

MA Thesis Conflict Studies & Human Rights
Ellen van Werkhoven

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Beautiful Resistance in Palestine

The Use of (Performative) Arts as a
Strategy to Decolonise



Utrecht University

**Beautiful Resistance in Palestine: The Use of (Performative) Arts as a Strategy to
Decolonise**

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Cover page: resistance art, Walled Off Hotel, Bethlehem, Palestine (photo: author's archive)

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“As you conduct your wars, think of others - do not forget those who seek
peace.” - Mahmoud Darwish

Abstract

With the multi-faceted, complex dynamics of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, a feasible solution seems further away than ever. Yet, all sorts of forms of resistance occur aiming to oppose the settler-colonial power structure. So does the understudied notion of beautiful resistance. It is defined as the means, and practices aiming to build peace within oneself through arts, education, and culture. This thesis explores the concept of beautiful resistance by unpacking it through three analytical categories. Central to this thesis is, therefore, the question of how practices of beautiful resistance can be understood as a strategy to decolonise Palestine. Beautiful resistance can only be sufficiently understood, once its practices are understood in the context of settler-colonialism and its political economy. Based on eight weeks of ethnographic fieldwork, practices of beautiful resistance are analysed by observing and discussing the complex dynamics between art, culture, and resistance with key agents in the field. This thesis presents a critical exploration of beautiful resistance by demonstrating 1) the inextricable relation with settler-colonialism, 2) the complex network of actors constituting the political economy in which beautiful resistance is embedded, and 3) how in this context practices of beautiful resistance result in the normalisation of the status quo, in other words, the continuation of the Occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. The academic and practical application of the notion of beautiful resistance demands a context-specific framework adapted to the oppressive structures of settler-colonialism and its adherent political economy.

Keywords: *Beautiful Resistance, Cultural Resistance, Art, Settler-Colonialism, Political Economy, Normalisation, Palestine, Ethnography*

Preface

Nearly a year ago, I decided to continue my academic journey aiming to pursue another master's degree in Conflict Studies & Human Rights. Here I am, writing the final words of my thesis. It is hard to believe where the time has brought me. Six years ago, when I started studying Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies, my perspective on the world as I had always perceived it, was rapidly changing. Continuing my academic journey, I was drawn to topics related to the Middle East, its diverse politics, the people's altruism, culture, questions of colonisation and so on. Foremost, I was seeking justice for how many of us misperceive, misunderstand and maltreat the region. I realised how much there is to learn from the region.

Now, six years later, I went to Palestine to conduct ethnographic research in the field for the very first time in my life, post-COVID-19. I cannot be more thankful and respectful to the people who guided and helped me throughout this extensive and eye-opening process. First of all, I would like to express my deep respect and gratitude to the people I met in Palestine. Ahmed, Mohammed, Abdelfattah, Amer, Sliman, and Ashraf, I can only applaud the work you do, for your fellow Palestinians, and children. Without you being so welcoming and helpful, this research and thesis could never be what it is now. Thanks for showing me the cultural and artistic landscape of Palestine, for your time and for opening up to tell your stories, and for sharing your experiences and artworks.

Dearest Heather and Mahmood, from the first call on the phone, completely lost in the outskirts of Ramallah, you made me feel safe and at home. Without your safeguard and home and the seven dogs, my stay would have never been the same. Thanks, Heather, for letting me join your women's football team, and letting me be part of such a powerful and beautiful group of people. A special thanks to star players Lina, Sojood and Nardeen, your *sumud*, and laughter during the training and marathon are truly unforgettable. I cannot wait to be back and see you again. I hope, once I will return, I will hike through the beautiful landscapes of Palestine again with you Amanda, Noor, and Feras. Thanks for showing me Lemon Valley.

This process of conducting research would not have been possible without the person who sparked my interest in this topic. Dr. Fabio Cristiano suggested conducting fieldwork in Palestine, and I cannot imagine it would have gone any other way. Thanks for giving me the reassurance I needed

throughout the process and guiding me the way you did. I am deeply grateful for the fact you made me believe in fighting for the right cause. And remember that book I wanted to write? It will be there one day, in sha Allah.

This thesis was part of the provisional last part of my academic journey, my second master's degree. I would like to thank Marit, Cemre, and Amber in particular, for accompanying me, and for the laughter and delicious dinner nights. It was a blessing to have met you this academic year.

Lastly, this thesis would not have been there if it was not for my family, friends, and the love of my life. Mom, Dad, Pim, Oma, Dirk, Kirsten, Bram, Willemijn, and Sanne, without your unconditional love and support, I was nowhere to be found. Thank you for all that you are, and for being there always. Let us go on many more adventures in life.

