SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, SUBJECTIVITY, AND SOLIDARITY: WITNESSING RHETORIC OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

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This study engaged in pushing the current political limitations created by the political impasse of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, by imagining new possibilities for radical political change, agency, and subjectivity for both the international activists volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement as well as Palestinians enduring the brutality of life under occupation. The role of the witness and testimony is brought to bear on activism and rhetoric the social movement ISM in Palestine. Approaches the past studies of the rhetoric of social movements arguing that rhetorical studies often disassociated ‘social’ from social movements, rendering invisible questions of the social and subjectivity from their frames for evaluation. Using the testimonies of these witnesses, Palestinians and activists, as the rhetorical production of the social movement, this study provides an effort to put the social body back into rhetorical studies of social movements. The relationships of subjectivity and desubjectification, as well as, possession of subjects by agency and the role of the witness with each of these is discussed in terms of Palestinian and activist potential for subjectification and desubjectification.
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CHAPTER 1

THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPASSE AND THE POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States November 4, 2008 marked a turning point for American politics. This election, predicated on the success of grassroots campaigning and community organizing, held a special value not only because this was the first election of an African-American to the presidency, but also because it marked the end of the Bush-Cheney era of devastating domestic, foreign, and economic policy. In her November 5, 2008 article, “Uncritical Exuberance,” Judith Butler noted the much needed sigh of relief many Americans took election night as it became apparent the Bush-era would soon end, but noted that the possibility of an uncritical exuberance with which Obama’s win set in motion, eschewing discourses of dissonance or antagonism. This focus on unity over dissonance presets a limit to political possibility that Butler finds problematic (Butler, 2008).

Butler argues for the necessity of Obama and his administration maintaining political momentum through the some of the probable difficulties they face. Butler highlights the importance of foreign policy on these issues, suggesting that the top three priorities for the Obama administration should be shutting down the Guantanamo Bay Detention facility, withdrawal of troops from Iraq, and a change of policy towards the war in Afghanistan. Surely Obama’s plans for a change in foreign policy efforts on these three fronts will be markedly different from the Bush administration foreign policy, but Butler hesitates at calling such differences a unity of change when there the obviousness of the “selling out” of Palestine as a changed foreign policy issued became apparent during the election campaign (Butler, 2008). The problem of Palestine and the importance of the United States political support for the state of Israel openly manifest itself soon after the election in the run up to President Obama’s election.
As if on cue, the Israeli government, preparing itself for an upcoming national election, launched the most brutal attack on occupied Palestinian territory in the Gaza Strip to date. Three weeks of relentless aerial bombardment, ground invasion, and merciless attack of the civilian population of Gaza began December 27, 2009, lasting until January 18, 2009, a mere three days before the inauguration of President Barack Obama, killing over 1350 Palestinians, predominately civilians, 430 of them women and children, with another 5,320 people severely injured, and over 1200 buildings destroyed (B’t Selem, 2009).

To assume that this attack, on the end of the Bush administration, whose presidency was marked by an increase in military aid to Israel, including weapons shipments during the Gaza massacre, and before the shift in power to the Obama administration, whose campaign circulated on promises of change in foreign policy and increased diplomacy, was timed coincidentally would display outstanding naivety. The infrastructure of the world’s poorest and most densely populated region of the world was being reduced to a walled strip of rubble; while the slaughter of over 1300 hundred people, mostly women and children, continued in Gaza, President-elect Obama remained silent on the issue (Mail Foreign Service, December 30, 2008). The President-elect provided both explanation and an indicator of his own performative contradiction in justifying his silence on Gaza as a foreign policy matter. Obama’s explanation noted that he should not comment on matters of foreign policy and interest before taking office, Obama failed to notice he had already commented on the brutal terrorist attacks in Mumbai some weeks before without hesitation (MSNBC, November 26, 2008). So why the silence on Palestine?

Ali Abunimah noted in his book *One Country* that Obama was not always silent on the issue of Palestine. As a rising politician in Chicago, he attended Arab fundraisers, one in which Edward Said was the keynote speaker, and was one of the first aspiring national politicians to
call for evenhandedness in U.S. policies towards Israel and Palestine, but post his 2004 overwhelming electoral victory into the U.S. Senate, his position suddenly changed and was soon condemning and blaming Palestinian leadership for violence against Israel (Abunimah, 2007, 2008, & 2009). The Palestine issue has long been acknowledged as one of the most controversial subjects for politicians, academics, and the media about which to circulate varied discourses. The U.S. position is monolithic, preserving “a deep friendship” with the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinian population (Abunimah, 2008; 2009). Obama’s silence not only marked a tacit support of Israel but also continues to lend to an unfortunate consistency in the office of the US President, where the complete disenfranchisement of Palestinians is neither acknowledged nor discussed. Even in the much hailed Cairo speech, Obama, albeit somewhat less extreme than President Bush, displayed far from an evenhanded approach to the discussion of the conflict, not so much as mentioning the recent and ongoing devastation in Gaza by the Israeli invasion and ongoing closures, yet absurdly mentioning the rockets fired from Gaza which killed only one Israeli during the entire invasion (Abunimah, June 04, 2009).

The influence and importance of the US foreign policy continues to play an important role in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and will continue to be central in negotiations for a solution, in large part because of the US relationship with Israel and American tax-funded financial support for Israel. Possibilities of a strong U.S. leader who is able shift foreign policy measures single-handedly seems improbable, no matter how charismatic that leader may be.

This being said, President Obama’s position on the conflict might very well be more alterable than those that have come before him. As Abunimah pointed out, Obama is aware of the conditions of Palestinians, at least to the extent that he had acknowledged their plight previously (Abunimah, 2007). Another small indicator that there might be some difference in
Obama’s tuning on the conflict is his relationship to Rashid Khalidi. During the campaign, Senator McCain and Governor Palin tried repeatedly to discredit Obama through fear mongering by associating him with intellectuals that the Senator and Governor painted as “‘extreme,’ ‘socialist,’ or ‘terrorist.’” Rashid Khalidi, a professor at the University of Chicago, a Palestinian and scholar who writes regularly on the Palestinian issue, was neighbors with the Obamas in Chicago and was painted as one such “extremist.” Although this tactic of fear mongering largely failed to garner support for the McCain/Palin ticket, scholars who support a just peace in the conflict, such as Judith Butler, took note. Butler flippantly notes that, “it is a relief, to be sure, that he knows Rashid Khalidi” (Butler, 2008, p. 2).

With or without knowledge of the Palestinian struggle, it seems that Obama is caught in what Slavoj Zizek has termed the symptomal knot of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the most appropriate solution is ignored as both sides sit in a stalemate (Zizek, 2002; 2004). Between the western media’s consistently skewed coverage of the conflict and the kowtowing of American politicians to AIPAC, there seems to be no end in site for the ongoing conflict and occupation of Palestinian land (Avery, 2008, Gibson, 2006, Hart, 2009, O’Connor, 2006).

What are scholars to make of the seeming incongruence resulting from a presidential campaign utilizing social organizing and grassroots motivation, but which seems unable to see the effects of changes in American foreign policy on local social conditions in Palestine? Given Obama’s focus on organizing at the grassroots level, is not the rhetoric of grassroots mobilization in Palestine not the missing part of this puzzle? Are not the problems of media coverage and focus on dissonance over assonance in Palestine the difficulty of hearing the rhetoric of the witness in Palestine? What opportunities are there for examining grassroots movement organization in a way that makes sense given its usage in American political campaigns?
Grassroots organizing is no new endeavor in Palestine. In 1936, eight years before the forcible expulsion of Palestinians from their land, a general strike was maintained against the British mandate government for six months in every major Palestinian city (Sa’di, 2007). Although this strike was forcibly put down and Palestinians forced to disarm, the memory of the struggle to resist oppression continues with both Israelis and Palestinians, who both actively participate in non-violent organizations aimed at ending the occupation. Although these received little to no media coverage in the United States, groups like Tay’yush and Anarchists Against the Wall, Women in Black, and the Coalition Against Home Demolition have worked for decades to end the brutal policies of occupation against the Palestinians. One social movement in particular, the International Solidarity Movement, provides non-violent direct action against the occupation through the volunteer efforts of Palestinians, Israelis, but mostly internationals who come to stand in solidarity against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land (ISM, About ISM). In their, “Who We Are” statement, ISM indicates they are,

a Palestinian-led movement committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land using nonviolent, direct-action methods and principles. Founded by a small group of activists in August, 2001, ISM aims to support and strengthen the Palestinian popular resistance by providing the Palestinian people with two resources, international protection and a voice with which to nonviolently resist an overwhelming military occupation force (ISM, About ISM).

Utilizing the non-violent direct action methods of civil rights struggles led by Mohatmat Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., ISM engages in protests and actions against the occupation confronting the occupation forces of the Israeli military. Functioning as negotiators, escorts, human rights observers, and most importantly witnesses to the occupation, ISM activists come from around the world to take advantage of their first world citizenship to oppose the racist occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and stand in solidarity with Palestinians (ISM, About ISM). This social movement’s global appeal to local activism provides on site non-violence
training in direct action to participants, but does not mandate a political stance, beyond more than a agreement to stand for Palestinian self-determination, on the conflict for participants (ISM, About ISM).

Founded eight years ago by Israeli and Palestinian activists, ISM calls for activists to participate in occupied territory alongside Palestinians. Activists volunteering in ISM come mostly from the United States and Europe with a large number of Jewish people coming from various countries to oppose the Israeli occupation. Activists have a variety of ideological beliefs, ethnic backgrounds, sexualities, ages, genders, and languages spoken. The variety and difference of activists continue to create a broad coalition of people from all walks of life, faiths, political affiliations, and socio-economic status, but all share together as witnesses of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (ISM, About ISM). Activists work with volunteer coordinators, both international and Palestinian, in each of the regions they are located (ISM, About ISM). The constant engagement of international with Palestinians, both political engagement and daily engagement, renders much time for relations, conversation, and intimacy of experience for those that usually are permitted only a limited view of life in occupied territory dependent on western media accounts.

Such close interaction and direct action against the occupation, while bearing witness to daily struggles of Palestinians, provides a unique opportunity for international activists to develop a different understanding of daily life and the politics of the conflict. The role of witnessing and production of documentation or testimony are some of the most important roles activists participate in (ISM, About ISM). The role of the witness ISM deems as necessary because of the unabated slaughter of Palestinian civilians, the destruction of land, homes, and businesses, and the constant struggle to reach the most basic necessities under the closure. All
areas of occupied territories, Gaza and the fragmented, open air prison of the West Bank, and partitioned East Jerusalem, which both sit behind giant walls, are subject to a constant denial by the Israeli government and military, while Israeli government and military argue that the occupation does nothing more than provide security for Israel (ISM, About ISM).

The role of the witness in social movements provides a unique instance for scholarly research on the role of rhetoric in social movements, as well as a better understanding of rhetorics relation to subjectivity, a term that names the relation between an individual and social process. Because witnessing and testimony are contingent upon rhetorical practices by activists working with ISM, the production of texts of testimony and the practices of witnessing provide ample ground for scholarly research. This study attempts to further explore the rhetoric of social movements through the use of witnessing and testimony in the case of the International Solidarity Movement, theoretically evaluating the possibilities of subjectivity and agency through Giorgio Agamben’s conception of the witness and testimony in his book, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Agamben, 1999). This study does not attempt to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but it is engaged in pushing the current political limitations created by the political impasse, to imagine new possibilities for radical political change, agency, and subjectivity for both the international activists volunteering as well as Palestinians enduring the brutality of life under occupation.

This study takes up these and other questions concerning the rhetoric of social movements in an effort to examine the rhetorical force of organizing in Palestine, an area where both hearing and understanding the witness is of central importance. In the second chapter this study presents approaches of the past studies of the rhetoric of social movements arguing that rhetorical studies often disassociated ‘social’ from social movements, rendering invisible
questions of the social and subjectivity from their frames for evaluation. The invisibility of the ‘social’ and subjectivity led to increasingly less use of the term social movement in rhetorical studies and hindered further exploration in the importance of the rhetoric of social movements.

The third chapter of this study opens to the voices and testimonies of the International Solidarity Movements. This chapter presents testimonies from these witnesses, Palestinians and activists, as the rhetorical production of the social movement. In an effort to put the social body back into rhetorical studies of social movements, it includes examples of testimony that not only attest to the importance of witnessing, but also raise important questions such as: Who is speaking? What is the force of the witness? And importantly what are audiences to make of these testimonies?

Chapter 4 establishes the theoretical framework for the study, approaching the concepts of the witness and testimony, as integral to the relationships of subjectivity and desubjectification, as well as, possession of subjects by agency. Here Giorgio Agamben’s comments on governmentality and *homo sacer* are examined in their application to Palestinian and activist subjectivity. As opposed to the many readings that focus on the desubjectification of Palestinians, I argue that a more intersubjective account of witnessing aids in understanding the potential openings ironically found in the inability of testimony to relay its own subjectivity.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of testimonies of the International Solidarity Movements from occupied Palestine, positioning to the reading of these testimonies as witnessing the witnessing of ISM. This chapter comments on not only the political potentiality of the witness, but also the interpretive difficulties of understanding the witness. Chapter 6 provides both a conclusion to the study, as well as, a positioning to allow for continued research in rhetoric on social movements, witnessing, testimony, subjectivity, and political agency.
CHAPTER 2
WITNESSING RHETORIC’S INVOLVEMENT WITH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Although social movements as an area for evaluation and criticism by rhetorical studies, has changed over the years, several practices regarding rhetorical analysis of social movements established a consistent set of issues about how to conceptualize and evaluate social movements. The most lasting of these practices is the use of the term movement separated from the term “social.” This conceptualizing of movement independently of its social constituency creates definitional problems with approaching social movements. The emphasis given to movement over social in the field made a lasting emphasis in analysis on the implications of movement as both phenomena and meaning with little regard to the social bodies that make up these movements and generate the rhetoric of the social movements.

With such an invisibility in analysis on social movements, the second problem of the analysis on movements seems easy to gauge. Due to the lack of development of theories dealing directly with members and their status in movements, little work on subjectivity and agency of members of the social movements was theorized beyond the constitution of identity of the members of the movement. Further analysis on the role of these members in creating the rhetorical practices of the social movement was also lost in this invisibility of analysis. Without being able to evaluate the role of subjectivity in shaping the practices of movements, questions of power and the psyche in regards to movement members has also been minimal if not altogether removed from analysis. This lack of discussion on subjectivity, prevents analysis on how modes of power produce rhetoric that has been unavailable for evaluation previously and how the relations or interrelations of members and their subjectivity also function as sites for rhetoric generation.
Interest in social movements for rhetorical studies helped develop many of the trajectories of study in rhetoric that would develop over the next century. Breaking with the tradition of a focus on oration and great men giving great speeches, rhetorical studies broadened the number and type of texts evaluated for study, as well as the types of rhetors and discourse deemed valuable for study. Social movements provided an area of analysis that justified such turns in the field, as they provided various rhetors, texts, sites, and audiences for evaluation.

This turn in the field created quandaries over “social movements” that have persisted in the field. Rhetorical studies seemed to express a hesitancy over even the naming of social movements as such, sometimes opting to split social from “movement,” naming of only movements. The titles of these studies alone present this removal or invisibility of the “social” of movements. Although formative to the study of social movements in rhetorical studies, articles like, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements” (Griffin, 1952), “Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form” (Cathcart, 1978), “Rethinking the Globalization Movement: Toward a Cultural Theory of Contemporary Democracy and Communication” (Best, 2005) present an invisibility in their titles of “the social” make-up of these social movements. Even one of the most prominent books in rhetorical criticism, Edwin Black’s *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (1965), encouraged studies on social movements, but presents this section of his book under the subtitle, “Movements.” Presenting these studies as focused on movements alone frames the studies of movements as somehow exclusive of the social bodies that make them up. Although such a focus did broaden the research scope of what was considered a movement and how these might be approached by rhetorical studies, much less research was dedicated to the positions of people in social movements and how they should be approached and framed by rhetorical studies.

Two patterns became apparent in the rhetorical study of social movements. The first
presented the invisibility of the ‘social’ from social movements perhaps determined more by the interest in a turn away from speaker centered focus, but the second pattern provided an invisibility the words “social movement” altogether from their titles when well known social movements were the focus of these studies. Studies like, “Justifying Violence: The Rhetoric of Militant Black Power” (Scott, 1968), “The Rhetoric of Confrontation” (Scott, & Smith, 1969), “Confrontation at Columbia: A Case Study in Coercive Rhetoric” (Andrews, 1969), “The Ego-Function of the Rhetoric of Protest” (Gregg, 1971), “Enacting Red Power: The Consummatory Function in Native American Protest Rhetoric” (Lake, 1983), “Passing, Protesting, and the Arts of Resistance: Infiltrating the Ritual Space of Blood Donation” (Bennett, 2008), all present a loss of “social movement” as a direct reference in the titles of their studies, although for most of these studies social movements are the explicit focus for analysis. The loss of “social movement” altogether from these titles frames these studies on social movements as primarily concerned with the specific forms or techniques of rhetoric. The noticeable pattern of invisibility of “social” and “social movement” from the titles of articles that address social movements in rhetorical studies presents an interesting invisibility that raises questions about how these words, “social movement,” or the lack of these words, conditions studies towards certain discourses.

The loss of “social movement” or the separation and/or removal of “social” and/or “movement” in the titles of these studies makes noticeable a pattern of invisibility that lends to the question, in what ways do these studies makes absent the very concepts they are referencing or analyzing? Analysis of these studies provides for comparison of the frames guiding the discourse of the studies studies. Variation in the theoretical and methodological frames for these studies lends to overlapping as well as mutually exclusive interpretations as to the role and definition of social movements rhetoric.
The invisibility of “social” from social movement occurred most often in studies of the rhetoric of social movements. This removal, as discussed above, can be witnessed in the titles of studies. Furthermore rhetorical studies on social movements, even if mentioning the social element of movements, do not elaborate on, or simply presume, the “social” frame for their study. Many studies characterized the people or bodies participating in social movements only in terms of collective actions or behaviors (Cathcart, 1978, Crandell, 1947, Enck-Wanzer, 2006). “Social” thus became interchangeable with collective behavior and action, sharing ground with sociological definitions from the outset of the rhetorical turn towards social movements as an interest in the field of study. Unfortunately many of these studies did not initially address the problems of assuming agency in collective forms. Studies that assume a collective behavior as the mechanism of membership participation remove the possibility of discussing subjectivity as an important component of constitution of social movements. Identity, rather than subjectivity, became a primary focus for many studies in the rhetoric of social movements (Bennett, 2008, Cathcart, 1978, Enck-Wanzer, 2006, Foss & Domenici, 2001, Gregg, 1971, Lake, 1983, Scott, 1968, Scott & Smith, 1969).

In order to present a cohesive body of members, scholars in these studies focused participation around issues of identity politics, identity constitution by the social movement, as well as, shared ideological frames. These limited descriptions of those who participate in social movements, do highlight several interesting rhetorical practices and techniques that stem from member association with identity and ideological frames presented by the social movements, but these studies also present several problems with conceptualizing the “social.” Subjectivity thus provides a lens for understanding the social as both the body of the individual, as well as the social position or processes that individual is subject to. This Foucaultian understanding of
subjectivity, where subjects as a fluid field of forces allows for an understanding of the social beyond merely identity, which constitutes the material forms of subjectivity, but does not account for the processes or differences of experiences rendered by subjectivity. Participants in a social movement who do not identify with the movement as a part of their self-hood become invisible to these studies, greatly limiting conceptions of both ‘the social’ to homogenized identities rather than the providing for multiplicity of identities, as well as, the potential of these movements to present forms of coalition building outside of identity politics. Social movements of the 1960s and 1970s studied by scholars for their political and rhetorical potential were very rarely evaluated in terms of those members who did not meet the criteria of identity constitution by the social movement, although it is well known that many of these identity based movements had participants from other positions and identities that stood in solidarity with members who could directly identify themselves through the social movements.

The limits of identity based collective action was not only politically disenfranchised during many of the COINTELPRO infiltrations by the government, where limited conceptions of membership created a conquer and divide mentality in addressing these new political identities formed by social movements, but also falls suspect to limited definitions of social involvement due to the insistence that coalitions or movements are presupposed on the basis of identity. Judith Butler notes the problems with this in her book _Gender Trouble_,

Clearly, the value of coalition politics is not to be underestimated, but the very form of coalition, of an emerging and unpredictable assemblage of positions, cannot be figured in advance. Despite the clearly democratizing impulse that motivates coalition building, the coalitional theorist can inadvertently reinsert herself as sovereign of the process by trying to assert an idea form of coalitional structures _in advance_, one that will effectively guarantee unity as an outcome (Butler, 1999, p. 20).

Although studies in the rhetoric of social movements were not the only locations of such an attempt to guarantee the unification of membership by categorizing participation in these
social movements as based on identity, the proliferation of this discourse in academia created a profound epistemic invisibility to conceptualizing ‘the social’ and its relation to the political through social movements. Questions of subjection were positioned in terms of an oppressed or subjugated group of people with a shared identity. The importance of revealing systems of oppression and the positions of those subjugated to those positions should not be underestimated, but framing such studies in terms of a participation by those that create their political identify in terms of victimization, showed the limits of merely describing member constituency and not discussing issues of agency and subjectivity.

Binary distinctions based on an antagonistic relationship between those inside and outside of the social movement coupled with identification through victimization positioned these social movements as wholly distinct from the establishment and people who did not identify directly with the social movement. bell hooks noted one of the problems with this focus on identity and victimization was its dangerously disempowering effect when internalized (hooks, 1995, p. 52-53). For hooks, being able to expand beyond identifications of victimization is essential not only for those who establish their own self-hood based on victimization, but for those who see others as victims. The necessity of both of these people or participants to practice acknowledging subjugation of the oppressed as well as their potential for self determination moves the politics of subjectivity towards liberation. The disheartening tale of the end of the black liberation movement offered by hooks, as an example of the consequences of what happens when this move beyond identity politics cannot be actualized. Ironically many whites who had struggled side by side with black folks responded positively to images of black victimization. Many whites testified that they looked upon the suffering of black people in the segregated South and were moved to work for change. The image of blacks as victims had an accepted place in the consciousness of every white person; it was the image of black folks as equals, as self-
determining that had no place— that could evoke no sympathetic response. In complicity
with the nation-state, all white Americans responded to black militancy by passively
accepting the disruption of militant black organizations and the slaughter of black leaders
(hooks, 1995, 54).

Instead of growing social movements, what was considered consummatory for those members of
the movements also became the lynchpin of the unraveling of movements. Government
infiltration into social movements of the 1960s and 1970s during the the U.S. counterintelligence
programs violently disrupted much of the progress made by these social movements for
recognition. Public acquiescence to this violent disruption of social movements was in part due
to the limited perceptions of identity each of these movements presented. The role of
victimization in creating rifts in relationships between identities was further addressed by hooks
in her analysis on the Women’s Liberation Movement. hooks argues, that the embracing of
victimization of women in the movement, isolated white women from women of color, creating
schisms in the movement (hooks, 1995, 55). This example is indicative of the issues Judith
Butler raises regarding pre-emptively establishing possible unities through identity politics for
the coalition theorist. In the case of studies on the rhetoric of social movements, analysis made
by scholars in the field seemed to perhaps both help to produce and proliferate additional focus
on victimization in movements, overlimiting from the outset what we consider to be the “social”
of movements (Gregg, 1971, Lake, 1983).

Although some of the recent studies on social movement rhetoric have included some
analysis on agency or political agency, (Bennett, 2008, Enck-Wanzer, 2006, Foss & Domenici,
2001), none of these studies explore how subjectivity relates to this agency, seemingly putting
the proverbial cart before the horse, presupposing an attainable agency to all subjects. Focus on
specific techniques or forms of rhetoric in these studies further limits questions of subjectivity.
By focusing on protest as rhetoric, rather than looking at protest in addition to other forms of
rhetoric and discourse, scholars have left unexamined the relationship between subjectivity and rhetoric and its potential for political agency.

The importance of the rhetorical nature of social movements presents itself not only in discourses generated by movements, but in those bodies participating, now often without common linkages of identification, in social movements and their role in creating political subjects. The problems of identity politics as the basis for “movements” was problematic for other reasons as well. This study of social movement rhetoric is not the first to raise questions as to frames guiding studies on the rhetoric of social movements. Criticisms of both the attachment to phenomenal conceptions of social movements, as well as, the formation of collective identity were taken up by Michael McGee in his articles, “In Search of ‘The People’: A Rhetorical Alternative” (1975), “‘Social Movement’: Phenomenon or Meaning?” (1980), and “Social Movement as Meaning” (1983).

The first study evaluated conceptions of “the people,” noting the imaginary nature of any given people and the shifting membership of those “people.” Although McGee’s study provided explanation for “the people” beyond those that participate in social movements, the study also preceded his later work on social movements and yet is not positioned in these studies as an explanation of the social. As noted in the last two titles, McGee does not avoid addressing social movements explicitly, unfortunately in both of these texts, dedicated to social movements, McGee quickly strips his argument of an analysis of the social simply evaluating only movement as meaning in human consciousness traceable through shifts in ideology. The splitting of analysis of the social and movement in McGee’s highly influential works, creates a discursive gap in scholarship of social movements, where social and movement are able to be dissociated,
removing bodies from those meanings generated through the practices and discourses of movements.

Tracking the rhetoric of “the people” in western philosophy, McGee notes the prevalence of the fallacy ad populum, where the basis of the individual moves to the abstraction of the whole or collective (McGee, 1975). Noting two problems with this, first that rhetors rarely encounter the problems of ethics in dealing with “demographic capture” of the collective and that this assumes rhetoric to be aimed at a rational audience constituted by elites, McGee articulates his conception of “the people” (1975). “People have a will but do not know what they will -- instead of knowledge, people possess ideology” (McGee, 1983).

