2010, p.4). We wanted to travel and thought that by travelling we would give our children the best life we can offer, but everything was suspended because of the situation in Gaza Strip where you were given the very basic rights that keep you alive but nothing more. At that time we were all caught up in the immediacy of what it meant to inhabit a State of Exception. Now, as I am able to reflect back on it, I see how Walter Benjamin’s reading of the State of Exception transcends the mere everyday facts of our existence and understands in them a whole mode of *history* itself: history not as the free unfolding of Spirit (as Hegel would have it) but “a concept of history . . . that accords with . . . the real state of exception,” that is, the State of Exception as the rule in history, from which the rule of law, at times, diverts (Benjamin, quoted in Agamben, 2010, p.57).

This was repeatedly reinforced by Israeli officials when they stated that Gaza can explode at any moment if we keep pressurising it. So, the number of hours when we get electricity was increased slightly after reaching just 2 hours a day for few months.

Suddenly, they decide to allow tens of people to travel through Eretz, the crossing point between Gaza and the outer world. Sometimes, they give permissions to some merchant to import limited quantities of goods that were prohibited for years. So, as we could see, it is not a case of besieging people to death but also it is not a situation where people can enjoy life. As such it is a kind of torture: it does not seek to destroy directly and immediately, but rather to prolong pain, to force the submission of a whole people. “Torture was a strict judicial game,” writes Foucault, “the victim was subjected to a series of trials, graduated in severity, in which he succeeded if he ‘held out,’ or failed if he confessed” (Kelly, Foucault, & Habermas, 2010, p.161). The torture to which we were subjected was not the torture of the torture chamber; it was not as obvious as this. It was a slow, drawn-out, weak torture that affected our everyday lives, sometimes hardly noticeable, but over time it wore us down.

On the plane at the moment we left, I kept looking at my wife for a few minutes while she was staring at me asking with her eyes if this was true. It was like we were prisoners escaping from the torture of being under siege. It was too true to believe. As the plane began to fly, we were remembering all the horrible moments we had passed through during the last war a few months ago when we felt that we would be killed, especially when our building was targeted and when the surrounded area was bombarded as well. We remembered the 40th day of the 52-day war. At that night, we were certain that we would not see the next day. The bombs and explosions were very loud and two flats at our building were partially damaged because of illuminating shells. We also remembered one of the most difficult moments when Tia’s arm was broken, and I was supposed to take her to hospital where I was told that they only serious injuries were admitted. I went to another

hospital and luckily there was not a lot of bombing at that hour. We were thinking of all time we have been waiting to be granted a permission to cross Eretz. We kept talking about these memories and did not realise that our 6-hour journey came to an end. I think it was the fastest flight we have ever had.

Luckily, one of our friends, who lives in Lincoln, insisted on coming to London to pick us and drive us to Chester. It was one of the best things we had in this journey. I can imagine how difficult it would be to push 6 big suitcases and several handbags with two children to the nearest train station and then move to Chester by train. I was sure it would be disastrous. I could not remember why it took so long to arrive to Chester, but I think it was traffic. I could see the looks of amazement in the eyes of my wife along the way. I could say that she did not believe that she arrived to the UK. It was the same for me but maybe a little bit different in this part as I came to the UK in 2013. However, the feeling that we did it was overwhelming us simultaneously. It was a strange feeling. We were exhilarated at having left Palestine finally, but at the same time disoriented by this new geography in a condition of what Georg Simmel has called “unbelonging.” The migrant, Simmel says:

is fixed within a certain spatial circle . . . but his position within it is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it . . . the distance within this relation indicates that one who is close by is remote, but his strangeness indicates that one who is remote is near (Simmel, 1908, p.259).

We were both close but remote, and remote yet near. Our friend guided us, and helped us navigate this disorienting mixture of near and far.

As soon as we arrived, I noticed how amazed the children and my wife were. Everything looked and felt different for them, especially the weather. The first thing my wife noticed was how friendly people are. People whom we met at the airport, restaurants, public places before arriving to Chester were nice and friendly, and this was contrary to the stereotype we used to hear about English people. We used to believe that English people are arrogant and unfriendly. We understand that in these cases we cannot generalise but at that time, to us, it was as if the whole people behaved the same. The other noticeable thing was the number of nationalities you can see in one place. For example, when we stopped to have something to eat at one of the small malls in London, my wife was counting the nationalities she could recognise, and she was impressed by the way they could communicate. For her, she could classify people from China, Japan and Korea, People from Italy and Western Europe, people from Eastern Europe, People from Arabian Gulf, people from Egypt and other Arab countries and people from India and Pakistan in particular although I am sure she mixed people from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka with people from India and Pakistan due to the fact that she has never met people from these countries. She was very excited and so were the children.

We were experiencing what I later came to identify, with the words of Appiah, “cosmopolitanism” (Appiah, p.207). It was not that everyone was the same, but rather that everyone was different and yet still apparently getting along with each other. Imagine how this appeared to us, we who had come from a locality in which the difference between Israelis and Palestinians is a source of violent hatred! What we saw was “dialogue among difference,” and “conversations among places” (Appiah, 2010, 207, p.225). In this cosmopolitan world I saw the idea expressed that “in the human community, as in national

communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association” (Appiah, 2010, xix). I began to hope, in those first few days, that through this kind of sympathetic imagination which I witnessed in the everyday space of the shopping mall, we—my family, the community in which we found ourselves, and perhaps even one day Israel and Palestine—would begin to develop “the capacity to follow a narrative and conjure a world” together (Appiah, 2010, p.224).

The situation in Gaza is of course completely different. There we are not exposed to foreigners due to the number of people from other nationalities in Gaza. They visit Gaza mostly after wars as journalists and NGOs staff members. Their stay is normally short and they do not go to public places. The other type of international people is the staff of the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). They are barely seen as their work is mainly at GFO (Gaza Field Office) where they spent most of their days and move very securely in their armoured vehicles to their accommodation. Only staff at the GFO can contact them. For my wife, she had not met a foreigner before although she studied at university in both her first and second degrees. Meeting people from other nationalities has always been something unique for the people of Gaza. As an interpreter, I used to accompany delegations when visiting Gaza and in many times, I found it almost impossible to ask children to stop surrounding journalists. My wife was so excited to communicate with people in the UK believing that this is the best way to improve her English. She achieved distinction in all the levels of her academic life but she still believes that her English should be improved and her dream, as she says, is to master both written and spoken English.