List of Abbreviations

ABR: Arts-Based Research

AL: Arab League

ATC: Anti-terrorism Certification

AP: Associated Press

BDS: Boycott Disinvest and Sanction

EP: Economic Peace

EU: European Union

ICC: International Criminal Court

IDF: Israeli Defence Forces

I(N)GO: International (Non)governmental Organisation

IOF: Israeli Operation Forces

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

NGO: Nongovernmental Organisation

NIS: New Israeli Shekel

PA: Palestinian Authorities

PCS: Palestinian Children's Circus School

PFA: Palestinian Football Association

PIJ: Palestinian Islamic Jihad

PLO: Palestinian Liberation Organisation

PNA: Palestinian National Authorities

PNT: Palestinian National Theatre (*Al-Hakawati*)

UKLFI: UK Lawyers For Israel

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRWA: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

UNSC: United Nations Security Council

US: United States

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

List of Figures and Tables

The figures used in this thesis mostly derive from the author's archive unless stated otherwise, and function as an illustrative element in the thesis presented below (discussion on the use of photography in methodical section).

Figure 1: This picture was taken as part of the Segregation Wall in Bethlehem, Palestine. In graffiti is written the Arabic word for Palestine. Below you can read one of the other graffities: "Peace for Ukraine" in both Arabic and Ukrainian, the author's archive

Figure 2: "Aida refugee camp entrance, Bethlehem", author's archive

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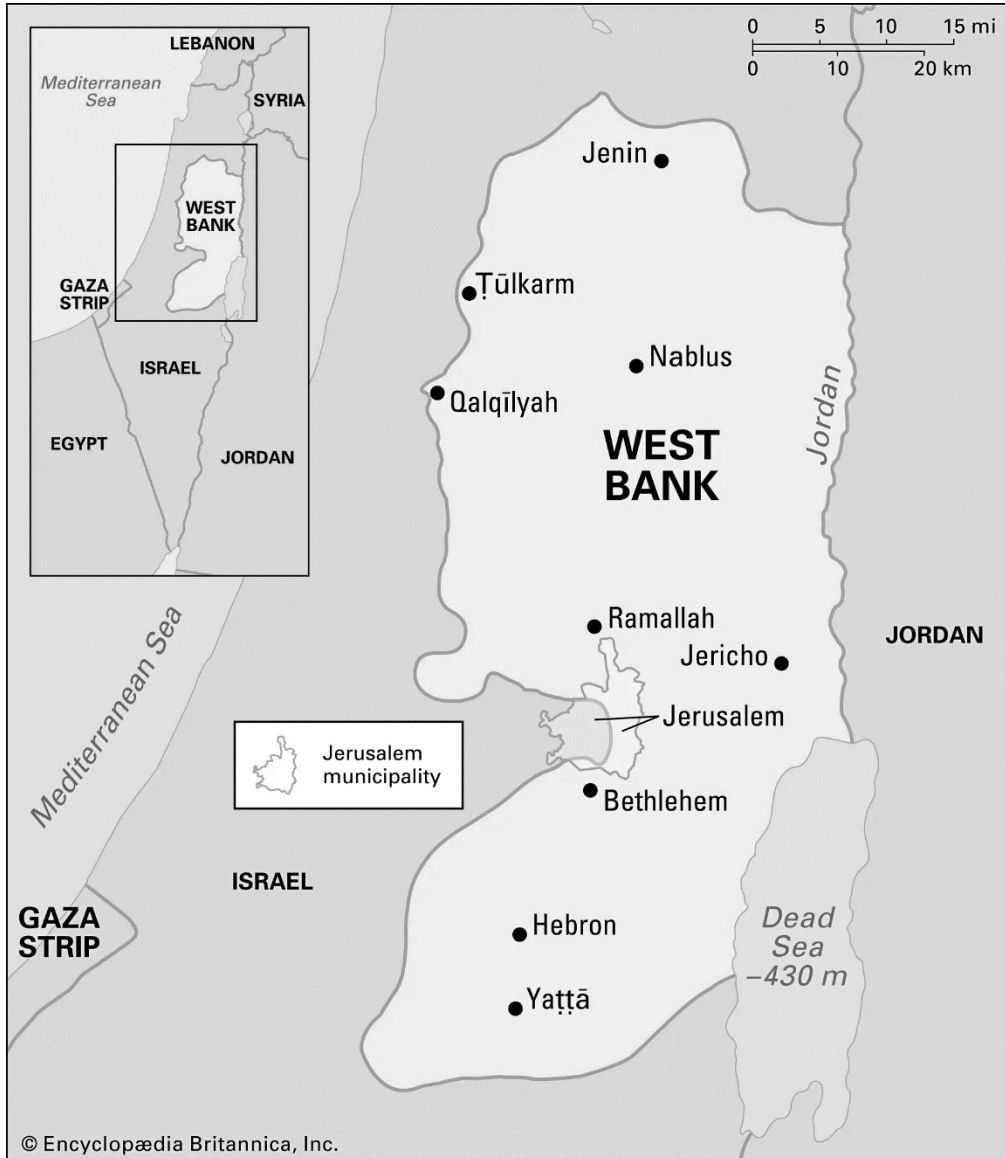
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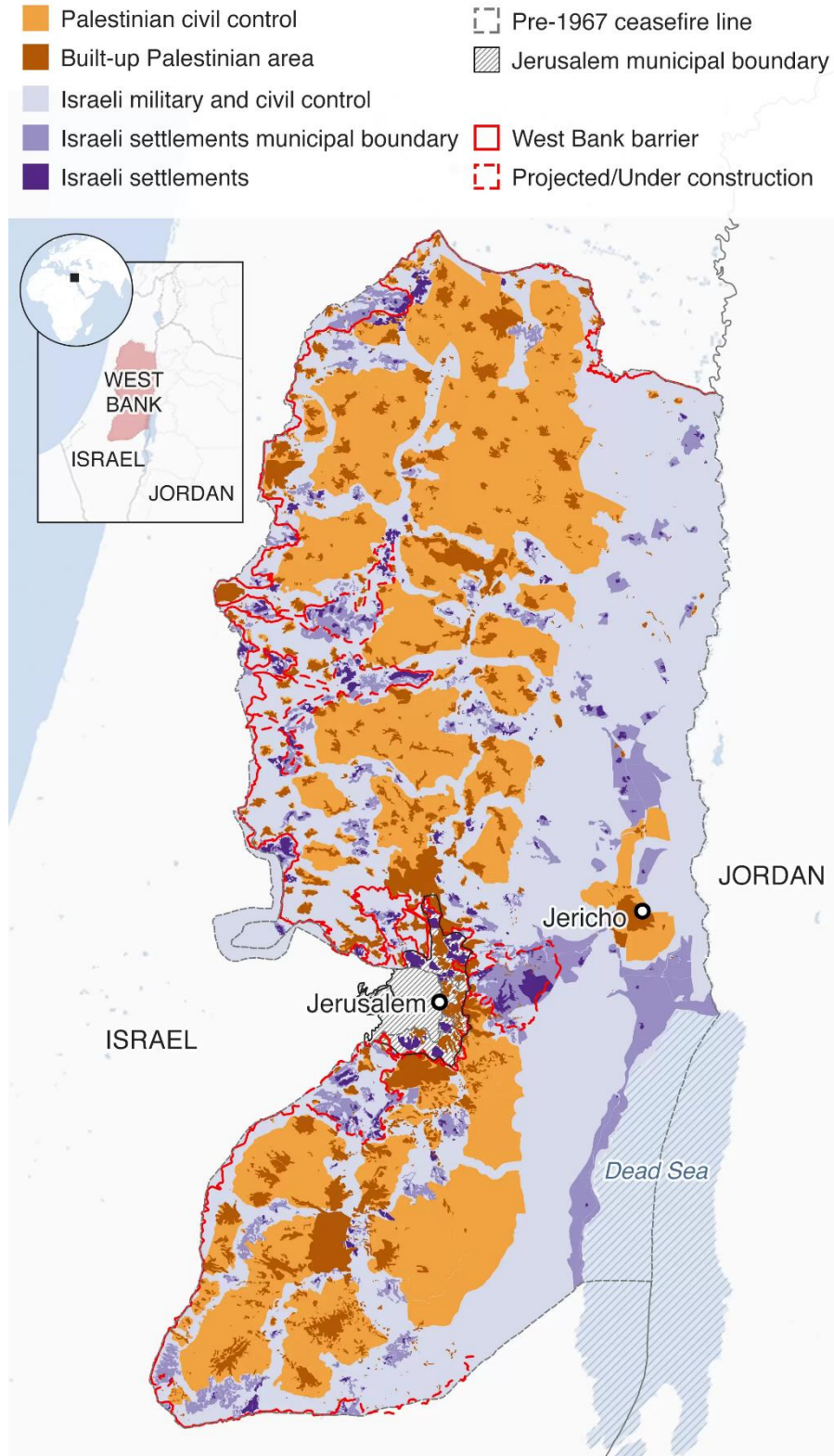
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Map of the West Bank (1967)