McGee argues that most rhetorical work sees “the people,” a purely linguistic phenomenon, constructed to be both real and imaginary. McGee argues that there are no such thing as “the people,” only individuals who “long for the same thing”; no collective identity because no one can describe “what is before the inner eye.” “The people,’ even though made real by their own belief and behavior, are still essentially a mass illusion, more a process than phenomenon” (1975).

Contingent upon fantasies of collectivity, “the people” are organized by ideological commitments into incipient political myths, visions of the collective life, dangled to create a real people. Highlighting the Marxian role of myth in shaping the people McGee discusses the need for action based on a belief in political myth as constructing a people.

So long as “the people” believe basic myths, there is unity and collective identity. When there is no fundamental belief, one senses a crisis which can only be met with a new rhetoric, a new mythology. From the moment of its first utterance, the political myth is in a dual competition with at least two other ontological constructs. Because it is an attempt to redefine material conditions, the myth most obviously conflicts with “objective reality.” Because it is a response, not only to discomfort in the environment, but also to the failure of previous myths to cope with such discomfort, a new political myth also conflicts with all previous myths. Each new vision of collective life, in other words,
represents a movement of ideas (and of “the people”) from one “world” of attitudes and conditions to another. (McGee, 1975, p. 245)

McGee creates a contingent relationship between myth, ideology, and construction of “the people” as an imaginary collective. McGee argues adamantly that constructions of “the public” function to reify people as a collective that must be approached ideologically (McGee, 1983). A focus on ideology and meaning construction implicitly joins McGee’s approaches to “the people” and “movements.”

McGee’s criticism leveled against the methodological approaches to social movement studies had lasting impacts on the direction of the field of social movement rhetoric. Not accepting the sociological or historical allegiance guiding previous scholars work, McGee articulated the need to evaluate “movements” as a change in meaning through human consciousness rather than “movement” as a phenomenon (McGee, 1980). McGee isolated “movement,” referring to it as “the analogue flow of “social facts” (McGee, 1980).

McGee’s criticism rested on the premise that scholars of social movements confuse phenomenon and interpretation when evaluating “social movements.” Sociologists focus on the collective behavior of people fall into this dilemma for McGee, who notes, “that episodes of collective behavior cannot be controlled experimentally,” that case studies of collective behaviors cannot be demonstrated to be typical” (McGee, 1980, p. 235). McGee notes, “collective behavior which is made possible but a nonessential consequence of a consciousness consisting of or represented by a form of rhetoric” (1983). The problem for McGee with interpreting a “social movement” in advance lies in essentially affirming a consequent as proof; “witnessing” the movement establishes a condition and a prior definition of “social movements” (McGee, 1980). The label of bad scientist motivates McGee to find alternatives to the theorization of the rhetoric of social movements that might not prove generalizable beyond
particular cases. This perspective criticized empirical sociology which assumed movements to be phenomenon based on social facts, which fallaciously establishes movements as objects versus constructions and transitions of meaning, rooted political and ideological perspectives. McGee sees social movements as a process in a change of human consciousness, rather than a means to a projected end goal or the fact of a collectivity of a pre-existing phenomenon (McGee, 1980; 1983).

McGee’s criticism of previous studies on the rhetoric of social movements, provided several problems with these studies’ frames of analysis, but McGee’s analysis also presents a problematic framing for the study of social movements in a few ways. By focusing on the end result to a change in meaning, McGee ignores the process of those changes to meaning. In fact, it becomes difficult to be able to know how one would identify changes to meaning without looking at the process of those changes. In other words, even when evaluating myth or ideology, one must look through the constitutive process of those myths and ideologies to unravel their position as such.

In broadly conceiving movements as meaning, McGee presents the second problematic issue with his evaluation of social movements. The open interpretation of changes to meaning of human consciousness allows for the inclusion studies of “imperialism” and “containment” as social movements (1980). Surely one of the most notable problems with establishing these concepts as social movements, would be the missing subjects that participate in the process of changing this meaning. In the cases of imperialism and containment, it would seem likely that states would communicate these meanings to a public through varied forms of circulation, but that the role of the public in regards to other members of that audience would matter very little in shaping these meanings. These examples articulate a theoretical gap in McGee’s analysis that
lends to the third problematic with his study, an insistence on the ideological subject(s) as “the people” who would constitute social movements. For McGee, this presents a couple of limitations to his analysis and study. The first, noted above, allows for such broad conceptualization of social movements that they are not distinguishable from the state or the establishment itself. Another problem with this focus on the ideological constitution of the subject is the exclusion of any discussion of agency, psychic influence, or difference in ideological frames that constitute each subject as a participant in a social movement. Butler’s criticism of pre-forming notions of coalitions applies to McGee’s construction quite well, but further, McGee fails to elucidate how the variations in social knowledge and fact, regardless of an agreed upon “collective knowledge,” may constitute participation in movements and changes to social meaning from the outset.

Because he limited his theoretical frame to discussions of ideology and ideological subjects who are formed by the very meaning they experience as changing, McGee’s analysis also falls under a rubric of criticism of subjectivity as purely ideological in construction presented by Butler in her book, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Butler, 1997).

McGee does not have a mechanism for exploring how the differences in positions of members in social movements might constitute variance in meaning and generate different forms of rhetoric. The removal of bodies from movements in isolating “movement” away from “social movement,” disengages bodies and subjects that maintain the very consciousness McGee argues as changing through “movement.”

McGee does provide some frame for the ways in which he conceptualizes “the people” (McGee, 1975), but the limits to how “the people” are formative in the creation of “movement”
or shifts in meaning comes into question when faced with a subject interpellated by ideology and with little political agency beyond acceptance of the meaning given to them.

Drawing on McGee’s analysis of the constitution of a “people,” Maurice Charland, in his 1987 article, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Quebecois,” expands the role of rhetoric in shaping a political identity and subjectivity for an identifiable “people.” The establishment of an audience as “a people,” through constitutive rhetoric is examined in this study through the rhetoric of the Mouvement Souverainete-Assocation. Noting McGee’s argument, that the term “people” can legitimate constitutions, Charland continues by arguing that although not all members of the audience would identify as peuple Quebecois, the interpellative effect of the use of constitutive rhetoric, as well as the ideological discourses that make up this notion of a people, create political subjects that had not previously existed. This study provides for a discourse on actors beyond identity recognition towards an understanding of the positioning of subjects and their role as historical actors. Although Charland does concede that not all constitutive rhetoric are successful in creating new subject positions, the study seems to stop at this limit, without exploring the possibilities of the interrelations of those subject positions or political possibilities of such new positions.

The limits of interpellation as a singular basis for understanding the constitution of the subject have been explored by Judith Butler in her book, The Psychic Life of Power (1997). Addressing the limits of interpellation as a theory for inauguring subjects, Butler addresses this gap of constitution of subjects through interpellation that Charland acknowledges but does not evaluate fully. Establishing the need for a study in the relations of power and the psyche in the formation of subjects and the need to have a conception of the political agency of the subject in postliberatory times, Butler addresses the psychic limits of Althusser’s interpellative address.
Rather than accept the Althusserian notion of a turn to the law as a need for acquittal of guilt, Butler argues that there is a desire manifest in the subject turning towards the law that is not equated always with guilt, but rather a psychic attachment or passionate attachment of love to the law (Butler, 1997). The limited account of a subject's turn towards the law, as presented by Althusser and reused by Charland in the interpellative address, does not account for the inauguration of the subject, but instead insists upon a subject's presence in order for subjection by interpellation to take place (Butler, 1997). Such a gap in the pre-narrative subject that has no account for an initial formation presents problems for interpellation as a single theory for the rhetorical construction of subjects.

Interpellation as constitutive of political and ideological subjects presents a rhetorical quandary in that it does not allow for rhetoric outside of that handed from the law or agreed upon by social meaning to have a place in subjectivity (Butler, 1997). Further, the ideological construction of “the people” presented by McGee, denies the role of the ego in subject formation. Freud establishes that, “the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego.” The subject’s body and psyche thus present real questions to the construction of ideological subjects based on interpellation.

The interpellation of the subject through the inaugurative address of the state authority presupposes not only that the inculcation of conscience already has taken place, but that conscience, understood as the psychic operation of a regulatory norm, constitutes a specifically psychic and social working of power on which interpellation depends but for which it can give no account. (Butler, 1997, p. 5-6)

Butler’s concern with power, the psyche, and where these two things meet to form subjects is further discussed in her introduction on desire and attachment. Butler notes,

To desire the conditions of one’s own subordinations I thus required to persist as oneself... It is not simply that one requires the recognition of the other and that a form of recognition is conferred through subordination, but rather that one is dependent on power for one’s very formation, that the formation is impossible without dependency, and that
the posture of the adult subject consists precisely in the denial and reenactment of that dependency. (Butler, 1997, p. 9)

The particularities of subject formation and the relationality of individuals as co-constituting one another through narratives and accounts given to one another through relations simply cannot be discussed through McGee’s frame. The positions of subjects in relation to one another, the conditions that shape and maintain the subject, as well as the psychic make-up of the subject all present unaddressed issues in McGee’s conception of “the people” of “movements.”

Perhaps McGee did not indefinitely foreclose searching out alternative possibilities to the study of ideology when he offered towards the end of his article that, “the analysis of rhetorical documents should not turn inward, to an appreciation of persuasive, manipulative techniques, but outward to functions of rhetoric. Studies of the collectivization process through rhetorical analysis of political myths orients the researcher to problems of social/rhetorical theory rather than to myopic questions of causation so common in contemporary historical methods” (McGee, 1975). Even if one chooses to not look at the collectivization process, he urges scholars to “use it to explore the relationship between rhetoric and social theory” (McGee, 1975, p. 249).

Perhaps this presents a jumping off point to further explore the functions of rhetoric in crafting people and subjectivities not based on purely interpellative or ideologic models but with questions of how the role of power in subjectivity generates rhetoric and discourses, how these locations or sites of power are positioned in points of exchange between participants of social movements and/or other social subjects?

Thus, a gap in understanding the subjectivity and its relationship to the rhetoric of social movements remains through these previous studies, due in part to the invisibility of the “social” in studies on the rhetoric of social movements. Although the study of rhetoric of social movements often evaluates the discourse produced by members and leaders of these movements,
the frames of these studies often denied these bodies as the producers of discourse by ignoring question of subjectivity and even agency while privileging the rhetoric of only “the movement.”

Studies in the rhetoric of confrontation tended towards this focus, with both the rhetoric of confrontation within the student movement and black liberation movement as producing confrontation through protest and slogans rather than evaluating or analyzing the personal moments of confrontation members of these movements engaged in both discursively and physically (Cathcart, 1978, Scott, 1968, Scott & Smith, 1969). This phenomenological approach, criticized by McGee, created studies in which social practices and bodies were limited to discussions of the effects of the rhetoric of movements rather than as integral parts of the production of this rhetoric and practice of politics. Evaluating social bodies merely in terms of rhetorical effect without subjectivity greatly hinders the ability of rhetoricians to discuss how these social bodies matter and in fact are constitutive of the very movements they participate in. Although McGee levels a solid criticism against framing social movements as phenomena, he also splits the “social” away from social movement in his analysis, with no analysis of subjectivity of “the people” or “the social” beyond ideological subjectification.

The opacity of these bodies or the invisibility of the social of social movements creates a second problem for the rhetorical study of social movements. Previous studies focus on movements created a phenomenal focus on movements, as if they were definable limited objects, discernible in time and space and somewhat limited to the descriptions of the studies. Although the problems with conceptualizing movements as phenomenon were worked through by several scholars, these criticisms positioned movements with such an openness of definition that identifying cohesive social movements became conflated with any establishment of social meaning. With the postmodern turn in rhetorical studies, the fragmentation of social movements
as well as the discourses surrounding those movements became prevalent even in the titles of studies. For contemporary studies this has created a hesitation to reference “social movement” altogether. Studies in rhetoric discuss the rhetorical practices of social movements with almost no mention of the term social movement. Contemporary studies focus predominately on ends rather than the means of a social movement, ignoring the processes of consummatory power involved in shaping the social movement. A focus on ends created a vacuum in the conceptualizations of movements with some studies referencing traditional notions of social movements mixed with postmodern practices, or focusing on the anti-globalization movement, rarely looking to movements that do not directly address issues of globalization. Although necessity of global analysis has been documented, studies that ignore local social movements minimize the global practices of social movements, which might yet be focused on local and regional oppressions rather than an inherent connection to the larger globalization movement.

Interestingly enough, one of the first studies on social movements in rhetorical studies

The beginnings of a methodology for social control studies in public address (Crandell, 1947) frames the study in terms of the social. With the publication of S. Judson Crandell’s article, “The Beginnings of a Methodology for Social Control Studies in Public Address,” in 1947, that called on scholars to pick up the study of social movements and social control, new boundaries of rhetorical studies widened substantially. Crandell argued rhetorical criticism on social movements and social control were essential to being able to look at multiple texts and speakers (1947).

Borrowing from sociologic analysis on the development of social movements, Crandell commented on both the development of the social movement, strategies used by the movement to retain membership, and the ideological construction of collective behavior by the members of
the organization based on Richard La Piere (Crandell, 1947).

Although Crandell does take into consideration the “social” of movement through his discussion of collective behavior and movement membership, the discussion of the social is limited to the terms of hierarchical institutional models that social movements are assumed to mimic. The focus of rhetorical study outlined by Crandell focuses on five areas, the origination of the movement and the historical-social context in which it developed, the ideologic analysis, demographic analysis of the membership of the movement, the leadership of the movement, and the persuasion and propaganda of the movement as analyzed through speeches. Besides offering quite the laundry list of classification to analyze these five areas, Crandell seems more interested in carving an initial space for this type of research in the field of rhetoric, than evaluating the definitional limits he accepts for movements by sharing so much disciplinary ground with sociology.

Soon following this publication, came Leland Griffin’s article, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements,” which also contributed to the expansion of the studies of movements in rhetoric (1952). Griffin articulates a need to ground these studies in the historical movements they come out of. Establishing the study of movements as embedded in larger historical movements, holistic perspectives of the context of the historical time were necessary in successfully evaluating the role and discourse of social movements in changing the social system. Simplifying Crandell’s analysis on the development of movements, Griffin provides three stages of development, inception, rhetorical crisis, and consummation (1952). Of concern for Griffin was the establishment of rhetorical criteria for evaluating movements. Offering two basis of evaluation, first, the effectiveness of the discourse in terms of the movements projected ends, as he notes that persuasion functions as a key component for change, and the second beings
evaluation grounded in the context and time of the movement. To focus the link of rhetoric and social movements to purely persuasion limited the ways of other discursive changes and responses made by and in response to movements that were not rooted in persuasive techniques. Griffin also focuses on historical movements rather than social movements, establishing a broad scope of what “movement” through time might mean and effectively disembodying members of the movement from their location in terms of temporal change. This alteration from social movement to historical movement setup a subtle but impacting focus on the term “movement” rather than the more specific reference to “social movement” (1952).

Another of the early seminal works in rhetorical studies was Edwin Black’s book, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, which dedicated an entire section of his chapter methods of criticism to movement studies (1965). The hold over from Griffin’s use of movements with no reference to “social” might perhaps be seen here, but Black addresses some of the problematics of Griffin’s earlier work, noting that the call to limit theoretical frames for criticism to those of the time being analyzed could very well being over limiting, in that theories written later might may be better suited to frame the movements in study retrospectively (1965). Although offering the study of movements much support, Black’s use of the sole term “movement,” meant the field of rhetorical studies was drawn away from a potential focus on the bodies producing the rhetoric of the movements, to seeing movements as phenomenon capable of rhetorical production.

Five years later, Herbert Simon wrote, “Requirements, Problems, Strategies: A Rhetorical Criticism” (1970). This work distinguishes social movements from institution, arguing three rhetorical requirements of social movements: the first, the movement’s ability to attract, maintain, and mold workers or members into an efficient organization; the second, the
movement’s ability to secure their product, ideology, but larger structures outside of the movement, and third, the movement’s ability to react to resistance from the general structure (1970). Although this offered scholars of rhetoric a streamlined frame for analyzing movements, this study still focused on the role of the leaders in providing cohesion for movement membership relying on hierarchical models of movement. Simons also assumes social movements respond or resist institutional systems, focusing on garnering a change within the system being addressed. Such an assumption of the role of social movements in creating social change, limits social movements purely to those working to change the established system without evaluating those social movements that either work to support established systems or those unconcerned with institutional systems, such as local community building movements that do not limit their engagement to dialogue with the established ruling or regulating systems.

These four studies established in rhetoric some general ground for the rhetoric of social movements to begin. A shared interest in exploring social movements with sociologists meant that developmental models outlined by these scholars matched up to sociological structure theories and interest in institutional response. The problem with models of social movements grounded in sociology was a limiting formulaic approach to the development of movements, which simply did not allow for movements that might not follow these formulaic descriptions, nor produced rhetoric the same ways as these movements (Black, 1965, Griffin, 1952, & Simons, 1970). Developmental models were constantly in flux attempting to incorporate new theories in addition to new structures in order to become more encompassing of movements, leading to theory and methods grounded in particularities that were assumed generalizable.

The detachment of “social” from “movement” with some of these studies could
perhaps be linked to the sociological roots of rhetoric’s interest in social movements. It has also been discussed as problematic to the evaluation of rhetoric in the social movements. Sociology often frames the social in terms of specific demographics and their relation to structures rather than community or relational impacts of the social on the development of the movement frequently speaking in terms of collective action or behavior by these demographics. These studies paved the way for continued discourse on the development of social movements, emphasizing the internal strategies movements use to maintain membership, as well as, focus on collective response by movements to single issues of ideologies and institutions.

The proliferation of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s provided many sites for rhetorical analysis for scholars at the time. Simon’s formulaic and generalizable approach to studying movements was balanced by several case studies of movements that evaluated particular rhetorical techniques rather than the general production of rhetoric coming from the social movement as a whole or the leaders of social movements.

One such study, Robert Scott’s 1968 article, “Justifying Violence: The Rhetoric of Militant Black Power,” shaped confrontation rhetoric as a strategy of social movements in directly confronting the establishment and its downfalls. His article with Donald Smith the following year addressed many of the theoretical underpinnings of confrontation rhetoric (1969). Largely based on post-colonial literature, Scott develops the rhetoric of confrontation as a rhetoric of those in opposition to the institution, or better yet as in the words of Frantz Fanon, “those that are considered less than men” (1969). The “social” of these movements consist of those most disenfranchised, often not considered or recognized as human at all. Confrontation rhetoric, as a strategy, roots itself in a right to kill or be killed as a need for development of a response by those who typically cannot respond. The strategy is totalizing but successful because
those using it are “dead already, can be reborn, have the stomach to fight, are united and understand” (Scott, 1969). This strategy of confrontation becomes consummatory for members who are able to unite through confronting the establishment (1969). Although this was one of the first studies on the rhetoric of social movements to explicitly analyze the position of the members of the social movements, the study falls short of analysis as to how these positions and relations between members alters the conception of the social make-up of movements.

In “Confrontation at Columbia: A Case Study in Coercive Rhetoric, “ James Andrews continues to evaluate the role of confrontation as a form of coercive protest to a disinterested establishment (1969). Students for a Democratic Society used a coercive form of protest and sit in at the University to work against a combination of issues the university refused to address. Andrews highlights the importance of the means of any social movement over that of a projected end. This change in focus allows for a varied form of analysis on protest and the rhetorical implications of coercion and confrontation, but unfortunately, Andrews gives almost no analysis on the social movement members that constitute a movement focused on a “means without end.” While other studies on the rhetoric of confrontation were limited to a confrontation of an establishment by a social movement constituted of members unified by shared identity and ideology, this study seems to glide over the possible importance of the SDS membership not being unified through identity politics alone. Surely Andrew’s analysis of coercive rhetoric as used by the social movement would have benefitted from further discussion of the location and position of their members. Although Scott’s analysis included a great deal on the member positioning within the movement, Andrew’s article totalizes this membership and member’s position within society and the social movement to one of antagonism. Although, some social movements do take confrontational and antagonistic positions to show alterity to oppressive
systems, it seems that these positions are not mutually exclusive to other discursive practices or rhetorical techniques that might be used by the movement.

Studies by both Scott and Andrews seem to refocus emphasis on the rhetoric of these social movements rather than an evaluation of the relation of the social movement to its rhetoric or how social movements generate rhetoric and discourse. Perhaps this is most noticeable in the titles of their articles, none of which contain “social movement” but rather emphasize confrontation and coercion, even though their studies both discuss particular social movements and position themselves in the field of rhetorical studies in the study of social movements.

Although these studies focused on coercion and confrontation as a rhetorical style in opposition to persuasion, other studies such as Robert Cathcart’s 1978, “Movements: Confrontation as Rhetorical Form,” compares confrontation to managerial forms of rhetoric, continuing a focus on the rhetorical techniques produced by movements. This strategic form of rhetoric used by movements, Cathcart argued as unique to social movements in that confrontation provided a means for collective behavior that addressed the establishment directly in order to avoid being co-option into the establishment. Co-joining theoretical frames from previous studies on development of social movements with ideologic criticism and dramatism, Cathcart (1983) grounds much of his analysis in social movements unified in advance through identity politics or shared ideologic frames.

Although confrontation as a form of protest within movements may be productive for establishing the identities of those in certain movements, these studies were largely limited to movements based on identity cohesion in response to the establishment. The problematics of analyzing social movements through only identity politics was evaluated above. Studies on confrontation rhetoric in social movements thus run one of two risks, either from the theoretical
boundaries established in the name of an evaluation of only identity, the only rhetoric evaluated for study is evaluated to justify consummatory rhetoric as identification, the use of confrontation without having a strong consummatory role tends towards a “last ditch effort” of words cast off in their mereness to be seek recognition, response, and change from an established institution. Although this does provide for some facets of the role of rhetoric in social movements and seems to begin an analysis on the constitutive role rhetoric of a social movement plays on members, the overt focus on identity with little discussion of power restrains scholars to limited studies of identity recognition.

Scott’s 1968 article on confrontation rhetoric and the black liberation movement, as well as his 1969 article, noted the consummatory role of confrontational rhetoric for members of a movement. Evaluating other consummatory factors of social movements, Richard Gregg (1971) developed the ego-function of the rhetoric of protest. For Gregg, protest rhetoric functions not explicitly as messages aimed at an institution with an expectation of change, but that ego-function of protest rhetoric provide a “constituting of self-hood through expression; that is with establishing, defining, and affirming one’s self-hood as one engages in a rhetorical act” (Gregg, 1971, p. 74). Gregg draws on examples of protest from the Black Power Movement, the Women’s Liberation Movement, and the student movements of the 1960s, where those oppressed groups initiated self-identification through the rhetoric of protest as oppositional to the oppressor and self-sustaining for members of the group. Identification through confrontation protest became an essential component of actualizing self-hood for activists and protestors (Gregg, 1971).

Although important in the creation of the self, these theoretical models of social movements were based on developmental models of the ego. This development arguably went
through three stages: a selfhood established through statement, denigration of the enemy, and recognition of victimage by the malicious qualities of the enemy (1971). This positioning of consummatory identity in terms of victimage or an internalized victimization seems limited in its analysis. This kind of antagonism in identity construction not only falls under Judith Butler’s criticism on pre-establishing who participates in coalition building, but also bell hooks criticism of the limits of political and social identities formed in terms of victimization.

Gregg’s analysis of the ego-function of protest rhetoric extended in Randall Lake’s 1983 article, “Enacting Red Power: The Consummatory Function of Native American Protest Rhetoric.” In this article, Lake is able to establish that Native American protest rhetoric during the American Indian Movement of the 1970s helped to create a pan-Indian identity, around which indigenous people in the United States could reestablish their own culture, spirituality, language, and political practices despite their continued subjugation. This rhetoric, unlike many of the previous studies did not use confrontational styles of protest but instead used protest as an inward focused rhetoric of community construction.

Gregg’s arguments on the ego-function of protest rhetoric was also evaluated in Karen Foss and Kathy Domenici’s 2001 paper, “Haunting Argentina: Synecdoche in Protests of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo.” In the article, Foss and Domenici highlight the role of protest in creating a strong political maternal identity for those women participating in the Plaza de Mayo marches and protests. The consummatory function of this protest not only allowed for self-identification with a political maternity that had previously not activated on such a collective level by women in Argentina, but also the constitution of mothers as political, identifiable by the public and establishment against which they were protesting (Foss, Domenici, 2001).

Although both Lake (1983) and Foss and Domenici’s (2001) articles account for the role
of protest rhetoric in shaping political identity for participants, they maintain a focus on the rhetorical perspective of protest rhetoric alone without evaluating the full rhetorical potential of subjectivity of the members of these social movements. Both articles reliance on Gregg’s formulation of the the ego-function of protest rhetoric harkens the criticism of focusing social movements on victimization with no discussion of the subjectivity created by such consummatory rhetoric.

Fragmentation of contemporary social and political life has been frequently commented on. In the field of rhetorical studies and specifically with the study of social movements, this practice can be noticed in the remnants of social movement scholarship still present in contemporary work, but usually without direct reference in titles or keywords. Due in part, perhaps, to the displacement of “social” from movement, the varied positionings in the field as to how to evaluate movements and what to even consider social movement, as well as discussions over the rhetoric of movements, created multiple places in the field to discuss the notions of social movements without an expressed fidelity to previous studies. The framing of social movements in these contemporary studies seems often to ignore the movement of the social(s) they discuss.

In his 2008 article, “Passing, Protesting, and the Art of Resistance: Infiltrating the Ritual Space of Blood Donation,” Jeff Bennett evaluated the practices of gay men during screenings for blood donation. The ongoing restrictions of “high-risk” practices target these men as possibly “contaminating” the blood donation supply. Although most of the risks of contamination remain low, through multiple tests and checks the donated blood must pass through, the denial of these men their civic participation in blood donation becomes a site for political and civic resistance. Although not positioned to deal predominately with the issue of social movements, Bennett
provides excellent analysis for the issues of protest, resistance, and social movements in contemporary postmodernity.

