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Withholding the Dead

On Necropower, Contentious Politics and Contested Martyrdom in the
Mobilisation of Palestinians against the Israeli Occupation.

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the effect of Israel's necropower exercised through the withholding of Palestinian bodies on the mobilisation of Palestinians. In order to prevent martyr funerals from turning into protest, Israel is actively withholding the bodies of those martyrs. With that, both cultural and structural aspects of the contentious politics by which Palestinians mobilise are gravely affected, as interactive discursive processes are disrupted by the absence of a body and the commemoration of these martyrs becomes a stage of contestation. The additional collective punishment, the conditions upon the return of a body and the context of the Israeli occupation further constrain the opportunities for Palestinians to mobilise. However, the withholding of bodies also provides new frames and opportunities for the mobilisation of Palestinians, as the necroviolence itself is a striking representation of the injustices Israel is trying to repress, which allows for alternate collective action frames and generates collective solidarity. This thesis will conclude that the given analysis of mobilisation in relation to the withholding of bodies in Palestine bridges a theoretical gap as the dead have often been ignored within social movement theory. Hence, this thesis will argue for an expansion of social movement theory beyond the agency of the living, by including the power over the dead and the postmortem.

Table of Contents

Introduction	8
Outline	11
Methodological Considerations.....	11
Data Collection Techniques	13
Chapter I: Martyrdom and Necropolitics	15
Israeli Necropower	19
Palestinian Martyrdom	21
Chapter II: The Culture of Contention	25
Identity and Framing	25
Contested Commemoration.....	28
Chapter III: Political Opportunity Structures	33
Political Opportunity Structures and Biopolitical Control.....	33
Collective Punishment.....	36
Occupational Barriers.....	39
Global Movements and Social Movement Organizations.....	41
Conclusion.....	44
Bibliography	47
Appendix: Declaration of Originality.....	53

Introduction

On the twenty-fifth of May, 2020 the world was shocked by a disturbing video showing a police officer pressing his knee on a black man's neck. The man was crying that he was unable to breathe, but the officer did not take his knee off his neck, nor did any of the other policemen interfere. Some bystanders filmed the instance while watching the man die after he had repeatedly called out for his mother. The man was called George Floyd, a name that would often resound during the global mass protests that followed this incident. Among others, house speaker Nancy Pelosi has referred to the instance as the "martyrdom of George Floyd" which has sparked national actions "as Americans from across the country peacefully protest to demand an end to injustice" (Washington Post 2020).

Five days later, on the thirtieth of May, 2020, a man of 32 years old with an autistic disorder was walking towards Elwyn El Quds Center, which provides services for children and adults with disabilities, when he passed the checkpoint at the Lion's Gate in Jerusalem. He was ordered to stop, but his disability caused him to misunderstand the orders to which he fled. After a short chase, Israeli officers fired seven shots at him while he was hiding in a garbage room (Staff 2020).

The shooting of Eyad al-Hallaq was highly covered by both local and global media, who were quick to draw comparisons between the killing of Eyad al-Hallaq and George Floyd (CBS News 2020; Holmes 2020) as they say it is a "similar neglect for the lives of Palestinian and black people in Israel and the US" (Holmes 2020). After Eyad's body was withheld by the Israeli security forces for one day and handed over to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society after, his funeral took place on Sunday evening the first of June (The Palestinian Information Center 2020). Immediately, the killing of Eyad al-Hallaq sparked protest in both Palestine as well as Israel, leading to apologies for the incident from both the Israeli defence minister and the alternate prime minister (Holmes 2020). However, as is expressed by Gideon Levy, an Israeli columnist and one of the most prominent anti-occupation voices in the country, these killings of Palestinians are not unusual. "There they shoot black people, whose blood is cheap, and in Israel they shoot Palestinians, whose blood is even cheaper" (Levy 2020).

A few weeks after the death of Eyad, on the twenty-third of June, 2020, a Palestinian named Ahmed Erakat was on his way to a hair salon in Bethlehem to pick up his sister for her wedding when he was shot at a checkpoint in Abu Dis (Al Jazeera 2020). Ahmed was the cousin of the renowned Palestinian human rights attorney Noura Erakat, who tweeted:

“Ahmed Erekat, 27, beautiful young man. A son. A brother. Fiancée. My baby cousin. Israeli cowards shot him multiple times, left him to bleed for 1.5 hours and blamed him for his death. Tonight was his sister’s wedding, his was next month. We failed to protect him. I am so sorry” (@4noura, June 23, 2020a).

Being the cousin of Noura Erakat, his death did get some publicity on international social media platforms, however there are no records of widespread protest in Palestine, such as in the case of Eyad. Furthermore, unlike the case of Eyad, Ahmed’s family did not get to bury their son as his body has been taken by the Israeli security forces (Al-Waara 2020; Erakat 2020b).

The detention of Ahmed’s body is not unusual. Since the late 1960s, Israeli security forces have regularly detained Palestinian corpses (Daher-Nashif 2018). On the thirteenth of October, 2015, the Israeli security cabinet approved the proposal by Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan to withhold the bodies of Palestinians who are killed by Israeli security forces after “carrying out violent assaults against Jewish civilians” (Jpost.com staff 2015). Erdan justified his proposal by stating that: “The terrorist’s family turns the funeral into a demonstration of support for terrorism and incitement to murder. [...] We cannot allow this. We must do everything so that the terrorist doesn’t receive the honour and accolades after carrying out attacks” (Jpost.com staff 2015).

These practices continue to this this day and are even intensified, as on November 27th, 2019, Israel’s newly appointed minister of defence, Naftali Bennett, announced that the Israeli army will no longer release the bodies of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces (Bachner and Staff 2019; Abu Sneineh 2019). Although this statement was not met by any legal decisions, the comment does address the relevance of this topic as these practices of withholding bodies continue, despite being in violation with customary international humanitarian law which stipulates that “the dead must be disposed of in a respectful manner and their graves respected and properly maintained”¹ (Al-Haq 2018).

Relating back to the previous examples of Eyad and Ahmed, in which Eyad’s death did spark widespread protest and Ahmed’s did not, I wondered whether the presence of a martyr’s body was, indeed, an incentive for Palestinians to mobilise, as is claimed by Israel. Subsequently, I wondered how a funeral could turn into protest and how the late Palestinians are commemorated and recollected when their body is being withheld.

¹ ICRC, Customary IHL Database, Rule 115, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/customary-ihl/eng/docs/v1_rul_rule115 [Accessed July 20, 2020].

In this thesis, I have analysed the withholding of Palestinian bodies using a necropolitical framework in order to understand the necropower – the sovereignty over the dead in a socio-political setting (Misra 2017, 13) – that is exercised over the postmortem of Palestinians in order to better understand the process of mobilisation among Palestinians and the effect of the withholding of bodies on the contentious politics – “when ordinary people [...] join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents” (Tarrow 2011, 6). Therefore, I resorted to social movement theory, which provides an extensive body of literature on the mobilisation of social movements.

The literature on social movements is divided in a cultural and a structural approach to mobilisation, the first referring to the discursive practices underlying the identity and framing of the cause of a movement (Tarrow 2011), whereas the latter is more engaged with a movement’s resources and structural opportunities (Tarrow 2011, 60). Both lead to different questions. Cultural questions address the framing of a deceased Palestinian: what will his status be within a community? How will the community identify itself? And how do these framing activities lead to collective action? The structural questions aim at identifying both the opportunities and threats that determine the possibility for Palestinians to mobilise. In this thesis, I work towards a synthesis between the cultural and structural aspects (Polletta and Jasper 2001), as I aim to understand how Palestinians mobilise as a result of these practices of withholding bodies that, according to Israeli claims, seek to prevent just that. By drawing on the concept of necropolitics, and social movement theory, I ultimately aim to answer the following question:

How does the necropower exercised by Israel through the withholding of Palestinian bodies after October 2015 affect the contentious politics through which Palestinians mobilise?

I have demarcated my research question by focusing on the period after October 2015, as the Israeli cabinet approved the proposal by Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan on the thirteenth of October, 2015 (jpost.com staff 2015). The proposal came after a period of intensified violence in Jerusalem in 2014 (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020). Simultaneously, Israel started to consistently contain the bodies in freezers, and provide them with the proper documentation.² Furthermore, as these practices are still ongoing, focusing on the bodies that

² Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

have been withheld after October 2015 is most relevant to contemporary mobilisations in Palestine.

Outline

In the first chapter, I will contextualise the withholding of bodies by discussing the meaning of martyrdom in Palestine and its corresponding rituals. Hence, I will start the chapter with an introductory vignette, stemming from my fieldwork in 2019. Subsequently, I will conceptualize the withholding of Palestinian bodies and argue its necropolitical nature. Furthermore, in order to contextualize the commemorative practices and rituals on which I will draw in second and third chapter and to understand the mobilising power of martyrdom, I will discuss the social status of Palestinian martyrs as national heroes.

In the second and third chapter, I will examine the impact of Israel's necropower on the contentious politics underlying the mobilisation of Palestinians. My analysis will be twofold; I will discuss both cultural and structural aspects of social movement theory. In the second chapter, I will focus on the cultural aspects, to which I will refer as the culture of contention. I will discuss how Israel's necropower – expressing itself in the absence of a body and the contestation over its commemoration – affects the identity politics (Demmers 2017) and framing activities (Benford and Snow 2000) underlying the discourse of a social movement.

In the third chapter I will analyse the political opportunity structures of Palestinians, who I argue to be subjected to Israel's biopolitical control. I will elaborate on the political constraints perceived by Palestinians, such as the collective punishment of the martyr's family and community, the occupational infrastructure and the conditions put upon the return of a body. Furthermore, I will explore the possibility that the presence of a larger movement or a social movement organization is a perceived opportunity for Palestinians to mobilise.