Why are these simple things so important? They are the basics of everyday life. We take them for granted. But I want to underscore in fact how radical it is, for us who have lived in Palestine, even to be able to speak freely with others. It is easy to be lulled into a sense of normality in times of freedom and peace. But under the “state of siege,” the “State of Exception,” this freedom to greet the other with speech and conversation is radically curtailed, forbidden, and dangerous. The thoughts of the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas are important to me here, since he wrote in the aftermath of the terrible events of the Second World War, after so many episodes of violent separation, forced migration, and death. In a time when speech between some peoples became impossible he formulated a reparatory philosophy of speech in which speech itself becomes the plane on which the self and the Other reach an equality. “The speaker,” he writes, “is personally present in his speech, absolutely exterior to every image he would leave. In language exteriority is exercised, deployed and brought about. Whoever speaks attends his manifestation” (Levinas, 1991, p.296). Being manifest and exterior, the speaker is allowed, through language, to exist in his or her infinite Otherness, exceeding the boundaries of the Self to encompass them, allowing them to overflow and be free in the abundance of their language which always remains outside of any individual’s grasp.

I was only able to begin processing some of these thoughts at the time during our long journey. I cannot understand why it took us more than 7 hours from Heathrow to Chester. My friend, the driver, told me that it was the traffic that affects our journey, but I cannot imagine that it added 4 hours to the time needed to arrive to Chester. Actually, I cannot say that because I was sleeping most of the way as I was told by my friend. These

experiences of movement are always accompanied by a kind of disorientation of space and time, signs that a change of being is taking place.

We called the lady and her husband who were acting as our hosts to tell them that we would arrive at around 3:00 am and we would stay in a hotel in Chester and then go to them but they strongly refused and insisted that we keep the plan as it was. I tried to convince her that we were a few hours late and it was unfair to keep them awake until 3:00 am but she did not accept any apologies and said that they would be happy to wait for us. Before arriving, I need to mention how great this lady and her husband are. They contacted us while we were in Gaza and offered to host us for a few weeks. This was through the secretary of the faculty who coordinated between us. It was the most wonderful surprise in my whole trip. For those who have not visited the UK yet, and for those who have not needed to rent a house or a flat when coming, I would like to mention that renting a house or a flat is the most complicated process especially for those who come with their families. For individuals, it might be easier as they can live at the university accommodation and they can arrange this a long time before arrival. However, for a 4-member family, things are more complicated. One of my friends came without arranging for accommodation and his life with his wife and children was really miserable for several weeks. This was the situation that I tried to avoid as its impact may last for the rest of the journey in the UK, and I was lucky to encounter a wonderful English couple. In order to rent a property, it is needed to have a bank account and to have a bank account, a permanent address is needed. It is a vicious circle that may last for weeks. Luckily, the English couple were so kind to host us for 5 weeks. It is acts of generosity like this which are the opposite of a State of

Exception. These actions remove the state of siege, they institute laws and protections, they create bonds of friendship, and create an ethical condition of existence.

From the first moment we entered the house, we felt something familiar. It was the first time ever to sleep outside our house, but we did not feel strangers at all. This is basically due to the warm welcoming we were offered, but it was also because of the feeling that we moved from a family house to a family house with no nights at a hotel or any other places. I was surprised that they took care of the small details and made sure that our accommodation would be as comfortable as possible. The children woke up early the next day at 8:30 am, and we woke afterwards. In minutes, we were all having our breakfast. It was a very different breakfast from what we were used to. In Palestine, people start their days with a traditional breakfast that could include: falafel, hummus, cheese, egg, olive, za'tar, olive oil and beans. We were introduced to the English meals and we started being addicted to English tea about which we spent years hearing how much English people loved it. Nourhan does not like tea a lot and the number of cups she had drunk since we married in 2009 does not exceed 5. However, now she has tea with milk, which is unfamiliar in Palestine, at least once a day. Upon finishing breakfast, the husband accompanied me to the University of Chester Riverside building, and his wife started chatting with Nourhan and telling her about the country and Chester in particular. We did not feel excluded at all; on the contrary, we felt included and the children were enjoying their time in the yard with all the toys they were provided with.

Another issue that we admired was that the couple served us Halal meat for dinner. They confirmed that the meat was Halal, and they told us about that even before we asked. I knew that the lady went to an English butcher and ordered the meat especially for us. This

was highly appreciated. Food has always been one of the main issues that confuse my friends when they travel especially that most of them travel without their families. They miss the Palestinian traditional food. From time to time, I invite some of them to share some Palestinian traditional food. I know what it feels like: I myself experienced missing our traditional food for a year when I was away from my family in 2013. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has written that “a society’s cuisine acts as a language through which it unconsciously expresses its structure” (Lévi-Strauss, 1968, p.411). As we sat down together to eat I realised the truth of this statement. Food is social. It binds together those who eat it with social ties. Like conversation, this is something we do not ordinarily consider when we eat throughout the day. But these ties are important. It would be impossible to sit and eat with the Israelis who are at war with Palestine. No social bonds exist between us. But here we were, eating with people who knew nothing of us, but who had already accepted us.

Food was always the key to different issues and topics. I remember the first morning when I was trying to make a cup of coffee. Our coffee is very different from the English one, and the kitchen was full of the aroma of coffee. The lady told me that she liked the smell of the coffee but not the taste as it was too strong. Food, in the lives of the Palestinian people, became a political issue. When we watch TV or read some articles in magazines and find that Israel has stolen our traditional dishes, we feel really angry. Hummus, falafel, tabbouleh and fattoush were introduced as an Israeli dishes in many exhibitions in Europe. It is painful when you see that everything is stolen from you even food. The issue of cultural appropriation and ethics is one that bleeds through the whole of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Like Young and Brunk I identify with Feinberg’s theory of “profound offense”

not in a legal sense but in a cultural one: the profound offense taken when one culture unethically seizes upon “a person’s core values and sense of self” (Young & Brunk, 2012, p. 5).

Food is an important part of the cultures of peoples. It is mostly the first thing that visitors are introduced to. I was a little concerned about changing the habits of my family when we arrived especially when I knew that Chester is a city where the majority of its inhabitants are English people. However, as one of the many favours that were done with us, they guided us to Brook Street. The street has several eastern shops where one can find most of the things needed for our traditional food especially spices. It was true that we wanted to try something different and experience more about the English culture but it was a little bit difficult for us because we have some guests from time to time and we wanted to introduce our traditional Palestinian food to them. We also receive some HESPAL scholars who miss the Palestinian food. So, it was necessary to find a shop where we could satisfy our needs. One of my friends who has been living here for 7 years told me that I must stop having Palestinian food and start trying English food. At the beginning, it was good idea because we like trying new things, but after a while I felt that I cannot live in an isolation inside the isolation I am already living in. The idea is not in the food itself; it is in the memories we have when we taste something from Palestine. For us, we have a story with each dish. Some of them constitute very important parts of our lives.

It was of no surprise to me to learn, at a later time, that one of the great theorists of “acculturation”—that is the blending of different cultures together—used the metaphor of food to express the intermingling of difference into a totality (Ortiz, 1947, viii). The Cuban Fernando Ortiz conceived of the long-cooking Cuban stew of mixed root vegetables and

spices (*ajiacco*) to have been created by the multiple creole groups inhabiting the island. The stew absorbed difference but also maintained it. The mixture was perfected by the addition of separate flavours. In the everyday challenges and experiences of our first months in Chester, it was these basic functions which took on great significance in our life and acculturation. Our palates changed, the food we ate, and the way we ate it also changed, as did those of our hosts. We were all transforming, but not violently. This was the difference between Chester and Palestine.