More often than not, reproach to the state is dispersed through everyday transgressions that alter the consciousness of the people participating in the polis. Collective action is possible only after such transformations have manifested in the minds of social actors. The gaps between and among diverse actions are necessary for change. Social movements are like muscles-- if you work the same angle consistently, they tend to plateau. Movements, like muscles, need the negative, the downtime, and an assortment of practices to grow and achieve strength. (Bennett, 2008, p. 39)

Although reminiscent of McGee-istic determinations of “movements” as equated to change in human consciousness, Bennett does not remove the bodies at work in this change to consciousness, instead he acknowledges the need for social movements that have variable practices, and one could argue variable bodies of resistance as well. Unfortunately, this study does not address the rhetorical functions of these bodies in relation to one another and how these social relations allow for the growth of a social movement. In fact, Bennett brings in this analysis on social movements with the assumption that the blood donation protest and resistance he discusses in his study might well be a social movement, and it may well be, but Bennett does not establish a frame for this social movement nor discuss the role of this protest and resistance in shaping or being shaped by the social movement.

Arguing that collective action only follows transformation in the minds of social actors, the co-joining of these concepts seems obvious in Bennett’s argument. Unlike, McGee however, Bennett realizes the importance of the negative, gaps, and variations in practices in growing social movements, which he does not indicate as linearly developing, but instead as perhaps slowing and reemerging as necessary. Collective action here does not remain contingent upon shifts in ideology among a collectivity, but instead looks to practices that would form a collective action already in the making (Bennett, 2008). As noted above, Bennett does not develop a frame
for social movements explicitly in this text, but rather exemplifies some of the inroads the study of social movements in rhetoric has contributed to the field, but also the great amount of discrepancy in the field as to the use of the term social movement, protest, and the discussion of the members of a social movement.

Another study engaging the questions of postmodernity and politics is Kristy Best’s 2005 work, “Rethinking the Globalization Movement: Toward a Cultural Theory of Contemporary Democracy and Communication. Although her work deals with new social movements, Best is interested in the position of subjects in regards to liberalism and the value of human rights in democratic practice. Calling for an expansion of democratic spaces beyond the polis, Best argues that democratic activism and participation should be expanded to electronic spaces, where institutions encouraging democratic practice could better reach the citizens in a globalized world (2005). Noting the impact electronic democratic participation has had on anti-globalization activism, Best sees the possibility of opening politics to various subjects in spite of the fragmentation of the polis (Best, 2005).

Best’s (2005) study, although mentioning the term “movement” in the title, disengages “social” from movement limiting out the social dynamic of her discussion. Best does evaluate the role of citizens in democratic practices but fails to discuss the membership or constituents of the anti-globalization movement and how these social bodies function rhetorically in the fragmentation of polis and find new contemporary political spaces. Her discussion of subjects and rhetoric of these movements is limited to citizens using electronic media to create new spheres of democracy. Although this provides possible new locations for discourse in politics, Best’s analysis is limited to citizens and their participation in the polis. Limiting out the role of non-citizens, some of whom are highly active members of the anti-globalization movement.
(indigenous peoples who are politically unrecognized by governing bodies or refugees for instance), Best’s analysis does contribute to the role of social movements in post-modernity, but by using modern frames that do not account for the power of political subjects and the possibilities of relations and rhetoric created by these subjects participation in social movements. Her analysis seems to limit from the outset the importance of “social” to social movements and in doing so, presupposes the membership of a movement and the implications of the practices of such members. The narrow conceptualization this study offers of possibility for social movements and political subjects working against globalization is perhaps one of the possible downfalls of a coalition (or in this case, movement) theorist presupposing the unified make-up of a members as previously warned against by Judith Butler.

Sticking with the theme of globalization and new social movements, Richard Day (2004) evaluated the role of direct action and affinity in the newest social movements in his article, “From Hegemony to Affinity: The Political Logic of the Newest Social Movements.” New social movements, or NSM, differ from old movements “in addressing a wide range of antagonisms that cannot be reduced to class struggle, such as those generated by racism, patriarchy, the domination of nature, heterosexism, colonialism” (Day, 2004, p. 722). NSMs still function in protest and response to institutions, but unlike old movements do not attempt revolutionary change of the entire system, rather seek axes of change through bureaucratic and political means embracing hegemonic systems of governance (Day, 2004). Day notes the transcendence of many of these NSMs to transnational movements, where international boundaries do not function as limits of participation, but enliven it. Day argues that, “Given their tendency to shun parties, leaders, and permanent foci of organization, all of the groups and communities involved in the anti-globalization movement could perhaps be productively analyzed as a chain of equivalences
united around the empty signifier anti-globalization” (Day, 2004, p. 729). These movements are often filled with activists, “who have rejected a politics which appeals to governments to modify their behaviours, in favour of physical intervention against state power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative” (Day, 2004, p. 730). These social movements practice a politics of the act, “which does not mean simply ‘doing as you please,’ just as direct action does not mean simply ‘blowing things up.’ All actions are carried out in complex contexts involving other groups and communities, each of which must be engaged according to its positioning relative to state, corporate, and other forms of domination and exploitation” (Day, 2004, p. 734).

Day crafts excellent analysis of the perhaps “uncommon sense” one should look at NSMs and affinity based tactics through, but does little to address the rhetorical implications of these movements. Opening the possibilities of subject positions in and outside of social movements and their relations to one another through chains of equivalences seems to offer new relations and sites in which to evaluate rhetoric, but Day presents almost no discussion of the subjects that locatable in such positions or the possibilities of changing subjectivity between relations. Discourses produced and regulative of these relations and new positions would expand present rhetorical studies with new conceptions of the political subject and the positioning of this subject through relations but would also allow for a rhetorical analysis of these social movement’s practices and acts. This study falls short of looking at how discourse and rhetoric work to form these chains of equivalences or the social cohesion through relations that allows for the fragmented and yet highly effective approaches of contemporary social movements. Analyzing the discourses produced by these varied relational positions could also clarify the role of consummatory power in aiding the networks and chains of equivalences contemporary social movements work through.
A final article, by Darrell Enck-Wanzer (2006), “Trashing the System: Social Movement, Intersectional Rhetoric, and Collective Agency in the Young Lord’s Organization’s Garbage Offensive,” addresses some of the rhetorical limits of not addressing bodies within a social movement. This particular social movement and even more particular offensive by the social movement, created a response to the racism of New York City officials against the Puerto Rican community. Mobilizing at various intersections throughout Manhattan, the YLO moved and set fire to large piles of trash and debris from their neighborhoods in order to make the conditions in which they live the most visible to those who would normally have chosen to ignore it. The use of not only protest and words, but combined with the images of the garbage in intersections, and the bodies of the participants in the movement formed an intersectional rhetoric providing agency and the constitution of a political identity for community members who resisted.

Although the majority of Enck-Wanzer’s analysis lies in establishing an anti-colonial agency through an analysis of intersectional rhetoric, very little framing of anti-colonial collective agency is outlined in his study (Enck-Wanzer, 2006). This limited look at agency is explored without a frame for the subjectivity of these agents or the theory guiding the discussion on bodies in collective action. Some references to constitutive rhetoric, as well as confrontational rhetoric, lend to a discussion of formation of political identity, but these encounter some of the same criticisms discussed above, the designation of collective agency without an analysis of subjectivity seems to deplete the very conceptual focus Enck-Wanzer tried to elucidate.

By focusing on intersectional rhetorics to prove the agency through observations of a social movement’s rhetorical practices, Enck-Wanzer avoids discourses or rhetoric that comes from the new political subject position of members and the possibilities of interaction that these members also generate. Although Enck-Wanzer does evaluate the varied privilege of those
students and communities members both involved in the social movement, little evaluation of the role of their relation to one another in mutually constructing agency and or new subjectivities through rhetorical practice was elaborated on. In fact, almost no discussion of the changes or status of the political agency of the students involved with the YLO was discussed at all; it is unclear as to whether or not the students involved with the movement also developed an anti-colonial agency or whether or their political involvement in the social movement created alternate forms of agency. An evaluation of the relations of members of the social movements and their role in the production of discourses based on subjectivity would add greatly to this analysis of agency. Analysis of subjectivity and the process of consummatory power would be necessary to address these problems.

Enck-Wanzer does a remarkable job of not oversimplifying the complexity of people(s), texts, spaces, and political actions during this offensive of the YLO, but perhaps presents a performative contradiction in his emphasis on the written word, which he argues to frequently be fetishized in analysis. Although he argues for the inclusion of multiple texts in analysis (images, bodies, and words), his own text contains only the written word and seems to privilege this epistemic frame, watering down his own arguments on the importance of non-western approaches to method and writing to establish anti-colonial agency.

This study worked to evaluate the rhetoric of social movements as a form of rhetoric that enables social relations for political action by evaluating the testimonies and witnessing of the International Solidarity Movement in Palestine. Because of the emphasis on social relations and the joint work of Palestinians and internationals in the social movement, these testimonies provide textual site for the evaluation of the rhetoric of the social movement, the discourses generated by members of the social movement, as well as, the subjectivity of members of the
movement and the effect of this subjectivity in creating relations and rhetoric that enable political change. This study investigated several questions: How do subject positions of participants in social movements change the production of rhetoric? To what extent does the intersubjectivity of members change relations of power and discourse? How can we better understand the complex negotiations of class, race, nationality, and gender in forming a social movement?
CHAPTER 3
TESTIMONIES

Given the inadequacies of both the discipline of rhetorical studies at large, and the American political system in particular to hear the Palestinian witness. The following testimony from International Solidarity Movement (ISM) members is offered. These are the testimonies of the volunteers and Palestinians that work with the ISM in the West Bank and Gaza, Palestine occupied by the Israeli Army. Testimonies range in date from 2002-2009. All of these accounts were found on the ISM website (www.palsolidarity.org) and some were replicated in the book, *Live from Palestine: International and Palestinian Direct Action Against the Israeli Occupation*.

Islah Jad

June 24, 2002 Ramallah

Before the return of the army’s visible presence, though, Palestinian lives were not exactly proceeding as normal. For example, I used to leave my house to go to work, to my dear Birzeit University, with my three children and husband. Now, you leave, you intend to arrive somewhere, but you never reach your destination since the army always prevents you from going to study, or to work, or to shop, or to pay condolences, or to visit a friend. Palestinians end up doing everything to prepare for a normal working day-- but we never get to work. We return home exhausted, tired of witnessing the constant humiliation, seeing our lovely students waiting in long lines under the searing sun, sometimes beaten, arrested, or shot at, and always cursed at or insulted. Israeli soldiers the same age as our students have the power to bring the entire academic community of 5,000 people to its knees. (Jad, 2003, 41)
I had spent the day with the villagers of Deir Istiya, where we planted trees on land coveted by
the settlement of Yakir. I was on my way home. Two soldiers reconized me and one asked in
Hebrew, “Neta, how are you?” A cell phone rang and a soldier answered it. “Guess who I’m
talking to?” he asked the caller. “Neta, from Peace Now.” To them I was a novelty. Peace Now
was as far Left as they could fathom. We talked. One soldier told me, “When I see a terrorist
laying on the ground in his own blood it gives me an appetite.” He hesitated before continuing.
He wanted to reveal to me something he was proud of. “There was a time when someone from
Hares village picked up a huge boulder to throw at me. Do you know what I did?” he asked. I
already knew. “You killed him.” “That’s right,” he replied with a self-satisfied smile. I knew the
two children and young father who were murdered in Hares recently by Israeli soldiers. So I
asked him when it happened, on what day? He told me. The soldier in front of me was the
murderer of my friend Muhammad Daoud. “Let me tell you about who you killed,” I said. “I
don’t care.” “I know you don’t. But I want you to know about to boy you killed. His name was
Muhammad Daoud. He was 15 years old. He was retarded. And I loved him very much.” I told
him everything I could think of about Muhammad and his family. “I know where he was
standing,” I said. “I saw his blood on the ground. There is no way he could have thrown a stone
at you from so far away, let alone a boulder.” “You weren’t there,” he shouted. “Okay. You were
there. So you tell me. How far do you think he could have thrown that “boulder”? Three meters?
Ten meters? Let’s just imagine that it is humanly possible to throw it 100 meters-- you were 300
meters away.” “You weren’t there.” “That’s right, I wasn’t there. You were there. So you tell me
how far away you were when you murdered him.” He tried to stop me, but I wouldn’t stop. And
the fact that he didn’t want to hear it was the only indication that maybe, something deep inside this boy, there was a piece of humanity still intact. After we parted, I wept.” (Golan, 2003, 94-95).

Kathy Kelly
April 12, 2002 outside Jenin in Taybeh

The dozen or so internationals who had been around Taybeh for several days assured us that it was impossible to enter the city of Jenin, much less get into Jenin refugee camp. Internationals told us of journalists who had been roughly turned back at the checkpoint or arrested. One reporter’s passport had been ripped up. We decided to sit tight and take testimonies from the refugees. Kamal Abu Mohammed gave us one such testimonial. On Saturday, April 6, at 5:30 am, the Israeli army broke his windows and entered his house. “I am peaceful,” he said. “There are 13 people in my family.” The soldiers phoned the helicopters, and the helicopters attacked his house from all four sides. Soldiers started shooting throughout the house; a fire started in the second floor. After ten minutes soldiers allowed Kamal to take his children out of the house. But when he tried to step through the doorway, holding his two children, the soldiers started shooting again. “They ordered me to put my children on the ground. Next they made me take off my clothes. They handcuffed and blindfolded me.” The soldiers tied Kamal to his 13-year-old son. They used the two Palestinians as human shields in order to enter further into Jenin refugee camp, stepping on bodies and corpses along the way. After what seemed like two hours, Kamal, his son, and the soldiers went into a three-story house. Thirteen people were fathered in a dark room, among them Kamal’s five brothers and three cousins. The soldiers told Kamal to sit down; he was still tied to his son. Outside, a resister shot at an Israeli soldier. In Hebrew, one soldier
told another, “Kill one every five minutes and throw them outside in front of the fighters. Let’s start with the boy.” The soldiers took Kamal’s boy outside. Kamal heard shooting, and feared it was his child. But the soldiers didn’t kill the boy, they just hit him. From a second location later that evening, the soldiers again used Kamal and his son as human shields. The two were positioned at the front of the house, in front of each window to protect the soldiers. They used Kamal’s soldier as a gun rest (Kamal showed us his swollen shoulder.) Kamal and his son stayed like that for an hour and a half. Afterward, they were retied by their hands and legs. The soldiers ordered them to sleep on broken glass. The son was weeping because his handcuffs were so tight. Kamal asked the soldiers to kill him son rather than keep him in that situation. In the morning, all the people in the house were taken away-- bound, handcuffed, in their underwear, and blindfolded. They were arranged like rows of schoolchildren, each with a soldier at his side. Soldiers used the rows of Palestinians as human shields. The Palestinians were led far away from Jenin. They didn’t know exactly where they ended up, because their eyes were covered. They slept on the ground until 11 that night, when soldiers put them in armored personnel carriers (APCs). Kamal asked where his son was, but on one gave him an answer. “We spent four days naked, without food and water, in cold weather,” Kamal told us. Soldiers wouldn’t unbind them to relieve themselves, so they were forced to foul their bodies with their own urine and defecation... (Kelly, 2003, 137-138).

Rachel Corrie

February 28, 2003 Rafah

After I wrote to you, I went incommunicado from the affinity group for about 10 hours, which I spent with a family on the front line in Hi Salam who fixed me dinner. The two front rooms of
their house are unusable because gunshots have been fired through the walls, the whole family-- three kids and two parents-- sleep in the parent’s bedroom. I slept on the floor next to the youngest daughter, Iman, and we all shared blankets. I helped the son with his English homework a little. Friday is the holiday, and when I woke up, they were watching Gummy Bears on cable TV dubbed into Arabic. So I ate breakfast with them and sat there for a while and just enjoyed being in this big puddle of blankets with this family watching what for me seemed like Saturday morning cartoons. Then I walked to B’razil, which is where Nidal and Mansur and Grandmother and Rafat and all the rest of the big family that has really wholeheartedly adopted me live. (The other day, by the way, Grandmother gave me a pantomimed lecture in Arabic that involved a lot of blowing and pointing to her black shawl. I got Nidal to tell her that my mother would appreciate know that someone here was giving me a lecture about smoking turning my lungs black.) Nidal’s English gets better every day. He’s the one who calls me “My sister.” He started teaching Grandmother how to say, “Hello. How are you?” in English. You can always hear the tanks and bulldozers passing by but all of these people are genuinely cheerful with each other and with me. When I am with Palestinian friends, I tend to be somewhat less horrified than when I am trying to act in a role of human rights observer, documenter, or direct action resister. They are a good example of how to be in it for the long haul. I know the the situation gets on them-- and may ultimately get them-- on all kinds of levels, but I am nevertheless amazed at their strength in being able to defend such a large degree of their humanity-- their laughter, generosity, family time-- against the incredible horror occurring in their lives and against the constant presence of death. I am discovering a basic ability for humans to remain human in the direst of circumstances-- I think the word is dignity. I wish you could meet these people. Maybe, hopefully, someday you will. My love to everyone. -- Rachel (Corrie, 2003, 174-175).
Tom Dale

March 17, 2003 Rafah

The closest eye witness account on the murder of Rachel Corrie. Many of you will of heard varying accounts of the death of Rachel Corrie, maybe others will have heard nothing of it. Regardless, I was 10 metres away when it happened 2 days ago, and this is the way it went.

We’d been monitoring and occasionally obstructing the 2 bulldozers for about 2 hours when 1 of them turned toward a house we knew to be threatened with demolition. Rachel knelt down in its way. She was 10-20 metres in front of the bulldozer, clearly visible, the only object for many metres, directly in it’s view. They were in Radio contact with a tank that had a profile view of the situation. There is no way she could not have been seen by them in their elevated cabin. They knew where she was, there is no doubt. The bulldozer drove toward Rachel slowly, gathering earth in its scoop as it went. She knelt there, she did not move. The bulldozer reached her and she began to stand up, climbing onto the mound of earth. She appeared to be looking into the cockpit. The bulldozer continued to push Rachel, so she slipped down the mound of earth, turning as she went. Her faced showed she was panicking and it was clear she was in danger of being overwhelmed. All the activists were screaming at the bulldozer to stop and gesturing to the crew about Rachel’s presence. We were in clear view as Rachel had been, they continued. They pushed Rachel, first beneath the scoop, then beneath the blade, then continued till her body was beneath the cockpit. They waited over her for a few seconds, before reversing. They reversed with the blade pressed down, so it scraped over her body a second time. Every second I believed they would stop but they never did. I ran for an ambulance, she was gasping and her face was covered in blood from a gash cutting her face from lip to cheek. She was showing signs of brain hemorrhaging. She died in the ambulance a few minutes later of massive internal injuries. She
was a brilliant, bright and amazing person, immensely brave and committed. She is gone and I cannot believe it. The group here in Rafah has decided that we will stay here and continue to oppose human rights abuses as best we can. I want to add that more than 10 Palestinians have died in the Gaza strip since Rachel... (ISM a, 2003).

Vladislav

August 10, 2003 Tulkarm

Ethnic Cleansing is the name of Israel’s Policies

Just thought I’d drop a line to say I’m still well and alive. I am living in the occupied territories of Palestine, in the West Bank town of Tulkarem. I have been working with the International Solidarity Movement here, a Palestinian-led group of internationals from around the world who help the Palestinian people resist the occupation through non-violent means. The group is truly international with all sorts of countries represented. The group is about 30% made of folks of Jewish decent, who like me, feel that this is a really outrageous injustice that is being done supposedly in our names. We help organize demonstrations, and provide protection for the Palestinian people. Whereas the army would normally use live ammunition to stop a demonstration, they would think twice when internationals are present. This all sounds wonderful in theory, but in reality, I’ve been stuck in crowds of rock-throwing kids, wondering if the Israelis would return live fire. Tear gas, sound grenades and rubber bullets have been tossed our way at demonstrations, although thus far no live fire thankfully... The other day I visited a morgue and saw the results of Israeli terrorism. They shot a man in the legs with a half dozen bullets. Then at point blank, about four bullets were pumped into his head (gun directly to the head). The Israelis claimed he had a bomb near him, but if that was the case, why execute
him? War crimes occur here on a daily basis – we have a flat for example right above a red crescent building that has been shelled by Israeli tanks (hospital bombing!) several times. The Israeli soldiers routinely use rubber-coated metal bullets to shoot at Palestinian kids’ eyes. The bullets pierce the eyes and enter the brains, killing the victim. This of course is in response to rocks being thrown at armored jeeps. The reality on the ground is that these people are simply defending their homeland against an invasion. This is the same story as of any indigenous people — they are being driven out, slowly and patiently. This is ethnic cleansing, pure and simple. The Israeli policies are very similar to what occured in Africa during the Apartheid, and there are tons of laws that are purely racist. For example, if an Israeli marries a Palestinian, their children will not be considered Israeli citizens. The other key sticky issue is the security fence, which when completed will leave to the Palestinian people 42% of the West Bank, but in reality when you consider the settlements (230 some of them in the west bank) the Palestinians will be left with about 8% of the west bank. All the water will be owned and controlled by the Israelis, and the fence DOES NOT follow the internationally recognized borders of Israel, but rather cuts miles and miles into the Palestinian land. The Israeli state is a well-funded apartheid state... I’ve seen a lot suffering here – far far far too much. I’ve seen the damage that a bomb from an American-funded F-16 fighter jet does to a building. I’ve seen the conditions within which these people live, the poverty, the destruction, the pain, the suffering. I’ve seen bullet-hole ridden walls in many of the cities here, left over from Israeli jeeps and tanks that ride around the cities and shoot indiscriminantly. I’ve watched a brother of a man killed by the Israelis break down and completely lose it after the death. I’ve negotiated with Israeli soldiers and prevented them from arresting the Palestinians, physically using my own body as a shield to prevent them from getting to Palestinians... Almost every Palestinian male has been through the Israeli jail at least once,
usually for about 6 months administrative detention, and most have no clue whatsoever what
crime they were guilty of (sound familiar? Think Guatanomo Bay for the Afghanistan war
victims)... The Israelis have done everything possible to kill the economy here (80-90% level of
unemployment) through a number of actions (such as simply digging up the main streets of
towns to kill off the shops by cutting the traffic through the area). Travel is impossible – a trip
that used to take 10 minutes, now takes 3 hours to a full day due the roadblocks everywhere
(mounds of dirt across major roads) and checkpoints. The other day coming from Jerusalem, a
trip that normally takes 1.5 hours took 5 as my bus was pulled over by 18 year old boy soldiers
who they decided to harass a bunch of Palestinian men. (ISM b, 2003).

Emma
September 5, 2003 Rafah
Weddings and Martyrs
Friends,
I am sorry my reports have been slow. Sometimes it is so hard to find the words to write about
the things that I see everyday in Rafah. In the last two weeks there have been seven assasinations
in the Gaza Strip. These are done with missles that are fired from F16s. Sometimes as many as
seven missles are fired in one assasination, killing innocent bystanders, and destroying shops.
Last night I stayed at Abu Ahmed’s house. His daughter is getting married today, and the whole
house feels the excitement. His neighbor Abu Fati invited us over for tea, so we went. We sat
with his whole family for about an hour, and I talked with his daughter who is trying to learn
English. While we were there we heard several tanks drive by the border, sometimes shooting.
When we left, we noticed that there was no one out in the street. We heard a tank drive by, and
cautiously walked toward Abu Ahmed’s. After a few steps, the tank opened fire in our direction. We darted back, and waited until it continued on. Back at Abu Ahmed’s I could feel my heart racing. This is what the people of Rafah face everyday when walking in their neighborhoods, to school, or the store. It is so hard for me to imagine, even living here, what it must feel like to own the house that is being shot at every day, or not be able to leave like I can. The tank continued to fire at Abu Ahmed’s house all night, for about five minutes every hour. The sounds of rapid machine gun fire have been incorporated into all of my dreams. Several days ago our group went to the nearby city of Khan Younis to visit the shahiid tent of an eight year old girl who was shot while playing next to her house. A shahiid tent is a tent that is put up for three days after someone is killed by the Israeli military. The family welcomes guests to pay their respects. We went inside, and spoke with the mother and sisters of Aisha (the shahiid). The morning that Aisha was shot, she had been fasting with her mother. She grew hungry, and her mother gave her some money, and told her to go buy crackers and juice, as she was so young, and needs to eat. Aisha went on her bike to the store. On her way back she stopped to play with several children right outside her home. Their house is right next to an Israeli settlement, which is guarded fiercely by towers and tanks. Aisha’s mother told us that the tanks open fire frequently on the children who play in the street. There were no adults in the area, yet on this day they opened fire again, sending live bullets through the young body of Aisha, killing her, and seriously wounding several other children. Could these eight year olds be armed resistance fighters? Aisha was the pride of her family. She got 98% on all her tests in school, and Aisha’s sister says that anyone who knew her would have given their life for her. She died because she lives in an Occupied land, where soldiers are so afraid of children that they stay inside their huge tanks while shooting at anything that moves. I am afraid that if the Israeli soldiers in Rafah never leave their tanks,
their fear will grow until nothing will ever stop them from murdering all innocent children they see. I want these soldiers (who are people caged inside their weapons), and the people of Rafah who caged inside Rafah by the soldiers, all to stop living in fear. The only way to live without fear is to live in justice and peace, without Occupation. All of my love, Emma (ISM c, 2003).