I will conclude that my analysis of mobilisation in relation to the withholding of Palestinian bodies bridges a theoretical gap as the dead have largely been ignored within social movement theory. Therefore, by combining contentious politics and necropolitics, I will argue for an expansion of social movement theory beyond the agency of the living, by including the power over the dead and the postmortem.

Methodological Considerations

On the first of March 2020, I arrived in Bethlehem to conduct a qualitative research on the mobilisation of Palestinians as a result of the withholding of bodies by the Israeli Defence

Force. It was the first week of my fieldwork and I had just conducted my first interviews when, on the fifth of March, the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Bethlehem. That same afternoon, the Palestinian authorities held an online press conference and declared a state of emergency. This was a unique situation, and nobody knew what this “state of emergency” actually entailed. Within a few days, Bethlehem was under a complete lockdown and slowly, the world came about to realize the scope and gravity of the pandemic.

While I had scheduled a three-month period of data collection, I was forced to depart from the field after precisely a week. This led to the necessity of making some adjustments in the formulation of my research question and the theoretical context of my research, but it mostly resulted in the loss of ethnographic richness within my data as I was forced to write my thesis with the limited ethnographic data I had gathered on the subject.

However, one of the key features that I have always validated most in qualitative research, is the flexibility of methodology (Boeije 2010, 11). So, whereas my methodology failed to grasp ‘what is going on in the field’ and create a “thick description” – a detailed and rich account of places, activities and people in a social setting (Geertz in Boeije 2010, 200) – that I initially aimed to write, this flexibility within my research methods allowed me to continue my research. Through online mediums, I was able to bring a small piece of Palestine into my own living room and include some ethnographic elements in a thesis that had forcibly been reduced to a literature study.

Before proceeding to an explication of the data collection techniques I have used, I deem it important to note that in (qualitative) research, the generated data is never an exact representation of life experiences, because the data depends on the ability of the participant to express thoughts, ideas, observations and experiences through language. Secondly, the data is a result of the interaction between the researcher and the participant and is, therefore, always coloured by the context in which it is produced and by the aim of the research (Boeije 2010, 58; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 36). Therefore, I argue that this thesis is a “translation” of Palestinian experiences, which is about capturing and conveying certain aspects, rather than representing the original (Maggio 2007). Hence, I deem it necessary to make explicit my personal feelings, perceptions and standpoints regarding the subject under study – the mobilisation of Palestinians in the absence of a martyr’s body – and regarding the sociopolitical situation in which my topic is embedded – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As ethnographic fieldwork implies that the researcher is the primary research instrument, the core notion of ethnographic research is to become engaged with the research setting (Ghorashi and Wels 2009, 246). Engagement allows for a deeper understanding of the

views and experiences from the field as they are embedded in connections and interactions in the field (Ghorashi and Wels 2009, 246). Especially in situations of power struggle and domination, the bottom-up engagement of a researcher can enable access to the complexities of the processes of inequality beyond modernist binaries like powerful versus powerless (Ghorashi and Wels 2009, 246), and address these social inequalities (Clarke 2010, 311). The risk, however, then, is that one can become corrupted by the complexities involved (Ghorashi and Wels 2009, 246). Engaged ethnography, therefore, has been criticized for being non-objective and non-theoretical (Clarke 2010, 311). Yet, once engagement is explicitly “chosen”, there is reflective space for the researcher. Thus, in order to make explicit an attitude that would otherwise be implicitly present in my thesis, I would like to position myself as ‘engaged’ in the Palestinian cause, struggling against what I perceive as the Israeli occupation. By taking on the role as an empathically engaged researcher, I aim to add transparency to my research.

Following Ragin and Amoroso (2019), the main goal of my research, then, is to “give voice” as my objective is, first, to increase the knowledge on the withholding of bodies and social movements in Palestine, and second, to translate the “Palestinian story” and spread the story of their suffering, their perseverance and their resistance. Furthermore, by combining the bodies of literature of necropolitics and contentious politics, I aim to make a theoretical contribution to social movement theory.

Data Collection Techniques

In my thesis, I draw on ethnographic data gathered in 2019 while I was in Palestine conducting qualitative research for my bachelor in cultural anthropology and the short period I spend doing research in 2020. Whereas in 2019, I was doing research in Palestine on a different topic, whilst in the field I did gather data about martyrdom and the occupation in general. The data I gathered during my fieldwork in 2019 was mainly obtained through participant observation during which I participated in the daily lives of tour guides providing political tours in Palestine.

Furthermore, before the outbreak of the pandemic, I was able to conduct two highly significant semi-structured interviews about the withholding of bodies in Palestine, which both comprise a great amount of pertinent data to this thesis. During these interviews, I chose an open-ended structure in order to limit my control on the interaction; to allow informants to talk about their emotions and experiences in their own words; and to make sure the interviews reflect those aspects that are salient to the informants (DeWalt & DeWalt 2011, 140; Boeije 2010, 63).

My first interview was with Salah,³ a lawyer in Jerusalem who is the father of a martyr named Tariq. After Tariq had been killed by the Israeli security forces, his body was detained for a long period of time. Therefore, Salah was able to articulate very personal experiences with regards to the subject matter. By profession, Salah is a lawyer in Jerusalem and a spokesperson for the martyrs' families in The Popular Campaign, on which I will elaborate in the third chapter. Therefore, Salah also contained extensive knowledge about the legal aspects and procedures regarding the withholding of bodies.

My second interviewee was Zahra, who is a researcher on the topic of withholding bodies for a Jerusalem based human rights center. When I spoke to Zahra, she herself was finishing up a research on the withholding of bodies which will be published in August 2020. Zahra has been highly involved in cases of withheld bodies for many years and has done extensive research on the subject matter. Therefore, she provided me with many specifics about several different cases and gave me a great many contextual information about the withholding of bodies.

³ Names and personal details of participants have been changed to protect their identity.

Chapter I

Martyrdom and Necropolitics

Bethlehem, 27-03-2019

The daylight was already shining through the curtains of my bedroom when I woke up. I had been out with some of my informants last night and as I had no plans for the day, I had decided to sleep in.

I could derive from the noise on the street below my bedroom window that for many Palestinians the day had already started a couple of hours ago. Street vendors were selling coffee at the crossroad down below and I could hear the cars honking. During the beginning of my fieldwork in Palestine, the honking cars often kept me awake, but since I had gotten used to the sound, it stopped bothering me. I did joke about it with my informants, though. Whenever I was in the car with one of them, I would comment on their occasional impatient and dangerous driving.

I took my phone from the nightstand to check the time. I immediately noticed the message from Mohammed. He was also at the bar last night and probably wanted to make sure I had gotten home safely as he is always slightly overprotective.

I opened our chat.

“It was a warzone, Dian, a warzone,” his message read.

Mohammed was one of my informants who lives in a refugee camp south of Bethlehem. I immediately felt the adrenaline rushing through my body. Mohammed is very sensitive and would never joke about these matters. Something was wrong.

I texted him back, asking what had happened. My hands were shaking.

He called me, explaining that the Israelis had invaded the camp twice that night and people got shot.

This news seemed unreal. Only about eight hours ago, we were still enjoying ourselves at a bar, while drinking a beer and smoking a cigarette. Whereas I had gotten home to my safe apartment in the centre of Bethlehem and enjoyed a good sleep, he had found himself in the midst of an invasion of the Israeli army.

With a frightened voice he told how, somewhere during the night, he had wanted to walk out of his apartment to check on his parents who lived one floor above him, but right

before he stepped out of his apartment, he noticed an Israeli soldier blocking his apartment through the peephole on his door. "If I had opened that door, they would have shot me, Dian."

He also said that a boy got shot about 50 meters from his house. He was taken to the hospital in a critical condition.

Before we hang up, Mohammed told me to stay home and promised he would keep me updated while he would be going to the hospital with some other men from the camp to check on the situation.

I got out of bed and quickly took a shower, somehow knowing that I needed to be ready as soon as possible for whatever was going to happen that day. I quickly made some breakfast, not leaving my phone out of sight. Mohammed never texted and as the time passed, I got more impatient and worried.

After about an hour, I packed my bag and decided to head to the hospital where Mohammed had said he was going.

On my way to the hospital, I passed the suq where most shop vendors were closing their shops. It was the middle of the day, but I did not devote any thoughts to it until I bumped into Amir who was closing down his shop as well. I was in a rush, but he was one of my informants and it would be rude not to stop and talk to him.

I told him that I was on my way to the hospital to which he answered that he had just received the news that the boy had died. He explained that all shops and schools were closing because they announced a day of strike in Bethlehem. It was then that I noticed all students coming from Bethlehem university and walking home.

After some brief chatter, I thanked Amir for his information and quickly resumed my walk to the hospital.

The road leading towards the hospital was closed down by Palestinian police. I sneaked past them, not knowing if I was even allowed to enter the area.

Down the hill I saw a large crowd of chiefly young men who were chanting and shouting in front of the hospital. I decided not to mingle and found a convenient spot on the parking lot across the street from where I had a good view of the street and the hospital.

After a while, I spotted Mohammed. One of his friends saw me first and they walked towards the parking lot where I was standing. He was surprised to see me, but luckily, he did not make a scene or send me home. Without asking further questions, Mohammed took me to

his house where his mother had made us some food. Mohammed was quiet during our meal and I could sense that he was grieving.

After we had finished the meal, Mohammed and I remained seated on the couch. He was scrolling through his Facebook timeline which was filled with photos and videos of what had happened that night, pictures of the boy who died, and a live video from riots in Ramallah as a result of the death of the martyr.

I learned that the boy had only been 17 years old and worked as a volunteer at the paramedics. He was on duty that night and got shot whilst taking care of the wounds of someone else. Mohammed had known him well as the boy was one of the more advanced dabke dancers from the cultural center where he works.

