

THE POETICS OF DISPOSSESSION: THE REFUGEE AND THE TERRORIST IN JEAN GENET'S
PRISONER OF LOVE



(Djurica)

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I. INTRODUCTION

When in 1943 Hannah Arendt published a short essay on what it meant to be a refugee entitled ‘We Refugees’ she gave, as Giorgio Agamben put it, an entirely new perspective on the condition of the refugee and the stateless people – a condition in which she herself was living – and proposed this condition as the ‘paradigm of a new historical consciousness’.¹ In the essay, which originally appeared in a small Jewish periodical called *The Menorah Journal* (1943), Arendt vividly describes the mentality of being a Jewish refugee, what it means to lose one’s home, occupation, family and language. With sarcasm and irony Arendt mocks the absurdities of the aspiration to adjust and assimilate, thereby nonetheless making a gravely serious point about the plight of the stateless human being, a non-person without any legal or political status: to be a stateless person means, as we can read in the closing paragraph of ‘We Refugees’, that one is “unprotected by any specific law or political convention” (118). Arendt wrote her essay in 1943 when the horror of the Holocaust became apparent, thereby sketching a dark and sinister scenario for the growing group of stateless people. The essay can be seen as a blueprint for her influential critique on the limits of human rights that was later to appear in her masterpiece *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). In *The Origins of Totalitarianisms* Arendt points out that in the face of Nazi totalitarianism it had become clear that human rights in itself do not have an ‘inalienable’ nature. Human rights could no longer be regarded as capable to protect people against totalitarian regimes and nation-states since human rights only function in and through the nation-state. Stateless people and refugees are therefore not safeguarded anymore; they have been driven outside the pale of law. As Arendt writes:

The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law and freedom of opinion – formulas which were designed to solve problems within given communities – but that they no longer belong to any community whatsoever. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them; not that they are oppressed but that nobody wants even to oppress them (295).

Arendt argues that being stateless thus doesn’t mean that you are not equal before the law, but

¹See: Agamben, Giorgio. “We Refugees.” *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 49.2 (1995): 114-19.

that no law exists for you. It doesn't mean that you are being oppressed, but that nobody even wants to oppress you. As a stateless person you are cast out of society and nation and this can in the end be seen as the fundamental deprivation of human rights: when one is deprived of a place in the world, a person's opinions are no longer significant and actions no longer effective. In his influential work *Homo Sacer* (1995) Agamben therefore argues that refugees, with the loss of citizens' rights, have become stripped of their political and cultural life reducing them to mere 'bare' life. Yet, while being driven outside of the domain of law the refugee still remains subjected to these laws, their lives are highly regulated and restricted and denied access into the *polis*. Arendt concludes: "They (the stateless/refugees) are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action: not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right of opinion" (296).

Today, more than sixty years later, Arendt's critique has not lost any of its currency and urgency: we are faced with a global crisis of displacement. Arendt was right when predicting that the appearance of refugees as a mass phenomenon, first occurring after World War I, would remain a problem, outlasting totalitarian regimes. Europe's failure to accommodate the refugees on its doorstep is therefore not just a humanitarian crisis but has in fact disturbing historical roots. The biggest humanitarian catastrophe that is occurring right before our eyes is the crisis in Syria. As explored by Elizabeth Ferris and Kemal Kirisci in their work *The Consequences of Chaos* (2016), the crisis in Syria has caused nearly 12 million people to leave their homes, presenting Europe with a tide of refugees knocking on its doors. The displacement, both internally and externally, of almost half the country's population is in fact one of the largest forced movements of people since the end of World War II, the background against which Arendt was writing her critique. The way Europe is treating these refugees, as Rick Lyman points out in an article in *The New York Times* evokes memories of 'Europe's darkest hour': "Perhaps not since the Jews were rounded up by Nazi Germany have there been as many images coming out of Europe of people locked into trains, babies handed over barbed wire, men in military gear herding large crowds of bedraggled men, women and children" (2). The images tend to reveal that although Europe is built on the virtues of human rights and humanism it remains a place that shows itself to be resistant to immigration and diversity. This has resulted in a situation where, as Lyman puts it:

Razor-wire fences rise along national borders in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and France. Many political leaders stoke rising nationalism by portraying the migrants as dangerous outsiders whose

foreign cultures and Muslim religion could overwhelm cherished traditional ways (1).

The mass phenomenon of refugees has thus come to be seen as a threat to Europe, which now sees itself obliged to put up heavily fortified walls. The refugee no longer is viewed as a helpless human being but as a dangerous outsider, who will potentially harm the safety and moral values of Europe.

This stance against supposedly dangerous outsiders has historical roots in the events on 9/11, which caused the world to turn its attention to combating the threat of global terrorism. Since then there has been a growing tendency in politics and popular discourse to link refugees and asylum seekers with acts of terrorism. The already restrictive climate for refugees has thereby become justified in the name of security. Monette Zard, a policy analyst, has already pointed out that the UN Security Council Resolution 1373², adopted on 28 September 2011, explicitly makes reference to the need to safeguard the system of international refuge from abuse by terrorists, thereby reinforcing the perception “that the institution of asylum is somehow a terrorist’s refuge” (32).

Nonetheless there is still no internationally accepted definition of terrorism. Although there have been numerous international conventions on terrorism, the much-quoted adage ‘one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter’ still holds. The term terrorism is therefore an ambiguous one; this is especially evident, as Alex Houen writes, in the inconsistency of its application. We have already seen that in the aftermath of 9/11 broad and far-reaching definitions of terrorism have been deployed, widening the grounds to deny access to refugees and narrowing their rights. Houen illustrates this by showing that multiple Anti-Terrorist Acts³ have included the threat, attempt or conspiracy to commit an attack in their definition of terrorism. The concept of terrorism, as Adrian Guelke has put it, has become “so elastic that there seemed to be virtually no limit to what could be described as terrorism” (qtd. in Houen 9). In their work *Terror and Taboo* (1996) social- anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass therefore come to the assertion that the concept of terrorism itself is first and foremost a discourse, and that this discourse, as Houen summarizes, “is largely a matter of fictionalization” (9). Zulaika and Douglass question the

² The UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (adopted on 28 september 2001) can be seen as the foundation of the international community’s response towards the terrorism threats in the aftermath of 9/11.