K and M
July 5, 2005 Rafah

Letters from Rafah

Special greetings again from Rafah. There is just no way to describe life here at the southern end of the Gaza Strip. We are the only International people in all of Rafah and the news has traveled fast and everyone knows we are here. This afternoon all of us, along with our two interpreters went over to the Block O neighborhood... I worry about the children who are not allowed to be children. While we were climbing among the ruins of Block O, some of M’s friends from the university walked by and invited us to visit his home. We walked along a street strewn with rubble (I didn’t think anyone could possibly be living on this street) and entered a courtyard. It too was a mass of rubble. I noticed a piece of tile that may well have been someone’s living room or kitchen.) From this courtyard of destruction we entered a small yard that was like another world. Roses and other flowers were blooming in a small garden. Several large pieces of cloth created a shady tent-like structure. Before long, S brought out the usual assortment of lawn chairs and we were joined by his parents, a brother, several young nieces and a number of young boys from the area. We have not gone anywhere in Rafah without attracting a cadre of preadolescent boys. This family lives at the very edge of the pile of rubble that is now Block O. The mother of the family was a very animated woman who spoke her mind. She told us that she
lives in fear of her family’s home being destroyed just as most of the other Block O homes were. The family home is not too far from one of the Israeli “security” towers and we did hear shooting from the tower while we were with the family. This family also asked us questions as United States citizens. They asked us if we thought Muslims were terrorists and what we thought about U.S. efforts to “export” its brand of democracy around the world. They also expressed their dismay that George Bush was elected president. A number of people have asked us about the election. They can’t understand how a democratic nation would choose someone like Bush. The father of this family had the saddest face I have seen, and in Rafah, we have seen many very sad faces. The image that stays with me from our afternoon is Block O is the roses blooming in this most unlikely of places. Maybe peace will come to this troubled land in some unlikely way.

(ISM a, 2005).

July 6, 2005, Bil'in

Transcript of Abdallah’s Interrogation

Abdallah waited until 2pm to be lead into the interrogation, accompanied by an international and an attorney. They were not present during the interview. Captain Rizik did not participate in the interrogation but typed into the computer, whilst the other man present (S) spoke with Abdallah.

S: Are you a man? Why did you bring those two sluts with you? [Referring to the women who were with Abdullah]

A: She is my lawyer. I know that this is a state that works according to law.

S: No. there is no law in Israel.

A: There is.

S: The Mukhabrat [Intelligence/Secret Service] has no law. Your lawyer says the paper we gave you is not official, so why did you come? It is not a problem if you don’t come, we will just write it on the computer and then come and take you from your house. What is your job?
A: I am a teacher.

S: In Bil’in?

A: No, Bir Zeit

S: What are you doing in Bil’in? You are doing something wrong. You don’t get called to the Mukhbrat unless you have done something very wrong. Where were you last week?

A: In jail.

S: Why were you in jail?

A: I was taken from a peaceful demonstration.

S: How long were you there?

A: Five days.

S: And then what happened?

A: The judge said that I was arrested by mistake and that I should be released.

S: All of you are arrested by mistake. You know now there are no demonstrations in Biddu?

A: There are demonstrations there.

S: Do you know what happened in Biddu?

A: Yes. They moved the fence further away.

S: Yes, but what’s the price?

A: Five martyrs.

S: No. Five people killed. The people that used to speak on the microphone and organise the demonstrations, do you know where they are? They are sitting in their homes, they are not demonstrating now. Five people were killed and then they stopped demonstrating.

A: If you take a balloon and you step on it what will happen?

S: It will burst.

A: That’s what you are doing to Bil’in. Bil’in used to be called the village of peace. You are strangling it. We are left with no land. Where is my son going to live? The wall in Bil’in will be moved back, but it will happen by peaceful means. We have decided that we are going to resist peacefully.

S: You throw stones. What about the soldier who lost his eye?
A: At the demonstrations stones are not thrown, but when the army enters the village and starts firing between the houses people throw stones at them.

S: We know everything you do.

A: I know you know everything I do and I have done everything according to the law. I haven’t thrown stones.

S: You do something worse than throwing stones. You tell the people to go out on demonstrations. We have reports about you. We know you make problems. Go home, sit quietly in your house, enjoy your life, don’t make problems. We are watching you very, very closely.” (ISM b, 2005).

Anna Baltzer

May 7, 2007 West Bank

“I pity you for having become murderers”

Five years ago, nine-month-old Mohammed and his grandmother were in their West Bank home when it began to fill with nerve gas from a nearby Israeli Occupation Forces military base. The Army had moved in on a hill near their home in the Skan Abu Absa suburb of Ramallah, and would frequently shoot all over the surrounding area, often retaliating against Palestinian gunfire from a hill away from the suburb. As the gas seeped into his living room, the baby Mohammed began to shake violently before suffering a stroke causing extensive paralysis. His grandmother ran to pick him up and also inhaled the gas, causing an intense burning sensation all over her body. When she realized her grandson had stopped moving, she pleaded with the soldiers outside to open the road out of her town and raced Mohammed to the hospital, where he was diagnosed with severe neurological deterioration resulting in a vegetative state. The Palestinian Ministry of Health and UNRWA conducted extensive tests on Mohammed and his parents to determine with certainty the cause of his condition. After a full genetic investigation, doctors confirmed that Mohammed’s state was neither hereditary nor due to a chromosomal abnormality, but a result of
the poisonous gas. I met Mohammed’s father Sami waiting at a checkpoint near Haris. He’d hesitated to publicize his son’s story for fear of harassment from the Army. He said his family was suffering enough - their personal tragedy only began with the gassing. After Mohammed’s injury, Sami’s father went from being a strong healthy 47-year-old to an emotional and physical wreck, and died one year later from stress and heart problems. Mohammed, now six, continues to suffer from severe neuro-developmental delay, poorly controlled seizure disorder, the loss of sight, and inability to eat normally. He eats via a G-tube (poking directly into his stomach) and is fed a special formula “Pediasure” that is not available in Israel/Palestine, so Sami travels to Jordan every three months to bring the formula and anti-convulsants that Mohammad requires. Each time Sami crosses back to the West Bank, he is forced to pay Israeli customs taxes on the formula, totaling hundreds of dollars a year. This is in addition to countless other expenses: land travel, adult diapers, maintaining his customized bed (to prevent bed sores), medicine, and round-the-clock care. Sami and his wife spend so much money taking care of Mohammed that they lack the remaining funds to take legal action against the Israeli Army for poisoning their son... Moussa will still never walk again, nor will my neighbor and friend Issa, who shot by soldiers outside his home in May 2001 as he ushered children in from the streets during an Army invasion. In spite of his handicap, Issa remains committed to working nonviolently against the Occupation. Last time we spoke, he quoted an Arabic saying: “You can’t clap with one hand.” He said Jews, Palestinians, and the world must work together to end injustice and oppression everywhere. Almost three years ago, Issa wrote an open letter to the two anonymous soldiers who shot and paralyzed him. It was published in Haaretz and elsewhere and I’ve copied it below. It is worth reading:

I remember you. I remember your confused face when you stood above my head and wouldn’t let people come to my aid. I remember how my voice grew weaker, when I said
to you: “Be humane and let my parents help me.” I keep all those pictures in my head. How I lay on the ground, trying to get up but unable. How I fought my shortness of breath, which was caused by the blood that was collecting in my lungs, and the voice that was weakened because my diaphragm was hurt. I won’t hide from you that despite this, I had pity for them. I felt that I was strong, because I had powers I didn’t know about before.

That was exactly three years ago. I rushed out of the house in order to distance the village children from the danger of the teargas. They were used to playing their simple games on the dusty streets of the village while the pregnant women watched over them and chatted. I didn’t believe that your weapons contained live bullets or dum-dum bullets, which are prohibited under international law. I was able to protect the children and get them away from your fire, and I don’t regret that.

I pity you for having become murderers. Since I was a boy, I have hated killing, hated weapons and hated the color red, just as I hate injustice and fight against it. That is how I have understood life since I was a boy, and that, in the same spirit, is what I have taught others. I gave all my strength for the sake of peace and justice and for reducing the suffering that is caused by injustice, whatever its origin. Yes, I pitied you, because you are sick. Sick with hate and loathing, sick with causing injustice, sick with egoism, with the death of the conscience and the allure of power. Recovery and rehabilitation from those illnesses, just as from paralysis, is very long, but possible. I pitied you, I pitied your children and your wives and I ask myself how they can live with you when you are murderers. I pitied you for having shed your humanity and your values and the precepts of your religion and even your military laws, which forbid breaking into homes and beating civilians, because that undermines the soldier’s morale, his strength and his manhood.

I pitied you for saying that you are the victims of the Nazis of yesterday, and I don’t understand how yesterday’s victim can become today’s criminal. That worries me in connection with today’s victim - my people are those victims - and I am afraid that they too will become tomorrow’s criminals. I pity you for having fallen victim to a culture that understands life as though it is based on killing, destruction, sowing fear and terror, and lording it over others. Despite all that, I believe that there is a chance for atonement and forgiveness and a possibility that you will restore to yourselves something of your lost humanity and morality. You can recover from the illnesses of hatred and the lust for revenge, and if we should meet one day, even in my house, you can be certain that you won’t find me holding an explosive belt or concealing a knife in my pocket or in the wheels of my chair. But you will find someone who will help you get back what you lost. You will find a soft and delicate infant here, whose age is the same as the second in which you pulled the trigger and who will never see his father standing on his feet but who is full of pride and power, even if he has to push his father’s chair, having no other choice. Even though I have reasons to hate you, I don’t feel that way and I have no regrets.
Issa is Arabic for Jesus, who is also revered as a prophet in the Muslim faith. Some would say it’s a suitable name for a man who believes in responding to injustice with passionate nonviolence and forgiveness. Mohammed and Moussa (which means Moses, also a prophet in Islam) never wrote a letter like Issa’s, but they and their families welcomed me, a Jewish American, into their homes with gentle kindness and openness. Struggling for peace and survival in spite of great personal tragedies, the three prophets’ namesakes and their families, like so many Palestinians paralyzed physically (as well as emotionally, spiritually, and economically) by the Occupation, are some of the true - albeit often forgotten - heroes of Palestine. (ISM a, 2007).

May 23, 2007 Dr. Mona El-Farra Gaza

Gaza today -lawless embargo, sanctions and occupation

Dreadful Consequences

A few days ago, a ceasefire has been signed again between the two Palestinian fighting parties, Fatah and Hamas. And children are back at school. My daughter started her end of the year exams early. All the schools had to squeeze the schedule of the examination, so they end as soon as possible before new violence erupts. I believe it is a fragile ceasefire. The armed men are still in the streets of Gaza, some of them occupy the roofs of some of the multi-story buildings. Israel has intensified its air strike attacks against Gaza, north east and some areas in the south. Many people have been killed. Eight members of one family were killed, when airoplanes launched an air strike against the home of a Hamas leaders in Gaza. He wasn’t at home, he escaped the attack. Hospitals, including Al Awda, are overwhelmed with increasing number of casualties, with inadequate medical supplies and medications. We all fear a large Israeli attack against Gaza. From my apartment by the seaside, I can clearly hear and see the Israeli gunboats
patrolling the sea of Gaza, and the Palestinian Authority armed men in their new base. It used to be a family resort. It is not any more, it is military place for security guards of the president. The smell of the death is strong, stronger than watching the lovely sea, or listening to the singing birds if there are any. Shooting sounds is prevalent, poverty too, and lawlessness. My friend Mansour, whom I mentioned in one of my previous entries, and who needs urgent cytotoxic treatment, in Israel or abroad, after 45 of long waiting days, he got the referral to one of the hospitals inside Israel. But the Gaza borders are closed both north and south, and he has to wait again for its unpredictable opening. His story is the same daily story of many patients in Gaza, who are dying slowly because of the closure... (ISM b, 2007).

Yifat Appelbaum
August 25, 2007 West Bank
Colored People to the Back of the Bus
This summer, the International Solidarity Movement, Art Under Apartheid, Tel Rumeida Project and Glasgow Palestine Human Rights teamed up to take over 100 Palestinian children from Hebron to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the beach in Jaffa. This was no easy task. West Bank Palestinian residents over the age of 16 are not allowed into Israel but those under 16 are allowed. In fact, there is no legal way to prevent them from entering because they do not have ID cards yet. But most of these kids will never get to visit Jerusalem or go to the sea because their parents are not allowed in to take them. Although we knew it was permitted to take these kids across the checkpoints (we checked with the the Association for Civil Rights in Israel) into Israel, we decided to check in with the District Coordination Office (DCO) of the Israeli military just to let them know we would be doing this and that we didn’t want any problems.
They told us we needed a permit (this is not true). We asked for a permit and were refused. So of course we decided to do it anyway...We knew that if soldiers at any of the checkpoints knew there were West Bank Palestinian kids on the bus, they would stop us, cause a problem, and more than likely tell us we had to go back, even though it is allowed for the kids to go in. We didn’t want a repeat of the last field trip nightmare so we choose to use Israeli checkpoint racism to our advantage. It has been my experience that if soldiers at a checkpoint see white or Jewish-looking people in the front seat of a car, they will not stop the car and check the passenger’s IDs to verify that they have the correct ID to enter Israel. This has happened to me countless times. If anyone who looks Palestinian is sitting in the front seat, they are automatically stopped, even if they are Jewish but have dark skin. Settler cars zoom through those checkpoints with no delays. Palestinians are always stopped and searched. Now, I will prove to you how the apartheid wall is completely useless for keeping suicide bombers out of Israel. We stuck four white people in the front seat of that bus, and we drove through the checkpoint without so much as a second glance from the soldiers. All the kids cheered. Now see how easy it is to sneak Palestinians (legally or illegally) into Israel? The inherent racist legal system allows it. As long as you are white, you can go though many checkpoints in a car unhindered and unquestioned. Because it’s so easy, if a Palestinian really wants to enter Israel badly enough, he or she will find a way. The kids were elated to go to the mosque and to play in the water. Most of them had never seen the sea before. I didn’t see any of them playing with Israeli kids at the beach but I think it was good for them to at least be around Israelis kids who weren’t hostile or violent towards them. The Palestinian adults who ran the Tel Rumeida summer camp this summer made a point to explain to the kids the difference between Israelis living in Hebron and Israelis living in Tel Aviv. Fortunately we have
a lot of Israeli activists coming to volunteer in Tel Rumeida so the kids are already learning the difference. (ISM c, 2007).

Sharon Lock

December 28, 2008 Jabaliya

Journal: One family’s fear and heartbreak in Gaza

In the basement, the family begins the night at their allotted sleeping spaces, but as the hours pass, draw closer together until women and children are huddled together in a pile of blankets. The women have slept little, and look exhausted. There are 5 or 6 children under the age of 5, tousled hair and solemn faces. The oldest boy’s face is pinched and distorted with anxiety. Explosions are sporadic; sometimes far off, sometimes close. The drone of Israeli aircraft is constant. Fragments of news come by the phone. Attack beside Al Shifa hospital; windows break onto patients. Security and Protection Forces attacked. Al Aqsa TV channel attacked. Plastic factory attacked. Al Asaraya building. The number of dead increases in small leaps. Multiple reports that Israel is phoning people at home, telling them “any house with weapons in it is a target and should be evacuated.” And the usual calls about “return Gilad Shalit and everything will be just fine”; as if any of these civilians know the first thing about his detention. If they answer “we don’t have any weapons in our house and we don’t have Gilad Shalit either,” will Israel just bomb the next door neighbours instead? At 4.30am - deafening bang, flare of fire, some of the windows break, the children shriek and each mother grabs her child. One of the young women was on the basement stairs, and she is carried in, sallow with shock and fear, to be cradled by one of the older women. I give her honey sweets, since the more desirable sugary tea appears beyond anyone’s capacity to produce right now, perhaps there is nothing even to heat
water with. We cautiously venture up the stairs; an unfeasibly large crater has appeared beside us, courtesy of an F16. Olive trees are the only casualties, but this is a little field in amongst residential houses. There is nothing here that even Israel, whose definition has always been broad, could begin to describe as a legitimate target. “Where is grandma?” asks one of the little girls. Grandma represents sweets and other good things, which would be pretty welcome right now. “Grandma is in paradise,” is the weary answer. This past morning no-one could find any bread in the nearby shops. Sara Eid Al Hawajri set off determined to track some down to feed the grandchildren. The first sweep of attacks at 11am caught her in the street, and left her covered in dust, dead from shrapnel. Eva (Canadian ISM volunteer) knew her, she was a friend of her son (who himself has lost both his legs) and of her daughter-in-law, who now feeds her small boy under the blankets beside me. We came to pay our respects, but fearing an Israeli army incursion as happened to them before, the family asked us to stay. Sara’s teenage daughter is helping care for the children, but when things are quiet her face drifts into blankness. In that first sweep of attacks, in approximately 10 minutes, we understand that 205 people were killed and more than 700 injured. Most government buildings and other social infrastructure were destroyed. 80 Israeli planes and helicopters were involved in the attack and over 100 bombs were dropped. So before tonight began, the hospitals and mortuaries were full, the staff overwhelmed, the medical supplies exhausted. It will be dawn soon and it is hard to imagine what we will find with the daylight. (ISM, 2008).

Eva Bartlett

January 3, 2009 Gaza

Journal: Why we are staying
January 2, 2009, 1:13 pm Israeli authorities benevolently announced that today, January 2nd, the 7th day of Israel’s air attacks throughout Gaza, internationals would be permitted to leave through the Erez crossing... Approximately 435 internationals are said to have left, from what journalists have told me, but I have no intention of doing so, we have no intention of doing so. Here are some reasons why we stay: Israel not only controls who is unable to leave Gaza, but who is unable to enter Gaza. Since November 4, Israel has banned foreign journalists from entering Gaza, making a minor exception for a few days in early December. At present, with the over 420 dead, over 2,100 injured and the many civilian homes and buildings destroyed, there is an urgent need for foreign journalists. I’ve seen the demolished houses, mosques, universities, water lines. I’ve seen the newly-homeless, asking where they will live now that their home is rubble, now that the winter cold combines with rain, now that there are continually drones, helicopters and F-16s overhead. I’ve heard the accounts of recently-killed: the 5 girls living next to a targeted Jabaliya mosque; the 2 boys collecting wood; the 55 year old mother of my friends; the 9 and 12 year old girls who stopped in a grocery store after school and were killed by the missile which targeted the police station across the street.. I’ve felt the terrifying impact of missiles landing 30 metres from a thin-walled ground-floor room hearing the screams of terrorized families trapped in their homes, 50 metres from a thin-walled apartment room, 100 metres from hospital buildings windows already shattered. I’ve been rocked awake night after night, if I’ve fallen asleep, by missiles outside of whatever building in whatever region I stay: Gaza City, Jabaliya, beside the port… I avoid the coastal road where Israeli naval boats continue to fire upon Gaza, but I walk under buzzing drones every day and night, under the warplanes, leaving one truly feeling like a target, no matter where we are. I’ve heard time and time and time again, “They call us the terrorists, yet it’s our kids, our wives, our mothers, our brothers dying.
What can we do? This is our life,” from Palestinians, even before the attacks, when it was Israel’s siege on Gaza that was the most urgent factor. Now that urgency is amplified beyond imagination by the on-going attacks. 1.5 million Palestinians throughout the Gaza Strip are unable to run from, escape from, these illegal attacks. My life, internationals lives, are no more important than Palestinians’ lives. We will stay on during their suffering, in solidarity and to document the illegal acts Israel is doing, the war crimes Israel clearly does not want the world to see, to understand, and is preventing journalists from reporting. To see, to understand, means to stop Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, its contravention of international humanitarian law and international law... (ISM a, 2009).

Tara

January 7, 2009 West Bank and East Jerusalem

In the Shadow of Gaza

While the world watches in horror as the death toll in Gaza continues to rise, in the occupied West Bank, the Israeli army is taking the opportunity to unleash a level of deadly force, in the knowledge that, under the shadow cast by their war on Gaza, these atrocities will go unseen by the international community. Palestinian communities in the West Bank have responded to the war on Gaza with daily demonstrations in cities and villages throughout the region. Taking the form of marches, sit-ins and candlelight vigils, as well as stone-throwing by young boys, these demonstrations have met with lethal repression from Israeli soldiers in their role as an occupying army. In the village of Ni’lin, West of Ramallah, two young men, Arafat Al-Khawaje and Mohammad Al-Khawaje were both brutally murdered in a spray of live ammunition from Israeli soldiers during a demonstration against the war on Gaza. Arafat, aged 22, was killed...
immediately as a bullet cut through his back, stopping his heart. Mohammad, who was shot in the head, held-on in Ramallah hospital in a critical condition for four days, before dying on the evening of Wednesday 31st December. A third young man, Mohammad Srór, was shot in the leg. International eye-witnesses to the slaughter describe the attack as being “callous and calculated,” with Israeli soldiers feigning an invasion of the village to lure the young men into the olive groves, where they had concealed themselves, before opening fire from a distance of just 15 metres. The attack took place with full knowledge that there was no ambulance in the village, as Israeli forces had refused to permit it to pass through the checkpoint. Once the shooting occurred, the ambulance was detained for a further five minutes at the checkpoint, before the soldiers allowed it to enter the village. In the village of Silwad, another young man, 17 year old Mohammad Hamid, was shot by Israeli soldiers from a guard-tower whilst at a demonstration – dying in hospital from three gunshot wounds to the chest and abdomen. On 4th January, in Qalqiliya city, another young man was assassinated by Israeli soldiers for throwing stones over the Apartheid Wall that surrounds the city. Mofed Saleh Walwil, 20 years old, was killed with a single sniper bullet to the forehead, when an Israeli jeep opened fire on the boys. Two more young men are in a critical condition after also being shot by Israeli soldiers whilst demonstrating against Israel’s Operation Cast Lead. Hammam Al-Ashari, 17 years old, from Abu Dis, near Jerusalem, was shot in the head with three rubber-coated steel bullets at close range, while he was walking up a stairwell with friends. For 30 minutes, the soldiers prevented a waiting ambulance from reaching Hammam, significantly worsening his condition. 17 year old Mohammad Jaber is also in a critical condition after Israeli soldiers again opened fire on a Gaza protest in Hebron, on Sunday 28th December, shooting him in the head. In the period of two days from 28th-29th December, Israeli soldiers in Hebron wounded at least 21 demonstrators
with live ammunition, according to doctors at Hebron’s al-Ahli hospital. International human rights workers living in the area, describe this as a significant “escalation in the violence used by the Israeli Occupation Forces.” The number of Palestinian youth shot by Israeli armed forces in the West Bank continues to rise, with at least 3 more young men injured by live fire from Friday 2nd to Sunday 4th December. Severe repression has also been leveled at Gaza demonstrations in the form of arbitrary mass arrests... In light of the violence and repression being leveled at Palestinians in the West Bank, claims made by Israeli military spokespeople - that they are attacking Gaza in order to put an end to rocket fire - ring hollow. As Israeli authorities protest that their massacre in the Gaza Strip is self-defensive, and that the civilian casualties are an unfortunate by-product of Hamas members “hiding” amongst the civilian population; as they proffer their occupation of the West Bank as an example of their even-handed, democratic restraint in the terrain of Palestinian Authority governance (“There are no rockets fired from the West Bank, so we don’t need to attack them”); the realities on the ground paint a very different picture... Amidst the barrage of rehearsed Israeli government rhetoric, Palestinian civilians are being killed by Israeli soldiers, in greater or lesser numbers, regardless of where they live, or what their political affiliations. In the occupied West Bank, Palestinian youths will continue to die under the shadow of Gaza, as Israeli forces act with impunity - immune to the international gaze and any potential censure that may accompany it. (ISM b, 2009)

Eva Bartlett

January 10, 2009 Gaza

ei: Too much to mourn in Gaza

The grief was very evident, as was the indignation: “Where are we supposed to stay,” one man
demanded. “How many deaths is enough? How many?” It’s the question that has resounded in my mind since the attacks on 27 December. Across Fakhoura street from the school, about 15 meters down a drive, a gaping hole in the Deeb family house revealed what had been happening when it was hit by a shell. Rounds of bread dough lay where they’d been rolled out to bake. Amal Deeb was in her 30s, a surviving family member told us. When the missile struck, it killed her and nine others in the extended family’s house, including two boys and three girls. Another four were injured, one having both legs amputated. Approaching the house, the stench of blood was still strong, and was visible in patches and pools amid the rubble of the room. Later, in Jabaliya’s Kamal Adwan hospital, 19-year-old Ahlam lay conscious but unsmiling, unresponsive. The woman at her side explained her injuries: shrapnel lacerations all over her body, and deeper shrapnel injuries in her stomach. Ahlam didn’t know nine of her family members were killed. Returning to the street in front of the Fakoura school, mourners had gathered, ready to march, to carry the dead and their pieces to their overcrowded resting place. Flags of all colors mixed in this funeral march: no one party dominated, it was collective grief under collective punishment. So many people had joined the procession through the narrow streets that the funeral split, taking different streets, to reach the cemetery. At the entrance to the cemetery, decorated cement slabs mark the older graves, laid at a time when cement and space were available. The most recently buried bodies, instead, show in sandy humps, buried just low enough to be covered but not properly so. Cement blocks mark some graves, leaves and vines on others. And some were just barely visible, by the raise in earth. But it was too packed, too hard to estimate where a grave might be, no possibility of a respectfully-spaced arrangement. “Watch where you step,” Mahmoud, a friend, told me, pointing to a barely-noticeable grave of a child. The enormity of the deaths hit me. After 12 days of killing and psychological warfare, I’d
become less shocked at the sight of pieces of bodies, a little numb, like a doctor might, or a person subjected to this time and again. I was and I remain horrified at the ongoing slaughter, at the images of children’s bodies being pulled from the rubble astonished it could continue — but adapted to the fact that there would be bodies, maimed, lives ruined. I stood among sandy makeshift graves, watching men digging with their hands, others carrying corpses on any plank long enough — corrugated tin, scraps of wood, stretchers — to be hastily buried. As the drones still flew overhead and tank shelling could be heard 100s of meters beyond, it all become too much again. I wept for all the dead and the wounded psyches of a people who know their blood flows freely and will continue to do so. Hatem, the other day, told me to be strong as Palestinians, for Palestinians. And I try, though each day brings assassinations no one could have imagined... And today Hatem crumbled, though he is strong. It’s all too much. Nidal, a Palestine Red Crescent Society medic, told how he was at the Fakhoura school when it was shelled. His aunt and uncle live nearby and he’d been visiting friends at the school. “I was there, talking with friends, only a little away from where two of the missiles hit. The people standing between me and the missiles were like a shield. They were shredded. About 20 of them,” he said. Like many Palestinians I’ve met, Nidal has a prior history of loss, even before this latest phenomenal assault on civilians. Only 20 years old, Nidal has already had his father and brother killed, martyred it is said here, by sniper’s bullets. His right hand testifies his part in the story: “Three years ago, the Israeli army had invaded our region [Jabaliya]. One soldier threw a sound bomb at us and I picked it up to throw away. It went off in my hand before I could throw it away.” Sound bombs are used against nonviolent demonstrations against Israel’s wall in the occupied West Bank villages of Bilin and Nilin, and many youths learn at a young age how to chuck them away. But Nidal’s stubs of fingers show that he wasn’t so lucky. However, he is luckier than his father and
brother. And luckier than two of his cousins, his aunt’s sons, who were in the area where missiles were dropped at the UN school. They, 12 and 27 years old, were killed. Osama gave his testimony as a medic at the scene after the multiple missile shelling. “When we arrived, I saw dead bodies everywhere. More than 30. Dead children, grandparents … Pieces of flesh all over. And blood. It was very crowded, and difficult to carry out the injured and martyred. There were also dead animals among the humans. I helped carry 15 dead. I had to change my clothes three times. These people thought they were safe in the UN school, but the Israeli army killed them, in cold blood,” he said. Mohammed K., a volunteer with the Palestine Red Crescent Society, was elsewhere when the UN safe haven was shelled. “We were in Jabaliya, at the UN’s G’ school, to interview the displaced people taking shelter there. We wanted to find out how many people were staying there, where they’d left from and why exactly, and how safe they felt in the school. While we were there, we heard the explosions, saw the smoke, and wondered what had been hit. It was Fakhoura.” (ISM c, 2009).