I don't know how long we sat there, but it was about three o'clock when we stood up and left the house. We walked down the hill towards the main street of the refugee camp where the family house of the martyr was located. On our way into the camp, we had driven past the house while residents from the camp were setting up a large tent and decorating the street with banners showing a picture of the boy in his paramedic uniform surrounded by some national symbols and Arabic texts which I expected to be verses from the Qur'an. I was amazed how quickly they had printed the banners and posters and wondered how standardized this process must have become.

Now, the street was crowded with hundreds of people, mainly men, who had gathered in front of the house. Mohammed said the family was inside saying goodbye to the body. They would carry the body to the cemetery where the boy would be buried after the prayer.

We waited there for a while and before the funeral procession would initiate, Mohammed pulled me away from the crowd as he had arranged for us to drive with a friend ahead of the procession so we wouldn't have to walk.

We arrived at the cemetery early.

While waiting for the body to arrive, Mohammed explained that this particular cemetery was reserved for martyrs from the refugee camps surrounding Bethlehem.

We got invited to watch the funeral from the roof of one of the houses next to the cemetery where other acquaintances of Mohammed were already present. From the roof we had an excellent view over the cemetery. Mohammed pointed to several graves and told me about some of the martyrs who had been his friends but were now buried in this cemetery.

The mood of the people on the rooftop was somewhat cheerful. Some children were playing around us and the family to whom the house belonged had put a couple of thermoses with coffee on a table.

While I was sipping my coffee, more people gathered on the hillsides and other rooftops surrounding the graveyard and a short while later the procession arrived on top of the hill in front of us, carrying the body down towards the graveyard.

The procession did not seem to come to an end, hundreds, maybe even thousands of people filled the streets, carrying Palestinian flags and flags of al-Fatah. Meanwhile they were chanting songs that, according to Mohammed, were about how lucky his mother was that she was now the mother of a martyr.

While I was watching the procession coming down from the hill, I was startled by gunshots being fired from the hill across. Frightened, I ducked for cover. People around me started laughing, including Mohammed who came walking towards me to help me up.

I asked him what was so funny.

He explained that it was part of the ritual, that people were always firing gunshots at funerals.

Again, gunshots were fired and I cringed, which caused Mohammed to burst into laughter again.

I explained that this was the first time in my life that I heard gunshots, which he jokingly translated to his friend who joined him in laughter. I realized how privileged I was when he replied that he was raised with the sound of bullets flying around the camp and I thought back about last night and the videos I had seen on his Facebook.

The procession had reached the cemetery and the martyr was carried to the grave on a stretcher, wrapped in a Palestinian flag and decorated with flowers, his face still visible. One man walking in front of the body shouted “takbeer” to which all the people in and around the cemetery responded “Allahu akbar”.

Mohammed later explained that takbeer is a call for ‘God the great’ and Allahu akbar, ‘God the greatest’, is the response.

After the body was lowered into the grave and the stretcher was carried away, a man, who was religiously dressed and who I assume to be the imam, prayed. It was impressive to hear the silence in the entire area after the past 30 minutes had been filled with hundreds of people continuously chanting and shouting.

The prayer was answered by the same shout as before: “takbeer... Allahu akbar, takbeer... Allahu akbar...”

While the shouting continued, the mother of the martyr left the grave and sat down on a bench in the middle of the cemetery. Some other women surrounded her to give her comfort while an older man stepped on a large stone next to where the mother was seated. He raised his voice and started preaching. Mohammed translated for me and explained that he was shouting that the death of the boy was the result of Zionism. The man was calling for people to resist the occupation.

While the man continued his speech, friends of the paramedic closed his grave and the funeral came to an end.⁴

This fieldnote was written during my first research in Palestine and contains several important aspects of martyrdom in Palestine that are significant for my arguments in the current and in the coming chapters, such as: the regional strike; the songs to celebrate his death and elevate him as a hero; the hundreds of people attending the funeral; the posters and banners covering the entire city; the visibility of the martyr and his fatal wounds caused by the Israeli army; and the speech calling for resistance.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on martyrdom in Palestine in general and on the withholding of bodies in specific. I will argue that the withholding of bodies is an exercise of necropower and I will conceptualize Palestinian martyrdom. By doing so, I aim to lay the groundwork for the following chapters in which I will elaborate on the impacts of the withholding of martyrs on the mobilising power of Palestinian martyrdom.

Israeli Necropower

As the introductory fieldnote of this chapter has explicated, performed rituals and commemoration – particularly the funeral – allow Palestinian martyrs to become powerful tools for mobilising the population. One of the means for Israel to fight against these powerful agents of Palestinian resistance is the withholding of their bodies. The bodies that are withheld are captured after being killed by Israeli security forces. Israel uses a variety of means to imprison the body, diverging from entering Gaza with a bulldozer to shovel the body (Kubovich and

⁴ Field observations. 27-03-2019.

Khoury 2020), to capturing the body in a hospital after the death of a Palestinian caused by his injuries.⁵

According to the media and literature, claims about the supposed aim of the withholding of bodies differ from keeping them for future exchange with imprisoned Israelis (Al-Haq 2018; Daher-Nashif 2018, 180); using them as bargaining chips to revive peace talks (Tahhan 2017); to hiding Israeli war crimes: “It is alleged that Israel uses undue force against attackers; preferring to shoot them rather than detain them, and fails to provide medical treatment to immobilised assailants, instead allowing them to bleed to death” (Salem 2016). Israel itself, however, argues they withhold the bodies to prevent funerals of martyrs from turning into protest (Jpost.com staff 2015).

Based on Israel’s motivations for withholding the bodies, Zahra distinguishes three types of withholding bodies: first, the withholding of bodies in the cemeteries of numbers that has been practiced since 1967. These bodies belong to Palestinian combatants who have died in clashes with Israel. They are withheld because they are classified as infiltrators by Israel.⁶ Second, there are the bodies that are withheld for security reasons when Israel fears “the funeral of this martyr might result in violations of public security and public order. Usually, these bodies are withheld for months,” often in freezers in morgues.⁷ Third, bodies are withheld to use as bargaining chips for potential negotiations with Hamas. Some of those bodies are preserved in morgues, whereas others are buried in the cemeteries of numbers. However, unlike the bodies of first type of withholding which often lack the proper documentation and identification, the bodies of the third type do not.

The decisions of who deserves to live and who deserves to die are at the heart of Israel’s colonial practices (Daher-Nashif 2018, 180). In Palestine, however, this sovereign power is not just performed over the living, as even the dead are subjected to this sovereignty and have become the victims of the settler colonial state’s logic of elimination and practices of dispossession (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 46). Therefore, both in death as in life, Palestinian bodies are subjected to the logic of erasure, as the dead, too, must disappear from the visibility of the colonizer (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 50). This erasure is part of managing Palestinians’ death rites. Funerals of martyrs in Palestine often turn from ritual into riot due to the powerful combination of emotions of grief and anger (Leshem 2015, 35).

⁵ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

⁶ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

⁷ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

The withholding of Palestinian bodies by the Israeli military is a case of what Mbembe has called “necropolitics”, which is the “subjugation of life to the power of death” (2003, 39). It is the sovereignty over life and death (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020). Necropower, then, is held by those agents who exercise sovereignty over the dead in a socio-political setting (Misra 2017, 13). However, the withholding of bodies goes beyond Israel’s mere control over mortality; it is the control Israel exercises over the postmortem of Palestinians, over the corporeal remains, its social status and over its commemoration. The withholding of bodies and the imprisonment of the corpses in freezers and the cemeteries of numbers aims to strip dead bodies of their dignity in their postlife (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020, 287). “Whereas Mbembe discusses the political economy of death as an expression of sovereignty, here it is the continued life and living of dead bodies that the state utilises to conquer new geographies, geographies of death, and manipulate Palestinian families and community” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020, 289). Israel’s exercise of necropower through the withholding of bodies could, therefore, be described as necroviolence, that is the “violence performed and produced through the specific treatment of corpses that is perceived to be offensive, sacrilegious, or inhumane by the perpetrator, the victim (and his or her cultural group), or both” (De Leon 2015, 69) Unlike Mbembe’s necropolitics, necroviolence specifically aims at the corporeal mistreatment and its generative capacity for violence (De Leon 2015, 69). The complete destruction of a body is the most complex and durable form of necroviolence as it prevents a “proper” burial for the dead, but also allows the perpetrators of violence plausible deniability (De Leon 2015, 71). However, the withholding of bodies by the Israeli military has, in many cases, less of a finality to its practice as the body is not completely destroyed and sometimes returned after an indefinite period of time. But nevertheless, as I will discuss in the following chapters, in a similar fashion, the withholding of bodies does affect the commemorative rituals.

Israeli necropower is, thus, exercised over the dead, contesting the legitimacy of one’s death and Palestinian claims of martyrdom. Before I will continue my analysis on the implications of Israel’s necropower performed over the dead on the mobilisation of Palestinians, I will first define the Palestinian martyr and analyse their social status within the Palestinian nation.

Palestinian Martyrdom

The notion of Martyrdom finds its origins in the classic Greek language, where ‘martyr’ means “to witness”. Martyrdom originated in Christianity where a martyr was a person that witnessed

for his belief and, therefore, chose death over conversion (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 369-370; Halverson et al. 2013, 322). In Arabic, the term ‘shahid’ is used to refer to a martyr, which also means “to witness” or “to testify”. The Arab martyr, originally, was someone who testified his or her belief and refused to convert (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 369-370). However, over time, this significance of a martyr has changed. The present-day interpretation of a martyr in the Arab world is a more secular one: a martyr is someone who dies in the context of an active religious or national struggle (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 370). Likewise, the Palestinian shahid symbolizes the collective struggle and suffering of the Palestinian nation (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 374). As evident in the fieldnote above, the death of the paramedic was instantly placed within the larger narrative of collective suffering under occupation by naming him a Palestinian martyr and deploying the corresponding discourse through posters, banners, songs and words. Palestinian martyrdom, therefore, is not so much a manifestation of the ‘traditional’ religious models, but rather it is the embodiment of a more secularised nationalist model of martyrdom.