Map Israeli Settlements in the West Bank



Source: Bt'selem

Note on Translation

In this thesis and throughout the process of conducting research, names, and words in Arabic have been translated and transliterated in accordance with the International Journal of Middle East Studies (the Translation and Transliteration guide) and the third edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam. Yet, these transliterations of Arabic words have been modified to Palestinian dialect as well as colloquial speak. The names of the people associated with this research adhere to Romanized spelling, as do the names of organisations and places.

Introduction and Research Process

1.1 Problem Statement and Research Questions

BETHLEHEM, West Bank – In March 2023, I walk for hours past the Segregation Wall¹ in the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. After I have left my first visit to *Alronmad* Cultural and Arts Society, I try to find my way out of the Aida Camp, and back to the centre. The complications of the barrier wall I face during my stay in the West Bank, however, pale in comparison to the many stories I come to hear of Palestinians dealing with this and many other consequences of the Occupation. Colourful paintings and graffiti flourish on the grey concrete slabs. Some of these wall paintings are made by the children active at *Alronmad*. Abdelfattah Abusrour, the director of the cultural centre, had just told me how art can break stereotypes between people, how it can help children to deal with their experiences of the Israeli raids, soldiers, guns, and violence, which constitute a substantial part of them growing up. Theatre, dance, photography, cinema, painting, and drawing makes the children abstain from violence. These practices of beautiful resistance offer peaceful tools for dealing with the Israeli Occupation of Palestine. During our conversation, I soon realise the reality of beautiful resistance is complicated in many ways. As I am attempting to continue my journey through Bethlehem, I am determined to understand how beautiful resistance functions in this context of settler-colonial oppression.