Sharon

January 10, 2009 Gaza

January 7th, 8th and 9th 2009

...Is anyone’s home going to be left standing? Wednesday was the first day when there was a truce from 1pm til 4pm. In that time, the Red Cross successfully negotiated for themselves and Red Crescent medics to enter Zaytoun, one of the places where calls for help have not been allowed to be responded to. My medic friends described walking for about 4 km, using donkey carts to bring out the few dead and injured they could; they only had time to reach four houses. At times they were shot at by the army despite the advance arrangements. The house of the
Samoudi family was one of the houses they reached. A medic told me that two days before, there had been a call from this house to the Red Crescent, saying that 25 women and children were there, with about 5 shaheed after shelling attacks. But on Wednesday when the house was reached, almost all were dead, survivors included one 11 year old boy with a leg injury. What shocked the medic I spoke to was that the majority appeared to have been killed by close range shooting - it seemed an execution had taken place. I have not been able to find out further clear details on this, and in fact there are various confusing versions of this story, speaking of seven families and 100 people in fact being in multiple houses together that were shelled... At other locations children without food or water were found besides dead parents. Some of the injured people brought out are above us here in the Al Quds hospital. I met baby Nour, tucked in a bed with her mother, and another woman with them whose child had been killed. Following this I obtained permission to go on Thursday’s Red Cross/Red Crescent evacuation back to Zaytoun again during the hours of ceasefire. My impression was they were glad of a second woman and another international... When I visited the Kabariti family yesterday, M told me that the girls are asking him how much it hurts to get injured, and what happens if they die. They are seeing so many pictures of children like themselves wrapped in body bags. He has explained that God sends you into unconsciousness if you are hurt, so you don’t feel the pain... (ISM d, 2009).

Sharon

January 10, 2009 Gaza

Working with Red Cross evacuation team in Gaza

So, Thursday.. the Red Cross co-ordinated evacuation into Zaytoun... I carry a stretcher and water. About 8 intrepid Red Crescent paramedics join us, wearing weighty bullet proof vests or
not, dependent on their preference for possible death or certain backache. What startles me first of all is how close the IOF have come. I have heard that they are 2km from the hospital but I guess I didn’t quite absorb that; when we all jump in the ambulances to drive there, we jump out again almost immediately. The Israeli Occupation Force is pretty much just round the corner. I haven’t seen them in person since 2005. They ain’t changed much. Just as I occasionally forget that the planes in the sky are killing machines and assume for a moment they’re just jetting folks off on climate damaging holidays, my brain firstly registers the sound of tanks as some sort of roadworks nearby. Which they are in a way, they are unmaking the road. As-Saladiin is the main north-south road and they’re doing their best to turn it impassible, with earth mounds and barriers and blockades made of bombed cars. Soldiers point guns at us from behind the earth mounds. Snipers cover us from occupied houses. We all hope Mr Walkie Talkie is saying the right things. He’s very polite, and isn’t in fact saying any of the things I would be saying if I was on the phone to the IOF right now. I guess that’s why he has his job and I don’t. Walking past all these weapons is the point where anyone would reasonably get scared; for some reason (I discovered this on my first West Bank trip years ago) this doesn’t happen to me. There’s clearly a bit of wiring in my head connected wrong, and I think people who are scared and do stuff anyway are much braver than I am... Even more, I don’t cope with the dissonance of trying to live in a Western society that pretends this reality, the reality of this road I am walking at this moment, does not exist. In the UK, in front of me is McDonalds, in my head are the tanks. It almost sends me crazy sometimes. So here, the dissonance is finally gone, and the relief is great. So yes, I acknowledge I have a personal agenda. We all do. When I was a kid, I was very aware of war zones, but I always understood they happened in places different from my home. I would like to tell you about what I am seeing right now as I walk. I am seeing flowering vines. Bright
curtains in windows. Chickens running about. This is your home, you know. This is the garden where your children play. This is your house with obscene holes blown in it, with Israeli snipers lurking in the shadows of its roof, with a dead resistance fighter sitting with his back to your wall. “Red Cross! It’s safe to come out! We can evacuate you!” everyone shouts up at the silent windows of the next house, the one after, the one after that. And eventually a lone elderly man appears from a house holding a white flag. And the a whole collection of faces behind a gate, hands reaching for our bottles of water. A dead teenage boy has been placed outside the gate. “My son,” says a man simply to us, in English. We ask them to wait there and continue. After an hour and a half, we have collected about 80 people, at least half children and many elderly. For each turn off the path we make to shout at damaged houses, permission must be asked and granted. And yes, I did the RC poster thing myself and carried a small child. Well, he only had little legs and we were in a hurry... 4pm is drawing near. In the Gaza city, Israeli planes continue shelling during the supposed 3 hour ceasefire, but here soldiers have watched us in eerie silence, apart from tank engines. When the children see the tanks, their faces twist, and they reach for their mothers hands, some having to be forced to continue moving past them. Guns are trained on us. Now we can see the earth mounds we have to climb over that have our vehicles on the other side. But! It’s 4pm. Woe betide holding off the day’s ceasefire end for another 5 minutes. Whoosh of a rocket, everyone tenses, it explodes just behind the building the ambulances are parked beside. Children stumble on rubble and begin to wail. Nearby gunfire begins. And strangely, the point after we climb over the line and open our vehicles doors is when some of the adults begin to cry anxiously. Perhaps they think there won’t be enough space for all - and we do have to shove people in, including into the ambulance carrying the three dead we stretchered out. “Where is Jusef?” “Where is Samir?” Parents lose sight of children and panic. But in the end we
get them all in, and drive that oh-so-short distance back to Al Quds hospital, where people tumble out of the vans. And then there is a bright moment, which I watch from a window above; families arriving and claiming their missing people. I sit down to eat cold rice with the medics on duty, but before I can take a mouthful, get physically hauled up 6 flights of stairs by one of the medics who was on the evacuation, to find that being on today’s team apparently merits very tasty scrambled eggs instead. We hear that on another Red Cross evacuation, the army shot at and injured one of the Red Cross workers... (ISM e, 2009).

Sharon Lock
January 22, 2009 Gaza

Reem’s Story
Today I met with my friend Reem. She is 21 and works with Mercycorps, and we met when she came to interview me after I arrived on the initial FreeGaza trip. She was so bright and sparkly then, and I know that is still in her somewhere, but right now she is very fragile. She didn’t realise I was back in the country until last Wednesday, when her family was one of the many fleeing attack to Al Quds hospital, and we collided amidst the chaos. Today she told me about what happened to them.

Tuesday night, we had stayed with my uncle elsewhere, because the attacks were so bad. But Wednesday we went home, because it was home. Also we heard that the bombs Israel was using (phosphorous bombs) set things on fire, and we thought if we were in our home we could put out small fires before they burnt everything. We just didn’t realise how bad it was going to get.

Wednesday night was terrifying. The bombing, the shelling - my mother was shaking and reading prayers. We realised how dangerous it was there on the 5th floor, but we were too scared
to go downstairs because there were windows all the way and we were afraid the Israeli soldiers or the planes would see us and shoot. My uncle lives on the ground floor, he has two daughters of 6 and 1 1/2, my grandmother lives with him also. He called us and said, come downstairs, but we said we just can’t. Next thing we knew, he’d come upstairs to get us. He actually went all the way up to the 7th floor by accident, and had to come back down to us to bang on our door. So we took blankets and went downstairs with him. We kept thinking - at 4am it will stop. Maybe at 6am it will stop. Because usually the army withdrew by then. We didn’t realise they were just continuing to move towards us this time. Some hours later, my aunt looked out the window and saw a tank; it was pointing directly at our windows. That’s it, in a moment the shells will hit us directly, we’re dead, we thought. But something happened and it turned away from us. I called Mercycorps and asked them to call the Red Cross and ask for help. But we realised we had to escape immediately, to try to get to the hospital because maybe it was safe. We couldn’t go back to the 5th floor for our day clothes or our passports or IDs. My brother was so worried because if the soldiers got him with no ID, they would shoot him. But everyone in our building said, we have to go NOW. But some of them knew the snipers had just shot a man and his daughter (Haneen Al Batran and her father). We went outside, we had small children with us - some of the little ones could barely walk but they had to if there wasn’t anyone to carry them. Then I saw you, and the other Red Crescent people coming; my brother was helping my grandmother but she can’t walk, she fell, and he stopped with her though he was sure he would be shot. Then you went to help them, so me and the rest of the family went on into the hospital. But inside, we waited for 10 mins and my uncle and my brother and my grandmother didn’t arrive, and we were sure they were dead. We checked the basement but we didn’t know it had two sides. I started to cry. Mum was shouting at everyone - did you see them, did you see them? Then I saw my
brother and I shouted “where the hell have you been!” After some hours they said everyone would evacuate from the hospital and go to the UNWRA school, but we had to walk and Israel only gave permission for two ambulances to go with the hundreds of people. It’s a long way and my grandmother can’t walk. I didn’t know what we could do, if she had to stay we wouldn’t leave her. But then we got a wheelchair for her so we could push her. I was carrying someone else’s child because her parents had their other children, she was afraid not to be with them so she cried all the way; she could see how scared we all were. I realised how empty this area of the city was, everything was burning, it was a city of ghosts. I believed they would drop a bomb on us as we walked. But we arrived to the school. From the UNWRA school, we went to very distant relatives - my uncle’s wife’s relatives... I lost my friend from the WhyNot project - Christine Al Tork. She was really dear to me, she was one of the sweetest girls, kind of smooth and soft. Her parents only had her and her brother, so they took such care of her, and gave her so many opportunities, she took lots of classes and things...she was literally scared to death. She got asthma and then a heart attack, from fear. It was Friday, the day she died. I began to think it would happen to me too, because I was scared to death too. I was so affected by that, my family tried to be very close to me to help me. I looked on Facebook, her friends made an online group for her, and the photos of her after she died affected me so much; one of her father kissing her goodbye for the last time. I couldn’t believe she would never be back. Then I heard my friend from college, Bissam - her name means spring - was dead. This shock was even worse. I was as pale as Christine after she died. I couldn’t eat or talk. My uncle wanted to wake me out of my shock. He shouted at me - it’s not the time for this - any of us might die at any moment, but we have to try to survive - show some care for yourself, for your family, wake up! I realised I had to find some strength, so I started to eat... During the attacks, I was calling all my friends every
night to say goodbye, I was saying to all of them, please forgive me for any bad things I did. And they would say, Reem, please shut up! My friends always used to say I was like a character out of a fairy tale, like Snow White or someone, not really living in the real world. After these days, I guess I am in the real world. I can’t watch the news, because the news was us, my life, my friends. All me and family are thinking about now is leaving Gaza. Those minutes or hours - I literally couldn’t tell you which - when I went out into the street with the amazing Red Crescent medics to meet all the families like Reem’s, who were fleeing for their lives, were a strangely calm time... In these last days, whenever Red Crescent folks from other places turned up on ambulance runs, the greetings were much closer to reunions. Big hugs and 5 or 6 smacking kisses on each cheek. The subtext: “you’re still alive. It’s a miracle, you’re still alive.” E heard today of a third friend who is dead. She has had a hard time. I have lost no-one personal to me. I have three hangovers that I’m aware of from these days. One, I hate to sleep alone at my flat; the two nights I did during the attacks, it felt too far from the hospital where my work and my friends were and I was worried I would be cut off from them. It still somehow feels like being in the wrong place. Two, I feel happiest when my 3 best Red Crescent friends are all present and within my sight. Three, in the dark when I see bags of rubbish on the street I think they are bodies. This is because I found, when we went to pick up bodies lying in the dark, that they looked more like crumpled bags of rubbish than the people they had been. The strength of Gaza people astounds me. Everyone was out today fixing things. Re-laying water pipes, clearing rubble. Putting aside the thoughts of the children who are dead, to smile for the children who are still alive. How is it done? Where do they find the courage? And what will be their reward for getting up and going on, one more time? I forgot to tell you that today again I woke to the sound of shelling from Israeli ships in the Gaza sea. (ISM f, 2009).
Sharon

January 23, 2009 Gaza

Amer’s story: They killed me three times

Ramatan TV, nine floors up and open 24 hours, was the last bastion of internet during the strikes.

We knew the place because we got asked in for interviews, and then called a few press conferences there, for example announcing that internationals would be riding with ambulances.

We began to hang around in the corners at other times, hoping no-one would mind us hitching a ride on the wifi. Instead of complaining about random internationals cluttering up the place, Ramatan journalists wholeheartedly adopted us, brought us tea, gave us blankets if we needed to stay the night. Now most nights at about 9pm, you’ll find some of us there being fed a small feast in the kitchen... Yousef AlHelou has the end office in Ramatan... Today he took me and E to Zaytoun to hear the story of his cousin’s family... Amer is 29. 14 people from his family were in the house that night, and they were all trying to sleep under their stairs as some sort of shelter.

Even though the stairs were partly open to the back yard, the F16 attacks on the house made downstairs seem the safest place. The house now has holes from shell blasts and thousands of pock-marks from the three inch nails that the shells were filled with. “We hadn’t known how bad it would get,” said Amer. “Or we would have left our house and gone somewhere else. But we thought our area was a quiet area. And then that night we thought they would go past us at the front. But they came from the back.” Amer didn’t know it yet, but his brother Mohammed had already been killed elsewhere that day, struck by drone rockets. The Israeli soldiers came to their house at about 5.30am, after the house had been shelled for 15 hours, and immediately opened fire on the family, killing Amer’s father with three shots. Then they told the family to leave.

Amer had called an ambulance (which had to turn back after being shot at) and was refusing to
leave his father’s body but the soldiers said they would shoot him if he stayed, so they fled 300 yards up the dirt track behind their house, at which point they were shot at again by another group of soldiers. This time Amer’s brother Abdullah was shot, Amer and Shireen’s 6 year old daughter Saja was shot in the arm, and their 1 year old daughter Farah was shot in the stomach. They spent the next 14 hours sheltering behind a small hill of dirt, while the wounded bled, and were not allowed to access help though the soldiers were aware of the injuries. Having no other way to comfort her small daughter, whose intestines were falling out, Shireen breastfed Farah as the little girl slowly bled to death. After 14 hours, at about 8 in the evening, the soldiers sent dogs to chase them out of their shelter and dropped phosphorous bombs near them, but due to the wounded family members and having bare feet in an area of broken glass and rubble, escape was difficult. The army took the three wounded and put them behind the tanks, and captured Amer, but the rest of the family managed to get away and call the Red Crescent. The ambulance that eventually reached the injured people 7 hours later (driven by my medic friend S) took an hour to find them, and by this time Farah was dead. (When I heard Amer’s story I realised S had already told me about collecting “a small shaheed” from this area.) Amer was held for 5 days in army custody (the first 3 without access to food, water, or a bathroom), beaten and tortured, and questioned about resistance activity which he knew nothing about. When he was finally released on the border, the army sent two known collaborators to escort him, so it would look to the resistance fighters like he himself was a collaborator. But the fighters knew who he was and that he was not a collaborator. He tells us: “I had my four children young, and they gave me the most happiness in my life. I took such good care of them. I didn’t let them just play on the street, we had a big living room in our house with toys for them, we would invite all the neighbours’ children to come play there with ours, so that we could be sure they were all safe. I always drove
them to and from school, I didn’t even let them walk. Whenever I was depressed, I would gather all my kids, pile them in the car, take them somewhere nice like the park or the beach, and then to see them happy and having fun would make me happy again. Now my remaining children will not go to sleep without their shoes on, because they think we will have to run for our lives again. We love life as the Israelis do. Are they the only people allowed life? They killed me three times that day, first when they killed my brother, then when they killed my father, then when they killed my daughter. We looked for my father’s body later; they had buried him under rubble, eventually we found his foot sticking out. Sometimes now I think we have to leave Gaza, to join my brother in South Africa. Sometimes I think, no – “Gaza is worth fighting for, this is our home.” Amongst their crumpled belongings, next to the spot Amer’s father died, the family gives us tea. Shireen solicitously dusts the sand off my back. We ask them how it is they have not gone crazy from the pain of these events. “It’s not us, it’s God who gives us peace and strength. Without this I would be dead too. What happened to my family was like a horror film,” says Amer. He shows us photos of Farah (whose name means “joy”) and Saja on his phone. “I don’t think I can have any more children. I am too broken inside.” The family is not living in the house right now, they are split between different homes, and Abdullah is in hospital in Egypt. Amer is wearing Abdullah’s jacket, complete with bullet holes. “It is hard to be here again in this house after what happened. But your presence has lifted my spirits,” he tells us. Back at Ramatan, I hear one of the journalists talking. “I couldn’t protect my children - this is my responsibility, and I couldn’t.” He says. “My daughter asked, what is it like to die? I told her, it’s just like closing your eyes.” (ISM g, 2009).
Amid destruction, school resumes

“We have no bathroom, how can we wash ourselves? How can we go to school looking like this?” implored 13 year-old Shaima al Samouni. It’s a pertinent question, given that schools reopened two days ago for the first time since the Israeli attacks on Gaza started. With 29 family members killed during the attacks on the Zaytoun neighbourhood in Gaza city, however, it seems a strange concern. But life marches on, and the other children have gone back to school. Tugging at the clothes they were wearing, the children explain that, now, three weeks after their homes were destroyed, what they’re wearing is all they have. And, it seems, they’re not going to school wearing that. They take us across the dirt, to a half-bombed house. On the way, we walk over the foundations of what used to be the house of Majid al Samouni and his family. The children stop to show us a drum of olives (zaytoun) that was destroyed. We pass by the carcass of a large sheep. Shot by the Israeli army. They show us their two pretty donkeys. “Donkeys quais,” I say in broken Arabic, relieved that they’re not taking us to more animal corpses. There used to be nine donkeys, they explain. But the Israeli soldiers shot seven of them. Then my colleague points out the gaping hole in the shoulder of the brown donkey - also shot by the Israeli army. Donkey mish quais. Samouni family loses many members and means of survival: their chicken coup was destroyed by Israeli forces. One of the young girls, who is nine years old, is desperate for me to understand the extent to which their lives were destroyed. Not in terms of life lost, but livelihood. “Bas al shugul - al ard. Bas” (The land is the only work we have), and the land is totally destroyed. The children catalogue the types of fruit trees they had - lemon, guava, orange, mandarin, and the ubiquitous olive. They don’t talk about the battery-chicken shed that is
crushed, chickens still in cages. When I finally ask just how many chickens there were, I find it difficult to believe the answer - two thousand chickens. Her older cousin goes to great lengths to tell me repeatedly, at every opportunity, that they were just farmers, not Hamas. I know, I reply. Inside the half-destroyed house, there is a clamour to show all of the atrocities crowded into one small space. Some of the children explain that their mother had given birth during the bombing, how they had to burn a knife over a candle to cut the umbilical cord. And about how their two-year-old sister was wounded on her face - lacerations from her eye across and down her cheek. Others point to where shells entered the house, some still stuck in the walls. They tell us how the soldiers had occupied the house, after the family had evacuated it. How they came back to find everything on the ground, including the Qu’ran. Then, worse, how one Qu’ran had been defecated on. Haram, was all I could say. I took photos somewhat helplessly, of everything they showed me. I’m well-practiced at documenting damage Israeli soldiers have done to Palestinian homes. And the families always seem to feel better if you take photos of everything. But the ridiculousness of what I was doing - taking photos of small holes in walls when half of the house was missing - hit, and I put the camera down. A couple of the children - the ones who had been telling me that they were all farmers, and just farmers - led me around the corner to a house they said belonged to Arafat al Samouni. The house was leveled, just a small tarp erected in the middle of the debris. “Sleep here” one of the children informed. 10 people killed in that house. Just one left, seemingly. Haram. I wanted to ask the children about their parents. I know at least some of them have surviving parents, saw them with their mother. Heard them talk about her. But I’m too scared to ask. I don’t want to hear a small child have to tell me that its parent or parents are dead. There’s so much I can’t bring myself to ask. I’ve taken a lot of reports in Palestine. I know how it goes. What you need to ask. What information is vital. I know it so well
I don’t even need to think about it. I can ask with sympathy about how Israeli soldiers invaded a family home; beat people; abducted their children. But this is something else entirely. Here and now, such questions seem vile. I just want to hang out with the children. Let them show me what they want to show me. Listen to them talk...(ISM h, 2009).

Sharon Lock
January 31, 2009 Gaza

Majda’s story: “Are my children terrorists?”

The night of Wednesday, January 14, was the worst night for the people in the Tela Howa area. You’ve already heard Reem’s story, and heard from me that this was the night they began to drop rockets on the Al Quds hospital, with our worst rocket fire occurring Thursday night. Today I met Majda Nadeem and her children. They live on the third floor of a building beside the crossroads of the main road that leads from Al Quds hospital. I was led to their story via the story of the Al Haddad family, which happened a few hours later and had a much more tragic end.

Majda, who is a poet with her own website, but also the pretty and youthful looking mum of Tala (7), Dima (12), Firas (13), Basher (14), and Mohanned (16), told me the area their building was in was targetted from about 1am that night. They hid in their middle room, away from any outside walls. Early on they thought maybe it was specifically their building being targeted with rockets and about to be destroyed, so they ran down into the street, but then decided it was the next door building and that the street was even more dangerous because the Israeli planes were shooting anything that moved. So they spent the night awake and frightened, praying, thinking they would never see daylight. At 6am 3 phosphorous shells hit their building, setting their cousin’s ground floor flat on fire, and they realised some of the buildings near them were on fire
too. The phosphorus fumes made it almost impossible to breath, and then at 7.30am an F16 plane dropped a missile on the main road beside them (I saw the enormous crater) and the exploding rubble smashed all their windows and doors. Terrified, they fled the building again. Majda’s husband Nasser and Basher and Firas went to try to get their car, but it wouldn’t start. Majda and Mohanned tried to get the girls away across the street. They got as far as the wall beside the street, and a tank - that could clearly see they were a family group carrying small bags - opened fire on them as they cowered against the wall. Mohanned made it across the street, but Majda dropped the bags and tried to shield the girls. “Mohanned was calling something to me but the attack was so loud I couldn’t hear. I tried to run to him with the girls, but fell on the street. I was injured and bleeding but I crawled over to him.” By this time Majda couldn’t see where her husband or other sons were, and the mobile wouldn’t work. When she finally got through for a moment, her husband told her he and Basher had been shot, were unable to move, and were lying flat on the street in the hope of surviving the combined land and air attack, in sight of the tanks that had already shot them. Getting her other three children to shelter, Majda tried to call the ambulance, the Red Cross, even a radio station, but the phone wouldn’t work. So she set out to run to Al Shifa hospital for help. When she said this, I stopped to check I’d understood. Al Quds hospital was 5 minutes away and Al Shifa was at least a kilometre, it takes me about half an hour to walk there from Al Quds. Majda explained that she knew from the radio that Al Quds was under the same attack as they were and there was no way she could make it there alive, nor could anyone there reach them alive, which was in fact true. In the meantime, 13 year old Firas was also going for help for his brother and father, but almost immediately he was shot in the knee by an Israeli sniper. This didn’t stop him however - he covered at least 60 yards, half of them in sight of the tanks, to reach his cousin’s house. His cousin then managed to
contact a neighbour who was a doctor with a UN car, and they went into the line of fire and
picked up Nasser and Basher and got them to Al Shifa. By the time Majda reached Al Shifa (I
still can’t get my head around how she must have felt during that run) her husband was in
surgery and her son was also being treated. Now, she has her two boys safe in her own double
bed, each with a bandaged leg. Basher has steel bolts in his - he lost a large chunk of the lower
leg to what have been described to me as a large bullet. He was due to enter a kung fu
championship, so that’s had to be put on hold, but he was apparently bravely joking with his
nurse, during a painful dressing change, that he could still kick with the other leg. Firas is going
to have an operation on Tuesday because his knee needs putting back together to what extent it
can be. Mohammed and Hazem, volunteer nurses-in-training attached to Al Shifa, come in daily
to care for them. Both boys have lovely smiles, and their mother says they mostly behave well to
each other while sharing the bed. Their father Nasser, an engineer with no work for more than
two years since the siege allows few building materials in, is still in Egypt being treated. As I
understand it, his hip, kidney, and prostrate are all damaged. Dima and Tala come in from school
while I am there, being treated to the usual coffee and arabic sweets. Such small girls. “Are they
terrorists?” asks their mother. “My family cares about all people. We don’t mind if they are from
a different country or a different religion. We think all people are the same. That’s what we
believe.” (ISM i, 2009).
CHAPTER 4

FROM HOMO SACER TO THE WITNESS

The term “to survive” contains an ambiguity that cannot be eliminated. It implies the reference to something or someone that is survived.