Although the martyr-status is attributed to multifarious causes of death, including the act of suicide bombing which were rather conventional during the second intifada, at present, martyrdom is also ascribed to those who were accidentally or mistakenly shot dead by the occupying force. For instance, the paramedic from the fieldnote above, was shot in his stomach while providing medical assistance to another Palestinian who got shot in his hand. Eyad al-Hallaq, the Palestinian martyr from Jerusalem whom I introduced in the introduction, failed to understand the stop-signs given by the Israeli soldier due to his autism disorder. The police briefly chased him and eventually fired seven shots at him, while he was hiding in a garbage room. The statement by the Israeli police read that he was “holding a suspicious object that appeared to be a gun.” Hebrew media, however, reported he was unarmed and Eyad’s father explained the object he was holding was most likely his mobile phone (Staff 2020).

These examples suggest that these nationalist models of martyrdom are not so much about the intention of a martyr, but about the constructed meaning of their death and, therefore, they are referred to as “unintentional martyrs” (Mittermaier 2015, 585), meaning that “it is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny” (Anderson 2016, 12). These secular nationalist types of martyrs, thus, incorporate less of the archaic Greek meaning “to witness” or the Arab “to testify”, but are more about what the famous Latin quote of Horace articulates: ‘dulce et decorum est pro patria mori’ (“it is sweet and honourable to die for one’s country”) (Horace, Odes 3.2.13 in Winkler 2000), in which one’s individual ‘virtus’ (“virtue”) in battle is the fundamental archaic concept of heroism, and remembrance for his deeds is the hero’s reward (Winkler 2000, 177).

Therefore, I argue that Palestinian martyrs are not inherently active agents – combatants in a struggle against Israel – but can also serve as passive representations of the collective suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Therefore, victimhood is central to the narratives of Palestinian martyrdom; martyrs are those violently killed at the hands of an “unjust enemy” – that is, Israel (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 373). However, in order to escape the victim-narrative that has haunted Palestinians for over 75 years, Palestinians began to portray their dead as courageous heroes. Those who had been killed by Israeli forces or died in battle against Israel did not just get the status of shahid, but also became a national hero (Abu Hashhash 2006, 393). Martyr posters and wall paintings are the representations of this heroism (Allen 2006, 117; Abu Hashhash 2006, 393), bearing the message that the displayed was a victim of the occupation, “who is now remembered and revered by the nation for which his or her life was sacrificed” (Allen 2006, 115). Simultaneously, martyrs are the embodied evidence of state violence. By representing their suffering and death in the larger framework of the Palestinian national struggle, martyrs escape their victimhood and become agents that possess the tools to hold the state accountable for its crimes (Mittermaier 2015, 585).

Jerusalem, 04-03-2020

The weather was nice outside when I arrived at the bus station in front of Damascus gate. I was early so I decided to sit down on the stairs in front of the old city. The Damascus gate is one of my favourite places in Jerusalem. I felt at ease being amongst Palestinians rather than Israelis: it felt more familiar. At the same time, there was always some spectacle going on at this entrance gate towards the old city. The gate is surrounded by three stations of Israeli security forces, causing a constant tension between the Palestinians and the Israelis. One could be educated about the conflict dynamics just by sitting down at the stairs facing the gate and paying attention to what is going on. It is like an open-air theatre, where you can watch a performance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Minutes flew by while several small rebellions occurred on the steps below me. After about 30 minutes, I got up and googled the address I had been texted by the translator. I had an appointment scheduled with Salah. As usual, my navigation app was useless as Palestinian addresses are poorly registered in Google Maps, so I had to call the translator to get the right directions.

Salah's office was very light and spacious with pastel pink coloured walls. We sat down on the sofa's and the translator handed us a cup of Arabic coffee and a cigarette. We started our interview and Salah explained what had happened to his son:

“In 2015, I was watching the news when they reported about the killing of two young men. I knew it was my son. [...] My son was one of the most educated people in Jerusalem and he was pushing activities in town, like pushing people to read and those things. So, he spread the Palestinian message.”⁸

Salah emphatically portrayed his son as an accomplished Palestinian citizen, rather than a violent combatant or passive victim, ascribing a more heroic character to his legacy. He argued the same for other Palestinian martyrs:

“Those martyrs are not subordinate or victims of economic conditions, nor were they desperate in life [...]. They are well educated people. They really live in good families, good economic situations. They only have the message to have a better life. [...]. This message had to be carried by their families and their fathers especially, otherwise their death would have no meaning.”⁹

This chapter has argued that most contemporary Palestinian martyrs are unintentional victims of the Israeli occupation, inheriting the status of a national hero through collective commemoration. As the opening fieldnote has shown, this commemoration may also lead to mass protests, especially during the funeral. However, in order to prevent these funerals from turning in to protest, Israel is exercising their necropower over these bodies by withholding the bodies in freezers or the cemeteries of numbers. This practice is aimed at stripping dead bodies of their dignity (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020, 287), contesting their martyrdom and obstructing their commemoration. The case of withholding bodies is, thus, about Israel's power over death, but moreover, it is about Israel's power over the dead. Therefore, through analysing Israeli necroviolence, the remaining chapters of this thesis will discuss how the exercise of necropower over the postmortem of Palestinian martyrs affects the mobilisation of the living.

⁸ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

⁹ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

Chapter II

The Culture of Contention

For a long time, scholars have predominantly emphasized the structural shifts that provided collective actors with the grievances and resources to mobilise for collective action (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 283; Tarrow 2011), thereby assuming there already was something like a “collective actor” waiting for the structural opportunities to open up (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 286), which is not always the case. Since the 1980s and 1990s, scholars have acknowledged this gap and started theorizing the formation of such a collective actor, focusing on aspects such as identity and frames that create movement solidarity (Tarrow 2011, 22). This is what Tarrow (2011) refers to as the “cultural turn” in mobilisation theory.

Thus, in order to understand how these social movements mobilise and how the withholding of bodies affects the mobilisation, we need to look at both structural conditions and cultural processes to understand the mobilisation of a social movement. In the next chapter I will discuss those structural conditions affecting the mobilisation of a social movement, whereas in this chapter I will inquire into the cultural processes by focussing on two catalysts – identity and framing – conditioning the creation of movement solidarity and the formation of a collective actor. In line with Tarrow (2011, 143), I will refer to these catalysts as the “culture of contention”. After briefly discussing the existing literature on the subject matter, I will analyse this culture of contention through studying how the commemoration of martyrs takes up a central role in the construction of a culture of contention and, subsequently, I will argue how Israel’s necropower is affecting these commemorative rituals.

Identity and Framing

In general, the literature identifies two approaches to identity; primordialism and constructivism. According to primordialist notions of identity, identity comes naturally (Demmers 2017, 26). It is fixed: a personal property acquired at birth (Baumann 1999, 59). Though such primordial notions of identity might be very much alive in the hearts and minds of the people, scholars have long agreed upon identity as being a social construct, meaning that we should perceive these identities as constructed through processes of social interaction (Demmers 2017, 28). The perception of identity as a social construct necessarily implies the involvement of individual or collective agency as it requires an agent to construct that identity,

to define the boundaries of the in-group and the outgroup; the movement protagonists and antagonists (Benford and Snow 2000, 616).

The construction of such a collective identity, can be better understood by framing theory. Since collective identities are, thus, not necessarily pre-existing, activists strategically “frame” identities that are critical in recruiting participants (Polletta and Jasper 2001, 291; Tarrow 2011, 144). These constructed collective identities, according to Tarrow (2011, 151-152), have an organizational function. A collective identity is important for mobilising people, because it creates unity and solidarity, which is necessary for a movement to act collectively and consistently. According to Tarrow, “Identity legitimizes a movement as an authentic representative of the constituency it claims to represent” (2011, 152).

In addition to the framing of a collective identity, framing theory also accounts for the framing of the movement’s cause. Through injustice frames, the victimization of the movement targets by a given injustice is amplified and some form of political or economic change is advocated (Benford and Snow 2000). Underlying the framing of injustice, the cause of the movement, and the boundaries defining the collective identity are interactive discursive processes – the speech acts and written communications of movement members in the context of the movement activities (Benford and Snow 2000, 623). In the case of Palestine, these interactive discursive processes take place through a variety of mechanisms, among which the commemoration of the martyrs on which I will elaborate in the following section.

The commemoration of killed Palestinians dates back to the Nakba, when Palestinians would teach their children about resistance during funerals (Allen 2006, 110). While at first, funerals would be held in secret during nighttime, after the first intifada public funerals were held for political activists who had been killed (Allen 2006, 111). By the time of the second intifada, the funerals of martyrs had become more common and functioned as a public space for expressions of solidarity with the struggle through which Palestinians relived their collective suffering (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 373).

Likewise, martyr posters are used as discursive means to construct the meaning of martyrdom in Palestine (Abu Hashhash 2006, 391). Martyr posters consist of a photograph of the martyr, accompanied by an assembly of signs and symbols, both classical, religious and national, and often a Qur’anic verse (Abu Hashhash 2006, 392). When walking through the cities in the West Bank, one will find oneself constantly reminded of those who have lost their lives in their struggle against the Israeli occupation as city walls are covered with martyr posters, the number of lives lost appearing to be infinite. As Abu Hashhash (2006, 399) argues,

these walls become “a sustaining metaphor of the life and death that flash by in the posters.” The martyr posters, however, are not the only recollection of these nation’s heroes. They are accompanied by numerous imposing murals that look down upon the living Palestinians walking down the streets. Indoors, murals and posters are found in local shops and public buildings, such as cultural centres. The culture of contention is, thus, ever present in Palestine in public and sometimes in private space. By representing the collective suffering of the Palestinian people, their agency in resistance and their martyrs as national heroes, these commemorative rituals and artifacts are the discursive stage through which the injustice and boundary frames are constructed.