Coincidentally, I knew that a friend had the coffee we like, and I asked him to send it to me. I still have the envelop until now as an important part of my journey here. It includes many things for me. This small envelop and pack of coffee represent Palestine, friendship, displacement, memories, work and many other things. It represents what Deleuze referred to as a kind of nomadism, within the context of another concept, “lines of flight.” A line of flight is a line that behaves “as if something carried us away, across our segments, but also across our thresholds, towards a destination which is unknown, not foreseeable, not pre-existent” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 125). The line of flight transgresses the segmentation of our lives, the divisions, the boundaries, the borderlines which are set up around us. Within Palestine our lives were segmented by tightly controlled lines of force. It was by leaving that we embarked upon a line of flight, an escape. And when I received this small envelope I recognised another object which had also managed to transgress the boundaries of the military state.

In this way, food was one of the ways that our lives continued to experience lines of flight. Coffee is so strongly connected with the UK where coffee represent an important part of the lives of English people. I started my story with coffee in the UK in 2013. I was

about 37 and I did not like coffee at that time. I lived with a Jordanian friend when I was studying at the University of Lincoln. He was studying forensic medicine and I remember that most of his speech was about terrible crimes about which he was asked to present a report to the police in to the extent that in many times I used to ask him to stop talking about these crimes especially as it was our first month in the UK and we were living in a big house with nobody else. The first time I sipped coffee was when he offered me a cup of coffee. It was really awful! However, as a gesture of thanking him for offering me that and as a part of our culture, I could not tell him how awful it was. After that, he started making me coffee every evening and when I was not in the living room, he used to go upstairs and knock my room door to give me the coffee, which was an Algerian one and very different from ours.

Back to our first days in Chester, we invited our host and hostess to a Turkish restaurant in Brook Street. We enjoyed our time there and we returned home quickly to watch the wedding of Nourhan's sister, which was on a channel on Youtube. Being surrounded by an English family who shared the happy moments of the wedding was strange but nice feeling at the same time.

One of the things that concerned us the most was the inclusion of our children at school. We were really worried that it would be difficult for our children to be merged into the class especially since they did not speak English. A few days after the beginning of the school year, I was contacted by the head teacher and she told me that Yazan was looking very nervous, and that he had struck his hand on the table several times. When I spoke to Yazan, I knew that he was upset because he did not know what the other children were talking about. He felt strange. However, the school staff were really helpful and kind. They

took care of him and dealt with him and his sister professionally so that soon Yazan and Tia could not wait to go to school every morning.

In the first few weeks, Yazan and Tia used to ask why they did not go to school on Saturday and Sunday. They thought that we did not take them to school deliberately. It was some time until they realised that it is the weekend and the school was closed. We took them to school on Saturday just to confirm that nobody goes to school on Saturdays and Sundays. One of the things that we have been happy with was the educational experience our children are having. This is also one of the things that we keep thinking about upon our return to Palestine. The two educational systems are totally different. While we appreciate the chance given to children to be creative and to raise questions here in the UK, I, myself, keep wondering about the effect of returning to schools in Gaza where learning and teaching depends mainly on memorising. Yazan and Tia would find it extremely difficult to adapt to the school system in Palestine after having been exposed to a learning process for three years in the UK.

I am completely satisfied with the way my children are encouraged to raise questions and ask about things they do not understand at school. One of the reasons behind this satisfaction is the fact that in Palestine, we, as students, were not allowed to ask about things we did not understand, or we found illogical. This was a perfect example of Foucault's description of the education system as a disciplinary institution: its purpose being not to lead children out of themselves (the etymological root of "education") but rather to discipline them into being governable subjects of the dominating state regime (Foucault, 2012). Unfortunately, this disciplinary treatment continues to happen even at university, where the lecturer says only those things which one should write in the exam. I

am not generalising of course, but the majority of teachers deploy this methodology to the extent that creativity and innovation are suspended. In that sense we might consider the university, the lecture theatre, or the classroom, as simulacra of the state, presided over by the teacher who occupies a sovereign position. This raises a question about the granulation of the State of Exception, and suggests that while it may exist at the geopolitical level of the nation state, it may also be replicated in miniature, on more local (but no less pernicious) scales. Indeed, for Foucault, it was precisely this percolation of power down from the state through smaller institutions which ensured its replication and hegemonic force (Foucault, 2012).

One of the things I remember very well, and which I keep comparing with studying in the UK, is the chance given to students to express themselves. My first degree in my country was in English literature where we studied a lot of novels, plays and short stories. Some of my instructors did not allow us as students to give our own opinions in analysing the literary text. For example, the themes of the work are the ones that the instructor gives. As a student, you need to write what was said in the lecture. There is no space for creativity. I had a Canadian-Palestinian friend whose English was really good given that he was born in Canada. Once, he wanted to contribute a new idea or a theme that he believed in from his own perspective when we were studying *Robinson Crusoe*, and this was considered a way of challenging the lecturer (Crusoe, 2013). He was given a poor mark for doing this. Thus, students started depending on memorization more than anything else. This is the thing that I do not want my children to experience. It kills their creativity. The issue that concerns me more than anything else in this regard is the fact that students study just to pass the exams. Exams became a goal not a means. The extra pressure put on the burdens

of students is increased by parents who believe that without passing with high marks, there will be no success. Success in life is strongly connected with getting high marks in exams. This is even proved through some proverbs in Arabic. For example, the common saying of “The proof of the pudding is in the eating,” which is used to show students that the day of the exam is the day when they will be judged to be either good or bad.

My family’s experience of school could be described as one of cultural hybridity which keys-in to the conversations which cultural theorists have had around “multiculturalism”—a word we heard a lot in our time in Chester. In Chester we experienced the multiplicity of culture—rather than one culture attempting to dominate, and appropriate another to which it was aggressively opposed. This had an impact on our own experience of identity. “Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories,” writes Stuart Hall, “but, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture, and power” (Hall, 2000, p.23). We were Palestinians in Chester, and being there made us feel our Palestinianness strongly, yet we also understood that we were being changed. We were Palestinians, but we were becoming irresistibly changed. I have already spoken about how I witnessed this taking place in my children. Chester became part of our history, as we became part of it.

Back to our experience in the UK, my wife started her Master’s degree at the University of Chester, and she was stunned by the experience itself. She said that she was learning things that she had not even heard before although she had already received her MBA before coming to the UK. My wife also found that the way her tutors used to teach is more inspiring and it encourages her to be more creative. For me, I realised these cultural

differences a few years ago when I came to the UK, so it was not such a new thing as it was for my wife and children. Being responsible for a family as well as for study was really hard for my wife. Spending most of the time at university, she was also supposed to take the children to and from school. This situation was completely difficult for her, especially compared to that in Gaza, where we used to send the children to their grandparents', who live a few meters away from us, whenever we had exams or work to do.