Agamben

What I learned that she taught me, was that life is not sacred in all circumstances, that very often she wondered in the concentration camp, how come people stick to life even when it is so humiliating, and never the less she remained alive by accident like many others, its not that she had a great desire to live, but she survived.


The paradox here is that if the only one bearing witness to the human is the one whose humanity has been wholly destroyed, this mean that the identity between human and inhuman is never perfect and that it is not truly possibly to destroy the human, that something always remains. This witness is this remnant.

Agamben

To survive, inspite of one’s conditions, continues to be a part of the human experience, especially amongst those subject to their conditions and the law who are unable to seek refuge or protection in the law. These human experiences of lack and survival continue to be pursued by philosophers and theorists, whom often express interest in drawing out the possibilities of human existence. The theoretical understanding of human existence that best characterizes the conditions and experiences of humans is subjectivity. Subjectivity thus marks the starting place to begin discussion of political agency, for understanding agency as the possession of subjects and effects of that subjection. In this chapter I explore the relationship between subjectivity and desubjectification and the role of the witness in potentiating subjectivity. For those desubjectified through biopolitical power, the potentiality of the witness animates the space of lack created
through testimony, marking the interdependence of contingency, necessity, possibility, and impossibility. The potentiating of becoming human once again relies on the relations of witnessing and testimony and the inexplicable lacuna which makes us subject to one another. For those deemed less than human or desubjectified by biopolitical power, like the Palestinians and activists working in solidarity with them, this potential marks space in which subjectivity may again be animated by political agency.

Subjectivity and Desubjectification

Agamben presents the relationship of \textit{homo sacer}, or life forced to survive, that can be killed without being acknowledged as murder and never sacrifice, and sovereignty as marking an understanding of the potential for dispersions of power, desubjectification, and subjectivity (Agamben, 1998; 1999). This relationship marks both the dispersion of power through governmentality and biopolitics, as well as, a marking of the intelligibility of lives worth living. \textit{Homo sacer}, thus, is life not worth living but forced to survive determined by sovereignty’s relationship to those seen as \textit{homo sacer}. \textit{Homo sacer} may be killed without punishment and cannot be deemed sacrifice. This violence expresses a limit of what lives are and are not livable, hence a desubjectification for Agamben (Agamben 1998; 1999). The killing of some people in the name of security assumes a people who are not considered human. Butler elaborates on this exclusion that takes place through both removal of the law and the lack of intelligibility in determining these people as subjects (Butler, 2004). Although Agamben notes the relationship of \textit{homo sacer} and sovereignty as almost diametrically opposed, subjects marked as sovereigns or as \textit{homo sacer} are neither static categories of subjection and desubjection but much like Foucaultian notions of power, these subjectivities are fluid and in exchange due to their relational contingency marked by shame.
We can therefore first propose a first, provisional definition of shame. It is nothing less than the fundamental sentiment of being a subject, in the two apparently opposed senses of this phrase: to be subjected and to be sovereign. Shame is what is produced in the absolute concomitance of subjectification and desubjectification, self-loss and self-possession, servitude and sovereignty (Agamben, 1999, p.107).

For Agamben, it is the sovereign who determines the state of exception, or when the deeming of a state of emergency will be necessary, but this sovereign is not a single actor who functions only for the state, but functions along with the fluid notion of governmentality and the extension of biopolitical power and the power of the sovereign to those who are able to deem who is and is not a threat to security.

If there is a line in every modern state marking the point at which the decision on life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics can turn into thanatopolitics, this line no longer appears today as a stable border dividing two clearly distinct zones. This line is now in motion and gradually moving into areas other than that of political life, areas in which the sovereign is entering into an ever more intimate symbiosis not only with the jurist but also with the doctor, the scientist, the expert, and the priest (Agamben, 1998, 122).

The dispersion of power through governmentality and its reinforcement of sovereign legitimacy and power is also described by Butler (2004) in Precarious Life

Governmentality not only works to order populations but to create the very conditions by which subjects are created in relation to power. Although it may seem that governmentality would subsume or confuse the sovereign power of the state, governmentality instead works as a ‘set of tactics’ to reinforce state sovereignty as legitimate through the state of exception where “petty sovereigns” become deeming agents of security and emergency (Butler, 2004).

In this way humanitarianism can often work in conjunction with governmentality and the deeming of the populations as homo sacer. The establishment of humanitarian aid within the space of the camp, deemed by Agamben the nomos of biopolitics reifies the regulations of populations to bare life as deemed by sovereign power. The Palestinian population, long dependent on humanitarian food and medical aid for survival, face a reification of the desubjectification of biopolitics through a forced survival. One cannot deny that Palestinians
living under occupation exist in relation to a biopolitics that determines their forced survival.

Conditions of occupation, refugee camps, the presence of constant military power, as well as populations largely dependent on international and humanitarian assistance for these populations, surely position Palestinians as *homo sacer*. In fact, all of occupied territory functions as a nomos of biopolitics or camp, in which life under the state of exception is forced to survive and desubjectification is routine.

“Watch where you step,” Mahmoud, a friend, told me, pointing to a barely-noticeable grave of a child. The enormity of the deaths hit me. After 12 days of killing and psychological warfare, I’d become less shocked at the sight of pieces of bodies, a little numb, like a doctor might, or a person subjected to this time and again. I was and I remain horrified at the ongoing slaughter, at the images of children’s bodies being pulled from the rubble astonished it could continue — but adapted to the fact that there would be bodies, maimed, lives ruined. I stood among sandy makeshift graves, watching men digging with their hands, others carrying corpses on any plank long enough — corrugated tin, scraps of wood, stretchers — to be hastily buried. As the drones still flew overhead and tank shelling could be heard 100s of meters beyond, it all become too much again. I wept for all the dead and the wounded psyches of a people who know their blood flows freely and will continue to do so. (ISM d, 2009)

Agamben notes the potential desubjectification of any subject through biopolitics. This potential marks not only Palestinian bodies, but international activists who choose to stand in solidarity with Palestinians under occupation. Two such activists with the International Solidarity Movement, Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall, were killed by the Israeli Army working to protect Palestinians and their property from destruction. These deaths, much like Palestinians were never thoroughly investigated nor discussed by the Israeli, US, or UK governments or media. These activists, as well as other international activists injured during their witnessing of the occupation, function as examples of the potential of desubjectification to apply to anyone. The deeming of *homo sacer*, contingent on sovereign power, extends to bulldozer operators, snipers, soldiers, pilots, sailors, military police, armed settlers, and even children. The deeming of life not worth living, but forced into survival extends to those perceived as standing in solidarity with
Palestinians. International activists and witnesses to the occupation potentiate targets for sovereign power’s deeming, perhaps with increased hesitation at moments, but their bodies potentiate *homo sacer* none-the-less.

If only the occupation and humanitarian organizations created the survival of Palestinians, surely casting Palestinians as *homo sacer*, desubjectified through their place in the camp and the state of exception that marks their exposure to sovereignty would seem obvious. Instead of looking solely at the structures of political desubjectification that un-bind, perhaps now it’s useful to turn to Butler’s analysis of Foucault, who highlights governmentality as a space for political struggle and contestation (Foucault, Governmentality in Butler, 2004, 54). Butler notes, recognition of the use of governmentality through biopolitics is the first step in recognizing breaks, fractures, or places where resistance to such political systems might be possible. Speaking to an Israeli soldier in the West Bank, Neta Golan articulates this possibility,

“So you tell me how far away you were when you murdered him.” He tried to stop me, but I wouldn’t stop. And the fact that he didn’t want to hear it was the only indication that maybe, something deep inside this boy, there was a piece of humanity still intact. After we parted, I wept. (Golan, 2003, 94-95)

It seems that most scholarly accounts of Palestinians as *homo sacer* do no account for the potentiality of resistance through governmentality, but rather reproduce a static notion of the ‘binary’ relationship of the sovereign to *homo sacer*. If dispersion of governmentality marks the possibility of resistance, perhaps the exchange and reversibility of those deemed sovereigns, as well as those deemed *homo sacer*, is more open then accounted for. This understanding would provide for the relational process of subjectivity, understanding the possibility of subjectification as a process without an end point, neither merely dichotomous nor stagnate identification. In the case of the Palestinians this openness of subjectivity and its relational structure is particularly
important to avoiding the limiting constructs of victimization and desubjectification as the full measure of Palestinian political life.

Scholarly discussions often identify Palestinian subjectivity as *homo sacer*. The War on Terror provided a global justification for the state of exception as a brutal mechanism for persecuting populations of colonial subjects. Derek Gregory notes that the enforcement of the state of exception per Palestinians created the frame for understanding Palestinians as *homo sacer* under the Israeli Army’s occupation (Gregory, 2004) The occupation of Palestinian land by the Israeli army, the extended network of checkpoints, and restrictions on movement (even in the event of necessity) all provide the conditions under the state of exception for the desubjectification of Palestinians. These conditions proliferate such biopolitical control over the population, specific instances of restrictions on access and movement for healthcare, provide the conditions for Palestinian desubjectification as *homo sacer* (Filc, Zic, 2006). The geographic splicing of the West Bank and Gaza behind walls and checkpoints further establishes the role of sovereign power in determining how Palestinian lives are livable under restricted conditions. Although the wall in the West Bank works to mark the splitting of Palestinian and Israeli populations, Glenn Bowman (2007) highlights that this separation of populations as those who are subjects and those desubjectified as *homo sacer* through policies on immigration, where Jews from all over the world are encouraged to migrate to Israel, while Palestinians born on the land are unable to return and live in an unending status as refugees (Bowman, 2007). Although these articles provide accounts of the conditions of the occupation, the forced static characterizations of Palestinians in direct opposition to sovereign power or Israelis, creates a false static binary, that does not account for the complexity of mixed populations (Palestinian citizens of Israel, Israeli settlers in the West Bank, Jews who ‘return’ to Israel not as immigrants
but as activists working against the occupation).

The apparentness of Palestinian political desubjectification can also be found in testimony of Palestinians in refugee camps. At one point in her article, “The Politics of the Witness,” Diana Allan (2007) presents the testimony of Palestinians as indicated the biopolitical state of forced survival per Agamben. Unfortunately, this is merely a footnote, but perhaps an indicator of the importance of testimony, although in this instance, left unlinked to subjectivity. Another article dealing with the Palestinian population as homines sacri articulates the limits of understanding the Palestinian people as desubjectified. Horit Peled works through the conditions of occupation, by drawing on the work of Machsom Watch, an Israeli women’s social movement working to alleviate the devastating impact of checkpoints and closure in the West Bank and Gaza, by observing the Israeli military and negotiating with soldiers who’s deeming of Palestinian bodies as homo sacer reifies daily practices of humiliation, wanton brutality, and often the simple desire to exercise sovereign power. Although Peled wants to work through some of these limits, the article ends with little alternative to such a characterizations; although this article does cut a path for understanding the importance of relations and subjectivity as the potential for moving through the impasse of Palestinians as only desubjectified, the arguments limit sets the role of identity performance as an indicator of changing Israeli political consciousness, endowing both geopolitical solutions as the only imaginable solutions, as well as reestablishing the false static binary of sovereign and homo sacer, where the former is left with the responsibility of changing the latter conditions through consciousness (Peled, 2007).

Nadia Latif (2008) also address the issue of Palestinian refugees as homo sacer, attempting to negate arguments of Palestinians as homo sacer. In her final analysis she argues that Agamben mis-reads Foucault’s notion of sovereign and biopolitical power, noting that
Palestinians should not be considered *homo sacer*, per the lack of a sovereign to deem them such. There are a couple of problems with Latif’s analysis, the first revolves around a limited reading of both Foucault and Agamben. Merely referencing *The History of Sexuality Part 1* for Foucaultian support, and *Homo Sacer* for her understanding of Agamben (she also includes a reference to “We Refugees,” a short article preceding Agamben’s work on *homo sacer*), she fails to articulate several important notions of both theorists work. First, Latif does not engage Foucault’s conceptualizations of power (sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical) as fluid and dispersed, instead seeking a singular sovereign who initiates action from a single location. Perhaps it was this underestimation that led her to unclarity about the dispersal of power in regard to the deeming of *homo sacer* by sovereign power through governmentality. This problem lends to another with her argument, with an understanding of governmentality as deeming populations and peoples as *homo sacer*, her hypothesis becomes the inverse, Palestinian refugees are in fact *homo sacer*, providing the various humanitarian aid organizations, The Red Cross, UNRWA, and governments as the deeming agent of such status. Latif even articulates the discourse of *homo sacer* by humanitarian aid organizations in her criticism (Latif, 2008).

Understandably, the deeming of Palestinians as *homo sacer*, presents a political quandary as to the limits of desubjectification and the inability to articulate status beyond *homo sacer*, but here it would have behooved Latif to access Agamben, Butler, and Zizek’s more recent work on biopolitics and *homo sacer*, which are able to fill in the gaps between Agamben’s original work and Foucault, as well as, present alternatives to desubjectification as the biopolitical limit through Agamben’s book *Remnant’s of Auschwitz*.

Giorgio Agamben’s (1998; 1999) analysis on biopolitics, the state of exception, and *homo sacer* continues to be applied to the Palestinian situation and Palestinian people by
scholars. One such scholar, recognized as contributing much to the discussion and expansion of Agamben’s political and theoretical analysis is Achille Mbembe. With a close eye to the geographic ramification of biopolitics, and the colonial history of the region, Mbembe argues for an understanding of necropolitics, or the politics of death, arising from the biopolitical situation (Mbembe, 2003). Although Mbembe’s goal seems more oriented towards understanding a politics of death and providing a political theorization of suicide bombing, the focus given to sovereign power without discussion of governmentality reestablishes parameters of power that only reinforce desubjectification, continuing to project the Palestinian population as only *hominis sacri*. The political subjectivity of Palestinians continues as purely desubjectification, leaving theoretical possibility of political engagement with no alternatives. A conflation of the modes of power, as well as, a conflation of agency and subjectivity, render Mbembe’s final analysis, limited offering no political alternatives out of the current impasse. Suicide bombing thus becomes the act of agency and becoming for Mbembe, who surely would not see the entire Palestinian population blowing themselves up as a ‘final solution’ to the conflict.

Slavoj Zizek (2002) is another scholar frequently drawn on for his application and development of Agamben’s use of *homo sacer* to the Palestinians. For Zizek one must also evaluate the role of humanitarianism in deeming populations *homo sacer*. Palestinians exist as *homo sacer* in placement outside the law, as recipients of humanitarian aid, and in life reduced to ‘mere life’ or ‘bare life’ as Agamben would argue (Zizek, 2002). Zizek also notes the potential of all humans to be viewed as *homo sacer*. That under the state of exception and extension of sovereign power through governmentality, we all can be deemed lives forced to survive with no reprisal for our murder and our deaths as non-sacrificable (Zizek, 2002) (Zizek, 2004). Much like Mbembe, Zizek turns to the aberration of the suicide bomber to discuss what seemingly
functions as the only political act actualizable by Palestinians. This turn is in part due to the lack of political subjectivity and action allowed *homo sacer*. The desubjectification of *homo sacer* does not allow them participation with the law nor the polis, thus finding political responses to such desubjectification becomes difficult, but Zizek does not refuse to look further. Offering a small space in which to begin to see an alternative to such desubjectification, Zizek offers the Israeli Refusenik as the example of the Neighbor. Here, Zizek rejects the notion that one can democratically work one’s way out of being deemed *homo sacer*, but does offer a response by others that Zizek articulates as an “authentic ethical act” (Zizek, 2002, 116). The focus here on relations as an alternative to the deeming of *homo sacer* should not be underplayed. Although this does not offer political subjectivity to Palestinians, the theoretical biopolitical quandry of understanding the conditions and lives of Palestinians as *homo sacer* because of their desubjectification by the Israeli military but potentiating alternatives finally seems plausible. Perhaps it was not so necessary to look so far from Agamben’s writing to conceptualize what relational alternatives might provide subjectivity for those deemed *homo sacer*. Reductive readings of Giorgio Agamben’s conception of *homo sacer* that stop at the desubjectification, do not account for the inherent intersubjectivity of witnesses and *homo sacer*, a relationship marked by a lacuna that opens possibility away from only desubjectification (Agamben, 1999).

The Witness

To view activists bodies or Palestinian bodies as only *homo sacer* through desubjectification, does not account for the relationship of the witness to the *homo sacer*. The activists with International Solidarity Movement who work in occupied Palestine, work as witnesses to the occupation, accounting through testimony for the conditions of Palestinian life and the Israeli occupation. The role of the activist as witness functions less in regard to their
political identity or ideological positioning as a protest to the occupation, but in terms of their accounting through testimony as eye-witnesses to the occupation.

In his discussion on the witness, Giorgio Agamben (1999) highlighted four categories of witness as bearing testimony. The first was testis, or the testimony of a third party witness. The second was superstes, or the party who has lived through the event from beginning to end and also can give testimony (1999, p. 17). The third witness was that of the victim who did not live to give testimony, presenting the lacuna of testimony. Agamben crafts a fourth category of witness, a complete witness, in that their testimony comes from the grey area of death, homo sacer. This fourth witness was represented in Remnants of Auschwitz, as the walking dead, or as termed in Auschwitz, the Muselmann, or life without life, life forced to survive in camp whose purpose was the production of corpses (Agamben, 1999). Although the Muselmann, the most extreme of state of those desubjectified by the biopolitics of the concentration camps during World War II, presents a daunting reduction of life to bare life, this example is the very opening in which Agamben presents possibility through the intersubjectivity of witnesses (Agamben, 1999).

The contingent relation of witnesses to one another is compulsory. The complete witness maintains an inability to speak as a witness to their own desubjectification. Providing testimony or speaking on behalf of homo sacer, the witness constitutes a necessary component of that which is unspeakable. Witnesses bear witness to the lacuna in testimony, or the very gap in testimony reproduced by the dead’s inability to testify and homo sacer’s inability to bear witness to that which desubjectifies them. The witness thus functions as a placeholder for subjectification and desubjectification through their relation to one another (Agamben, 1999).

Perhaps the inability to witness one’s own desubjectification is most obvious in the testimony of Tom Dale following Rachel Corrie’s death, where Corrie is no longer able to bear
witness as she had only moments before. Testimonies render the ability to see potential desubjectification as possibility. ISM activists do not attempt to play heroes immune to the force of occupation and desubjectification, but understand the importance of their presence to potential intersubjectivity.

My life, internationals lives, are no more important than Palestinians’ lives. We will stay on during their suffering, in solidarity and to document the illegal acts Israel is doing, the war crimes Israel clearly does not want the world to see, to understand, and is preventing journalists from reporting. To see, to understand, means to stop Israel’s bombardment of Gaza, its contravention of international humanitarian law and international law. (ISM a, 2009)

The desire to see and to understand, as witnesses, tips its hat to the inability to do just that. The overwhelming burden of bearing witness to the bombardment of 1.3 million people in Gaza could not possibly be holistically rendered by the accounts of less than a dozen international witnesses on the ground, but nonetheless these lacking testimonies become vital for witnesses and Palestinians; they become the thread to hang on to human life and the existence of themselves as subjects rather than turning away from the overwhelming monstrosity of attempting to bear witness at all.

The inadequacy of testimony to present the completeness of experience, the lack of language and speech to provide an account of witnessing is referenced in testimonies of activists.

Special greetings again from Rafah. There is just no way to describe life here at the southern end of the Gaza Strip. We are the only International people in all of Rafah and the news has traveled fast and everyone knows we are here. (ISM a, 2005)

Both noting the impossibility of language and speech to render accounts of life in Rafah, these witnesses also immediately follow this statement of lack, with the known importance of their presence to the local Palestinian population. Despite the lack of their ability to testify, their presence as witnesses becomes necessary knowledge to the people they are bearing witness for. The overwhelming use of force in Gaza often escapes the imagination of those who have
testified to witnessing this destruction. Even when accounts try desperately to detail the
destruction and statistics minute by minute of the atrocities happening around them, the
overwhelming nature of their position as witness and the lack of language to describe it returns
again in the form of a lack of imagination.

In that first sweep of attacks, in approximately 10 minutes, we understand that 205 people
were killed and more than 700 injured. Most government buildings and other social
infrastructure were destroyed. 80 Israeli planes and helicopters were involved in the
attack and over 100 bombs were dropped. So before tonight began, the hospitals and
mortuaries were full, the staff overwhelmed, the medical supplies exhausted. It will be
dawn soon and it is hard to imagine what we will find with the daylight. (ISM, 2008)

As witnesses attempt again and again to provide testimony, it is the lacuna of testimony that
remains. Differences in statistics, renderings of what is happening as witnessing occurs,
testimonies shared, spliced and reshared, all cite the inability to testify completely. The
importance of the lack of testimony, the inability to account or the ridiculousness of even
attempting to bear witness in the face of survivors, show not only the lack of testimony, but the
immense burden of testimony witnesses bear.

I have not been able to find out further clear details on this, and in fact there are various
confusing versions of this story, speaking of seven families and 100 people in fact being
in multiple houses together that were shelled... I will try to write a description of this
process shortly. We understand also that UN food deliveries were fired upon and one or
two UN people were killed. My access to the net is so little that you will be able to
find out more accurate reports on these sort of events (ie involving international agencies)
with your own searching. (ISM d, 2009)

I took photos somewhat helplessly, of everything they showed me. I’m well-practiced at
documenting damage Israeli soldiers have done to Palestinian homes. And the families
always seem to feel better if you take photos of everything. But the ridiculousness of
what I was doing - taking photos of small holes in walls when half of the house was
missing - hit, and I put the camera down. (ISM h, 2009)

How can one relate to the survivor? How can the witness to the unimaginable? How can one
share the feelings of those that have felt their own dehumanization? Testimony marks this place
of lack, this gap between subjectivity and desubjectification.
Getting her other three children to shelter, Majda tried to call the ambulance, the Red Cross, even a radio station, but the phone wouldn’t work. So she set out to run to Al Shifa hospital for help. When she said this, I stopped to check I’d understood. Al Quds hospital was 5 minutes away and Al Shifa was at least a kilometre, it takes me about half an hour to walk there from Al Quds. Majda explained that she knew from the radio that Al Quds was under the same attack as they were and there was no way she could make it there alive, nor could anyone there reach them alive, which was in fact true. In the meantime, 13 year old Firas was also going for help for his brother and father, but almost immediately he was shot in the knee by an Israeli sniper. This didn’t stop him however - he covered at least 60 yards, half of them in sight of the tanks, to reach his cousin’s house. His cousin then managed to contact a neighbour who was a doctor with a UN car, and they went into the line of fire and picked up Nasser and Basher and got them to Al Shifa. By the time Majda reached Al Shifa (I still can’t get my head around how she must have felt during that run) her husband was in surgery and her son was also being treated. (ISM i, 2009)

Agamben’s opening of an inquiry into the role of the witness, might, in fact, displace the presumed employment of governmentality and sovereignty as only deeming homo sacer. Rather the intersubjectivity through witnessing potentiate political subjectivities differently than the static articulations in which analysis of the relation of homo sacer and sovereignty seem to hold.

Agamben further explains this relation through testimony,

This can also be expressed by saying that the subject of testimony is the one who bears witness to a desubjectification. But this expression holds only if it is not forgotten that “to bear witness to a desubjectification” can only mean there is no subject of testimony (“I repeat, we are not... the true witnesses”) and that every testimony is a field of forces incessantly traversed by currents of subjection and desubjectification. Here it is possible to gage the insufficiency of the two opposed theses that divide accounts of Auschwitz: the view of humanist discourse, which states that “all human beings are human” and that of anti-humanist discourse, which holds that “only some human beings are human.” What testimony says is something completely different, which can be formulated in the following thesis: “human beings are human insofar as they bear witness to the inhuman.” (Agamben, 1999, p.121)

This would indicate that it is the activists who become human through witnessing. Agamben’s use of subjectivity relies on the constitutive lack of a subject. This lack, indicated by the other within ourselves and the separation, as Agamben refers, of the I-Other, can be understood as a separation from language that constitutes subjectivity. “Subjectivity and consciousness, in which
our culture believed itself to have found its firmest foundation, rest on what is most precarious and fragile in the world: the event of speech” (Agamben, 1999, p.122). Further explaining the inauguration of the subject, Judith Butler relying on Lacan for the rhetorical condition as the scene of address for the inauguration of the subject, elaborates the importance of relations in understanding subjectivity (Butler, 1997). Butler points to individuation per Foucault as necessary to survival of the subject, but this individuation cannot occur without initiation from others. Individuation through giving an account of one’s self reaches a failure when accounting for its own emergence (Butler, 2005). Thus, from the outset we are given over to others; impingement on the other functions as primary vulnerability. We cannot therefore give a complete account of our own emergence without that which has been given to us by others (Butler, 2004; 2005). “Within this founding scene, the very grammar of the self has not yet taken hold. And so one might say, reflectively, and with a certain sense of humility, that in the beginning, I am my relation to you, ambiguously addressed and addressing, given over to a “you” without whom I cannot be and upon whom I depend to survive” (Butler, 2005). Much like the lacuna of testimony, the inability to account fully for oneself in the inauguration of the subject, replicates itself in witnessing. Agamben elaborates on this in Remnants of Auschwitz further,

If there is no articulation between the living being and language, if the “I” stands suspended in this disjunction, there there can be testimony. The intimacy that betrays our non-coincidence with ourselves is the place of testimony. Testimony takes place in the non-place of articulation. In the non-place of the Voice stands not writing, but the witness. And it is precisely because the relation (or, rather, non-relation) between the living being and the speaking being has the form of shame, of being reciprocally consigned to something that cannot be assumed by a subject, that the ethos of this disjunction can only be testimony-- that is, something that cannot be assigned to a subject but that nevertheless constitutes the subject’s only dwelling place, its only possibly consistency. (Agamben, 1999, p. 130)

For Agamben, “unity-difference alone constitutes testimony.” The witness is inextricably linked
to the process of desubjectification they witness. Arguing that possibility and contingency offer
the constitution of Being, Agamben also argues that necessity and possibility offer “pure
substantiality without subject,” in that “at the limit a world that is never my world since
possibility does not exist in it” (Agamben, 1999). Further elaborating, Agamben argues,

*The authority of the witness consists in his capacity to speak solely in the name of an
incapacity to speak- that is, in his or her being a subject.* Testimony this guarantees not
the factual truth of the statement safeguarded in the archive, but rather it unarchivability,
its exteriority with respect to the archive-that is, the necessity by which, as the existence
of language, it escapes both memory and forgetting. It is because there is testimony only
where there is an impossibility of speaking, because there is a witness only where there
has been desubjectification, that the *Muselmann* is the complete witness and that the
survivor and the *Muselmann* cannot be split apart. (Agamben, 1999, p. 158)

This opening or vulnerability towards the other, presents not only our potential for
desubjectification, as Butler notes, “words are slaughtering,” but also for subjectivity and the
ethical demands of our accounts (Butler, 2005). The importance of Agamben’s relational
understanding of subjectivity through witnessing creates a conduit for the lacuna of the subject
marked by their inability to give an account of one’s emergence and “their own ruin.” The
necessity of testimony or accounting in desubjectification and subjectivity establishes the
relation of the humans to one another; Butler notes the importance of this relation which would
rather be marked by a choice of death upon non-narrativizability of the self (Butler, 2005).