Figure 1: This picture was taken as part of the Segregation Wall in Bethlehem, Palestine. In graffiti is written the Arabic word for Palestine. Below you can read as one of the other graffiti: “Peace for Ukraine” in both Arabic and Ukrainian.

¹ Throughout this thesis, I refer to the wall as “The Segregation Wall”, as the wall is locally referred to as the *jidar al-fasl al-unsuri*. Translated from Arabic, this means segregation wall (More to read on this: R. Gould, “Sumud: The Palestinian Art of Existence”, *World Policy Journal* 31, no. 3 (2014): 99-106).

Michel Foucault's famous words "Where there is power, there is resistance" have been central to the human science on the complex relationship between power and resistance.² The ongoing situation in Israel and Palestine is widely (academically) discussed as a two-sided, symmetric conflict. Much of these dichotomous divides between Israelis and Palestinians are based on assumptions that the two peoples have been intrinsically irreconcilable through this conflict for decades or even centuries, whether through religion, cultural heritage, territory or language. In this thesis, I rather argue that in the context of Israel and Palestine, this divide is enforced through the Segregation Wall, heavy security measures, and defence policies: through practices of settler-colonialism. The Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza led to an ongoing struggle for survival for the Palestinians. Based on eight weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in the Palestinian West Bank, this thesis engages with the cultural, political and economic layers, in which the notion of beautiful resistance is embedded. It is mainly the anthropologist who follows and observes informal, small-scaled manifestations of resistance, and political cultures emerging from those manifestations. In its turn, the anthropologist analyses how these cultural manifestations of micro-politics challenge and problematise the macro-level.³ In the field of resistance studies, Sherry Ortner suggested the need for "thickness" created by ethnography.⁴ In light of this thesis, beautiful resistance and its practices are these cultural manifestations on a micro level and help us unpack the broader settler-colonial structure that is holding back the essence and realisation of beautiful resistance.

This thesis is written in the background of the ongoing expansion of Israel's settler-colonial practices. The shift to extreme right-winged politics in the Israeli government and the increasing call for expansionism is resulting in the further escalating violent oppression of the Palestinian people. In this light, a decolonial perspective on the context of Israel and Palestine challenges the dominant narrow discourses perceiving the situation in Israel and Palestine as a conflict, which can be resolved through peacebuilding and reconciliation tools. With this ethnographic and decolonial approach, this thesis aims to make both an academic and social contribution in challenging Israel's settler-colonial status quo. Therefore, this thesis aims to study the concept of beautiful resistance and its practices to unpack its cultural, political, and economic realms. Altogether, this thesis aims to answer the following overarching research question:

² M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), 95-96.

³ Salih, R., & Richter-Devroe, S. (2014). Cultures of resistance in Palestine and beyond: On the politics of art, aesthetics, and affect. *The Arab Studies Journal*, 22(1), 8-27.

⁴ S. Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 173-193.

“How Can Practices of Beautiful Resistance Be Understood as a Strategy of Decolonisation in Palestine?”

To unpack this main research question, this thesis covers three sub-questions, which will be answered in the three analytical chapters to follow. Each sub-question covers an analytical category covered in this thesis. The sub-questions posed are as follows:

- ❖ How are beautiful resistance and settler-colonialism related in the context of Palestine?
- ❖ How can practices of beautiful resistance in Palestine be understood in its local and global political economies?
- ❖ How can practices of beautiful resistance be understood as a process of normalising the status quo in Palestine?

1.2 Methodology

Intellectual Puzzle

This thesis has a qualitative nature and addresses two kinds of intellectual puzzles. These puzzles suggest an “investigative orientation” to the research project.⁵ Central to this research project is a thick description of the contextual interpretations of beautiful resistance in Palestine. I have chosen this type of research design, as a thick description of beautiful resistance in Palestine offers us rich insight into the micro-politics of resistance in settler-colonial political structure on a macro level. Through a thick description, an interpretative and analytical description is made of this context. As Mason states, once a researcher is interested in thick descriptions, it is useful to deploy more than one intellectual puzzle.⁶ In line with her argument, I use an experiential intellectual puzzle as the second foundation of this thesis. This type of puzzle questions how human beings experience life and seek a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of the world and human experiences. As ethnography offers us insight into human experience and behaviour, these two research designs logically complement each other. In the context of this thesis, this experiential element is strongly connected to the structure and agency vacuum and aims at exploring settler-colonial structures and political economy on the one end and beautiful resistance and normalisation on the other. Underpinning this thesis is an ontological view that seeks to explore and understand social and

⁵ J. Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publishing, 2017), 13.

⁶ Mason, *Qualitative Researching*, 13.

cultural practices and how these are inextricably connected to the broader structures, institutions and (global) markets.