This side of life in the UK has been very different from life in Gaza. Neighbours, friends and family are around us all the time. You cannot feel alone while living in Palestine because people share all the good and bad times with you. Although we were hosted by a great English family, I know how tough being away from your extended family can be. We were lucky to meet that family, but many other scholars from Palestine talk about their loneliness when living here, especially in Ramadan and Eid.

This returns us to the loneliness of exile, the estrangement of migration, which was theorised in the work of Said and Simmel. There is no doubting the melancholia of exile. The foreigner is always Other, exterior, outside. Yet while this affective plight may connote loss, the critical theory of the twentieth century has consistently acknowledged the tactical advantages of occupying this position. Walter Benjamin, himself an exile, perceived that it was by being outside a culture that a critical distance could be established, from which that culture could be looked at more discerningly (Osborne, 2005, p. 323). There is always a danger of romanticizing the outsider, and the condition of outsidership. Exile is a conflicted condition. "The unique combination of freedom and constraint" which attend the position of the exile, "and of the bizarre hybrid of exhilaration and depression that this bearing or posture occasions" must be acknowledged as inseparable (Sussman, 2007, p. 2).

That was our experience, not only ours, it was shared by the community of Palestinians we met in the UK away from their homeland in general.

As many of the scholars who came through HESPAL are among my students or friends, we talk to each other from time to time. Some of them feel isolated especially in the first few weeks, particularly in winter. I suffered from that when I came alone in 2013 and left my family in Gaza. However, I will always remember our friends in Chester to whom we were introduced by the family and other friends. It was something that I did not think could happen in the UK. Whenever a family has a party or an occasion for children, the family contacted us and we were introduced to other families who have children. Our children felt completely included, and they lived in peace.

As for me and Nourhan, our daily life became very special and we could enjoy living peacefully after witnessing 3 wars in less than 5 years. Now, we start our day by going to one of the cafes here in Chester. We enjoy having our mocha without being watched, asked, or observed. We started changing several habits so that we can enjoy every moment of living in the UK. We just do whatever we like without much thinking of what others may think. This was part of the hard life in Gaza, where people do things just because of others. The story of coffee with my Jordanian friend is a simple representation of what I mean. I had it while I was living in the UK because we shared the same culture. This is an example of how people live in Palestine. We cannot ignore the other people and we have to do things we do not like because others may not like it if we don't, even if not doing it would not harm anyone. I think one of the things which has made our life more comfortable in the UK is that we do not need to be obsessively careful of everything we do.

Freedom is an essential conception in our life in the UK. In the UK, we felt how ordinary people live and move freely. How people can plan for their daily lives without being worried about the repercussions of a governing power. It was perhaps when I started travelling freely and noticing the lives of people in the UK that I began to realise with full force the nature of the conditions of the State of Exception under which we had been living in Palestine. Familiarity and habit had inured us to the realities of a siege mentality, or what Agamben would call “legal civil war” (Agamben, 2010, p. 2). Our previous endurance of closed borders, the suspension of the rule of law, and emergency measures, was thrown into sharp relief by our experience of basic freedom and protection under the law in Chester. When I arrived in Chester, and when people asked me about my journey, I realised how shocked they were when they knew all the complications of travelling including the application for permission to enter Israel, visa, travelling to Jordan and the uncertain status we had to endure while I lived in waiting decisions from different authorities. When I compare that to the life people live in the UK, I found it unfair to be treated differently just because I am Palestinian. I experienced part of the feeling of freedom when we applied for visas to travel to France, Spain, Netherlands and Turkey. Things were so smooth just because I have residency in the UK. My children experienced travelling to different countries and different cultures and they were lucky to do that as I, myself, could not travel until I was 35, when I obtained my ID. This does not include moving from Kuwait to Iraq of course as I was young, and it was under the supervision of my father. One of the issues that I will face when we return to Gaza is the limited movement again. When I apply for a visa from Gaza, it is mostly rejected because most embassies believe that people are travelling and will not return. Moving freely has been one of the greatest feelings we have

ever had. One of the advantages of living in the UK is that you can decide and plan for your future without considering any illogical obstacles such as the ones we have in Gaza. In Gaza I cannot plan properly for my future and the future of my family because of all the restrictions we have. For example, I and my wife are going to have our graduation ceremony in March 2019, but we know that we will not be able to attend it because of the closure and siege imposed on Gaza. Although it has been a dream to celebrate our success together at the Cathedral, we are deprived of this right just because we are Palestinian. While I was writing these lines, news came from Gaza that there will be a devastating war on Gaza and some raids were already launched. We do not know even if we will be able to return on time or not.

Chapter 7: Critical commentary on a video to accompany stories on Palestine and the State of Exception

At root, this is a project about stories: not just the narrative events which, together, complete a story, but the form of the story itself as a way of knowing. The three stories which I have written and which form the core of this project are experiments in the weaving together of my own subjective experiences with theoretical discourses that help to situate my experiences within broader epistemologies of power and knowledge. Together, this combination of theory and experience offers a strategy to investigate the states of exception which I, as a Palestinian, have experienced and critiqued through my journeys.

Why, then, introduce, at this point, a wholly new medium altogether, that of video? Does doing so risk opening up a completely new set of complex discourses without embedding them sufficiently within the already existing paradigm of narrative and storytelling which has defined the arts-based research practice detailed in the preceding methodology? This risk is real, and I will acknowledge the outlines of the complex discourses on media and visuality which have emerged over the last three decades to deal critically with images in a postcolonial context. However, I hope to show here that the use of video in the present context in fact avoids these issues once it has been understood less as a distinct epistemology of the image distinct from the textual stories, and rather as something simpler: that is, as an *illustration*. In this sense, the video component of this work plays a role in the basic act of storytelling, of sharing my personal experiences—not by way of a laborious manipulation of images according to a highly complex system of video direction, editing, and *mise-en-scène* typical of commercial film, but rather in an

improvised, ready-to-hand, awkward, frank presentation of reality with no pretence at an established aesthetic of filmic beauty.

Despite this claim, it must be acknowledged that there is no “outside” to the aesthetic per se in film—which is inherently a medium addressed to the senses. Instead my approach here might be thought of as an “anti-aesthetic,” an active refusal of the governing norms which conventionally determine the way films look. At root this relates to a fundamental conviction derived from the French neo-Marxist philosopher Jacques Rancière about the formative and influential relationship between aesthetic acts and politic acts. Following Rancière, I am convinced that aesthetic acts can be understood not as an alternative paradigm to politics but instead as “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (Rancière, 2013, p. 3). This means that in composing a video I am composing and re-composing my sense impressions of the world, and that in doing so I am also recomposing a political point of view.