³ Houen takes the US Anti-Terrorist Act (1995) that has been implemented after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and the UK government’s ‘Terrorism Act’ (2000) as example (p 8).

very concept and notion of truth within terrorism itself. They write:

As is the case with other discourse of the postmodern world we inhabit, the terrorist signifiers are free-floating, and their meanings derive from language. The connections between discourse and reality therefore become open to question (xi).

Anthony Kubiak, in “Stages of Terror” (1989), also builds on these thoughts since he sees a strong relation between terrorism’s violence and mediation, foregrounding the role played by the media: “Terrorism first appears in culture as a media event. The terrorist, consequently, does not exist before the media image, and only exists subsequently as a media image in culture” (3).

In the end, as I will argue, we can say that the term terrorism is a discursive formation and has performative, figurative and strategic vestiges. I therefore think that in order to understand the reality we live in today and especially the constructedness and mediatedness of the discourse on terrorism, it is illuminating to look at literary representations of terrorism in addition to studying terrorism and its representation in political discourse or in the media. In this instance literature can be a valuable, critical commentary on mediation and representation, and reveal the constructedness of much of the rhetoric connected to the figure of the terrorist. There is, of course, existing scholarship on this topic: prominent and influential examples are the studies conducted by Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel, who in 2008 published “Terrorism and the Novel”, Alex Houen’s study *Terrorism and Modern Literature* (2010) and most recently, Michael Frank and Eva Gruber with their work *Literature and Terrorism* (2012). Something that has not been explored extensively in this context is the discourse that surrounds and connects refugees and terrorists. This is a notable and surprising gap, since, as we have seen, there has been a growing tendency to link the two figures with each other in politics and popular discourse. I want to explore this in my thesis and show that both of these figures are in fact discursive constructs. This is an important point to keep in mind since the laws that are being implemented by the international community to restrict the rights of refugees have real, devastating effects. Just as Arendt has argued, the stateless and refugees, now often seen as terrorists or dangerous outsiders, are thereby in fact deprived of their most fundamental human rights, of a place in the world and the right to action and opinion.

In this thesis I will therefore turn to a work of literature written by Jean Genet, called *Prisoner of Love* (1961). Through an analysis of this text I want to show in how far literature can be political: Genet depicts how the term terrorism gained its contemporary meaning amidst the Israel-Palestine conflict and he also reveals the blind spot in our current aid system for refugees. Genet is hereby providing a critique on the notion and discourse of terrorism, making clear that within this discourse the transformation from refugee into terrorist is somehow inevitable: since the refugee finds himself outside the law and polis he also has to act outside the law. Through his memorial chronicle of the years he spent with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) he shows how the PLO was born from refugees and has shaped itself politically, precisely on the basis of falling outside of the law. Genet hereby shows that refugees can (re)claim their right to action and opinion when they organize themselves politically. I also want to show, however, that literature can have a humanizing effect. Just as Arendt has done in her essay “We Refugees,” Genet vividly describes what it means to be someone without territory. In order to represent these feelings of dispossession, Genet even needs to adopt a new way of writing, which he himself calls “a poetic revolution”. *Prisoner of Love* hereby manages to break the taboos set within terrorism discourse. By giving the ‘terrorist’ other the ability to speak, in this case through a witness, and by giving access to the Palestinian Fedayeen’s thoughts and feelings, Genet is able to present us with a counter-narrative. His novel, as I will argue, can therefore be seen as a form of discursive and literary resistance to the coproduction of the terrorism discourse.

I will divide my thesis into two chapters: In the first chapter I will explore the performative and figurative vestiges of terrorism. I want to show that the concept of terrorism is a discourse in itself, receiving it’s meaning from language, culture and mediation and should thus be seen as fictionalization. I will therefore base my research on a discourse analysis, whereby I will be looking at the ways refugees and terrorists are discussed in the media and how this has shaped reality. This will enable me to bring literary studies together with insights from terrorism studies. In the end I will discuss the relation between discourse and reality, which will also function as a way to question the boundaries between fiction and reality and literature and history. I will further explore this in the second chapter “The Poetics of Dispossession” where I will give an analysis and close reading of Jean Genet’s *Prisoner of Love*. Influential scholars such as Stathis Gourgouris and Edward Said also have studied Genet’s novel. Gourgouris argues that the revolution Genet is writing about should be seen as a “poetic encounter” (254): “(that) is to say, against the grain of our desire to understand the

puzzling moments of social disorder by appealing to the calming order of “scientific” analysis, that the puzzling enterprise of a poetic apprehension of the world should be given precedence” (Gourgouris 255). I am, in a way, building on these thoughts since I want to argue that literature, in a time of great disorder - a global crisis of displacement and terrorism threats - can give us a better understanding of the world. I want to show that literature cannot only be political, but can also raise ethical questions for the reader. Literature, by making unheard stories and versions of stories heard, and by giving us access to others’ thoughts and feelings, can therefore function as a form of literary and discursive resistance. Through Genet’s novel I want to emphasize that at the heart of the discourse around refugees and terrorists is the feeling of dispossession, and this feeling can best be caught and made relatable in literature and language: in poetic language. *Prisoner of Love*, even though it was published in 1986, can thereby speak to the global crisis of displacement we are facing today. Genet lets us realize that the Palestinian revolution isn’t just a struggle for territory, but a struggle over rights. His novel shows that you cannot simply deprive someone of a place in the world; people will eventually claim their right to action and opinion.

II. DISCOURSE AND REALITY: THE FIGURATIVE DIMENSIONS OF TERRORISM

The term terrorism, as pointed out by Satoshi Ukai, has been in use for roughly 200 years but has not always been employed in the same contexts as it is currently used, which illustrates that the term isn't stable. While it has started to dominate popular discourse, there is still not one definition of terrorism that has gained universal acceptance. The term nonetheless carries great political power: it is used and applied in order to dehumanize, criminalize and demonize the enemy, justifying increasingly intrusive measures in the name of state "security," and strengthening the nation's sovereignty. With various legal systems and government agencies that have been using and deploying different definitions of terrorism the term has become increasingly ambiguous. The ambiguity of the term, as Alex Houen argues in *Terrorism and Modern Literature*, nowhere becomes more evident than in the inconsistency of its application: "to a great extent, combating it has entailed trying to clarify the general, definitional haze" (7). When the events on 9/11 heightened anxiety worldwide this has resulted in a situation where individual nation-states have been allowing their definitions of terrorism maximum flexibility, trading reduced freedom for greater security: countries such as the US and the UK have come to include performative potentials such as the threat, attempt or conspiracy to an attack within their anti-terrorist legislation. The legislation of individual nation-states is thereby widening the performativity of terrorism whereby former lines between action, attempt, speech and event have disappeared.