Arts-based Research Traditions in the Context of Resistance and its Relevance

In a substantial portion of the existing scholarly literature on political systems and cultures in the Middle East, the politics-culture nexus is often overlooked.⁷ For this thesis, it is essential to understand (performative) art as a dimension of this research's methodological design and thus functions as an analytical lens. In the field of arts-based research (ABR), Susan Finley has studied the political, social and theoretical implications of critical arts-based research traditions. This discipline aims at understanding "what might be" and seeks positive research outcomes in terms of post-colonialism, ethics and social transformation.⁸ A critical arts-based research tradition as elaborated on by Finley, criticizes the neoliberal way that is underpinning the way that society exists today. Through this lens, cultural practices that reinforce the existing power hegemony, demand a critical and reflexive research tradition. This thesis aims to contribute to the development of critical arts-based research. Why I take such an epistemological approach to this thesis, is because, as Finley points out, ABR enables us to think beyond dichotomies such as art versus science, subjectivity versus objectivity and sense versus effect.⁹ This epistemology rather reconfigures and integrates these matters into holistic research projects. ABR promotes ethical activism and social justice. In light of the context of this thesis, I, therefore, value this approach as highly important. With the maintaining of the current status quo of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, and the international silence around this matter, the situation seems beyond repair. In the last couple of months, everyday media platforms keep "fearing for further escalation of the conflict" and hollowly call for de-escalation.¹⁰ Finley argues, and I agree, that ABR has the possibility to cross boundaries beyond neoliberalism and global crisis.¹¹ The decolonial stance underpinning ABR could offer a challenging

⁷ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 10.

⁸ S. Finley, "Critical Arts-Based Inquiry: Performances of Resistance Politics", in *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2017), 561-562.

⁹ Finley, "Critical Arts-Based Inquiry", 563.

¹⁰ Al-Jazeera, "Israeli, Palestinian officials discuss violence in West Bank", News, Israel-Palestine conflict, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/28/israeli-palestinian-officials-discuss-violence-in-west-bank>.

The Guardian, "UN condemns Israel's use of excessive force in attack on Palestine", Middle East, Palestinian territories, accessed July 19, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/06/un-israel-excessive-force-attack-palestine-jenin>.

¹¹ Finley, "Critical Arts-Based Inquiry", 563.

narrative to the status quo. She admits this sounds utopic, yet I hope this thesis modestly contributes to her aim.

Methods

This thesis project builds upon eight weeks of ethnographic fieldwork in the West Bank, Palestine and lasted from February 28 to April 12, 2023. This comprehensive research design, existing of an experiential phenomenology and thick description of Palestine's scene of beautiful resistance, demands the proper research methods. This thesis builds on qualitative research methods of (participant) observation and semi-structured interviews. Additional informal conversations and local social media analysis were instrumental in gathering the data as a whole and thus functions as a *data corpus* to holistically contextualise beautiful resistance in Palestine. Before I arrived in Palestine, I mapped the cultural and artistic scene in the West Bank and started to contact many of these organisations and individuals through the so-called snowballing method. The organisations ranged from working on performative arts to artistic education for children. The individuals I talked to range from well-known painters to circus artists. In total, I contacted 36 organisations and artists in the West Bank through website contacts, email or Instagram. As will be discussed in the section on limitations, societal disruption and distrust were undeniable facts of the research setting. In total, I have succeeded in conducting eight interviews, from which one was excluded from the data out of concern for the participant's safety. These transcripts have been analysed by coding them into different analytical themes. These themes concern settler-colonialism, its societal consequences, artistic and cultural practices, political economy, and normalisation. These themes form the analytical categories, which lie at the core of this thesis. Throughout my field visit, I collected data through observations of the settler-colonial context of Palestine. In my field notes, I included photographs functioning as supporting visual materials. Likewise, these observational field notes have been included in the system of coding as mentioned above.

Throughout the thesis, I have included the photographs taken and collected during my field visit to the West Bank. Ethnographic photography is widely used for context. Ethnographic research predominantly builds upon methods of observation. Therefore, I included photographs of the field as I observed, interpreted, and aimed at representing the cultural context. Methodologically, therefore, these photographs function to contextualise and supplement the textual chapter. In light of this thesis, the photographs aim to visualise the cultural context of beautiful resistance and help to navigate through the complex dynamics between settler-colonialism, political economy, and normalisation in Palestine. The images have intentionally been excluded from analysis as they constitute an illustrative addition to this thesis.

1.3 Ethical Considerations and Dilemmas

Research Ethics

Ethical issues in any type of research, yet qualitative research in particular, must be taken seriously. The sensitivity around the context of Israel's ongoing Occupation of the Palestinian Territories necessitates adherence to ethical considerations. This section discusses the most important ethical aspects that I took into consideration during my field research and thus need to be elaborated on, in preparation for reading the rest of this thesis.

❖ *Protection of the participants, affiliated organisations, and researcher.*

It is a researcher's duty to protect all persons and organisations included in the research. The research needs to minimize risks to the lowest level possible. Regarding this ethical aspect, this firstly implies the avoidance of any type of physical, emotional, or psychological harm that might be related to the research. The context of Palestine comes along with a certain sensitivity, as well as one needs to consider the surveillant power of Israel that presents itself to be omnipresent. In light of this, I stored all data on a separate tablet in a double-secured storage program. This included all photographs and field notes to pass any security check at the airport of Tel Aviv as well as at the checkpoints. As my departure to go home drew closer, I imagined the staff asking for the tablet. I made sure before I arrived at the airport, the battery of the tablet had died.