During my time in Palestine, I have seen many posters and murals, but one mural always stuck to my mind. When I had just arrived in Palestine for my first research, I made a visit to the cultural center of a refugee camp south to Bethlehem. I had my first appointment with Mohammed. As he was still working at the hospital, I was waiting at the front desk for him to arrive. Some children invited me up to come and watch their dabke dance class. I accepted their invitation and followed them upstairs. We stopped at the auditorium on the second floor where I sat down on a chair in the right corner. After a short warming-up, the children started dancing. It only took me a short amount of time to grasp the meaning of their performance. Their dance featured a young boy who was killed by the Israeli army. The dancer would lie still on the ground for the extensive part of the song. The girls were mourning the death, whereas the other boys gathered around his body. Towards the end of the song, they lifted up his body and slowly carried him away.

Almost an hour had passed when the dabke class ended, and Mohammed could be downstairs any minute now. I thanked the children and their group leaders for their impressive performance before I left the room. As I walked towards the stairs, I saw a large painting of four young boys above the entrance of the auditorium. Later I would learn that one of the boys used to be Mohammed’s friend and was now laid to rest in the martyr’s cemetery on the other side of the camp. Walking downstairs I noticed the other paintings decorating the walls of the center. All walls provided a political message as they featured women and men throwing stones, lifeless children laying on the street, and the keys that some refugees still carry of their homes in the area’s they were forced to flee.¹⁰

¹⁰ Field observations. 07-02-2019.

Commemorating the martyrs creates a sense of immortality; by narrating and visualising the story of heroism and sacrifice, the martyr is ever present, keeping the legacy of resistance alive (Hamamra 2018). Resulting from the active commemoration of Palestinian martyrs is a feeling of collective solidarity (Daher-Nashif 2018, 190), creating a shared sense of identity through the portrayal of death and especially the portrayal of the victim and the perpetrator, which defines the boundaries of the group identity (Buckner and Khatib 2014, 372; Kaufman 2009). Thereby, these mechanisms of commemoration also function to create a historical narrative and political discourse (Allen 2006, 114). According to Buckner and Khatib these martyr narratives function to mobilise the people through “emotional appeals to injustice” (2014, 372).

The outcomes of the abovementioned framing activities are, what Benford and Snow have named, “collective action frames”: “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (2000, 614). Collective action frames are produced by movement actors, who are “signifying actors actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning” (Benford and Snow 2000, 613). By attributing meaning to certain occurrences, defining certain actions of an authority as unjust, and making a compelling case for the likely effectiveness of collective ‘agency’ in changing that condition, movement actors intend to mobilise potential adherents (Benford and Snow 2000).

Thus, the commemoration of martyrs through funerals, posters, murals and sometimes even dance provides the stage for the interactive discursive processes between the movement actors and the Palestinian people. The result of these discursive processes are collective action frames which have the potential to mobilise Palestinians. However, in their aspiration to prevent people from mobilising, the withholding of Palestinian martyrs’ bodies by the Israeli security forces obstructs the abovementioned interactive discursive processes. In the following section, I will discuss how different aspects of the abovementioned culture of contention are affected by Israel’s enactment of necropower.

Contested Commemoration

First, and most obvious, as was explicated by the minister of Public Security, the aim of withholding the bodies is to prevent funerals from turning into protest. By foreclosing the funeral of a martyr, Israel keeps away the target public and obstructs the discursive processes leading to the creation of collective action frames. Furthermore, central to the concept of martyrdom is the act of witnessing; whereas a martyr himself is a witness to the national

struggle, “audience is a prerequisite for the occurrence of martyrdom and recognition of the martyr and his martyrdom” (Hamamra 2018, 228), as martyrdom is, in essence a collective act. Martyrdom is the outcome of interactive discursive processes including the target audience and movement entrepreneurs. In Hamamra’s words: “The witness/speech of the witness (martyr) is to be witnessed by a witness (audience) that witnesses (testifies) that the witness/martyr is a witness to a higher authority” (such as religion or a national struggle) (2018, 228). Thus, by withholding the body and obstructing the funeral, the target audience of the social movement is being withdrawn from the stage of mobilisation.

The second way in which the withholding of Palestinian bodies obstructs the interactive discursive processes is by challenging the cause and veridicality of the death of a Palestinian – the injustice frames that underly the cause of a movement. Not only does the withholding of bodies prevent a “proper” burial for the dead, it also allows the perpetrators of violence plausible deniability. As the corpses of Palestinian martyrs inhabit a body of knowledge, Israel aims to challenge the classification of those martyrs and alternate the discourses through which these martyrs are commemorated by withholding their bodies and, therefore, allegedly hiding war crimes. As most bodies detained after 2014 are stored in freezers, they are in a frozen status upon return to the family. It takes 48 hours for the body to defrost in order to be able to carry out an autopsy (Daher-Nashif 2018). Because the conditions upon the return by Israel (on which I will elaborate in the next chapter) compel the family to bury the body that same night¹¹, no autopsy is being conducted on those bodies that have been withheld.

Besides the uncertainty about what happened to the body and the cause of death, as explicated above, sometimes there is even uncertainty about whether the person is actually dead.¹² “This puts the families in a daily torture because the occupational forces send no information, no reports about what happened to the martyr.”¹³ Salah continues to explain that sometimes even the red cross was asked to visit the bodies to investigate the death, but these proposals were refused by Israel.¹⁴

“Last month, there was a shooting at the Israeli army in a village next to Ramallah. We didn’t receive any news after the shooting. After eleven days, they said they had found the one who committed the shooting. However, no one has seen the body, no one knows

¹¹ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

¹² Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

¹³ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

¹⁴ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

anything. Now we have information saying that he was arrested from the scene, then he disappeared and eleven days later we get the news that they found him dead. However, we believe he was executed, but we can't investigate the case, we can't be certain as long as we don't have the body."¹⁵

The uncertainty about the veridicality of the martyr's death is mostly found among the family members. According to Zahra, for the Palestinian community it is often very clear that the person has died: "Obviously, the society knows that he is a martyr and he is referred to as a martyr and that doesn't renegade his status as a martyr."¹⁶

Finally, Israel's necropower challenges the construction of meaning over the death. A Palestinian martyr is subjected to ambivalent posthumous reminiscences as they are commemorated by the Palestinian nation as national heroes, while simultaneously they are degenerated as terrorist and unworthy enemy by the Israelis. The statement by Gilad Erdan already insinuated Palestinians whose body is being withheld to have been carrying out violent attacks against Jewish civilians, emphasizing past crimes that become defining to the identity of the Palestinian in Israeli statements, whereby they legitimize his postlife punishment and delegitimize his heroic legacy. Also, according to Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2020, 294), in official documentation the family receives about the withholding of the body, the dead individual is referred to as a terrorist at every opportunity. Likewise, the documents implicate his family, referencing to them as "the family of the terrorist" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020, 294).

Thus, in order to withhold the body, Israel has to define the martyr as a criminal, a terrorist and an enemy of the state of Israel. These crimes, however, are often alleged. As such, Salah's son Tariq was killed after allegedly killing an Israeli. Salah said that "[this] is an assumption that we couldn't confirm until now. [...] they assumed that Tariq had committed the killing and they shot him, but they did not investigate his case."¹⁷

Like Salah, many parents fail to believe Israel's report about the actions of their child and they are left with uncertainty about the cause of death. However, the contestation over the legitimacy of the status of a martyr, is not limited to the case of Palestine alone. Other cases have also shown the contestation over the meaning of the death of a martyr and the way he is commemorated postmortem. This was rather obvious in the aftermath of George Floyd, when my Facebook homepage had become a site of meaning making over the significance of his

¹⁵ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

¹⁶ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

¹⁷ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

death. Through pictures and texts, some of my Facebook-connections were opposing the “Black Lives Matter”-statement by portraying George Floyd as a criminal and recollecting his past crimes, arguing he was no hero, but deserved to die a criminal (Dibbet 2020). Based upon her fieldwork in Cairo on the Arab spring-martyrs in 2011, Mittermaier writes that “the martyrs were also omnipresent in everyday conversations – praised by activists for having sacrificed everything for a new Egypt, and dismissed by others who claimed that most of the so-called martyrs were really thugs who had been shot while looting during the disarray following the protests” (Mittermaier 2015, 586).

Though the withholding of bodies poses a serious impediment to the culture of contention of a social movement, simultaneously, withholding of bodies in itself can offer the adequate collective action frames on which people can mobilise. Israel’s necropower can be threatened by the most powerless and silenced who represent a certain narrative and the existence of the colonized (Shalhoub Kevorkian 2014, 40).

“The disappeared sustain and convey the traces of the state’s power to determine the meaning over life and death. Although the disappeared are only supposed to intimate this menacing state power, the ghost cannot be so completely managed. Because making contact with the disappeared means encountering the specter of what the state has tried to repress, means encountering it in the affective mode in which haunting traffics” (Gordon 1997, 127).

The colonial state struggles against these eternal witnesses of oppression, because they are always just out of reach of being totally managed (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014, 40). Shalhoub-Kevorkian argues that “in this way, the Palestinian topos of death is simultaneously a topos of memory and recollection – and thus a topos of life and living inscribed by Palestinian history, belonging and continuity” (2014, 41). Therefore, “the Israeli practice of withholding dead bodies can provide grounds for the very forms of resistance that it is intended to suppress.” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020, 298).