Minoli Salgado, when writing about the "War on Terror", a war that was declared by the United States in response to the attacks on 9/11, argues that this term also has to be considered as "embattled" and "foggy", raising pertinent questions on the discursive construction and mediation of terror itself (208). On the one hand, as he explains, the term claims to respond to violence and intimidation, whereby we could loosely translate the term as a 'war on war'. But, on the other hand the war is only granted immanence and permanence because it is locked in a logic of spatial and temporal indeterminacy. In the end, as Salgado argues, "Terror can always be found somewhere, so this is a war without boundary, limit or perceivable end" (208). By depicting the 'War on Terror' as a contemporary discursive paradigm, Salgado is building on the thoughts of social anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass, who in their 1996 study on terrorism assert that terrorism is first and foremost a discourse that must conform to and borrow from some form of fictionalization. Zulaika and Douglass here apply a very broad definition of "fiction", which they see as "the

crafting of a narrative” (4). In order to study terrorism effectively we should, they argue, redirect the study of terrorism into an examination of the discourse in which it is couched:

As is the case with other discourse of the postmodern world we inhabit, the terrorist signifiers are free-floating, and their meanings derive from language. The connections between discourse and reality therefore become open to question. The challenge is not to learn the ultimate “truth” about terrorism, but to delve into the rhetorical bases of its powerful representations; not to insist that myths are often used to “fool” audiences, but rather to scrutinize the concrete discursive practices whereby this transpires (xi).

Michael Frank and Eva Gruber, in their study *Literature and Terrorism* (2012) argue that the view of terrorism as a discourse, receiving its meaning from language, culture and mediation, has proved particularly suggestive for the purpose of literary studies: “It sets forth the premise that insurgent “terrorism” – as it is publicly perceived and discussed – heavily relies on myth, making fact and fiction largely indistinguishable” (Frank and Gruber 12). With the emphasis on representation and narrativization Zulaika and Douglass indeed tend to underscore the inherent complicity between fact and fiction in terrorism discourse. In their study they argue that while reports about terrorist attacks often seem concerned with facts, the number of casualties for example; these same facts are also always framed. Zulaika and Douglass illustrate this with the example of sociologist William Catton who studied the 800 deaths attributable to terrorism worldwide in the time period of 1968-1975 and who noted that the annual death toll from influenza in the United States was in fact almost ten times the global toll from terrorism. A more recent study conducted by Charles Ruby, published in 2002, includes the most devastating single terrorist attack in U.S history, the attacks on the World Trade Center on 9/11, and it also confirms this. Ruby points out that even with the huge loss of life on this day—approximately 6,000 people were killed—terrorist deaths have typically paled in comparison to other forms of more common fatal incidents (10). Yet, despite the fact that there are more deaths due to traffic or murder in the United States in a few months than there are deaths attributable to terrorism worldwide for an entire year, terrorism has been dominating popular discourse and political agendas.

In order to explain this we should take into consideration in how far the discourse relies on mediation and thus foreground the role played by the media. Houen, who has also studied the relation between terrorism and the media, points out that in many studies the view

that terrorism and the media form a 'symbiotic relationship' is commonplace, yet there has been significant disagreement about the precise form of this symbiosis. While some argue that the media is the dominant partner others assert that it is the terrorist who's in control.⁴ Anthony Kubiak in his article, which he later turned in a book, entitled "Stages of Terror" (1989) argues that this would presuppose that terrorists themselves not only create an economy of the media event, but the media event would create terrorists: the news media inscribe and inform terrorism. Or, as Kubiak poses it: "Terrorism appears first *in culture* as a media event. The terrorist, consequently, does not exist before the media image, and only exists subsequently *as* a media image in culture" (3). Kubiak therefore argues that we should reverse the emphasis on the two: "the media do not merely "need" and support terrorism, they construct it as a phenomenon, because American culture as a whole needs it, is fascinated by it, desires it, and utilizes it as a central impulse in its foreign and domestic policy" (4).

Today we have then come to see that recent terrorist groups such as ISIS make very sophisticated use of the media exactly because they have understood the constitutive function of the media for the image of terrorism. James Farwell in his study "The Media Strategy of ISIS" underlines this, since he points out that this makes ISIS stand apart from other violent extremist groups. With the use of cellular technology and the exploitation of mainstream (social) media, ISIS videos have made an appearance on Western broadcast outlets, as well as extremist websites. The communication strategy of ISIS aims to persuade all Muslims to understand that they have to go to battle in order to restore a caliphate, which is their religious duty. The group is thereby constructing a narrative that, to put it in Farewell's words, "portrays ISIS as an agent of change, the true apostle of a sovereign faith, a champion of its own perverse notions of social justice, and a collection of avengers bent on settling accounts for the perceived sufferings of others" (49-50). The methods that the group uses, every contemporary mode of messaging, such as Twitter, Facebook, Youtube and Instagram, have allowed them to easily distribute powerful and emotional images. ISIS hereby gains the ability to construct a narrative that stresses that they are gaining strength and power, making it seem that a victory is inevitable. Farwell therefore points his finger at the West, since he argues that it is us that is allowing them to spread their messages. He concludes: "By allowing

⁴ See: Houen, Alex. *Terrorism and Modern Literature, from Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010. (p 11).

the group to project strength and gain visibility, ISIS social media has inspired recruits from all over the world, including US citizens and Europeans” (50).

Terrorism, as a discourse, thus shows itself to rely heavily on mediation, something that now has been discovered and exploited by terrorist movements themselves. The constructed narrative of fear and othering has started to shape reality. By pointing this out we come to see that the discourse indeed borrows from forms of fictionalization, when considering fiction in its broadest sense: the crafting of a narrative. The result of this, as Robert Appelbaum and Alexis Paknadel argue in their study *Terrorism and the Novel* (2008), is not simply a distortion of perception: “it is the replacement of the perception of things with a reaction to representations. Policies end up being made, wars even end up being fought, not in response to real conflicts in the realms of social relations and politics, but in reaction to the simulacra of conflict circulated in the media by way of a mythology of terror” (389). Monette Zard, in her study of the exclusion causes within the refugee convention, points out that refugees are the first victims of these policies and measures, which she illustrates by showing that the events on 9/11 have intensified an already restrictive climate for refugees and asylum seekers: Although no refugees or asylum seekers were among the hijackers, the terrorist attacks have fuelled the public perception of refugees as criminals and undesirable elements in society (13). Within popular media and politics we have therefore come to see a growing tendency to link refugees and terrorist with each other. The view of refugees as potential terrorists, I want to argue, nonetheless tends to be constructed through mediation. Some researchers who have explored this in depth are Victoria Esses, Stelian Medianu and Andrea Lawson; in their study “Uncertainty, Threat, and the Role of the Media in Promoting the Dehumanization of Immigrants and Refugees” they examine the effects of common media portrayals of immigrants and refugees on dehumanization and its consequences. These portrayals, as they argue, include depictions that suggest that immigrants are sources and spreaders of infectious diseases, that refugee claimants are bogus queue-jumpers and that refugee claimants can also be terrorist that may gain entry to western nations as disguised refugees (518) This last claim is of specific interest to us here.