Additionally, in full accordance with my participants, each has given their consent or assent to whether and to what extent their names or their affiliated organisations would be named or anonymized. This was done either orally, or double-confirmational through text or email. In doing so, I aim to minimise the risks for the concerned Palestinian organisations and individuals and establish confidential relations between the researcher and co-constructors or participants. Confidentiality and privacy are core concerns in the protection of participants and affiliated organisations in qualitative research. A central element in this (and any) qualitative research project is informed consent. Participants were interviewed voluntarily and were asked for their consent. I chose to not do this through consent forms, demanding to write down a signature. I made this decision, as I did not want to raise suspicion or worries regarding safety and privacy. This was done in recital of building trustworthy relations between the researcher and co-constructors.

Lastly, for the protection of all parties involved, I briefly want to consider the ethical concerns about the emotional distress of the researcher. As an early-career researcher, I underestimated the psychological and emotional impact the research setting and relationships with people in the field would have on me. This ethical consideration is often

left out of research proposals and papers. In this light, I made sure to seek help and counselling with my supervisor as well as with other researchers and fellow students who were equally working in conflict-affected research settings.

❖ *Humanizing and dignifying the research participants:*

It is important to always treat participants with dignity and as equal human beings, no matter their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or any intersectional factor. Qualitative researchers should therefore respect the participant's rights, culture, beliefs, worldview, and loci. In the context of this thesis, I perceived my participants rather as the people who co-constructed my situated knowledge throughout the process of conducting research. Knowingly, I engaged the data polyphonically into the written text to shed light on the human experiences of a social phenomenon (more to read on this in the section on positionality).

❖ *Participants' voices:*

In his book, *Qualitative Research: Studying how things work*, Robert Stake states that he believes that many qualitative researchers are driven by the will to amplify the voices of the underrepresented or the marginalized, in other words, those with little to no voice.¹² Therefore, qualitative researchers should acknowledge that research is not value-free. In the context of this thesis, a reoccurring topic arriving from the interviews with my participants was that central to beautiful resistance, is the matter of visibility. A way towards social justice of the Palestinian matter is to make the situation known, according to the artists and cultural initiators. This thesis is built upon an epistemology (ABR) that offers an approach, putting those facing crises such as the Occupation, central.

Limitations

As this thesis will illustrate, many different factors highly disrupt everyday life in Palestine. Due to these complex dynamics of discontinuity caused by the ongoing Occupation, this particular research project was limited by some of these factors, which I will briefly discuss here. First and foremost, it must be mentioned this thesis refers to Palestine and the West Bank. I was obliged to follow the instructions of both my home university and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and thus, I was discouraged or simply not allowed to travel to many cities in the West Bank, such as

¹² R. Stake, *Qualitative research: Studying how things work* (New York: Guilford, 2010).

Nablus, Jenin, and Hebron. This implies that the scope of this research is limited to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Bir Zeit, and Ramallah. Nevertheless, in my thesis, I talk about Palestine and the West Bank, as these cities already portray a high level of societal diversity and fragmentation as a consequence of the Occupation.

Secondly, I conducted fieldwork over a period of eight weeks. The tradition of ethnographic fieldwork builds upon the premise of staying in a context for at least a couple of months and some even years. Within the framework of this thesis project, this is simply not feasible. Central to ethnographic fieldwork is building relationships with people in the field on the premise of reciprocity. It is therefore highly important to establish human interaction based on trust. Particularly in Palestine, we face a context of high (Israeli) surveillance, monitoring, and control. Building trustworthy relationships is not easy and I expect has regularly led to unanswered emails, requests, or follow-up meetings. It required more time than I was given in Palestine. In this same timeframe, the holy month of Ramadan began. Whereas on the one hand, I had the inspiring opportunity to gain insight into this pillar of Islam in a context where the vast majority is Muslim, on the other hand, the festivities led to many closings of everyday institutions, cultural centres, and activities. For my research, this implied that it was nearly impossible to stay over a longer period at one location to find myself in continuing activities.

Thirdly, I made the conscious decision to not record any of the interviews or conversations I had with any person in Palestine in respect of their safety and privacy. With Israel's (digital) omnipresence in terms of surveillance, espionage, monitoring and raids, I felt it would be best to write the transcripts of the interviews as completely as possible straight after the interviews were conducted. I took a participant-centred approach, in which I centred the participant's trust and ease of the interview. In the context of the Israeli Occupation, signing forms and recording people's conversations can easily cause distrust, if not suspicion. As a researcher, you must be aware of the fact you can be perceived as 'the enemy'. In my decision to deliberately not record the interviews, I planned time after the interview to write and recall the interview. Yet, in doing so, it is difficult to fully recall every single spoken word or sentence of the interview and is therefore not as comprehensive as a full audio recording. However, in writing down the transcripts of the interviews, there was more room for non-verbal interaction and to 'set the scene'.

Lastly, I want to briefly address the limitations of my research in terms of language. The common spoken and written language in Palestine is Arabic. Despite my years of getting a grip on this language, I was not able to conduct interviews (fully) in Arabic. Written academic work is often seen as a translation of an observed world. The researcher translates perceived data into written texts. In conducting interviews, having small talk and conversations with Palestinians in English

thus implies a ‘double’ translation. Additionally, it is important to mention that I have only included informants in my research who could discuss the topic of beautiful resistance, art, and culture in English.