In this chapter I have argued that movement entrepreneurs construct collective action frames through the commemoration of Palestinian martyrs. These collective action frames are sets of beliefs and meanings including over the collective identity and the injustices that befall Palestinians, namely the Israeli occupation. Through these collective action frames, movement

actors have the potential to mobilise the Palestinian people. The withholding of Palestinian bodies is obstructing these interactive discursive processes underlying the construction of collective action frames in three ways: by foreclosing the funeral Israel takes away the target public from the discursive stage; Israel's necropower challenges the cause and veridicality of the death of a Palestinian by denying an objective autopsy and sometimes even obscuring death in itself; and Israel's necropower challenges the construction of meaning over the death by counterframing the status of the dead as martyrs, but rather, portraying them as criminals or terrorists. However, as I have concluded this chapter, the withholding of bodies in itself also provides new frames for people to mobilise, as the practice in itself is a recollection of the colonized and of what the Israel is trying to suppress.

Chapter III

Political Opportunity Structures

Following the cultural turn in social movement theory, in the previous chapter I discussed the cultural aspects of the mobilisation of Palestinians through the commemoration of martyrs and the effects of Israeli necropower on these commemorative rituals and artifacts. However, as Polletta and Jasper argue, the analytical challenge is to find the interplay between this culture of contention and the structural processes that accompany this culture (2001, 285). Tarrow (2011, 156) argues that it is important to not just look at the “text” – the culture of contention – but also at the “context” – the political structures – in which this process of mobilisation occurs. Therefore, in this chapter I will elaborate on the context of mobilisation in Palestine in order to better understand the political opportunities and constraints for Palestinians to mobilise.

First, I will give a theoretical overview of the existing literature on political opportunity structures. Thereafter, I will argue that whereas dead Palestinians are subjected to Israeli necropower, likewise the living are subjected to Israeli biopower, which purposefully limits their political opportunities to mobilise. To support my argument, I will elaborate upon two political constraints – collective punishment and occupational barriers – that were regularly articulated in both the literature on the mobilisation of Palestinians, as well as during the interviews. Despite the resulting feelings of despair and fatigue among the Palestinian people with regards to protesting the Israeli occupation,¹⁸ the occurrence of protest as a result of the withholding of bodies has not been completely absent, but, as I will argue, often occurred in concurrence with social movement organizations. Therefore, in the final section of this chapter, I will discuss the presence of allies as a possible opportunity for Palestinians to mobilise.

Political Opportunity Structures and Biopolitical Control

Opportunities refer to the perceived probability that social protest will be successful in achieving the desired outcome (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, 182). These opportunities arise due to changes in the political and economic resources between the state and its challengers which will weaken the state’s power, resources or support, increasing the opportunities of its opponents (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, 182-183; McAdam et al. 1996 in Benford and Snow 2000, 628). Drahos argues that these perceived opportunities result in emotions of hope (in Wlodarczyk et al. 2017, 205). Threats, on the other hand, are the perceived costs of action or

¹⁸ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

inaction (Tarrow 2011, 160). The decision regarding collective action is formed by weighing the threats and opportunities combined (Goldstone and Tilly 2001).

Political opportunity, then, specifically refers to those dimensions of, or changes in the political environment, such as the availability of potential allies and the formation of coalitions that provide incentives for collective action by affecting the perceived threats and opportunities (Gamson and Meyer 1996). In response to changing political opportunities and threats, contentious politics emerge, that is, “when collective actors join forces in confrontation with elites, authorities and opponents around their claims of those they represent” (Tarrow 2011, 4). Linking political opportunity structures to the culture of contention, Tarrow, then, argues:

“When actions are based on dense social networks and effective connective structures and draw on legitimate, action-oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions even in contact with powerful opponents. In such cases – and only in such cases – we are in the presence of a social movement” (Tarrow 2011, 16).

Despite the prominence of political opportunity theory in social movement theory and its wide acceptance in the field, the theory has also been subjected to some important criticism. First, scholars (see Alimi 2009; Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2003) have criticized political opportunity theory for being Western dominated, taking a liberal approach towards processes of mobilisation. Namely, underlying political opportunity theory is the fundamental question why movements sometimes emerge in apparently healthy democracies (Meyer 2004, 127). As a result, political opportunity theory, as well as other theories and models of contentious politics have been developed in established democracies (Alimi 2009, 215). However, history has proven that social movements are not unlikely in the context of a repressive regime. What should be taken into account is that political opportunities for mobilisation in liberal democracies vastly differ from those in repressive regimes as, contrary to repressive regimes, in democracies “civil rights are constitutionally protected, the mass media are uncensored and dissent is tolerated” (Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2003, 606). However, repression in itself offers political opportunities to mobilise as well.

For over seven decades, Palestinians have been subjected to what postcolonial scholars have referred to as Israel’s “colonial occupation” (Daher-Nashif 2018; Davis 2017; Leshem 2015; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2014) in which Palestinians live in a state of “bare life” – that is mere biological existence whilst being stripped of any political significance (Ziarek 2008, 90). Therefore, Palestinians have become the target of sovereign violence and are the embodiment

of what Agamben (1998) has named “homo sacer”, that is a “banned man”, “who can be killed with impunity” and “who is the target of sovereign violence exceeding the force of law and yet anticipated and authorized by that law” (Ziarek 2008, 91). Thus, in Palestine not solely the dead are subjected to Israeli necropower. Likewise, the living Palestinians – the potential movements’ participants – find themselves continuously subjected to Israel’s biopower exercised through “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault 1976, 140).

Although some scholars argue that oppression reduces the participation in collective action because it increases the costs for participants, others have found that protest might increase when coercive methods are deployed (Tarrow 2011, 174; Osa and Corduneanu-Hoci 2003; Alimi 2009). The latter was also suggested by Foucault, who argued that subjects cannot be mere “docile bodies”; bodies on which power is inherently enacted. Rather, resistance is intrinsic to relations of power, as the subject will attempt to creatively instrumentalize the means by which power is enacted to resist and undermine it (in Hoy 1999, 10). In fact, one of the most pressing political questions raised by Agamben’s homo sacer is whether bare life itself can indeed be mobilised by emancipatory movements; whether it can indeed be the object that can enable mobilisation and, therefore, engender contentious politics (in Ziarek 2008, 89; 99).

In order to understand the mobilisation of the oppressed and to dissolve the Western bias in political opportunity structure theory, Osa and Corduneanu-Huci (2003) have conducted a qualitative comparative analysis based on twenty-four political situations in fifteen stable non-democracies on the political opportunity conditions. They analysed their cases on five aspects of political opportunities: dynamics of repression, divided elites, influential allies, media access and social networks. In their analysis, they found two aspects to be most influential: media access and social networks. They argue that free and uncensored media is important to confront authoritarianism and a social movement is most likely to arise “when society manages to overcome internal divisions and creates links between individuals and groups” (Osa and Corduneanu-Huci 2003, 623).

Furthermore, political opportunity theory has been criticized on its utility, arguing that it explains too much – neglecting the importance of activist agency – yet too little as it offers only a mechanistic understanding of social movements (Goodwin and Jasper in Meyer 2004, 126). Political opportunity structures are said to explain too much as some scholars have argued that collective action frames (the culture of contention) are more or less determined and modified by political opportunities (Benford and Snow 2000, 628). Other scholars, however, have argued

that political opportunities in itself are not so much objective structures outside of the agency of the individual, but rather political opportunities are actively framed (Benford and Snow 2000, 631).

Working towards a synthesis between agency and structure, Gamson and Meyer (1996, 285) have argued that “the framing of political opportunity is [...] [a] central component of collective action frames.” Political opportunities, then, should be perceived as a social construct rather than a structural condition. This approach to political opportunities offers some flexibility to the conceptualisation, as it does not perceive political opportunities as a fixed set of variables, but rather, it analyses opportunities and threats as experienced by the movements’ participants. Thus, in order to impede the risk of explaining too much, yet too little, I will confine my analysis to those aspects most relevant and most articulated in relation to the withholding of Palestinian bodies by my interviewees and by literature on mobilisation in Palestine, that is collective punishment and occupational barriers. Thereby, it is important to note that I do not strive to give a conclusive account of all the political opportunities and constraints Palestinians encounter in their lead-up to mobilisation.

While discussing the collective punishment and occupational barriers, I will take the literature on political opportunities in repressive regimes in consideration by including the importance of media access and social networks for mobilisation under a repressive regime. I will explicate how restricted media access and the partition of social networks are part of Israel’s occupational regime and pose a constraint for Palestinians to mobilise.

Collective Punishment

One way in which Israel exercises biopolitical control over the Palestinian population is through collective punishment. “Collective punishment is [...] subjecting a group of people to a punishment for a crime [...] that they haven’t carried out.”¹⁹ According to Shalhoub-Kervorkian, the withholding of bodies – to which she refers as the imprisonment of dead bodies – is a punishment of the dead as well as the living, as for the living it produces an “eliminatory social order” by depriving both the family and the entire community the right to mourn their loss (2020, 286). This was also articulated by Zahra. With sadness and anger in her voice, she spoke:

¹⁹ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

“Everyone involved in the family is subjected to collective punishment due to the inhuman treatment that the family is subjected to [...]. They have no body, they don’t know the whereabouts of their loved ones, they know that they can’t visit his grave, they can’t read Qur’an over his grave and they can’t pray over his grave.”²⁰

In addition, Zahra argued that the withholding of bodies is often accompanied by a number of punitive measures, especially for the family.²¹ Salah, being subjected to this punishment himself when the body of his son was withheld, said:

“The first punishment was that they assumed that Tariq committed the killing and they shot him, but they did not investigate his case, even though they could have stopped him and investigate his case. The second assumption of the occupation was that the family always knows that [their] children commit such crimes, that they have knowledge about these things and therefore they should be punished. A lot of steps are part of the punishment for the families that change their lives after.”²²

Salah did not further elaborate on the subject, but instead, started talking about the legal campaigns he had helped organizing in order to address the topic to the court and retain the bodies. About halfway through our interview, the translator received a phone call and walked away. Salah and I were left together in his office, sipping our coffee and smoking our cigarettes. There was an awkward silence, not because we had run out of conversational topics, but because of my poor Arabic and his little knowledge of English. There was so much I wanted to ask, but I struggled to make myself understandable.