Thinking of it from a basic semiological perspective, what the video presents is a different species of sign: it presents indices, real electronic traces of the subject’s body (my own) and the objects which have been affected by these stories (my identity cards, my possessions, and my family). The linguistic sign has an arbitrary relation to what it signifies (I know this only too well as a non-native English speaker)—but the image is *non*-arbitrary. The image is “physically or causally related to its referent” and this chain of causality passes through my smartphone, through my hand, my arm, and my whole body as it moves and films and continues to live in the world constituted out of the journeys through which

it has passed. My stories *tell* these movements—my video makes them really present (Evans & Hall, 2013, p. 13).

The illustrated story is epistemologically distinct from the video narrative or film. A video narrative exists on its own terms, independent of any text, whereas the images of an illustrated story retain an inseparable relationship to the text. There is, of course, no set formula for the nature of the relationship between image and text in an illustrated story, and either image or text may dominate at different moments. Yet within the context of my work, the stories themselves are paramount, and the medium of video is deployed as a means of illustrating—that is, adding visual detail—to information which is already embedded in the text itself. Bringing together this synthesis of media forms represents a convergence which is typical of (rather than being an exception from) the way that stories are constructed and experienced in contemporary culture. Older media cultures are absorbed into new information technologies but “still recognised in the way that text, images, and video are presented” and it is therefore “in their synthesis and continued influence and acceptance of new ways of interacting with information” that new forms of understanding are constructed through combinations of texts and images (Doyle, Grove, & Sherman, 2018, p. 487). The video material offered here, therefore, does not represent a separate visual, audio narrative, but rather adds a further layer on top of the existing stories, synthesizing their key imagery, presenting objective documentation, serving as a reference to the objects, people, and texts which populate those narratives.

The history of video in arts-based research can be traced back to the wide dissemination of video media in the wake of traditional film used in ethnographic, sociological, and anthropological work. “Video made possible extended recordings in

different settings,” especially once technology had developed “into lighter and more user-friendly equipment, driven by consumer demand” so that a transfer took place “from the researcher’s exclusive use of rare and expensive film equipment . . . to the ubiquitously available smartphone” which requires “a reformulation of the constraints and affordances of video research,” bearing on ownership and participation (Leavy, 2018, p.322). The use of video thus becomes “one of the most important resources for describing and understanding the world or some aspect of it” and is part of a general diversification of research tools available in arts-based research (Barone, & Eisner, 2012, p.169).

While a growing body of research practices deploy video as the dominant source of data gathering, in my research practice the video imagery instead complements the dominant medium of storytelling through text. As will be seen, the video helps to visualise the travels in my story cartographically, it presents images of my documentation (some of the most important artefacts discussed in the stories), it also serves to reinforce the presence of the theoretical texts discussed throughout as objects which can be possessed and carried through these journeys by filming the actual texts I carried with me. This is an important reality of the discourse of this project. Roland Barthes reminds us that “discourse” itself is etymologically rooted in journeying: “*dis-cursus*—originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measures taken”—discourse is a journey (Barthes, 2010, p.3). I have already referred, in the stories themselves, to the striated linear, deterritorialized space through which my journeys and those of my family traced their own “lines of flight” and how these amounted to a kind of discourse on Barthes’s sense: a “running here and there, comings and goings” (see Deleuze & Guattari, 2017, 223ff). But I also wish to give a sense of how “lines of flight” has also meant, for me, fleeing with lines of text—that is,

carrying with me the lines of theoretical text which, in my possession, as luggage, as something I carry with me, as a portable discourse, have themselves become a kind of map through which I can trace my own “dis-cursus.” Thus it is important to me to show the books I have carried with me. Those books were not only ideas, they were weights, objects, physically inscribed with the effects of my journey. I became attached to them. That is why they must be seen, not only cited. In this sense the text has a new materiality: it is like a monument.

Photographs mentioned in the stories are also made visible, as well as archival documentation, including manuscripts by my father, and footage of the actual spaces I inhabited (in particular, the home in which my family stayed in Chester).

The privacy and immediacy which I believe these photographs convey are a powerful addition to the project’s epistemology. Like the video itself, these are not carefully edited compositions—more often they testify to the speed with which everything has to be carried out: there is no time to compose the perfect shot, instead places, people, objects are quickly grasped in the moment—an application, as it were, of some of the techniques of urban street photographers who must respond instantly to the appearance of a new and previously unphotographed image before it disappears (Rosenheim & Arbus, 2016). These photographs, photographs of documents, and documents are also more than illustrations—they are artefacts. They do not only represent things, they are also significant objects themselves, either because they have travelled with me, or because they carry the aura of having facilitated my journey—for example my ID card and refugee card. These objects are real, they bring the message home: this really happened, this “story” is not *just* a story.

Again it is Roland Barthes who is able to pin-point the impact of the image (as opposed to the text) as a “*punctum*”—a puncturing force: “the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points . . . these marks, these wounds . . . I shall call [them the] puncture; for puncture is also: sting, speck, cut, little hole . . . a photograph’s punctual is that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (Barthes, 2012, p. 27). Above all, what “pricks” the viewer of the photograph is its indexical nature. That person was really there. The light that reflected off of their body made a mark in the camera which I see now. Those are my possessions piled up before leaving. That is my bomb-damaged neighbourhood. This is my son, safe, after the journey. There is no equivalent in the text of the *punctum* which these images can effect.

Rather than attempt to embark upon a convoluted methodological discussion of the ontology of the video image, I instead present these materials in terms of illustration, and then in terms of increasing the dissemination of, and access to, my research. Indeed, within the field of educational psychology, video has long been considered a means of strengthening access and participation by subjects (Como & Anderman, 2016). The instantaneity of video imagery and the ease with which it can be shared from researcher to researcher has a positive effect on the circulation of research findings and increasing access to its key details in contexts where the entire text of a thesis may be more difficult to disseminate. Thus distillation is a key property of the short form video narrative: a distillation of objects, images, and places which capture and illustrate key components of the text narratives, enhancing their memorability and the ease with which they can be disseminated among other researchers.

These concerns help to determine the form of the video itself. The video is a “short”—approximately eight minutes long, filmed by hand with a phone camera, which visually documents many of the objects and spaces which have been mentioned in the stories themselves. While the stories are not the “script” of the video, they supply its *mise-en-scène*, or visual context. The aim of the video is to provide an alternative means for visualizing the data of the project, composing and selecting a visual narrative which draws parallels with the arts based methodology of the thesis and Palestine as a State of Exception in which the rights of Palestinians are held in suspension, where arbitrary borders are created by the West, demarcating juridical states of “bare life.”

In order to perform this, the video eschews the conventional techniques of narrative film, and instead works as a visual illustration of the text, enhancing the stories themselves. There is a rich seam of critical theory which has deconstructed the Hollywood-type coherence of narrative cinema, in which the film medium itself disappears, rendering a highly illusory world in which the film’s own role as a representation (often a highly ideological one) is repressed (Stam & Miller, 2000). Drawing on critical film theory (notably via Laura Mulvey’s’s feminist critique of Hollywood film and Stuart Hall’s visual cultural approach to the politics of the image), would be ways to further explore how video seeks to produce a set of visual techniques which can radically deconstruct normative experiences and critically engage with the codes embedded within normative modes of production (Mulvey, 1989; Hall, Evans, & Nixon, 2013). Yet rather than pursue the implications of these re-readings of film history, the aim of this video is to remain closely tied to the function of illustrating a narrative text, in order better to testify to and reflect the daily experiences of Palestinians, in which the experience of not belonging, of being

outside of identity, of living in a camp along the border of the World is engendered by the State of Exception.