Esses, Medianu and Lawson argue that the media play a large role in the framing of public policy and discourse about immigrants and refugees. By analyzing multiple media publications over the last 10 to 15 years they come to the conclusion that portrayals of immigrants and refugees in Western countries have become increasingly negative, whereby the media has mainly been focused on the threats that immigrants and refugees pose to

western nations and societies. Reasons for this negative portrayal of refugees can, according to Esses, Medianu and Lawson, be found in the uncertainty and unease that refugees and immigrants evoke among the population in the countries they come to. Refugees and immigrants can call into being feelings of a collective insecurity about citizenship and national identity. By depicting immigration as a crisis, the problem can then easily be identified and solved, which reduces anxiety in the process. The media reinforces these perceptions of a crisis, and by providing one-sidedly negative portrayals of immigrants and refugees the uncertainty is reduced and transformed into negativity. Esses, Medianu and Lawson therefore come to the assumption that “what many negative media portrayals of immigrants and refugees have in common is their tendency to promote the dehumanization of these groups” (522). Dehumanization thereby serves as a means to reduce uncertainty and to provide definitive answers on how to view and treat immigrants and refugees.

The media thus, again, play a large role in the shaping of the discourse that surrounds and connects immigrants and refugees. The media’s focus on negative stories has created a dominant narrative that has started to shape reality whereby fact and fiction have become intertwined through framing. The discourse of terrorism and its mediation have successfully established the view that refugee claimants are potential terrorists. Yet, as I want to argue, this view is not in accordance with reality, since terrorism has been established by the media as a phenomenon and as a means to deal with feelings of uncertainty that immigration brings along. By making this argument I want to reveal the connection between discourse and reality. We therefore also have to, again, underscore the inherent complicity between fact and fiction within the discourse on terrorism. Opening up the relation between discourse and reality thereby also functions as a way to question the boundaries between fact and fiction: Terrorism, as Appelbaum and Paknadel argue, has “inserted into an “enabling” fiction, a myth of terrorism and its causes, dangers, and meanings, which ends up making its own realities” (389). Scholars such as Houen, Frank and Gruber argue that the study of this discourse calls for the expertise of literary studies: “one of literature’s specific potentials no doubt lies in its capacity to narrativize terrorism as fiction” (Frank and Gruber 15). Moreover, as Appelbaum and Paknadel put it: “[f]iction, we perceive, both responds to this mythography and contributes to it, adding its own coloration to the mythic identity of terrorism” (389). In order to understand the reality we live in today it can be illuminating to look at literature and its representations of refugees and terrorists. In the next chapter I will therefore turn my attention to Jean Genet’s *Prisoner of Love*, making the argument that his novel, through its political

message and humanization of its subjects, can be seen as a form of discursive and literary resistance to the coproduction of the terrorism discourse.

III. THE POETICS OF DISPOSSESSION: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF JEAN GENET'S *PRISONER OF LOVE*

Jean Genet is known as a prominent but controversial French writer⁵: early in his life he was nothing more than an orphan, vagabond, prostitute and a petty criminal but when in 1942 he began to write, while imprisoned for theft, he produced a widely celebrated novel entitled *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943; *Notre Dames des Fleurs*) His talent was brought to the attention of prominent French writers and philosophers such as Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. When in 1948 Genet was facing life imprisonment after being convicted for theft for the tenth time, a delegation of well-known writers, including Sartre, Jean Cocteau, Andre Gide and Paul Claudel, decided to make an appeal on his behalf to the president of the French republic, where after he was pardoned. In the following years, Genet published several by now widely celebrated novels⁶ In the late 1940's he also started to experiment with theater, which due to his success, made him a leading figure in avant-garde theatre, especially the Theatre of the Absurd⁷. From the late 1960's onwards, as Ahdad Souief points out, Genet then became more and more politically active, which eventually made him abandon literature all together. In 1970, the Black Panthers invited him to the USA where, after he smuggled himself across the Canadian border into the US, he spoke on behalf of the Black Panthers at Stony Brook University, New York, in March of that same year. Genet also attended the trial of their leader, Huey Newton, and published articles in their journals. Later the same year he visited the Palestinian bases in Jordan. Travelling between several refugee camps of the Palestinian freedom fighters, the Fedayeen, he stayed until the end of May 1971 and then, intermittently, through the end of 1972. His involvement with the Palestinians, and to some extent the Black Panther, as Souief writes, is the story of *Prisoner of Love* (x).

Prisoner of Love is Jean Genet's last work and was first published in France in 1986, a month after his death. While, as Souief points out in the introduction, the novel was celebrated by *Le Matin*, who declared that "Genet was assuredly one of the greatest French prose poets of this century, reaching the same heights as Proust and Celine" (qtd in Souief IV),

⁵ For a complete bio see: White, Edmund. *Genet: A Biography*. New York: Vintage, 1994.

⁶ The novels Genet published included: *The Miracle of the Rose* (1946; Eng. trans. 1966), *Funeral Rites* (1948; Eng. trans., 1953), *The Thief's Journal* (1949; Eng. trans., 1964) and *Querelle of Brest* (1947; Eng. trans., 1974).