Positionality

Central to the field of anthropology, is the debate concerning objectivity and subjectivity. Anthropologists have countered academic attacks on the subjectivity of their research by highlighting the importance of reflexivity on the researcher’s positionality. The field of anthropology embraces the subjectivities of the researcher as long as the researcher takes on the important and central task of reflection.¹³ I acknowledge my work and position as an academic researcher, activist, and person as deeply politicized and each position blurs into one another. My field visit to the West Bank was my first in many regards. It was not only my first solo travel to the region I am so (academically) intrigued by. It was my first field visit as an anthropologist graduate following the global COVID-19 pandemic. I can assure you, positioning myself in the field was complex, conflicting, and emotional. The research process led to many questions. What does it mean to study an oppressed subaltern group? What does it mean to be a Dutch student, a white woman visiting Palestine individually? What does it mean to be safe; social constructs of safety are not universal. What does it mean the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs is preventing me from going to cities such as Nablus, Jenin, and Hebron, while Palestinians face and feel the consequences of the Israeli Occupation every day in these same cities? It should be widely acknowledged that every anthropologist struggles with representation, getting access to your field and the dynamics between humanizing and dehumanizing observed objects.¹⁴ Foremost, in a context of oppression and a strong limitation of all sorts of freedoms, I struggled with “entering” and “abandoning” the field. Entering and leaving Palestine, crossing checkpoints nearly every day, and having the freedom to interrogate and criticize the context made me very much aware of my privilege. My Dutch passport enabled advantages in terms of travelling and crossing Qalandiya and Checkpoint 300, where Palestinians can hardly ever or never leave their environment. As I entered the West Bank, I questioned who I was having the means to come to Palestine to study the consequences of the Occupation through lived experiences. After leaving the field, and flying back to the Netherlands, I felt as if I was abandoning my interlocutors, my informants, my acquaintances, and friends, not

¹³ E. Grassiani, “Critical engagement when studying those you oppose” In *Secrecy and Methods in Security Research: A Guide to Qualitative Fieldwork*, ed. M. de Goede, E. Bosma and P. Pallister-Wilkins (London: Routledge, 2020), 250.

¹⁴ G. Carey, “Anthropology’s “Repugnant Others”, *American Ethnologist*, accessed July 6, 2023, <https://americanethnologist.org/features/reflections/anthropologys-repugnant-others>.

knowing how the ongoing Occupation is evolving and thus if and when I would see some of them again.¹⁵ However, in the process of thinking of your data, writing the thesis, and pursuing to continue my (academic) journey in this context, do you ever really leave the field?

Another important element of constituting a researcher's positionality is one's position as an author. A considerably important part of doing research is writing down one's findings. Particularly in the field of anthropology, there appears to be very little consensus on how to 'write ethnography'.¹⁶ It is important to keep in mind the author does not only have a scientific community to convince, but one also has to convince the participants of the research just as much. The reality the ethnographer aims to capture in research does not have its own language. Therefore, the ethnographer has to translate this reality for both audiences as encompassing and holistic as possible.¹⁷ In the field of anthropology, the type of narrative, the ethnography is written in, has often resulted in questions on the position of the anthropologist. In a realist narrative, the anthropologist is the 'anonymous subject' and writes oneself outside of the field. In doing so, the anthropologist aims to take a 'snapshot of reality'. In my opinion, this narrative fails to address the fact that the anthropologist always alters the field with one's presence. The ethnographer is not merely a detached observer and author, but rather an explicit actor in both the field and the process of writing.¹⁸ As an alternative, the ethnographer can choose to narrate his data as a process, in which the researcher's cognitive evolution during the process of conducting research is elaborated on. This narrative contributes to the researcher's validity and sheds light on one's position in the observed world. Yet, this approach is often criticised for the anthropologist's centrality in narrating reality. In this thesis, I chose to write polyphonically. This thesis is narrated through a plurality of voices who contributed to the research project as a whole. Polyphonic anthropology aims to decentre hegemonic narratives shaped by imperialism, colonialism, and structural oppression.¹⁹ This style calls attention to a multitude of human experiences as the loci for understanding social phenomena.

¹⁵ I consider it important to mention, that I am still in (close) contact with many of the people I had been in contact during my stay in Palestine. This is possible through social media platforms.

¹⁶ S. Brown, *Writing in Anthropology: A Brief Guide (Short Guides to Writing in the Discipline)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁷ G. Gobo and A. Molle, *Doing Ethnography* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2016).

¹⁸ P. Roth et al., "Ethnography Without Tears [With Comments and Reply]", *Current Anthropology* 30, no. 5 (1989): 555-569.

¹⁹ S. Aihikhai, "A Case for a Polyphonic Anthropology: Giving Voice to Experiences of Women of Color", *Religions* 13, no. 9 (2022): 868, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13090868>.