I don’t want to hear a small child have to tell me that its parent or parents are dead.
There’s so much I can’t bring myself to ask. I’ve taken a lot of reports in Palestine. I
know how it goes. What you need to ask. What information is vital. I know it so well I
don’t even need to think about it. I can ask with sympathy about how Israeli soldiers
invaded a family home; beat people; abducted their children. But this is something else
entirely. Here and now, such questions seem vile. I just want to hang out with the
children. Let them show me what they want to show me. Listen to them talk. While we’re
hanging out with these kids, our friends encounter one of their cousins who watched both
of her parents die when Israeli soldiers bombed a house that they had told everyone from
neighbouring houses to shelter in. (ISM h, 2009)

This testimony provides not only a glimpse into the vulnerability of living, but also an
example of how we are given over to one another through relations. These relations become the basis for giving an account of ourselves and those around us. Giving an account of oneself, or for Butler being given over to or possessed by others in our narration of ourselves, or through witnessing provides a responsibility not as a choice but an ethical imperative.

I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others. Do I need to know myself in order to act responsibly in social relations? Surely, to a certain extent, yes. But is there an ethical valence to my unknowingness? If I am wounded, I find that the wound testifies to the fact that I am impressionable, given over to the other in ways that I cannot fully predict or control. I cannot think the question of responsibility alone, in isolation from the other. If I do, I have taken myself out of the mode of address (being addressed as well as addressing the other) in which the problem of responsibility first emerges. (Butler, 2005, p. 84)

For Butler, ethical demands give rise to political accounts. Taking a Foucaultian position Butler also argues, speaking is action in the field of power. Speaking or accounting as the form of witnessing is integral to escaping reductive notions of desubjectification in two ways. First, practices of witnessing rework social and political conditions through power potentiating witnessing beyond purely exercises of sovereign accounting, overcoming biopolitical attempts to separate bios from zoe or the living being from the speaking being. Second, practices of witnessing open questions as to the priority of rhetoric to ethics and its relation to subjection. Butler elaborates on this,

One must ask how the formation of the subject implies a framework for understanding ethical response and a theory of responsibility. If certain versions of self-preoccupied moral inquiry return us to a narcissism that is supported through socially enforced modes of individualism, and if that narcissism also leads to an ethical violence that knows no grace of self-acceptance or forgiveness, then it would seem obligatory, if not urgent to return the question of responsibility to the question, How are we formed within social life, and what does it cost?...Perhaps most importantly, we must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when out willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance- to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself
elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or if we are, we will surely be forgiven. (Butler, 2005, p.135-136)

In this way, the relations of witnessing established through testimony provides the basis for our founding subjectivity, as well as, the continued process of our subjectification. The lack of the self, the lacuna of testimony, that which cannot be spoken, provides the potentiality for reimagining subjectivity beyond the limits of desubjectification. The role of the witness does not mark a juridical responsibility to the other, but instead an ethical one, where the ethics of the address and response are rendered through testimony and giving an account of oneself and what one has witnessed.

Who is the Palestinian Subject?

Characterizations of the biopolitical state of occupation in Palestine frequently seem to come to an impasse when dealing with the desubjectification of Palestinian lives under occupation. To move beyond this impasse, an analysis of the role of International Solidarity Movement activists presents a particular practice of witnessing that presents the possibility of intersubjectivity of witnesses as presented by Agamben. Activists with International Solidarity Movement position themselves in solidarity with Palestinians, by living with, working with, and witnessing the occupation in Palestine. It is these activists status as first world citizens with the privilege of travel that allows for them to enter occupied territory and stand in solidarity with Palestinians, but this privilege of status does not protect them from the potential desubjectification of Israeli occupation, Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall both were deemed *homo sacer* by the Israeli Army’s ability to kill them without their deaths being considered murder, nor were their lives considered sacrificial in the name of a greater struggle. Thus, the role of these witnesses is not precisely contingent upon their identity or privilege as first world
citizens, rather their witnessing becomes a necessity in establishing the potential of subjectivity in its relationship to desubjectification. Witnessing re-potentiates subjectivity for Palestinians and activists not through recognition, but through an accounting of their conditions and the testimony produced by their witnessing.

The variability of desires motivating activists to travel to occupied Palestine and stand in solidarity with Palestinians, presents precisely this “unknowingness” or “divergence” from the typical unintelligibility of Palestinian bodies under occupation. For some International Solidarity Movement activists, the struggle against Israeli occupation is motivated by the intimacy of their own personal accounts, as volunteers of both Jewish and Palestinian descent, traveling under first world citizenship often work as witnesses in occupied territory. For other activists, the desire to know “the Palestinians” and establish “facts on the ground” could be as likely as motivation to participate in solidarity and witnessing. These motivations spur the possibility of misrecognition as often, if not more often than recognition between activists and Palestinians. This is not reason to presume that intersubjectivity fails in the face or either, for it is the lack inherent in subjectivity, or as Butler points out per Lacan the misrecognition of self as the inauguration of the subject.

It would not be accurate to assume that most activists working with ISM presume romantic notions of the Palestinian political struggle, although activists have been deemed “naive idealists” by some, the strong political consciousness of the activists seems to motivate their desire to work with ISM (O’Hehir, May 3, 2009). The gap between the discourses about Palestinians per Israeli governmentality, Palestinian culture, and the founding of the State of Israel and simultaneous destruction of Palestinian villages, land, and uprooting of the population, articulate the subjectivity of Palestinians through various discursive formations that hide or
provide fragmented facets of Palestinian subjects (Abu-Lughod & Sa’di, 2007).

In 1969, Gold Meir, then Prime Minister of Israel infamously declared, “There are no Palestinians,” “[Edward] Said decided to take on “the slightly preposterous challenge of disproving her, of beginning to articulate a history of loss and dispossession that had to be extricated, minute by minute, word by word, inch by inch” (Democracy Now, 2009). The very existence of Palestinian subjects continues to be an argument in political discourse, regardless of the bodies on the ground in Occupied Territory and the history of a people on a land, prior to Israel that were subject to British colonization after hundreds of years of Ottoman occupation. Palestine and Palestinians thus mark what Judith Butler renders, “The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of subjects appear as viable actors” (Butler, 2002, p.XVII). The political accounts of Palestinians, the discourses of their experiences, and articulations of their subjectivity range from inhumane representations to a rejection of the grievability of their lives in the US media (Butler, 2002). Butler elaborates on the complexity of these discourses,

   Here the dehumanization emerges at the limits of the discursive life, limits established through prohibition and foreclosure. There is less a dehumanizing discourse at work here than a refusal of discourse that produces dehumanization as a result. Violence against those who are already not quite living, that is, living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark. (Butler, 2002, p. 36)

This refusal of discourse on Palestinians creates the frames in which Palestinian subjectivity and desubjectification becomes invisible. For those that seek out discourses about Palestinians and their history and struggle for self-determination, the search produces not only discourses of Palestinians themselves, their cultural practices, heritage, language, and political histories, and personal narratives, but also the discourses of denial of Palestinian dispossession, colonization, and suffering, denials Palestinian history and ties to the land, as well as stereotypes
or demonization of the population (Esmeir, 2007). In spite of these varied discourses on the Palestinians, activists with ISM travel to stand in solidarity with a people that many, perhaps, do not know exist, or whom are often viewed as a population of “terrorists.” To commit to volunteering for an organization that works through non-violent direct action to confront the Israeli military occupation of Palestine, activists with ISM have familiarity with many of these conflicting discourses, as well as the repercussions such discourses will have on their decisions to stand in solidarity with Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza (O’Hehir, 2009).

**We are All Palestinians**

A shared desire for activists working with ISM is the desire for solidarity with the Palestinian people living under occupation. Perhaps tantamount to a perfect imaginary consubstantiality, witnesses to the occupation and activists in solidarity with Palestinians often use the slogan, “We are all Palestinians.” This desire seems both encompassed by and simultaneously outside of the statement of solidarity, “We are all Palestinians.” Ironically, Agamben’s analysis of witnessing would indicate that this desire will likely remain unsatiated for witnesses, for it is not that we are all Palestinians, nor that we all become Palestinians in witnessing, but that witnessing motivated by solidarity opens the very lack that constitutes our subjectivity, offering the primary impingement of vulnerability for Palestinians and activists alike, providing an intimacy of subjectivity not limited to the potential of desubjectification along the way, but pushing the limits of possibility. For it is the very lacuna of testimony, that which cannot be accounted for, the lack of the witness which produces the potential of subjectivity away from the reductionist view of Palestinians as only *homo sacer*. In this sense, the necessity of saying “We are all Palestinians” is revealing in that it marks the space between
self and other which is necessary for subjectivity. Rather than the limiting commentary of Derek Gregory who when speaking of the extension of sovereign power through the endless War on Terror, closes his article on “Palestine and the War on Terror,” with this comment, “After 9/11, many commentators proclaimed that ‘we are all New Yorkers.’ Perhaps- in this sense at least- we are all potential Palestinians too” (Gregory, 2004, p.193), this understanding of subjectivity opens questions of the intersubjectivity of witnessing, per Agamben, to the potential to imagine ourselves once again as human through our role as witnesses.

Another potential analysis for this statement, “We are all Palestinians,” is that of the performative statement, or better yet the performative contradiction, Judith Butler notes,

One has to pause and wonder: does this speech act- that not only declares boldly the equality of the we but also demands a translation to be understood- not install the task of translation at the heart of the nation? A certain distance or fissure becomes the condition of possibility of equality is not a matter of extending or augmenting the homogeneity of the nation...this is precisely the kind of performative contradiction that leads not to impasse but to forms of insurgency... Once we reject the view that claims that no political position can rest on performative contradiction, and allow the performative function as a claim and an act whose effects unfold in time, then we can actually entertain the opposite thesis, namely, that there can be no radical politics of change without performative contradiction. (Butler & Spivak, 2007, pp. 61-66)

As a speech act providing the political contradiction necessary for a radical politics of change, “We are all Palestinians” presents the possibility of not only an articulation of subjectivity as a possibility, but a rhetoric of radical political change, perhaps one that moves us beyond the impasse of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict towards forms of insurgency, providing for possibility of new politics as well.
CHAPTER 5

WITNESSING WITNESSING

The human being is this always beyond or before the human, the central threshold through which pass currents of the human and the inhuman, subjectification and desubjectification, the living being’s becoming and speaking and the logos’ becoming living. These current are coextensive, but not coincident; their non-coincidence, the subtle ridge that divides them, is the place of testimony.

Agamben

Testimony of witnesses to the occupation of Palestine, offer an account of experiences not often discussed in academia nor western media. The testimonies of witnesses working with the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) offer an opportunity to explore the relationship of subjectivity and witnessing. Rather than evaluating these testimonies in terms of their ability to render a complete or accurate picture of the experiences of occupation, this chapter attempts to open the possibility for subjectivity out of those experiences of victimization and desubjectification through a hospitable position towards the testimonies of the witnesses, both Palestinian and international activists working with the ISM.

Little scholarly analysis of testimonies of the ISM witnesses exists in published research. The work of Toine Van Teeffelen (2004), one exception, which begins by arguing that the interconnection of collective identity and narration as productive but not without the risk of schizophrenic sensation if too divergent, drawing on the specific case of the Palestinians. This article relies on hermeneutic reading of narratives of members of the ISM, but methodologically presents several obstacles for Van Teeffelen. Focusing on narratives as potential masterstories conflates the role of the witness with the narration taking place, presenting “pedagogical problems,” which Van Teeffelen (2004), characterizes as the presentation of Palestinians as victims with no ground for libratory practice(s). Unfortunately the method of analysis and
theoretical framework of the study reimposes these problems. Highlighting the increased coverage of ISM witnesses’ and their narratives by western media over that of Palestinians, Van Teeffelen (2004) notes the potential of speaking for others and the damage such practices do for those that seek liberation from oppression.

Van Teeffelen’s study provides its own theoretical limitations; by relying on a hermeneutics of narratives, the study fails to conceptualize the possibility of the witness as not producing only narratives but testimony. Rather than opening the role of the ISM witness to a participant in mutual subjectivity, the framing of Palestinians as purely victimized people with little ability to narrate themselves, underestimates the intricate role Palestinians themselves play in shaping the testimonies of ISM members. Van Teeffelen study’s juxtaposing of the Israeli military’s commentary on the ISM versus that of other activists such as Susan Sontag, seems to reify the seemingly naturalized forms of power and authority created by sovereignties oppositional relationship to those subject to the sovereign (2004). Rather than potentiating alternatives, such a narrow reading of narratives, runs the risk of flattening the political possibilities of Palestinians and activists in solidarity with them. It would seem that Van Teeffelen walks dangerously close to throwing out the proverbial baby with the bath water in arguing the dangers of members of the ISM “speaking for Palestinians” as perpetuating victimization, while simultaneously presenting the difficulty of Palestinian voices reaching beyond the walls of occupation. This impasse, which presents both the oppression of Palestinians while not rendering an alternative to limited presentations of victimization, presents precisely the potential of understanding the role of ISM members and Palestinians as witnesses to the ongoing

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1 Van Teeffelen fails to point out that this coverage of ISM activists who were shot, injured, and/or killed in Gaza and the West Bank, actually received minimal coverage for a very short period in mainstream western media, with few Americans and Europeans who recognize the names Rachel Corrie or Tom Hurndall six years after their deaths in Gaza.
occupation of Palestine. Agamben’s analysis on the witness potentiates the witness as the
remnant of testimony, the production of subjectivity through intersubjective relations (Agamben,
1999). Agamben’s framing of the witness thus moves us beyond an objectification of the victim
towards an understanding of the witnessing of oppression as relationally bound, exemplified by
the testimonies of witnesses and tied to the accounts which narrate our subjectivity, not as
collectives, but as potential subjects intimately and inherently possessed by one another (1999).

Van Teeffelen (2004) also presents subjects as willful agents, with the capacity to employ
desired change to their political conditions. In their 2005 article on subjectivity and agency,
Chris Lundberg and Josh Gunn articulate a criticism of this understanding of agency as agent
bound, arguing that a more hospitable position towards agency allows for the understanding of
the subject as possessed by agency, still subject to their conditions but yet able to produce effects
through their subjectivity (Lundberg & Gunn, 2005). Likewise for Butler (1997), subordination
and agency are not binaries but subordination is constitutive of agency (Butler, 1997). Much like
Lundberg and Gunn’s argument that a necessary re-conceptualization of agency in the field of
rhetoric would account for an understanding of the subject and effect, rather than from a position
of agent and agency, Butler articulates the agency of the subject as the effects of subordination
through both Foucaultian and Lacanian notions of subjectivity. These alternative understandings
of agency open the importance of possession of the subject in the production of subjectivity and
possibility of agency to possession by another, by social conditions, by power, by desire, lending
to a conceptualization of Agamben not merely as articulating new subjectivities but the potential
agency these possessed subjectivities require. Rather than understanding ISM activists and
Palestinians as agents, the potential of subjectivity and desubjectification become hospitable
towards the necessity of possession of witnesses, opening the possibility of political alternatives
to both the theoretical impasse of victimization, and the stalemate of geo-political solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Rather than attempting to force a theoretical frame in advance for the testimonies of ISM and Palestinian witnesses in a vain attempt to elucidate, clarify, or interpret meanings of these witnesses’ experiences and words of testimony, this section attempts to provide a space in which to witness witnessing, to open hospitably towards the complexity and lack within testimony. To open oneself to the lacuna of testimony, witnessing the witness, and thus becoming undone by testimony provides a chance for becoming reconstituted as human, becoming subject to that which posses us, without rendering effects in advance.

Witness, Testimony, and Solidarity

The testimony of witnesses in the West Bank and Gaza working with ISM presents the role of witnessing primarily as documenters. Testimonies filled with statistics and details of occupation and closure, violence and the banality of life, as well as, the weight and horror of witnessing create for readers small fragments of life under occupation. Perhaps the emphasis on statistical and almost juridical documentation stems from activists background in Western nations, whose primary exposure to documentation through reporting concerns journalism, research, and or the legal system.

Kamal Abu Mohammed gave us one such testimonial. On Saturday, April 6, (2003) at 5:30 am, the Israeli army broke his windows and entered his house. “I am peaceful,” he said. “There are 13 people in my family.” The soldiers phoned the helicopters, and the helicopters attacked his house from all four sides. Soldiers started shooting throughout the house; a fire started in the second floor. After ten minutes soldiers allowed Kamal to take his children out of the house. But when he tried to step through the doorway, holding his two children, the soldiers started shooting again. “They ordered me to put my children on the ground. Next they made me take off my clothes. They handcuffed and blindfolded me...” (Kelly, 2007)

Regardless, I was 10 metres away when it happened 2 days ago, and this is the way it went. We’d been monitoring and occasionally obstructing the 2 bulldozers for about 2
hours when 1 of them turned toward a house we knew to be threatened with demolition. Rachel knelt down in its way. She was 10-20 metres in front of the bulldozer, clearly visible, the only object for many metres, directly in it’s view. (ISM a, 2003)

Although we knew it was permitted to take these kids across the checkpoints (we checked with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel) into Israel, we decided to check in with the District Coordination Office (DCO) of the Israeli military just to let them know we would be doing this and that we didn’t want any problems. They told us we needed a permit (this is not true). We asked for a permit and were refused. (ISM c, 2007)

ISM activists from outside Palestine, attend a three day training in the West Bank, attending to matters of legal responsibility and protection, methods of negotiation and documentation, collaboration with local communities and other organizations in Palestine and Israel, non-violent direct action training, and cultural and historical information. The training assists with understanding the importance of gathering information during activists time in occupied territory, while simultaneously respecting the cultural practices of the people of Palestine.

Although ISM activists take on the role of negotiators and escorts in an attempt to alleviate the suffering of Palestinians living under constant occupation, international presence in ambulances, at checkpoints, in the streets, hospitals, and schools, does not guarantee the acquiescence of the Israeli military. Many witnesses recognized that their presence might not function as a deterrent in all instances. Opening oneself to the mercy of a tank, bulldozer, or F-16 is quite different than a face-to-face negotiation with a soldier at a checkpoint or during an attempt to protest or break curfew.

In the last two weeks there have been seven assassinations in the Gaza Strip. These are done with missiles that are fired from F16s. Sometimes as many as seven missiles are fired in one assassation, killing innocent bystanders, and destroying shops... When we left, we noticed that there was no one out in the street. We heard a tank drive by, and cautiously walked toward Abu Ahmed’s. After a few steps, the tank opened fire in our direction. We darted back, and waited until it continued on...(ISM c, 2003)

The bulldozer drove toward Rachel slowly, gathering earth in its scoop as it went. She knelt there, she did not move. The bulldozer reached her and she began to stand up, climbing onto the mound of earth. She appeared to be looking into the cockpit.
bulldozer continued to push Rachel, so she slipped down the mound of earth, turning as she went. Her face showed she was panicking and it was clear she was in danger of being overwhelmed. All the activists were screaming at the bulldozer to stop and gesturing to the crew about Rachel’s presence. We were in clear view as Rachel had been, they continued. They pushed Rachel, first beneath the scoop, then beneath the blade, then continued till her body was beneath the cockpit. They waited over her for a few seconds, before reversing. They reversed with the blade pressed down, so it scraped over her body a second time. Every second I believed they would stop but they never did. (ISM a, 2003)

To presume that face-to-face negotiations would render ethical responses simply because of the presence of speaking bodies would seem naive at best, but the ethical moment of confrontation present with two bodies, does provide witnesses with opportunities variable to those when faced with militarized machinery. The prevention of detainment or arrest of Palestinians, the use of live ammunition, negotiating movement through checkpoints, and the release of Palestinian civilians detained for no reason are potential effects of witnessing and non-violent direct action against the occupation, but rely on the agreement of soldiers whose wanton behavior can easily turn on the witnesses ISM and Palestinian alike.

I’ve negotiated with Israeli soldiers and prevented them from arresting the Palestinians, physically using my own body as a shield to prevent them from getting to Palestinians... Almost every Palestinian male has been through the Israeli jail at least once, usually for about 6 months administrative detention, and most have no clue whatsoever what crime they were guilty of... (ISM b, 2003)

The categories of witnesses, survivors, third parties, the dead, and homo sacer, working and living in occupied territories fuse in many testimonials, making the bright lines between speakers and those experiencing occupation sometimes difficult to determine. This indeterminability of subjects, the dead, and those desubjectified by varied statuses and identities, placement and positions, highlights the importance of an Agambenian understanding of witnessing its relationship to subjectivity. Tactics of humiliation and violence are standard when confronting or being confronted the Israeli military. “We return home exhausted, tired of
witnessing the constant humiliation, seeing our lovely students waiting in long lines under the
searing sun, sometimes beaten, arrested, or shot at, and always cursed at or insulted” (Jad, 2007,
p. 41). Many testimonies rendered by witnesses share the conscious realization that identity and
status of Internationals does not prevent desubjectification or brutality. The potential for injury
and death is mentioned in testimonies, not only for Palestinians, but for international activists
alike. Rachel Corrie, Tom Hurndall, Tristan Anderson, and Brian Avery were all ISM volunteers
injured or killed during their time in the occupied territory. Even with this potential
desubjectification, where ones life is made to survive, rendered bare life, witnesses working with
ISM, rarely feel the need to abandon their role as witnesses for fear of desubjectification.

Testimonies stress the importance of solidarity with Palestinians again and again. The
sometimes overwhelming responsibility of giving an account of occupation, of what one
witnesses, of relaying the testimony given by Palestinians unable to testify themselves, to listen,
speak, and see the everyday banality of occupation, as well as the horror of the violence of
occupation seems to outweigh much of the fear of desubjectification.

Here are some reasons why we stay: Israel not only controls who is unable to leave Gaza,
but who is unable to enter Gaza. Since November 4, Israel has banned foreign journalists
from entering Gaza, making a minor exception for a few days in early December. At
present, with the over 420 dead, over 2,100 injured and the many civilian homes and
buildings destroyed, there is an urgent need for foreign journalists. (ISM a, 2009)

The constant reminder that Palestinian children cannot escape, that Palestinian women are targets
for Israeli snipers, that Palestinian men are daily humiliated as they try to provide for their
families maintains the importance of bearing witness, but also lends to the feelings of
helplessness of the witness. Facing homes riddled with bullets, facing cities demolished and
flattened by aerial bombing campaigns, photographing the ruins of lives, meeting those
Palestinian bodies that bear the scars of occupation through missing limbs, psychological
damage, and silence, contributes to the feeling of helplessness by many witnesses. How can
one’s testimony ever be enough in the face of such enormity? When the lens of a camera cannot
take in the horror of the sites around you, when there are no words left to describe what one has
experienced, when exhaustion overwhelms the witness, what keeps the witness from simply
giving up? Perhaps some witnesses do quit; those internationals able to escape, walk away and
never return perhaps do so, but a great deal of ISM activists return again and again to occupied
territory, claimed by their own testimony, the testimonies of those around them to not forget that
Palestinian witnesses and survivors cannot walk away, cannot escape occupation. To share the
burden of occupation, to share the weight of witnessing, to expose oneself to such horror that the
differentiation of corpses from bags of garbage can no longer be determined, provides the only
means to testify to the to that which Palestinians have been forced to endure for decades.

Osama gave his testimony as a medic at the scene after the multiple missile shelling.
“When we arrived, I saw dead bodies everywhere. More than 30. Dead children, grandparents … Pieces of flesh all over. And blood. It was very crowded, and difficult to carry out the injured and martyred. There were also dead animals among the humans. I helped carry 15 dead. I had to change my clothes three times. These people thought they were safe in the UN school, but the Israeli army killed them, in cold blood,” he said.