⁷ The plays Genet wrote after this period included: "The Maids" (1947; Eng.trans., 1954), "Deathwatch (1949; Eng. trans., 1954), "The Balcony" (1956; Eng. trans., 1957), "The Blacks" (1958; Eng. trans., 1960) and "The Screens" (1961; Eng. trans., 1962).

today several bibliographies do not list the book and even readers familiar with Genet are often unaware of its existence. Reasons for this can be found in the fact that the work was published after a 30 year- long silence, and fundamentally differs from his earlier works: *Prisoner of Love* is a memorial chronicle of the time Genet spent with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jordan and with the Black Panthers. His book, as Souief points out, displays leaps between times, places, styles and modes of consciousness (XI), is highly poetic and as such can hardly be called a novel: his book doesn't know a center or a plot. Genet's choice to return to literature as the necessary mode of expression, after his self-erasure from the field, should not be left unnoted. Stathis Gourgouris, who has written extensively about Genet's last work, points out that while the experiences with the Black Panthers and the Palestinians certainly affected Genet and caused him to turn to the political essay as the only legitimate mode of writing, they failed to unite into an artistic expression. Genet's final turning point took place when he became an accidental firsthand witness of the immediate aftermath of the Sabra and Shatila massacres. The literary essay that he published four months after these events; "Quatre heures a Chatila" (September 1983), became a celebrated piece. Gourgouris argues that we could see this as Genet's first poetic encounter with the violence of the world, whereby Genet became inspired to embark on his final literary journey. Within two years Genet then finished his book about the Palestinian experience.

By writing *Prisoner of Love* Genet transformed himself into a witness of displacement. Or, as Martin Kramer put it, Genet "had been a thief and a prisoner, then a world famous novelist and dramatist. Now he would be reborn as a witness for the Palestinians" (46). Genet spent two years in the Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan between 1970 and 1972 and later in 1982 and 1984 returned to Beirut and Jordan. As an outcast himself, Genet was drawn to these displaced people. With his book, Genet tells us the story of the Palestinian revolution, and he does so by giving us access to the thoughts and feelings of the Palestinian Fedayeen; refugees with a revolutionary aim: to regain their homeland and status as citizens. As such, Genet doesn't present us with a clear and straight narrative, as he tells us himself: "This is *my* Palestinian revolution, told in my own chosen order" (355). Yet, Genet finds himself in a different subject position than thirty years ago. When asked in an interview by Rudiger Wischenbart what marks the difference between his early and late work he answers:

In my books, and when I was in prison, I was the master of my imagination. I was the master of the element in which I was working. Because it was solely my *dream*. But now, I am not the master of what I have seen, I am obliged to say: I saw men tied up, bound, I saw a woman with her fingers cut off. I am obliged to bend myself to a real world. But always with the old words, with words that are mine (74)

In the same interview we also come to see that Genet is not only drawn to displaced people, but also to people in revolt, in which he sees a necessity and a kind of beauty: “This beauty I speak of, and which shouldn’t be emphasized unduly, for I’m afraid people will misunderstand – this beauty resides in the fact that former slaves cast off their bonds, their submission, their servitude in order to obtain their freedom from France, or, for blacks, from America, or for Palestinians, I would say from the Arab world in general” (69). His interest in the Palestinian revolution and its subjects, the Palestinian Fedayeen, therefore does not come as surprise to us: the Palestinian revolution can be seen as a revolt of people who have been denied a place in the world; refugees, who are not only trying to regain their territory, but also their right to opinion and action. Genet sees in revolution an instrument to question the whole of society and its institutionalization. Gourgouris elaborates on this, arguing that “If revolution has any meaning at all – if the countless lives lost its name behind a demand on history that cannot be outmaneuvered – it is because revolution makes palpable, often against the grain of reality, humanity’s capacity to alter its own destiny, its own assured understanding of itself. The revolutionary project is profoundly a matter of cognition, of gaining knowledge into self and other, often at the price of death (252).

The project and book of *Prisoner of Love* can therefore be seen, with Gourgouris, as a love encounter with otherness. By approaching the Palestinian Fedayeen Genet comes to be captivated by the flexibility of their identity. In “The Palestinians” he writes that it was only when their nation was deprived of its territory that the Palestinians became conscious of themselves as an autonomous nation, within, but also separate from the Arab world: “while the land was being forced under its feet, the Palestinian nation was finding itself in fantasy, but for it to be able to exist, to continue, it had to discover the revolutionary necessity” (Genet 4). In a way, Genet thereby seems to view Palestine as a fiction. Shaul Setter illustrates this by showing that Genet might have been drawn to the Palestinian struggle precisely because it has been able to mobilize a certain fictive quality into the realm of the political struggle (122):

Revolutionary struggle is therefore woven into fantasy, based on a certain void in political reality – the fact that the Palestinians have no land and were still unformed as a people and devoid of any recognized political institutions. Hence, they are compelled to launch their revolutionary struggle as a textual, poetic or theatrical revolt within political reality itself (Setter 123).

In order to give expression to the textual, poetic or theatrical revolt of the Palestinians Genet therefore turns to literature. His aim to capture the Palestinian revolution in literature can, as I will argue later on, even be seen as a prominent revolutionary act in itself. Yet, Genet shows himself to be aware of the limits of his writing. On the very first page of his novel he writes that the page, blank to begin with, is now filled with tiny black characters: it is because of them that the page is said to be legible. This, however, gives him a feeling of uneasiness, a feeling close to nausea; do these black marks add up to reality, or can whiteness possess more reality than the signs? Genet suggests that if the reality of the time he spent among the Palestinians resided somewhere, it would survive between all the words that claim to give an account of it. He writes: “Another way of putting it: the space between the words contains more reality than does the time it takes to read them” (6). In order to write his account and to give us access to the thoughts and feelings of the Palestinian Fedayeen, Genet needs to adopt a new way of writing which he himself referred to as “poetic revolutions”. Gourgouris therefore suggests that we should not read his work as a novel but as a “*poetic chronicle*”: both a historical account and a historical invention. This cannot be otherwise since “you cannot write the history of the other as truth, only as poetry” (Gourgouris 265). Through his novel Genet exposes the gestural, theatrical and image-bound qualities of the Palestinian revolutionary struggle. The revolutionary arena, as Setter argues, hereby becomes a theatrical space, in which a certain game or play, is taking place, but this is a serious game, dead serious.

The Political

This, however, does not make the Palestinian struggle any less real. *Prisoner of Love* shows itself to be a highly political novel in which, as Ukai argues, Genet depicts how the term terrorism gained its contemporary meaning and connotation amidst the Israel-Palestine conflict. He illustrates this with a passage from *Prisoner of Love* where Genet recounts what a certain Palestinian had said to him.

Although you had your white, royalist terror in 1795, the word terror wasn't too terrible in French until lately. Jack the Ripper spread terror nicely enough in London, and so did Bonnot in Paris, but the word terrorist has metal teeth and the red jaws of a monster. The Shiites have inhuman jaws like that, it says in the papers this morning, and Israel must lash them to death with the poisonous tail of their army – the army that ran away from Lebanon. If you're against Israel you're not an enemy or an opponent – you're a terrorist. Terrorism is supposed to deal death indiscriminately, and must be destroyed wherever it appears.