After a few minutes, Salah broke the silence between us and asked me in crippled English where I was from.

“Holland, the Netherlands”, I answered, “and you?”, making a hand gesture towards him, “Jerusalem?”

“Yes, my wife in West Bank”, he answered, “another punishment.”

“So, you are living apart?”

“I am in Jerusalem. My wife in Abu Dis. ID”

I did not know what he meant with the ID-card, but I decided to continue my questions.

²⁰ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

²¹ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

²² Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

“So has this been like all your life, or did you live together before?”

I was happy to learn that he understood my question when he answered: “before we lived together. Here in Jerusalem.”²³

I tried to ask him why they were living separately, when the translator came back. He noticed how Salah was struggling with the correct language to tell me about his situation, so he took over. Knowing Salah’s story very well, he explained that:

“They look at each case and they see how they can destroy your life as much as they can and then they start doing it. So, they looked at his case, his wife has a permit [to live with Salah in Jerusalem], they have a house, they detain the body, they demolish the house and they pull the permit.”²⁴

Salah, therefore, not only lost his son but also his house and was forced to live separately from his wife. According to Zahra, these punitive measures – besides the demolition of the family house and the withdrawal of permits – also include harassment of both the family and the community at large, as these measures are not just aimed at punishing the family, but also at deterrence; warning the community about the consequences of violent acts against the occupation.²⁵

The deterrent effect of collective punishment not only influences people’s perceptions of political threats, but also significantly affects the culture of contention of a social movement by alternating the course of the commemorative politics. Salah, for instance, recalled how recently a family requested their martyred son not to be commemorated through posters. “The family was too scared, because [...] their house is not licensed and they are waiting for demolishment anyways. [...] Everyone respected their wishes.”²⁶

Also, outside the family of the martyr, Palestinians experience repression when raising awareness about political issues, for instance on (social) media. “Having a big mouth” or spreading information against the Israeli occupation on Facebook, according to Mohammed, might get you killed or at least arrested: “Sometimes they come with undercover soldiers. They come to kidnap those with a big mouth.”²⁷ Furthermore, Israel is constantly seeking to shut down those websites containing harmful information against their governance. Thus, though

²³ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

²⁴ Translator of Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

²⁵ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020; Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

²⁶ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

²⁷ Mohammed. Field observations. 01-03-2019.

Palestinians do have access to (online) media, what they publish is strictly monitored by Israel and might have real-life consequences, such as torture, imprisonment or even death.

Occupational Barriers

A second way in which Israel exercises biopolitical control over the Palestinian population is clearly visible in the Palestinian landscape, which is marked by walls and checkpoints, separating Palestinians from their land and from each other. However, Palestinians are not just divided by infrastructure, but also by the colour of their ID-card. The geographical fracturing is a result of the Oslo Accords, which divided the West Bank in Areas A, B and C (Darweish and Rigby 2015, 105). Subsequently, the construction of the wall began in 2002 during the Second Intifada to protect Israeli citizens from Palestinian attacks (Dana 2017, 887). Based on a survey study, Dana (2017) concludes that besides restricting Palestinians access to their lands, disrupting family connections, obstructing access to education and damaging the Palestinian economy, the construction of the wall and what she refers to as the “permit regime” have also fragmented the Palestinian community and disrupted social networks. However, some Palestinians reported that frequently crossing checkpoints has placed them in contact with other Palestinians living under different circumstances, which increased a sense of fraternity and community. Others, especially residents from refugee camps who have had to deal with displacement, have reported to feel distanced from other Palestinians who have faced less severe consequences by the occupation (Dana 2017, 904). Dana concludes that though the occupational infrastructure “fragmented and eroded [the] Palestinian community and [its] ability to function within a cohesive society”, “at the same time, daily and weekly experience with the wall and checkpoints increases the primacy of Palestinian national identity” (Dana 2017, 906).

Not only is the gathering of Palestinians made complicated due to the movement restrictions imposed on them by the occupational infrastructure, moreover, during funerals of martyrs whose body has been withheld, the gathering of people is made even harder by conditions imposed by Israel. When, eventually, Israel returns the bodies to the family, they put several conditions on the burial of the body, especially when the burial is in Jerusalem. For instance, the burial should be at night with a limited number of people (often between fifteen to twenty people).²⁸ “The conditions limiting funeral attendance force families to create a hierarchy of importance of who from the community can mourn the dead.” (Shalhoub-

²⁸ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020; Zahra, semi-structured interview, 04-03-2020.

Kevorkian 2020, 293). Therefore, Israel's necro- and biopower fragment and disintegrate the Palestinian community through conditioning the burial of their bereavements and turn the funeral into "an administrative task controlled by state authorities" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2020, 293). With the funeral of his son, Salah had to cope with these conditions himself:

"When they gave him to me at twelve at midnight, they surrounded the whole area. They only let fifteen people from the family attend. So, I went to the ambulance and I checked him. I was sure it was him. [...] I took Tariq to the cemetery where he was allowed [to be buried]. There were three checkpoints on the way. Each one checked if it was the same fifteen who walked [in the funeral procession].²⁹

The limited number of funeral attendees is only one of the several conditions imposed on the burial of the martyr. Also, the family has to pay a fine and bury the body in a place that is decided by Israel within the time limit of an hour, which also prevents the body from being examined by the family or Palestinian doctors. The time limit is often less strict in the West Bank, but the body should still be buried the same night.³⁰ Furthermore, according to Zahra, when returning the body Israel also restricts the carriage of banners and the singing of chants during a funeral.³¹

The abovementioned political structures do not seem to offer an opening for mobilisation into protest but have mainly emphasized the political constraints that Palestinians face. Though for some Palestinians the occupational infrastructure does create opportunities as they have reported it to result in an increased sense of a national identity, possibly contributing to the collective identity necessary for a movement, for others, the fracturing of the Palestinian people obstructs the social interactions necessary for the establishment of a collective identity, especially among those living in Palestinian refugee camps. The additional conditions put on a funeral and the collective punishment directed towards both the family and the community further affect the culture of contention by obstructing the interactive discursive processes underlying collective action frames. Therefore, according to Zahra, there is not as much engagement in social movements these days: "People are just trying to navigate their lives, [they are] trying to keep up with daily acts of survival, so you won't notice massive political

²⁹ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

³⁰ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

³¹ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

mobilisations in general, including over the issue of withholding bodies.”³² Likewise, Darweish and Rigby (2015, 98) note that participation in protest starts to decline because Palestinians do not see results stemming from their effort. Zahra explains that Palestinians are fatigued, desperate even.

“This fatigue is not exclusive or limited to the issue of demanding to release the bodies, it is a general syndrome because we feel that uprising after uprising after uprising things are only getting worse. Also, the political demobilisation that the Palestinian authority has been doing and their control over Palestinians – Palestinians being both under Israeli occupation and under the control of the Palestinian Authority – have left the community in deep problems regarding the political organization of the Palestinian society, which means that it is very hard to mobilise for anything. [...] This will change during the next conglomeration when something big happens, but right now we are in this stage of general exhaustion.”³³

Global Movements and Social Movement Organizations

Despite the predominant political constraints and the effects of the withholding of bodies on the culture of contention, social movements have not been completely absent. Both Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2014) and Daher Nashif (2018) have mentioned the occurrence of protests aimed at retrieving the bodies that are withheld by Israel in their research. According to Daher-Nashif, a large protest which was attended by thousands of Palestinians has been effective and led to the release of the bodies of seven martyrs four days later (2018, 187). In addition, Salah and Zahra have mentioned different campaigns that are organized to retrieve the bodies of Palestinians.³⁴

“The National Campaign” was set up by the Jerusalem Legal and Human Rights Center (JLAC) in August 2008. The initial aim of the campaign was to highlight the issue of the withholding of bodies and uncover the martyrs’ bodies and the disappeared through investigating cases and filing them before the Israeli supreme court.³⁵ The National Campaign was mainly focused on the bodies from the cemeteries of numbers. Therefore, in 2015 after the death of his son, Salah collaborated to launch “The Popular Campaign” with the initial aim to

³² Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

³³ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

³⁴ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020; Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

³⁵ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020; Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

retrieve twelve Palestinian bodies that were being withheld in freezers, including the body of his son Tariq.

Whereas The National Campaign is primarily focused on the legal aspect, The Popular Campaign's focus is fivefold: besides the legal aspects on which they cooperated with The National Campaign, The Popular Campaign also focuses on the population, the media, politics and international advocacy. As every city used to have at least one detained body, they started to attract attention to that case on a local level. Thereby, they ensured that Palestinian media were reporting about the withholding of bodies. On a political level, they pushed the political class (including the ministers and the president of the Palestinian Authority) to get involved with the issue.³⁶ The popular aspect of the campaign is particularly relevant: Salah describes it as a "collective effort" in which hundreds, sometimes a thousand people would gather in different cities. During those gatherings, they would call for the return of the bodies using posters and slogans such as "we want our sons back!"³⁷

Another recent example of popular protest is the case of Eyad al-Hallaq, which I introduced in the introduction. After his death, many Palestinians but also Israeli citizens protested on the streets in several cities, such as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Haifa and Bethlehem, holding signs reading texts including "Palestinian Lives Matter" (Holmes 2020). Furthermore, Eyad's funeral drew hundreds of attendees protesting his death in the streets of Jerusalem (ILTV Israel News 2020).

What I found striking is that some of these demonstrations were either led by a social movement organization as part of a larger campaign or built upon the discourse of a larger (international) movement. As the empirical data on these demonstrations is rather limited, I do not aim to make any hard statements on the conditional factors for mobilisation in Palestine. Rather, I aim to highlight this observation to explore the possibility that the presence of allies and larger movements provides a certain incentive to Palestinians to mobilise and protest the occupational practice of withholding bodies, as well as the Israeli occupation of Palestine in general.