Yet, it must be stated that my visual methodology reflects this position by self-consciously refusing the idea of completion, wholeness, and naturalness, which defines aesthetically established visual forms of presentation. The grammar of film, especially commercial film, even with its range of camera shots, sutures the expectations of the audience which on the whole has grown up being with film, into specific forms of narrative, which have their own ways of establishing completion, conformity, and so belonging. Establishing shots, closing shots, shots which ask questions, shots which indicate that we should contemplate and question what we see—and especially self-consciously reflect on the role of the medium itself in constructing the narrative—all provide a grammar with which to critique the relationship between *what* we see in film and *how* it is represented. The phone video inherently transgresses the norms which define Hollywood-type narrative cinema, both through its technical limits, as well as through its radical removal of the massive apparatus of film crews and production costs. Thus the hand-held camera becomes the double of my narrative voice in the stories: it captures my experiential data, connecting the movements and context of my own embodied experience as a researcher with the images on display. By this means the fiction of a “natural life” is deconstructed and replaced by the suspended condition of the State of Exception.

These are, of course, the main themes of the stories themselves and they demonstrate that there exists a complete overlap between the video illustrations and the stories themselves. The key feature of the video illustrations is that they do not lead away from the stories but rather keep attention fixed on them. Yet, it is also true that the technique

of the video illustrations themselves does not impose a false sense of completeness on the stories. Indeed, it is the very hesitancy and contingency of the phone camera medium which supports the suspended condition of the State of Exception, the fragility of life in that condition, and the uncertain momentum and mobility of life conducted in a boundary-crossing environment. For this reason the video illustrations do not present a clean-cut, authoritative presentation of established facts: rather they themselves embody the transitory and uncertain nature of the State of Exception.

If the opening sequence of the video evokes the convention of the animated credit sequence it does so only to disturb it with a prolonged, awkward passage of video in which I film myself writing out the title of my project by hand. Writing is a kind of labour. Its time is not the time of the rapidly edited action thriller or the neatly packaged narrative—word follows laborious word coming from the hand, sometimes with uncertainty and slower than expected. This is perhaps easy to forget when reading the edited typescript of a finished text. The function of video here is to force a recognition in the viewer of the temporality of thinking and writing and the resistance that we face when we attempt to write. The scene of the writing table also serves as a place to introduce the other protagonists in my stories—Agamben’s two texts, *The State of Exception* and *Homo Sacer* which stand in a physically proximate relationship to my own production.

The line of text—the line of my handwriting—is continuous with the cartographic line of my journey. I move from one to the other. Attached to my body the phone camera moves from the desk to the wall, from one epistemology to another. The room in which this takes place—my room, an ordinary room, a domestic interior like any other, is also, for all its simplicity, a scene which stages the two fundamental activities out of which this

project is made: moving and writing. The domestic table and the interior wall, while private and relatively secure spaces, nonetheless for me perform the work of staging the documents of the State of Exception. I hope that the viewer is able to appreciate this quality, which Freud's concept of the "*unheimlich*" might describe—the feeling of being at home and yet not being at home, of alienation from a source of identity, of displacement and difference. This is the predicament I wish these shots to illustrate: the precariousness of the spaces we take for granted.

The domestic interior is always already a mediatised environment. It is not only a series of surfaces for the display of printed imagery but also a stage for the display of digital imagery which broadcasts from around the globe. In one sense interior and local, the domestic space is also a node within a global network of flows of images and stories, and the television is often the centre, and gateway, of these information streams. Thus from the map my phone camera turns towards the television which reveals the background music—a Palestinian song sung by an Egyptian group filmed in London. This configuration highlights the shared, diasporic experience of displacement and the sympathy which exists between Arab peoples across multiple geographies. The song is especially poignant to me because it is filmed in front of Marble Arch in London, an iconic focal point, a gateway, a ceremonial border point. In the urban fabric of the capital this monument may not have outstanding significance but for me the ancient function of the triumphal archway as a threshold, as a border point, takes on a new meaning as a symbolic entry point into a new life.

The picture of the music video brings into focus an important feature of the video which I have made, which is its relationship to other forms of media representation. All

media are, by definition, “mediations”—they construct the reality they represent. Thus they are never free from rhetoric and ideology. By taking the camera in one hand and manipulating objects in the other hand I am working with a technique which is deliberately personal, and one which is deliberately opposed to the uniform corporate broadcast viewpoint. I cannot myself step back and away from the representation because I am personally holding the camera. I am the mediator of my own story and I cannot be disassociated from the camera. Part of what this means is a taking back of the system of representation—of representing me, my story, and the nation to which I belong—from larger, more powerful systems of representation which are ideologically motivated. By this I principally mean Israel and its power to manipulate and construct its own version of Palestine through media imagery. The power of this ideological mediation of Palestine by a foreign power cannot be underestimated. It promulgates through global networks of circulation and calcifies into stereotyped representations and beliefs which Palestinians must then, in their everyday lives, confront, and be judged against. Israel has declared its ownership over the imagery of Palestine, creating its own ownership over the imagery, self-creating its own perfect image of Palestine, a way of creating ownership over it through narrative.

My response is to make this video, to contest a dominant representation with another, to take the personal embodied view and dismantle and disrupt the self-contained image of a self-contained country. The resulting video may not “look right” in the sense that it may not conform to prevailing standards of video representation in terms of its cleanness and sophistication—but it is precisely through these technical “faults” that it is able to produce ideological “fault lines” within the ways that Palestine has been represented

by external forces. By this means I wish to show the reader/viewer that there is a connection between the personal and the imperfect—the imperfect being a political corrective to the ideal image of the state.

Within its structure, the video will present an image or declaration of the perfect/ideal representation and expression of Israel as a state which has always existed in the mind of Israel. This fiction is presented in the Israeli media as self-evident, natural, the way things have always been. The seamlessness of the media narratives which present it this way appear to confirm the inevitability and incontestability of the representation. My own unsteady phone camera video obviously juxtaposes with this visual narrative, deliberately destabilizing its stability. The phone is attached to my hand and my body, it fixes subject to object, establishes a direct relationship, instantiating the transitory nature of life in movement and the disruptions and interruptions of life. As such the video does not pretend to be able to produce a perfect image. In fact, it insists that no such representation can exist without detaching the video from the subject. By insisting upon the unstable nature of representation I wish to make the argument that all narratives of Palestine which lack this instability must to a large extent consist of fictions which exclude the subjective experience and lives of Palestinians.