(ISM c, 2009)

ISM activists’ solidarity and fidelity to witnessing with and for Palestinians continues in spite of attempts by the Israeli military to prevent their interaction and entrance into occupied territories. Detentions, deportations, closure, and harassment of ISM volunteers is frequent, but only provides that activists search out other means of entrance. In Gaza, post the closure of the strip in 2006 from internationals, as well as humanitarian assistance and necessary goods for survival, ISM activists boarded boats in Cyprus and since have successfully and unsuccessfully entered Gaza through the Israeli controlled Mediterranean waters around the sea ports of Gaza. The Free Gaza boats surely were a testament to the complete suffocation of the 1.3 million people living in
the poorest and most overpopulated strip of land in the globe, by the world’s fourth most advanced military.

The presence of volunteers with ISM during the last 28 day brutal invasion of Gaza by the Israeli army, navy, and air force during the winter of 2008 and 2009, perhaps was the most critical for providing accounts to the outside world as to the conditions of war and desperation of civilians with nowhere to run or seek shelter from assault. Internationals had long been restricted access to Gaza. Most quickly left Gaza after the initial air assault, but a handful of ISM activists and doctors from the West remained present during the assault, providing major news distributors and the outside world with the accounts the Israeli government had intended otherwise silent through their expulsion and denial of entrance to journalists. Testimony of witnesses, ISM activists and Palestinians alike, during this slaughter accounted for a brutality most had never witnessed nor imagined.

When I visited the Kabariti family yesterday, M told me that the girls are asking him how much it hurts to get injured, and what happens if they die. They are seeing so many pictures of children like themselves wrapped in body bags. (ISM d, 2009)

Some of the children explain that their mother had given birth during the bombing, how they had to burn a knife over a candle to cut the umbilical cord. And about how their two-year-old sister was wounded on her face - lacerations from her eye across and down her cheek. (ISM h, 2009)

The overwhelming use of force and its application to any living thing in Gaza created a great burden on many of the witnesses, who felt a sudden inability to describe or testify to what they were witnessing. The emotional and psychological trauma of the war, and the desubjectification of the population only seems to find reprieve in the ability to expose through testimony, as many testimonies as possible, the horror and trauma of people’s experiences during and after the assault.

The production of testimony by these witnesses seems less guided by merely...
documentation, but a realization of their own subjection and helplessness. Testimonies relay the questions of many. Not only do these questions establish the lack of testimony itself, but provide a daunting tale of dehumanization. Children questioning what it is like to be injured or die. He says. “My daughter asked, what is it like to die? I told her, it's just like closing your eyes.” (ISM g, 2009) Adults questioning the brutality of humanity and how they and their loved ones can be deemed so worthless as to be spared nothing. Internationals questioning the response of their home countries, governments, friends, and loved ones. Friends questioning those they love about their lives and behavior from a fear of not living another day. Questions seeking an answer to the illogical justification of such a brutal invasion, “Are my children terrorists?” (ISM i, 2009).

Shame, Anxiety, and the Subject

Testimonies of the ISM also display a level of anxiety and affect both in explicit description, as well as implicit in the structure of the testimonies. The vulnerability of bodies under occupation instills bodies with a fragility and expellability those not living under occupation do not face. Beyond the vulnerability of the body, the vulnerability of the psyche is most present in the emotional strength and breakdown of those witnessing occupation and in the testimonies they share. Feelings of humiliation, great sadness, grief that seems to have no end, anxiety, shock and terror and weariness are present in most testimonies.

This shock was even worse. I was as pale as Christine after she died. I couldn’t eat or talk. My uncle wanted to wake me out of my shock. He shouted at me - it’s not the time for this - any of us might die at any moment, but we have to try to survive - show some care for yourself, for your family, wake up! (ISM f, 2009)

Whether these are felt by the witness or the survivor, or both, the presence of shame is almost a constant reminder of the humiliation of occupation, and the lack of protection and ability to defend themselves Palestinians feel daily. The shame of the inability to protect ones family testifies to the desubjectification of Palestinians. “Having no other way to comfort her small
daughter, whose intestines were falling out, Shireen breastfed Farah as the little girl slowly bled to death” (ISM g, 2009). While survivors guilt haunts grieving families and friends, fear of becoming the next death of the occupation bears on witnesses. Adults cry in anxiety, children shriek in response to the military assaults they have no reprieve from, some quite literally have been scarred to their deaths. “Children stumble on rubble and begin to wail. Nearby gunfire begins. And strangely, the point after we climb over the line and open our vehicles doors is when some of the adults begin to cry anxiously (ISM e, 2009). Although emotional dilapidation seems to indicate that those experiencing loss, those with twisted faces of sadness and fear, those who emotionally crumble after maintaining a great fortitude of strength, would be only broken as humans more, perhaps it is this emotion that allows them to be subjects. Like the founding of the subject through shame, perhaps it is the ability to grieve, to shriek, to cry, and to experience moments of guilt for their own life spared over others that re-subjects them to their own founding.

Hatem, the other day, told me to be strong as Palestinians, for Palestinians. And I try, though each day brings assassinations no one could have imagined... And today Hatem crumbled, though he is strong. It’s all too much. (ISM c, 2009)

The oceans of sadness in the saddest faces in the world, perhaps allow those that witness this emotion to also become subject to the inauguration of their humanity by relaying the shared vulnerability of bodies and human emotion. This does not mean that the only way of becoming human is provided by the excruciating pain of oppression, occupation, and violence, but surely these emotions render us human, but more so our the witnessing of these emotions, the possession of the subject by these others emotions is what desubjectifies the witness. For the survivor the lack of these emotions, the numbness of shock at too much horror for too long, the inability to feel at all, the complete and utter unmaking of emotions, seems a dangerous loss of
the subject into a desubjectification feared by survivors. “Sara's teenage daughter is helping care for the children, but when things are quiet her face drifts into blankness” (ISM, 2008).

Testimonies from the assault on Gaza present this quandary. Some witnesses, Palestinian and ISM activists alike become so inundated with constant loss and destruction they are unable to render shock or fear for themselves.

Walking past all these weapons is the point where anyone would reasonably get scared; for some reason (I discovered this on my first West Bank trip years ago) this doesn’t happen to me. There’s clearly a bit of wiring in my head connected wrong, and I think people who are scared and do stuff anyway are much braver than I am... (ISM e, 2009)

Testimonies from this same period almost burst with the emotional complexity of the burden of witnessing. Witnesses give up an attempt to detail the destruction, but rather begin to detail the emotional relations of those around them. Fear and anxiety follow witnesses into their sleep, dreaming of machine gun fire, soldiers invading, and tanks in the streets. Fear of re-invoking the trauma of loss and grief soon after the invasion, ISM activists remain highly conscious of the questions they ask families in Gaza, especially children. Children who seem to express no emotion, parents, extended relatives, and neighbors fear for, explaining away the lack of emotion as the presence of journalists who flooded the devastated strip after the ceasefire. ISM witnesses express frustration with this scene, perhaps with the overwhelming trauma they have experienced they can relate to the inability to grieve properly and the daunting task of relaying to the world what they have seen and heard.

The implicit anxiety of testimony lies in the inability to witness everything; the inability to relay the complexity of the occupation and the great suffering of so many that takes so many forms. Many of the testimonies from both the West Bank and Gaza seem to being anxious attempts of accounting for all elements of the occupation. Desiring a holistic rendering of theirs and others experiences, testimonies are often long, but jump from topic to topic, cramming as
much information as possible into their testimonies. The importance of witnessing takes on an anxiety and often a shame towards what has been witnessed and the subjects relation to it. Testimonies seem to ready to burst with information and or emotion, as if they are never enough and the witness realizes the inherent lack in their renderings, and cannot help their possession by shame.

The Lacuna of Testimony

Perhaps it is precisely that testimonies are never enough, that renders their value. The lack of testimony, the inability to say it all, to express all of the emotional burden attempted to be shared that produces witnesses as subjects. Although the lacuna or lack of testimonies would be the most difficult to reference, testimonies of the ISM do tip their hats to the lack inherent within them. Not only is the great bubble of anxiety and shame seemingly ready to burst an indication of the lack of completeness of testimony, but also the words of witnesses that run dry. The inability to speak on a what was witnessed, the acknowledgement of the failure of description, the lack of imaginability of the experiences of those desubjectified, the return to pure abstraction as solution to the conflict and desubjectification of those under occupation all indicate the lack of testimony. The lacuna of testimony is also pointed to with the opposition of testimony.

Testimonies of Palestinians who ‘knew’ family members were dead or gone, and yet return, lends to the inability to know, the lack in speaking and rendering an account.

But inside, we waited for 10 mins and my uncle and my brother and my grandmother didn’t arrive, and we were sure they were dead. We checked the basement but we didn’t know it had two sides. I started to cry. (ISM f, 2009)

Another indication of lack in testimonies, returns to the style of many of the witnesses who attempt to document testimonies and what they have witnessed in statistical, emotionless descriptions, where they take on others voices with no acknowledgement of the field of forces
that make up their own subject position or desubjectification. The need to offer complete renderings of what cannot be known to the witness tips to the lacuna of testimony. Descriptions of the suicide bomber as hopeless and devastated, the completion of desubjectification simply cannot be known by the witness. Most obviously the emotional and positional state of the suicide bomber cannot be known by the witness, because the witness does not know the suicide bomber in advance and simply cannot experience this description, even the families of suicide bombers are often surprised and confused by the decision of their relation to use their body as their final weapon of resistance. In this way, ‘knowing’ represents lack rather than that which is consciously unknown. Much like the Mukhabarat’s threat of omnipotence, the need for such a stated threat indicates not only a lack, but the fear underlying the need for such an empty threat.

S: We know everything you do.
A: I know you know everything I do and I have done everything according to the law. I haven’t thrown stones.
S: You do something worse than throwing stones. You tell the people to go out on demonstrations. We have reports about you. We know you make problems. Go home, sit quietly in your house, enjoy your life, don’t make problems. We are watching you very, very closely. (ISM b, 2005).

Witnesses also seem to indicate the lack of their testimonies through a lack to share that testimony with those who would witness their accounts, much like Palestinians who lack a forum to be heard, activists worry over the lack of witnesses to their testimonies. The lacuna of testimony functions much like the lack of mourning produced and reproduced in the occupations squelching of grief and mourning. Families often experience the inability to buried their loved ones properly due to ongoing invasions, curfews, and/or aerial assaults.

Cement blocks mark some graves, leaves and vines on others. And some were just barely visible, by the raise in earth. But it was too packed, too hard to estimate where a grave might be, no possibility of a respectfully-spaced arrangement. (ISM c, 2009)
Perhaps lack in testimony is most present in those bodies which physically lack due to occupation.

His right hand testifies his part in the story: “Three years ago, the Israeli army had invaded our region [Jabaliya]. One soldier threw a sound bomb at us and I picked it up to throw away. It went off in my hand before I could throw it away.” Sound bombs are used against nonviolent demonstrations against Israel’s wall in the occupied West Bank villages of Bilin and Nilin, and many youths learn at a young age how to chuck them away. But Nidal’s stubs of fingers show that he wasn’t so lucky. (ISM c, 2009)

Those that have lost limbs, over six thousand in the last assault on Gaza, and those with the physical scars that bear witness to their experiences of occupation. This is perhaps the hardest thing to comment on for a rhetorician. The loss of body parts, scars on the body, and the scars on the mind are surely the testimony that presents the greatest lacuna of testimony. The material testimony of the body that renders clearly a story which cannot be extrapolated, where words will never be enough to replace the missing parts, to describe the suffering of a constant reminder of desubjectification and the weight of bearing witness.

Banality and Hospitality

Testimonies present us with a certain banality of life, constant desubjectification of life under occupation, an undoing of those that are desubjectified and those that witness it. The testimonies of these undoings presents a fortunate moment for the reconstitution of subjects. In one telling testimony, a Palestinian man writes to the soldiers who maimed him, he shares a great pity for his oppressors, inverting the inhumanity deemed upon him, reclaiming his dignity through his testimony. Rather than pose pity as his only verdict, this man also offers unconditional hospitality, openness, and softness, towards those very soldiers so unmerciful to him. Rejecting hate and offering kindness and openness, his testimony becomes the indication of his subjectivity.

I pity you for having fallen victim to a culture that understands life as though it is based
on killing, destruction, sowing fear and terror, and lording it over others. Despite all that, I believe that there is a chance for atonement and forgiveness and a possibility that you will restore to yourselves something of your lost humanity and morality. You can recover from the illnesses of hatred and the lust for revenge, and if we should meet one day, even in my house, you can be certain that you won’t find me holding an explosive belt or concealing a knife in my pocket or in the wheels of my chair. But you will find someone who will help you get back what you lost.

You will find a soft and delicate infant here, whose age is the same as the second in which you pulled the trigger and who will never see his father standing on his feet but who is full of pride and power, even if he has to push his father’s chair, having no other choice. Even though I have reasons to hate you, I don’t feel that way and I have no regrets. (ISM a, 2007)

These testimonies of hospitality towards witnesses and the other, an unconditional openness in the face of the most devastating vulnerability are precisely the openness to subjectivity and possession that renders one human.

Witnesses document the constant pressure of occupation, the drudgery of checkpoints, and endless limits on movement, work, healthcare, and education. Even violence seems to take on a normalcy or banality because of its expectation when not present and the seeming endlessness of its presence for those living under occupation. Constantly under the power and whim of Israeli soldiers who determine the live-ability of Palestinian lives, one would think that hospitality as a cultural practice would shrink in fear of opening too unconditionally to vulnerability, but testimonies indicate something quite different.

We walked along a street strewn with rubble (I didn’t think anyone could possibly be living on this street) and entered a courtyard. It too was a mass of rubble. I noticed a piece of tile that may well have been someone’s living room or kitchen.) From this courtyard of destruction we entered a small yard that was like another world. Roses and other flowers were blooming in a small garden. Several large pieces of cloth created a shady tent-like structure. Before long, S brought out the usual assortment of lawn chairs and we were joined by his parents, a brother, several young nieces and a number of young boys from the area. (ISM a, 2005)

Although most testimonies overflow with the descriptions of the banality of evil of the occupation, there are often references to the cultural practices of hospitality.
And then there is a bright moment, which I watch from a window above; families arriving and claiming their missing people. I sit down to eat cold rice with the medics on duty, but before I can take a mouthful, get physically hauled up 6 flights of stairs by one of the medics who was on the evacuation, to find that being on today’s team apparently merits very tasty scrambled eggs instead. We hear that on another Red Cross evacuation, the army shot at and injured one of the Red Cross workers... (ISM e, 2009)

Sharing sweets, tea, cigarettes, and conversation in the midst of ruin, families establish strong relations with witnesses who feel an immense remaking of themselves through such generosity.

Dima and Tala come in from school while I am there, being treated to the usual coffee and arabic sweets. Such small girls. “Are they terrorists?” asks their mother. “My family cares about all people. We don’t mind if they are from a different country or a different religion. We think all people are the same. That’s what we believe.” (ISM i, 2009)

Invitations to weddings, soccer games, and dinners are regularly mentioned in between stories of destruction and annihilation. Small gestures of humanity, offered by those most brutally dehumanized remind us of the ability to be human in the face of the greatest odds.

Sometimes I think, no - Gaza is worth fighting for, this is our home.” Amongst their crumpled belongings, next to the spot Amer’s father died, the family gives us tea. Shireen solicitously dusts the sand off my back. (ISM g, 2009)

Perhaps this openness to the witness, this hospitality towards possession that becomes the indicator of the possibility of our being human. It would seem that only when we are undone can we be reconstituted; only in the possibility of us being homo sacer can we also have the possibility of subjectivity and being human.
CHAPTER 6

THE COMPLEXITY OF OUR SUBJECTIVITY

This study offers an evaluation of several discourses that remain important in global political life, but are often invisible or ignored by geo-politics. With the renewed focus on grassroots campaigns and community organizing, brought with the Obama presidential victory, the conceptualization of social movements as potentially powerful tools for political and social change has returned to public discourse. The renewal of a focus on the potential of social movements to initiate political change finds resonance in the American and even International collective memory. The social movements of the 1960s offered a cultural shift in the imagination that paved the way for the election of the first African American President to the United States, expanding the lines of political possibility. The importance of the symbolic victory, the first African American President, and its relationship to a history of struggle by people who were willing to march in solidarity with those facing brutal oppression in the United States, potentiates the possibilities for social movements to create changes in not only human consciousness, but the very psychic make-up of the subjects that participate in these social movements.

The ongoing Palestinian/Israeli Conflict and potential for failed foreign policy in terms of United States peace brokerage, could have imaginable alternatives that allow for radical politics change not contingent on our leaders, but on that which we bear witness to, through our own subjectivity and desubjectification, through testimony, which in spite of never being enough, always containing a lack, provides the performative contradiction necessary for such change. Perhaps where political change may be most possible and the chance of becoming human again may exist is through the very people that live, witness, and testify, to our
desubjectification. To the occupation of our bodies and beings themselves, in possession of one another through our bearing witness to this occupation.

This study of localized grassroots approaches to political change through social movements in the occupied territories offer the expansion of political possibilities in regards to the conflict, as well as, a renewed focus on the importance of the rhetoric of social movements in creating political change. This study was not an attempt to clarify the role of witnessing and testimony, but rather to open to the complexity of the rhetorical process of witnessing and the lack in testimony as that which is essential to our desubjectification and reconstitution as humans. In this way, the speech act functions as the most local, political, and intimate form of knowledge and life we are possessed by and the intimacy of bearing witness to those that have born witness in Palestine.

Opening new potential for understanding our own subjectivities, bodies, and voices, in that space shows the effectivity of rhetoric. I become possessed by the field of rhetoric, as I am possessed by the social movement. I am grateful for this space to evaluate the intersections of subjectivity and agency on the ground in social movements, the effectivity of social movements that allows for change through subjectivity, but cannot be known in advance, relying on the lack in testimonies I witness. It is the trace of testimony that provides a glimpse of the sufficiency of agency to subjectivity, and not our total mutable desubjectification. Without understanding the importance of the “social” of social movements we remove the lived experience, the chance for subjectivity, and become mired in only the discursive processes.

The study of social movements in the field of rhetoric has a civic history of political participation and activism. The International Solidarity Movement as a rhetorical study offered a unique convergence of the global and local, while simultaneously providing a space for
understanding the loss of agency, subjectivity, and the possibility of radical political change through witnessing, while bringing together the very differences of identities and potentials for coalitions that can not be formulated in advance, but provide perhaps the most imaginative political alternatives to our understanding of the world around us. This study also positioned itself within the discourses of the field of study and historical memory of social movements that have come before shaping, breaking, and reshaping our understanding of our own place and subjectivity, and our potential political and rhetorical agency if we are to be open to being possessed by it.

Perhaps this political change through the witnessing of testimony has already begun. This study attempted to take up questions concerning the rhetoric of social movements in an effort to examine the rhetorical force of organizing in Palestine, an area where both witnessing and testimony become of central importance to political possibilities. The past studies of the rhetoric of social movements argued that rhetorical studies often disassociated ‘social’ from social movements, rendering invisible questions of the social and subjectivity from their frames for evaluation. The invisibility of this term and the study of subjectivity led to increasingly less use of the term social movement in rhetorical studies. The importance of subjectivity to the field of rhetoric has been noted by such scholars as Lundberg and Gunn, but its particular relevance to the study of social movements becomes a starting point for understanding the relationship of bodies to the social structures so often studied by rhetoric. This study attempted to move the discussion in the field beyond a focus on the techniques of rhetoric and discourse used by movements to an evaluation of the importance of relations between bodies and social structures in determining processes of subjectivity and rhetoric. In many ways, this study opened more questions than attempted to provide answers to the complexity of subjectivity and testimony. The
third chapter renders many of these questions, by providing an opening to the voices of activists and Palestinians engaged in witnessing in Occupied Palestine. In an effort to put the social body back into rhetorical studies of social movements, it includes examples of testimony that not only attest to the importance of witnessing. Approaching the concepts of the witness and testimony, as integral to the relationships of subjectivity and desubjectification, as well as, possession of subjects by agency, the theoretical frame of this study attempted to maintain a position of possibility for political alternatives for subjects, as well as, establish the importance of subjectivity in discourses of the “social.” The relational nature of witnessing becomes accounted for both in witnessing the witnessing of the ISM, but also in the very words and experiences rendered by others which present us with the lack of language, the lacuna in testimony, that shows an inherent lack necessary for our becoming human. The difficulties of understanding the witness, rendering an account of testimony, and opening to the complexity of lack provides the possibility for political alternatives for subjects. Perhaps the beginning of the work of witnessing and its potential effects were written and spoken on March 20, 2003, a few days after the death of Rachel Corrie, by Palestinian American poet Suheir Hammad, wrote this poem in honor of Corrie.

On the brink of ...

On the brink of tears, sanity, and war, I feel powerless, hope less and less alive. What do we tell young people? How do we say, “…your voice means nothing to those who think life is about power over others and greed? And where is it safe to think for yourself and try real hard to not want to hurt nobody? I don’t want to hurt nobody, God knows. In Iraq, children are looking towards the night sky with fear, as though there were no stars, only bombs in the cosmos. And they are afraid of the earth because they can count the cancers
in their hoods now, where once there were none. And how do I tell American youth that
popular culture means nothing to justice and everything to keeping them numb to the
world? And how do I scream when I have no voice left? And who will answer these
questions for me? Not Rachel Corrie. She is dead. And no matter what any army says, I
have seen the photos and that woman was wearing orange, bright and alive one minute
and dying under rubble the next. Even I, it seems, have developed a callousness to the
deaths of Palestinians, because the murder of this white girl from Olympia, Washington
has my heart breaking and my blood faint. Something like ten Palestinians have been
killed since yesterday, when a Caterpillar bulldozer driven by a man demolished the
home that was her body. If anyone knows her family, please relay to them my grief and
my sorrow. You can still find her phone number on the Internet for meetings and
organizing. You can still read her accounts of being in Palestine. She was a good writer.
There are people who are writing, “She should not have been there in the first place”
Now she is dead. “Good Riddance” Now she is dead. “Treasonous bitch” Now she is
dead. What do I tell young people about non-violence when they can see for themselves
how even orange bright and megaphone loud and cameras and US citizenship will not
stop your murder? I recall the days black boys were lynched and dismembered for
looking at white women, now tax dollars are crushing dissent wherever it blooms. Human
shields for human targets. There are words I am taking back. I reclaim them and will no
longer allow anyone to dictate my language. There is no “right wing” a wing is of nature,
and murder may be human, but it is not natural, even if animals eat each other, is that
what we are then, animals? If so, claim it, motherfucker. There is no “mother of all
bombs.” Blair, Sharon, Bush, all have mothers and no matter what they do, there is
something they love. White power, oil, the need to be God’s only chosen, whatever, but
they love something, because their mothers loved them. A bomb loves nothing, has no
mother and is not about life. There is no mother of all bombs, only more mankind self-
destruction. There is no safety in being a bully. I know because I have been bullied and I
know now, with my first grey hair and all, that authentic power is not about others but
about the self. This is not a poem. This is not a threat. This is a promise. God has a better
imagination than all of us combined and I do not know what form retribution will take,
but I have seen karma happen and it will again, and when it does I will chant the names
of the innocent and I will stand with those who have kept their hands clean of blood and
their hearts clear of hate. It is hard not to hate right now. But I have been loved, I have
loved and I know that those who de-humanize their enemy are only doing so to
themselves. Peace work is justice work is God’s work. Rachel Corrie wrote,
“Nevertheless, I think about the fact that no amount of reading, attendance at
conferences, documentary viewing and word of mouth could have prepared me for the
reality of the situation here. You just can’t imagine it unless you see it, and even then you
are always well aware that your experience is not at all the reality: what with the
difficulties the Israeli army would face if they shot an unarmed US citizen, and with the
fact that I have money to buy water when the army destroys wells, and, of course, the fact
that I have the option of leaving. Nobody in my family has been shot, driving in their car,
by a rocket launcher from a tower on the end of a major street in my hometown. I have a
home. I am allowed to go see the ocean.” She is dead now. And the ocean shall miss her
gaze. Palestine will miss her heart, but mostly her family will miss her breath. And the
president of the United States of America (when did that happen again?) has all but
declared war on Iraq, and so more deaths are promised. What do I tell young people about any thing? Especially about humanity and morality? Slightly a month before her murder Rachel wrote home, “Many people want their voices to be heard, and I think we need to use some of our privilege as internationals to get those voices heard directly in the US, rather than through the filter of well-meaning internationals such as myself. I am just beginning to learn, from what I expect to be a very intense tutelage, about the ability of people to organize against all odds, and to resist against all odds.” More words I reclaim: Hero, Brave, Soldier. This young woman did the un-thinkable, she did not blink, did not half-step, did not back down in the face of death. What greater odds than one lone female frame against a destructive machine? What greater story to tell? On the brink of war, may our power come from the people Rachel Corrie was murdered defending. On the brink of war, may our hope come from one another. On the brink of-wait- this is not a war. On the brink of whatever new-fangled imperialist project this is, may Rachel Corrie live in our resistance, in our pursuit of justice, and in the spirit of sisterhood. On the brink of war, may we remember how divine human beings can be. (Hammad, 2003)

This poem reminds us not only of the possibilities and lack of testimony, but of the role of the poet and the intimate connection between the poet and the witness per Agamben’s analysis.

But the final paradox is that in the letter the confession is immediately followed not only by silence and renunciation, but also by the promise of an absolute and unfailing writing destined to destroy and renew itself day after day. It is almost as if the shame and desubjectification implicit in the act of speech contained a secret beauty that could only bring the poet incessantly to bear witness to his own alienation. (Agamben, 113)

Perhaps even in her unending title, “On the brink of...,” Hammad notes the failure of speech, the inability to bear witness completely, but the ethical demand to do so inspite of the lack in testimony to that bearing of witness. It is this contradiction in which the speech act opens as a
performative contradiction for radical political change, and reminds us that the political effects of
our subjectivity cannot be known in advance, but rather only through the hospitality of opening
oneself, the “I” as intimately possessed by the other.
REFERENCES