Very smart of Israel to carry the war right into the heart of the vocabulary and annex the words holocaust and genocide. The invasion of the Golan Heights didn't make Israel an intruder or predator. The destruction and massacres in Beirut weren't the work of terrorists armed by America and dropping tons of bombs day and night for three months on a capital with two million inhabitants; they were the act of an angry householder with the power to inflict heavy punishment on a troublesome neighbor. Words are terrible, and Israel is a terrifying manipulator of signs. Sentence doesn't necessarily precede execution; if an execution has already been carried out, a sentence will gradually justify it. When it kills a Shiite and a Palestinian, Israel claims to have cleansed the world of two terrorists at once (374).

Ukai argues that it is here, amidst the Israel-Palestine conflict that the term terrorism makes an appearance in its contemporary sense. The passage shows how royalist terror has undergone a transformation into terrorism, a term that carries negative connotations is associated with the Middle East and carries great political weight: it gives a nation the power to place someone outside of the protective framework of national citizenship. The term thereby also shows itself to be embedded within language. By depicting one as a terrorist the nation can legitimize its violent actions and responses. The term terrorist, as Ukai argues, therefore clearly entails a move to dehumanize the enemy, forcing this enemy to exist “outside” the world of human beings.

In *Prisoner of Love* Genet daringly explores the relation between the refugee and the terrorist; two figures who are both forced to exist outside the world of human beings, cast out of society and nation. At the time the Palestinian Fedayeen, who united themselves in the PLO, were both refugees, deprived of their territory and homeland, and considered members of a terrorist organization. Genet, however, lets us realize that their struggle isn't just a struggle for territory. He writes:

When I looked at the Palestinian revolution from a viewpoint higher than my own, it was never a desire for territory, for land more or less derelict and unfenced kitchen gardens and orchards, but a great movement of revolt, a challenge over rights (...) (103).

By depicting the Palestinian revolution as a great movement of revolt and the PLO as a movement that is striving for rights which they are lacking since they are refugees and considered terrorists, Genet presents us with a different, and unique portrayal of the Palestinian fighters. Genet shows that autonomy, even when one is under occupation or expelled, can still be achieved in fantasy, or as Gourgouris puts it: “One of the first things that Genet realizes about the Palestinians is that their territorial dispossession mobilizes a national imaginary where none was necessary before” (265). Even when cast out of society and nation it is thus still possible to claim the right to opinion and action. However, as Gourgouris notes as well, this does not guarantee that the Palestinians will actually require territory or autonomy, let alone nationhood.

At the heart of the novel is therefore the theme of dispossession. A key scene in this aspect is the scene where Genet describes a group of Palestinian Fedayeen playing a game of cards. In this scene, Genet interjects a reference to the Japanese *Obon* feast, which, as he explains, is the feast of the dead, who, for 3 days, will come back to life. Yet, as Genet poses it, the person who returns from the grave is present only through the deliberately clumsy actions of the living. The ceremony is all of a sudden then nothing more than the mocking laughter by the living, who have briefly brought a taste of life to the lifeless skeletons, who, condemned to a hole in the ground, can't take offence. Genet writes:

The game of cards, which only existed because of the scandalously realistic gestures of the Fedayeen, they'd played at playing, without any cards, without aces or knaves, clubs or spades, kings or queens – reminded me that all the Palestinian's activities were like the *Obon* feast, where the only thing missing, exacting such solemnity present in a smile, was whatever must not become apparent (30).

In Genet's view, the Palestinian activities are like the *Obon* feast. Just as Gourgouris has argued, we could therefore see this passage as emblematic of the actual experience of

dispossession and its consubstantiality with the fantasy of autonomy: “a double existence that exemplifies the ghostly life of a revolutionary, a life situated at the border of death” (266). The Fedayeen are playing a game of cards without cards and only by acting out the playing of the game, they are able to hold up the fantasy of autonomy. Within *Prisoner of Love* the game of cards, both boundless and endless, is not only part of the Palestinian struggle, but becomes its form. This has immediate destructive vestiges, we read:

The show they'd put on for me demonstrated their disillusion, for to play only with gestures when your hands ought to be holding kings and queens and knaves, all the symbols of power, makes you feel a fraud and brings you dangerously close to schizophrenia. Playing cards without cards every night is a kind of dry masturbation (34).

Genet shows us the destructive effects of resistance and revolution: the Palestinian refugees are playing a game that they are not supposed to be playing since they are cast out of society and nation. Because the refugee finds himself outside the pale of law and the polis, the Palestinian Fedayeen consequently are acting outside of the law: In the eyes of the international community this turns them into terrorists. Yet, Genet seems to show us that this transformation is somehow inevitable. Ukai explains that we can blame this on our current system of aid for refugees, which only gives two options: it will either be abandonment without any refuge, or refuge as a recognized refugee. It is thereby never assumed that the refugee might become something other than a refugee. Genet, however, reveals the blind spot in our current aid system for refugees: through his novel he shows that the PLO has actually been born from refugees and has shaped itself politically, precisely on the basis of falling outside of the law. This has surprised the international community, which doesn't know how to react yet:

It was much the same in 1970-71: the “refugees: were not even the subjects of dreams, but seen merely in terms of aid allocated annually and distributed by UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administrations) in some camps somewhere to an undifferentiated mass in which no one had a name. But in 1970 an old word that had disappeared from political vocabularies was heard again: the word Palestinian. Neither masculine nor feminine, singular nor plural, it didn't denote men or women. It was armed; all the super-powers knew that it represented a revolution; they didn't know

yet whether they ought to keep an eye on it or destroy it (Genet 148-149).

Genet is hereby providing a critique on the concept and discourse on terrorism. Within this discourse it is presupposed that refugees will not have access to the law and the polis, but will remain subjected to these laws: their lives are highly regulated and restricted. Genet, however, shows us that it is possible for refugees to organize themselves in order to determine their own destiny and to regain access to the polis. Yet, by finding themselves outside of the law their actions consequently will make them act outside of the law. When a refugee wants to become other than a refugee, his transformation into a terrorist is therefore inevitable.