A further aspect of the reality effects of the video I have attempted to produce is its relation to time. The video is shot in real time. It is not cut and edited and montaged like a Hollywood narrative in which a patchwork of fragments are arranged in highly ordered artificial ways in order to tell a particular kind of story which leaps across multiple temporalities. Again, due to its direct connection with my body the camera in my video is bound to the irresistible linear flow of time from beginning to end in a continuous take. If

it is impossible to edit and reconstruct reality, the camera is locked into a different temporality. Real time intervenes. The time it takes for me to write. The time it takes for me to walk over to the map, the time it takes for me to fumble with my identity card with one hand while holding the camera in my other—these are all episodes which surely would be edited out of any feature film or documentary, yet in some senses they are the most important parts of my video. They testify to the intrusion of real time, of the disrupted nature of all experience. Identity is a difficult, awkward thing to grasp—what better way to show this than in the fumbling gesture of my hand, wary of the time it is taking to film this shot, having difficulty exposing the small image to the light of the camera. This is not just “bad technique,” it is instead, in effect, an allegory of the subject.

Thus it might be said that what the video portrays is that which is ordinarily not allowed to be seen—the “obscene,” that is, etymologically, the “off-stage,” the things which are beyond the scope of the ordinary systems of representation. In terms of the cultural imaginary of Israel and Palestine the obscene can also be expressed as that which is behind the wall of representation—the parts of Palestinian life and subjective experience which escape and evade the attempts of the Israeli media apparatus to represent them. Thus my painfully slow writing, my awkwardly lit and out of focus presentation of photographs are all significant precisely because they resist the expected means of representing myself as a Palestinian, because they would never be the techniques employed by an external power. They are so un-technical that they become, in fact, a wholly new set of techniques. These gestures and episodes testify to that which is not normally seen, which remains hidden and out of sight behind the way, submerged under the regime of Israeli-dominated representations of Palestine.

Nevertheless, in all of these gestures there is an ultimate sense of pathos, or loss. Kobena Mercer has written that this sense of “discrepancy” and melancholia marks all forms of diasporic experience (Mercer, 2008). Perhaps the clearest way that this emerges in the unfolding of the video narrative is in the display of objects. As memories or souvenirs, these documents all point to something which is ultimately absent: Palestine. My identity, my rights, my possessions, my home, my father—these are all things which are not present for me in any other way than in signs. I have the images but not the things themselves. The video is a representation of representations and the laborious sequence of presenting each of these tokens reinforces, I hope, the painful sense that the things to which all of these representations point, are ultimately not there. Again this relation between sign and signified is particularly acute in the image, as opposed to the text. When we can see the objects which are lost their absence becomes all the more apparent. While the video narrative itself creates form and structure, an aesthetic assemblage of signs which has meaning and value and which is held together by the continuity of my own body and its subjective time, the disrupted and incomplete nature of this gesture finally serves to signify the challenging series of absences which define the State of Exception in which Palestinians must live.

Conclusions

Stories of displacement and migration rarely come to a final ending. Part of the condition of mobility is the always temporary and contingent nature of space and time. Stories emerge and unfold and proliferate according to what Deleuze and Guattari would call a rhizome logic—ends are not termini but rather points of divergence where one narrative is interrupted by another from which it diverges while remaining attached, continuing on to the next bifurcation, and the next, and the next. That is the case with the stories presented here. Even during the period of their composition the events they describe have continued to unfold and remain suspended in different states of non-conclusion, even at the moment when, as now, time is taken to attempt to bring into at least a provisional focus, the entirety of the project. The new understanding of the experience of Palestinian academics and their families in the UK to which this thesis has been directed must, therefore, inevitably serve as an intermediary conclusion, ready to be updated in due course.

Each of the stories presented here take up the question of experience posed by the thesis title, attempting to investigate what constitutes experience under the specific state of exception and proposing that under this condition narrative alone cannot fully account for it. Experience of the state of exception by subjects whose lives also intersect with the transnational networks of academic inquiry is inflected by theory and this inflection introduces an element of distanced self-reflection and analysis closely interleaved with direct experience of events. The narratological methodology which has resulted, which modulates between first person narrative and reflections on theory, constitutes an emergent property of the research and constitutes the leading contribution of this work to the field.

This research therefore reasserts the inherent provisionality of experience under the conditions of the state of exception. If that state changes (though there is little in current geopolitical affairs to suggest that it soon will) then it may be the case that the experience of Palestinian academics and their families living abroad may evolve alternative appropriate methods of narrative. Yet the overriding finding of this work is that new experience reflects back upon earlier moments in narratives, changing their significance in light of events as they progress and alter. The stories, then, are presented here not as the final statements on a subject (my own subjectivity, the subject of my experience, the critical theory of Agamben and others), but rather as studies of always inherently provisional data drawn from my own experience as an academic and writer. Yet, the argument of this thesis is that provisionality is not a lack or a disadvantage—rather that provisionality, contingency, and suspension are all in the nature of our experience of place and time. While we may wish for an experience of finality and arrival—to come home—the nature of the journey is that, more often than not, we are instead suspended within a border condition, neither quite here nor there. To use a term from narratology, we are perpetually in a condition of *medias res*—a situation which inherently resists the finality of the totalitarian state (Prince, 2003, p. 46).

Journeys are full of movement, but also moments of stasis. Periods of walking, driving, flying (when movement is most intense) are followed by durations of waiting, staying put, resting, or being prevented from carrying on. In the same way, the sequence of writing this project is itself marked by a differentiated temporality, in which these conclusions represent a moment of critical reflection back over the distance already

travelled—with the full knowledge that there is further to go, though where and when and how is not always certain.

If a visual signature of this differentiated temporality were to be looked for, it might be found in the jogging, stuttering yet highly direct and immediate field of vision of the smartphone camera presented in the video. This visual/cinematic position correlates with a particular position of subjectivity and experience, situated within the home of the Palestinian family living abroad. Its instability represents my instability. Its movement is my movement. Its visual data is attached to the data of my own perceptual experience, and its limits are the household I share with my family who, like me, are also displaced, and inhabiting spaces in a temporary way. My insistence on this narrative device has emerged out of a basic methodological conviction that it is through the personal experience of the researcher that critical theory and broader discourse on the subject of Palestine should be approached. The tying together of provisionality and subjectivity represent one of the key findings of this research and assert themselves in the face of conventional claims for final certainty and positivist fact. These alternative positions, which distance themselves from the immediacy of such forms of first person narrative and POV film, in search of a more fundamental or generalisable basis for discourse, might enjoy a certain advantage in terms of the level of generality they are able to apply to the subject, but it has been my intention here to make a contribution through the particularity of my own subjective experience, and to draw on this first-person data as a driving methodology throughout this project, and not dismiss it as contingent and therefore exceptional and non-objective. This is to say that methodology inherently has a political basis and that the commitment to provisionality, immediacy and subjectivity are not marginal methodological concerns but rather central

claims. In some sense this might be seen as reversing the conventional outcome of a thesis project: that it is the methods which take on the nature of the findings. It will be remembered that from a positivist point of view the subjectivity of the researcher is inevitably, and purposefully excluded from the research process, coded as an interference, an alien particle liable to distort the accuracy and reliability of results with their presence (Mizrahi & Davis, 2008, vol. III, p. 492). The critical reversal which this project has made is to reevaluate the “distortion” effected by the presence of the “alien particle” as in fact a new way to see, investigate, and interpret the State of Exception. Rather than conclusions in the traditional sense, this research project presents “strategies-as-findings” instead—not only recorded experiences but *methods for the documentation of experience*.