Though the involvement of an organization or larger movement appears to be present with most current demonstrations in Palestine, it is not a sufficient opportunity to mobilise, nor to effectuate the release of a body. For example, more recent cases, some of which have even been extensively advocated by human rights organizations and human rights lawyers like the case of Ahmed Erekat, have not led to any widespread protests and Ahmed's body is still

³⁶ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

³⁷ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

withheld. Likewise, Osa and Corduneanu-Huci (2003, 623) argued that “Even when supported by external allies, the political opportunity conditions are not easily produced when authoritarian governments are at the peak of their power. In fact, all the mobilisations we have studied ended with the suppression of social mobilisation. Nevertheless, the long-term outlook is hopeful: despite the numerous ‘failures’ of collective action catalogued in our database, the majority of the countries we studied are now functioning democracies.”

By drawing on the literature on political opportunity structures, in this chapter I have analysed the political opportunities and constraints that Palestinians face in light of the withholding of bodies when mobilising into a social movement. First, I argued that as the dead Palestinians are subjected to Israel’s necropower, likewise the living are subjected to Israel’s biopower. Living in a state of bare life, Palestinians find their political opportunities to be gravely affected through the collective punishment that accompanies the withholding of bodies, as well as through the occupational regime and its corresponding rules and infrastructure. Despite these constraints, social movements in Palestine have not been ruled out and there is some empirical evidence of demonstrations as a result of the withholding of bodies. Within the context of these social movements, I found two possible opportunities for Palestinians to mobilise: first, the occupational infrastructure aimed at fracturing the Palestinian community sometimes has the opposite effect as it increases the primacy of a Palestinian national identity (Dana 2017). Furthermore, I have propounded that when a movement is supported by (influential) allies and larger movements, this might give a certain incentive to Palestinians to mobilise.

Conclusion

It is mid-July when I start finishing up my research project. The Black Lives Matter protests are still continuing in the United States and around the world, having initiated a number of political debates and economic boycotts in several countries across the globe. Some of the movement's momentum is gone, for sure, and the demonstrations are not as massive as before. However, most committed protesters and political figures have hold on to the cause. Meanwhile in Palestine, the streets are quiet. Afflicted by a second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and Netanyahu's annexation plans, Eyad has been lost out of sight by the public eye, whereas the body of Ahmed has yet to be released (Al-Waara 2020; Erakat 2020b).

In this thesis, I have examined how the withholding of bodies affects the mobilisation of Palestinians through a necropolitical lens. I found that necropower in Palestine is expressed in two ways: first, by the possession of the dead bodies and second, by the power over the discursive commemoration of the dead. This affects both the cultural and structural aspects of contentious politics. On the cultural aspect, first and foremost, there is no martyr funeral as there is no body to bury. This removes the witnesses from the act of martyrdom. Furthermore, the absence of a body and upon return, the frozen status of the body combined with the limited time to bury the body denies Palestinians the possibility to conduct an autopsy. This may result in unclarity over the cause of dead and sometimes even about whether the person has actually died. This ambiguity causes a hiatus in the way the deceased is commemorated, offering space for both Israeli and Palestinian agents to fill this gap and frame the death of a Palestinian. This is where the contested necropower is located; both Israelis and Palestinians aim to frame the deceased as respectively a terrorist or a national hero. The outcome of these framing activities determines the tenor of the injustice discourse.

The withholding of bodies is not a self-contained event but, rather, is accompanied by a variety of biopolitical structural constraints, such as the collective punishment of both the family and the community, as well as the conditions that are put upon the return of a body. These constraints obstruct the formation of social networks and translate into political risks, demotivating Palestinians to mobilise. However, despite the abovementioned constraints to the creation of effective collective action frames and to the opportunities for mobilisation, I did find some empirical evidence of demonstrations as a result of the withholding of bodies, which were oftentimes in the presence of either a larger movement or a social movement organization. Furthermore, the deliberate fracturing of the Palestinian community might, in some instances, actually increase the sense of a collective identity. Therefore, further research is needed to

explore these social movements up close and examine the perceptions of (political) opportunities among Palestinian movement targets.

Though the case of withholding bodies of Palestinians entails some unique particularities which I have highlighted in my thesis, the empirical contribution of this thesis to the existing literature on the withholding of Palestinian bodies is rather limited, the primary cause being the logistical limitations I encountered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the presented data is deficient to draw any solid conclusions about the likeliness of protest as a result of the detention of a Palestinian body. More qualitative research will be necessary to better understand the impact of body detention on the mobilisation of social movements in Palestine. Therefore, a more thorough exploration of the collective action frames upon which these movements mobilise and the accompanying political opportunity structures would make a valuable contribution to the literature on protest in Palestine, as well as a quantitative analysis of the number and amplitude of Palestinian protests which could assess the effectiveness of Israel's necroviolence.

Furthermore, in this thesis I only discussed the identity and framing aspects of the culture of contention. However, over the past two decades, a substantive body of literature has been dedicated to the inclusion of emotions within the culture of social movement theory (Jasper 1998). Contributing to this body of literature, Bayard de Volo (2006) found that emotions of grief, when employed in an instrumental manner, can actually have a mobilising function. However, according to Zahra, the withholding of bodies adds a certain kind of ambiguity to the loss.³⁸ By the erasure of a body, relatives and the community are denied the necessary funeral rites associated with mourning – necessary to make sense of death and life and the new place of the dead within the community – leaving them in a state of ambiguous loss, a loss that remains unclear (De Leon 2015, 71). Due to my limited time in the field, I was unable to research the emotions of grief and the ambiguous loss among Palestinians. However, future research should also address these emotions in relation to withholding of bodies to develop a more holistic approach to the effect of necropower on the mobilisation of social movements in Palestine.

Despite its empirical limitations, the current analysis of necropower and social movements as discussed in this thesis does bear consequences for the way we approach and examine specific

³⁸ Zahra. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

social movements. The notion of martyrdom and the explicit physical presence or absence of dead bodies in social movements is not limited to the case of Palestine alone. Correspondingly, in this thesis, I have drawn on research from Mexico, the United States and Egypt. However, beyond these cases the list of mass graves, forced disappearances and body detention is relentless, yet the existing body of literature on social movements is limited to the agency of the living, perpetually excluding the power over the dead and the postmortem.

As this thesis has argued, oftentimes the memory of the dead occupies a central part of the collective action frames by representing a particular injustice and, therefore, the movement's cause. Through commemorative practices and rituals, the necessary interactive discursive processes take place, constructing the frames of a social movement. Hashtags such as #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd, #BlackLivesMatter and #PalestinianLivesMatter have become the slogans of these collective action frames.

These frames, however, are oftentimes contested through necropolitical practices aimed at exercising sovereignty over the dead and its commemoration. These practices may vary from counterframing or delegitimizing the death to the physical destruction of a corpse. Furthermore, these necropolitics are oftentimes accompanied by biopolitical restrictions exercised over the living, such as punitive measures, rules and regulations, or the employment of counterforces, actively affecting the political opportunities for people to mobilise.

Therefore, in this thesis I have made a start at bridging the existing gap between the bodies of literature of contentious politics and necropolitics, thereby extending social movement theory beyond the living by examining the position of the dead within the politics of contention. However, this thesis is only a beginning and I argue that more research is needed to understand the impact of necropolitics on social movement theory.

As for the case of Palestine in particular, I would like to align with Salah's concluding remark:

“The only message I am trying to deliver is that I don't want anyone else to experience this pain caused by the withholding of the body. Although five years have passed, the pain is still there. [...] We have to speak every day and remember every day. [...] But the pain is less when we go for the big goal.”³⁹

#BringThemAllHome.

³⁹ Salah. Semi-structured interview. 04-03-2020.

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Appendix

Declaration of Originality

MA Thesis in Conflict Studies & Human Rights
Utrecht University
(course module GKMV 16028)

I hereby declare:

- that the content of this submission is entirely my own work, except for quotations from published and unpublished sources. These are clearly indicated and acknowledged as such, with a reference to their sources provided in the thesis text, and a full reference provided in the bibliography;
- that the sources of all paraphrased texts, pictures, maps, or other illustrations not resulting from my own experimentation, observation, or data collection have been correctly referenced in the thesis, and in the bibliography;
- that this Master of Arts thesis in Conflict Studies & Human Rights does not contain material from unreferenced external sources (including the work of other students, academic personnel, or professional agencies);
- that this thesis, in whole or in part, has never been submitted elsewhere for academic credit;
- that I have read and understood Utrecht University's definition of plagiarism, as stated on the University's information website on "Fraud and Plagiarism":

"Plagiarism is the appropriation of another author's works, thoughts, or ideas and the representation of such as one's own work." (Emphasis added.)⁴⁰

Similarly, the University of Cambridge defines "plagiarism" as "*... submitting as one's own work, irrespective of intent to deceive, that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement. It is both poor scholarship and a breach of academic integrity.*" (Emphasis added.)⁴¹

⁴⁰ <https://students.uu.nl/en/practical-information/policies-and-procedures/fraud-and-plagiarism>

⁴¹ <http://www.plagiarism.admin.cam.ac.uk/what-plagiarism/universitys-definition-plagiarism>

- that I am aware of the sanction applied by the Examination Committee when instances of plagiarism have been detected;
- that I am aware that every effort will be made to detect plagiarism in my thesis, including the standard use of plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin.

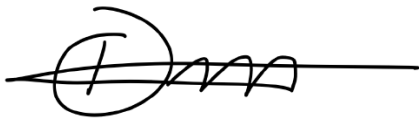
Name and Surname of Student:

Dian Ooms

Title of MA thesis in Conflict Studies & Human Rights:

Withholding the Dead: On Necropower, Contentious Politics and Contested Martyrdom in the Mobilisation of Palestinians against the Israeli Occupation.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'D' followed by several loops and a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Date of Submission:

03-08-2020