Genet's novel shows that literature has the ability to function politically. Setter argues that Genet, by writing his book, has been able to transform the common relation between struggle and writing: where writing is normally left with the task of representing, portraying and telling the story of worldly revolutionary actions, actions that have already taken place and are considered as political-historical facts, Genet instead understands writing as part of the politico-historical factuality of the struggle (138). Since it took Genet more than ten years to write his book in the first place, Genet rejected the position that we would originally ascribe to a book of this kind: one that would either have to function to explain the armed Palestinian struggle to the Western public, or, the other way around, to tell its story to its own fighters. Genet, while writing the book, even didn't know if his novel would gain any readers at all. He writes:

This book will never be translated into Arabic, nor will it ever be read by the French or any other Europeans. But since I'm writing it anyway... who is it for? (289).

Historically speaking, Genet was wrong in this regard; the novel eventually gained many French and European readers and has been translated into Arabic as well. At the same time, as Setter states, we could also read this assertion beyond its historical factuality, namely as a claim regarding *Prisoner of Love's* conditions of addressability. Setter argues: "Genet does not only lament the lack of any possible readers but also redirects the question of readership: by actively denouncing the existence of these preconceived national-linguistic groups of readers, he opens up a space for a different potentiality of address" (140). As I want to argue, Genet hereby shows that instead of focusing on his potential readers and their nationalities,

restricting him to stay within certain boundaries, he instead aims at the book's political affinities.

The Human

Literature here thus shows itself to be able to reach beyond its usual sphere and to interact directly with politics. *Prisoner of Love* however also shows, as I want to argue, that literature can have a humanizing effect. By exploring the relation between the refugee and the terrorist, and by blurring this distinction, Genet's novel raises ethical questions. Elaine Martin, when writing about the representation of the terrorist in novels, seconds this view. In her study "The Global Phenomenon of "Humanizing" Terrorism in Literature and Cinema" she argues that literary texts and films with terrorism themes manage to break with the taboos set in conservative terrorism discourse: within literature, terrorist subjects are placed within an interlocking grid of time, causality and history: allowing them a place in the world. Literature and films hereby can play a revolutionary role, since they aid and abet terrorism by explaining, rationalizing and legitimizing it, and by 'humanizing' terrorist figures. This view is somewhat complicated by Richard Jackson, who in his study "Terrorism, Taboo and Discursive Resistance" points out that while there are indeed a few scholars, such as Martin, who have studied the humanization of terrorist figures in literature and cinema, the more common view is that the literary terrorist has been and still is being depicted in derogatory, dehumanizing and demonizing terms: Even when the literary 'terrorist' has been given a prominent place in the central narrative, most terrorism novels are still organized around the experience of the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence (402). The terrorism novel may then still have the potential to act as a mode of discursive or literary resistance to oppressive forms of power, but to date the novel has not realized this potential. Due through its flawed and misleading depictions of the terrorist it is still reinforcing and maintaining the current and dominant terrorism discourse.

Prisoner of Love, as I want to argue, however, does break the taboos set within the terrorism discourse. Genet accomplishes this by not treating the subjects of his book, the Palestinian Fedayeen, as terrorists, and thus to write a terrorism novel, but by stressing that they are first of all refugees: people without territory who have decided to unite themselves in order to (re)claim their rights. Genet hereby blurs the distinction between the refugee and terrorist and through his personal and poetic account humanizes his subjects. The book is

written, as the title already reveals, and informed by love, it is a tribute to the life sources that gave Genet's life meaning at the moment death came close to him. By writing his novel Genet turned himself into a witness for the Palestinians, which he does very carefully. He is very transparent and self-reflective about his role as a witness and his abilities to give an account of what he has seen. Throughout the book Genet problematizes the figure of the witness and its abilities of bearing witness: he questions his own subject position towards the events he has witnessed. Furthermore, he stresses that he spent time *among* and not *with* the Palestinians. For example when we read:

How far away I was from the Palestinians. For example, when I was writing this book, out there among the fedayeen, I was always on the other side of a boundary. I knew I was safe, not because of a Celtic physique or a layer of goose fat, but because of even shinier and stronger armour: I didn't belong to, never really identified, with their nation or their movement. My heart was in it; my spirit was in it. Everything was in it at one time or another; but never my total belief never the whole of myself (105).

Prisoner of Love nonetheless still seems able to allow the refugee and 'terrorist' other to speak, which it does through its poetics. By adopting a new way of writing, which Genet referred to as "poetic revolutions", he gives us access to the thoughts and feelings of the Palestinian Fedayeen. It is through his poetics, as we have seen for example in the scene of the card-game, that Genet lets us realize that at the heart of the discourse around refugees and terrorists is the feeling of dispossession. Another important aspect that gives us the ability to identify with the Palestinian refugees and Fedayeen is the special relation Genet has with the Palestinian fighter Hamza and his mother. While *Prisoner of Love* does not have a real center, or a plot that is evolving we can see that this relation and the feelings Genet has towards these two persons, has given the novel its form. Through this relationship Genet manages to identify with the Palestinian Fedayeen.

While we only learn about Hamza about halfway through the novel, his name is already mentioned at the very beginning of Genet's account, when Genet is wondering if Hamza will still be alive. Genet first meets Hamza around 1971 in the Irbid refugee camp where he is invited to sleep in Hamza's bed while Hamza is out fighting. The scene that

follows leaves a deep impression on Genet. After Hamza's mother has quietly brought him a cup of coffee and a glass of water at night, something she did every night for Hamza, we read:

Because he was fighting that night, I'd taken the son's place and perhaps played his part in his room and his bed. For one night and for the duration of one simple but oft-repeated act, a man older than she was herself became the mother's son. For "before she was made, I was." Though younger than I, during that familiar act she was my mother as well as Hamza's. It was in my own personal and portable darkness that the door of my room opened and closed. I fell asleep (193).

Throughout the following years, Genet therefore still finds himself thinking about Hamza and his mother. As soon as he left Jordan the image of Hamza and his mother started to haunt him. Although he is questioning his own memory, he believes that his feelings are true. Later on we read:

I'd seen Hamza and his mother for too short a time – real chronometric time- to be sure it was always their true faces I remembered during the fourteen years I thought about them. But I did remember truly, I think, my feelings when I met them – Hamza and his mother, with her gun. Each was the armour of the other, who otherwise would have been too weak, too human (203).