The state of the “alien particle” is one of imbalance. It will be recalled that Agamben’s declared purpose in *The State of Exception* was to examine what he called “a point of imbalance,” the “no-man’s land” between “public law and political fact” (Agamben, 2010, p.1). This imbalance, or no-man’s land, was not framed as a permanent state of affairs but, as its name implies, an exceptional state of affairs originating in the declaration by a sovereign power in response to extreme internal conflict. Yet, while it has the nature of a crisis, and while it appears at first to be a momentary state of affairs, and while the experience of inhabiting this state is one of sudden and unpredictable change, it is a temporary crisis indefinitely prolonged.

The stories and video presented here represent both a documentation and a critical reflection upon the experience of the “stripped down creaturely life” without rights or protection endured by subjects who have been abandoned by the protection of the law and inhabit a dangerous space of indistinction in which the sovereign is free to act with

impunity and without limits (Agamben, 2010, p. 2). Their significance rests both on their documentary nature and arguments.

Current scholarship on practice-based research has focussed on reclaiming the validity of practice as a form of research—less so on the formulation of new hybrid forms of research which accommodate critical aspects of practice in order to promote new forms of analysis. The “Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice” model in the creative arts is typical: it entertains the idea that research and practice interact and that either one may take the lead, yet it maintains the autonomy of both terms without considering the possibility of cross-contamination between the two (Smith & Dean, 2014). Nelson has considered the relationship between practice and research to be governed by principles, protocols and resistance (Nelson, 2003). Barrett and Bolt (2019) likewise assert that research and practice enjoy a productively dynamic relationship, rather than being opposed to one another. The research presented here has shown that these terms cannot adequately serve as either the conceptual or the methodological basis for investigating the question of Palestinian academics’ and their families’ experience of the state of exception.

The key argument of this project—set out by means of the stories and video—is that the space of indistinction inhabited by the subject calls for a radical (that is, fundamental) response on the level of narrative. My response has been formulated at this level by working through a narrative method that combines and weaves together first-person story-telling and theoretical analysis—an approach which it makes no sense to parcel out into “research” and “practice.” Agamben argued that the State of Exception emerges as the state’s apparatus for dealing with “citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system” (Agamben, 2010, p. 2). The experience of non-

integration is indeed characteristic of Palestinians and, in response to the potential critique that first-person narrative and academic citations do not sit well together—are not integrated—I would respond that it is this very non-integration of conventional textual modes which my project instrumentalises as an effective methodology in itself. It is as if a critic might express their wish that the shakiness of the smartphone camera be eliminated from the video and the POV kept still. Under the terms of my response this is impossible. It would imply a level of totalisation which is out of step with the contingent and decentred position which is the subject of this project in relation to its central question concerning the nature of the experience of Palestinian academics and their families in the UK. Indeed, it would imply a resolution of state, it would imply arrival, it would imply the restoration of the law—it would imply home.

There is perhaps an extent to which “home” (law, order, the restoration of rights) represents the longed-for yet endlessly displaced conclusion of this project. There is no doubt that this desire is operative. It is matched by the desire for a return of the absent one—a nation, a father, a job, an apartment building. Yet, while the condition of the exile is indeed characterised by a melancholy of loss, absence, displacement, and lack, whose expression can be nothing other than lamentation, there are many reasons also to positively and critically evaluate the condition of the exile as one that enjoys a certain privileged viewing position in relation to the operation of power and one whose strategies for the documentation and analysis of experience have something critical to offer. Even though it is subject to power in perilous ways, the position of the exile has the advantage of first-hand experience of space in its most exceptional state, a feeling for the texture of its borders

and limits, and an image of power viewed from the outside, translated into a double-coded narratological structure of immediate experience and theoretical reflection.

It has been the argument of this project that the State of Exception is an inherently spatial formation of borders, limits, frontiers, and camps. In the case of Palestine specifically the spatial logics of annexation, encroachment, and militarily enforced peripheral borderlands—which are all in a constant state of reinscription both physically and legislatively—define the spatiality of the State of Exception and are characteristics of the camp, “the hidden matrix and *nomos* of the political space in which we are still living” (Agamben, 2016, p.166). Again, by means of the first-person narrative, these borders and matrices have been “felt,” as it were, haptically, by the embodied “I” which moves through the stories emically (that is, from the inside) rather than etically (from the outside), while at the same time retaining the capacity to frame and re-frame the picture through immanent theoretical analysis. Rather than observing disinterestedly from a position of ideal objectivity (the scenario of positivism), this project has argued that first-person narrative enhances critical analysis by means of its direct experiential account of space as an instantiation of political crisis. The altered state of the critical voice of the researcher in this scenario is (it is hoped) matched by an altered state of the reader. The overlap of this project with the practice of autoethnography offers the possibility of an empathetic engagement with critical theory which in turn may initiate, as Leavy has written, “the possibility of enlarging our understanding of the world” through processes of becoming “more understanding, tolerant, and open to the needs and perspectives of those with whom we share differences” (Leavy, 2018, p.194). The “understanding” which is referenced in the title of this dissertation, therefore, (“understanding the experiences of Palestinian

academics and their families in the UK) is an understanding distributed across not only those subjects whose Point of view has been directly represented but a broader understanding transmissible through the ultimately co-participatory act of a writer writing and a reader reading.

The first person narrative has also provided an antidote to the void which the work of Agamben produces in its devastating critique of the State of Exception as the defining spatial experience of modernity. In his re-reading of Agamben, Abujidi was shown earlier to emphasise the power of Palestinian struggle and resistance within the paradigm of the camp, noting the absence of any such treatment in Agamben's work (Abujidi, 2009, p.288). While the current project has not endorsed the rhetoric of struggle and resistance—which is fundamentally associated with a Marxist conception of collective class struggle somewhat out of step with a first person narrative—the stories do work to map out other spaces and experiences within the camp. Whereas the camp reduces the subject to bare life, the story restores to the subject to a degree of legality—not the law of state, not any law that physically protects the subject from violence, but, as it were, an aesthetic law, a network of narrative logics which help to secure the subject's position within a non-judicial space which the reader, too, may inhabit. The story and the video are responses to the State of Exception, alternatives to it, attempts to find a way out of it. In essence this amounts to a basic claim that narrative emerges in the emptiness of judicial space.

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