When, in 1984, Genet returns to Amman, he therefore finds himself determined to find Hamza's mother and to learn about Hamza. In Irbid Genet then manages to track down Hamza's mother, who tells him that Hamza is now working in Germany. Yet, where Hamza's mother trustingly welcomed him in 1970, Genet now realizes that a lot of time has gone by: "The years between 1970 and 1984 had been a time of suffering and trial, and had changed that sturdy intelligence into its opposite – timid mistrust. She'd been worn down, but not completely extinguished by affliction". And so Genet wonders: "Would she have enough time left to change back to what she'd been before?" (411).

Genet is hereby finally giving a face to the Palestinian revolution; through his poetic chronicle Genet humanizes his supposed 'terrorist' and refugee subjects. By giving his account and by presenting the Palestinian Fedayeen as human beings, people without territory

that are striving for rights, Genet is able to present us with a counter-narrative, raising ethical questions to his readers. His book is not a terrorism novel but rather an anti-novel. Genet's aim to capture the Palestinian revolution and its subjects in literature can, as I want to argue, therefore be seen as a form of discursive and literary resistance to the coproduction of the terrorism discourse. Genet is able to show that the figures of the refugee and the terrorist are discursive constructs. Yet, his novel also shows that you cannot simply deprive someone of a place in the world; people will eventually claim their right to action and opinion. *Prisoner of Love*, as we will see in the conclusion, can thereby speak to the global crisis of displacement we are facing today.

IV. CONCLUSION

After the events on 9/11 the world turned its attention to combating the threat of global terrorism. Even though the hijackers were not refugees or asylum seekers, these events have nonetheless led to the perception that refugees are potential terrorists. In order to safeguard the system of international refuge from abuse by terrorists the already restrictive climate for refugees and asylumseekers therefore has been intensified. Refugees have become the first victims of these policies and measures. Within Europe this has led to a situation in which political leaders express nationalistic thoughts portraying migrants as dangerous outsiders with a violent religion, threatening our culture. These thoughts now more and more have turned into actions: razor-wire fences have risen along national borders in Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary and France and several European countries are not welcoming (Syrian) refugees anymore. In this thesis I nonetheless have tried to show that this view of refugees as potential terrorists has been constructed through mediation. Terrorism in itself can be seen as a discourse and as such borrows from forms of fictionalization.

In order to address these problems and to reveal the connection between discourse and reality I therefore have tried to show that in times of great disorder – a global crisis of displacement and terrorism threats – literature can perhaps give us a better understanding of the world. Through an analysis of Jean Genet's *Prisoner of Love* I have pointed out that literature can be political: Genet has provided a critique on the very notion and discourse of terrorism by showing that within a discourse that casts the refugee outside the law and polis, the transformation from refugee into terrorist is somehow inevitable. His novel, however, also raises ethical questions for the reader: through Genet's personal and poetic account the distinction between refugee and terrorist is blurred and these figures have become humanized. Genet let us realize that at the heart of the discourse around refugees and terrorists is the feeling of dispossession. *Prisoner of Love* hereby shows that literature has the potential to function as discursive resistance to the coproduction of the terrorism discourse.

Yet, while literature has this crucial potential this thesis has also revealed that there is not much research to be found that explores the discourse that surrounds and connects refugees and terrorists. This is a notable and surprising gap, not only because there has been a growing tendency to link the two figures with each other in politics and popular discourse, but

also because of the exponential growth of novels with terrorism themes⁸. Within this field there are thus still many possible avenues for further research. This research, as I will argue, is much needed and can make a difference in times of global displacement and terrorism threats: issues that have started to dominate our century and are affecting our political climate.

What has remained open to question in this thesis is whether Genet can be held for a trustworthy witness, since he is in a radically different position than the subjects of his book. Further research could point out in how far this kind of witnessing literature is reliable and what precisely literature that is not written by participants, participant observers, or first-hand witnesses can add to the story. We also need to raise the issue of Orientalism. Questions like these have been taken up by influential scholars such as Edward Said, who, in his article “On Jean Genet’s Late Work”, has argued that although Genet did allow his love for Arabs to frame/determine his approach to them, there is no indication that he aspired to have a special position when he was with them or wrote about them. Genet also did not try to ‘go native’ or relied on colonial knowledge, using clichés about Arab customs to give expression to what he saw or felt. Yet, as I want to argue, it still seems surprising and problematic that *Prisoner of Love*, a novel that we have depicted as a form of literary and discursive resistance against the coproduction of the terrorism discourse, has been written by a white French man instead of by its subjects: the Palestinian refugees and freedom fighters. Not allowing the Palestinian Fedayeen to speak for themselves will keep them in the position of the ‘other’ and thus in place. As a group they are then still lacking artistic and political representation since the ‘other’ always and only exists in relation to the discourse that would name it as other⁹. Even though the novel shows that they are able to (re)claim their right to opinion and action this would suggest that they are still denied access to the cultural sphere¹⁰.

⁸ In their study “Terrorism and the Novel” Appelbaum and Paknadel have documented over a thousand novels that deal with terrorism. Since 9/11 these novels have continued to increase from year to year (p. 396).

⁹ See: Spivak, Gayatri Chakravarty. 2001 (1988). “Can the Subaltern Speak?” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, edited by Vincent B. Leitch et. al. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company. In this influential text for postcolonial studies Spivak questions if the subaltern can speak and represent itself within culture and politics.

¹⁰ See: Hochberg, Gil Z. *Visual Occupations: Violence and Visibility in a Conflict Zone*. Durham: Duke UP, 2015. In this study Hochberg shows how the Israeli Occupation of Palestine is driven by the unequal access to visual rights, or the right to control what can be seen, and from which position.

Prisoner of Love nonetheless sends an important message to us today, a time where in the mass phenomenon of refugees has become seen as a threat and we are faced with a global crisis of displacement. The perception of refugees as dangerous outsiders and potential terrorists is fuelled by the media and is now also communicated and used within politics. After the Paris attacks in 2015 the European Union's open border policy, allowing free movement for refugees seeking asylum, immediately came under fire. By now several European countries and American states are not welcoming Syrian refugees anymore. Yet, by embracing restrictions on refugees, right-wing politicians in the West are playing right into the hands of the Islamic State (and other terrorist groups) since this will just feed into their propaganda. Novels such as *Prisoner of Love* could hereby function as an intervention: by making unheard stories and version of stories heard, and by giving us access to the thoughts and feelings of its subjects, literature enables us to identify with the 'other': the refugee with its limited right of existence. Literature, by raising both political and ethical questions, can then be a valuable and critical commentary on mediation and representation: it reveals the constructedness and mediatedness of the terrorism discourse and its figures: the refugee and the terrorist, and instead gives them a voice and a face and thus a place in the world.

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