1.4 Research Setting: Contextualizing Art and Culture in Post-Oslo Palestine from a Historical Perspective

History is often written by the victorious. Giving a socio-historical overview of the situation in Israel and Palestine is therefore an ultimate challenge. Given such a long history with multi-faceted conflicting narratives, it is highly unlikely that this, or any historical account of the situation between Israel and Palestine, will be accepted by all parties.²⁰ Rather, what I intend to do here, is portray the events perceived as most important in light of the socio-historical timeline. These events departed from the moment the West Bank and Gaza were occupied. Central here is the period surrounding the First Intifada and the Oslo Accords, as these events mark a pivotal point in history, leading to the emergence of the philosophy of beautiful resistance, and impacting the artistic and cultural scene in Palestine in general.

In 1967, disputes over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the Sinai region became the cause of the Six-Day War in which Israel was able to defeat Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian air forces and conquer the Sinai, Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. With the Occupation of these areas, over one million Palestinians were brought under Israeli control, yet unable to be incorporated based on Israeli Jewish citizenship. Amid this Palestinian struggle for existence, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) was founded in 1964 under the lead of Yasser Arafat. Palestinian art became an articulation and expression of this nationalist resistance movement. This period in Palestinian art and culture is known for famous artists like Mahmood Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, and Sliman Mansour.²¹ It is this context, in which most of the humanitarian assistance given after the '67 War was concerned with promoting a sense of *sumud* (steadfastness), and solidarity, as well as with the development of Palestinian individual well-being.²² In this light, many artworks of this period depict the Palestinian trauma of refugeehood as well as being exiled.²³ While Israel dug in on the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinian support for guerilla resistance increased quickly.²⁴ In 1974, the PLO was recognized by the Arab League (AL) as the legal representative of the Palestinian people.²⁵ In the years following, heated debates on a proposed two-state solution (the West Bank and Gaza would be constituted as the Palestinian “mini” state) were central to the

²⁰ S. Mock, A. Obeidi, and J. Zeleznikow, “A Brief Outline of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict”, *Group Decis Negot* 23 (2014): 1245-1262, DOI: 10.1007/s10726-012-9293-7.

²¹ Salih and Richter-Devroe, “Cultures of Resistance”, 9.

²² M. Turner, “Completing the Circle: Peacebuilding as Colonial Practice in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, *International Peacekeeping* 19, no. 4 (2012): 492-507, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2012.709774>.

²³ Salih and Richter-Devroe, “Cultures of Resistance”, 9.

²⁴ R. Hamid, “What Is the PLO?”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 4, no. 4 (1975): 90-109, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2535603>.

²⁵ M. Albzour, “The Deconstruction of the Concept of Normalisation within the Context of the Settler-Colonialism in Palestine: The Duality of Acceptance and Rejection”, *Language, Discourse & Society* 7, no. 2 (2019): 34-54.

internal dissension emerging within the PLO. With Israel's invasion of Lebanon, many Palestinians started to believe their armed struggle was not enough to stand up against Israeli military control.²⁶ Arafat was demanded by the Soviet Union and the United States to accept the UNSC Resolution 242, in which Israel's right to exist was made explicit. With the First Intifada, erupting in December 1987, an outbreak of uprisings across the West Bank and Gaza was initiated by the Palestinian population living under Israel's Occupation and was fuelled by *Hamas* and *Fatah*. This illustrated the weakening position of the PLO and appeared to be directed towards negotiations.²⁷ At the time of the Intifada, Israel's public opinion indicated that maintaining the "status quo" in the Occupied Territories was not sustainable and seen as a major threat to Israel's economy and security. In this light, a window of opportunity was fuelled by the US towards some 'economic peace' and semblance of compromising between Israel and the PLO.²⁸ From 1993 onwards, a subsequent period of supposed peacebuilding was defined as the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accords, however, are not based upon equal rights and do not commit Israel to end their illegal settlements in the Occupied territories. The paved way towards a two-state solution was an illusion and no further steps were undertaken. As this thesis will illustrate, the post-Oslo era is engaged with different forms of control, normalisation practices and neoliberal economic forces. Considering this complex matrix of Palestinian society, post-Oslo Palestinian art characterises itself, according to Salih and Richter-Devroe, with new types of language, symbols, and aesthetics.²⁹

In the wake of Oslo, the Jewish settler population even increased by 77 per cent, from 110.000 to 190.000.³⁰ Israeli military violence persisted and reactionary attacks by Palestinian factions as Hamas increased. With the establishment of the PA under the Oslo Accords, 97% of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza would nominally be under Palestinian control, yet only 8% of the territory was effectively controlled by the PA.³¹ Meanwhile, the settler-colonial project ongoingly expands. By 2005, the Segregation Wall was constructed, aiming to separate the Israeli and Palestinian populations, and Israel's rhetoric was aimed at ceasing Palestinian attacks. Palestinian resistance persists and Israel's apparatus turned this into the legitimisation of fighting terrorism. In the current days, the Occupation is characterized by strategies of modern urban warfare, impacting the Palestinian struggle for survival, their right to existence and self-

²⁶ S. Hassan, "Oslo Accords: The Genesis and Consequences for Palestine", *Social Scientist* 39, no. 7/8 (2011): 65-72.

²⁷ Hassan, "Oslo Accords", 66.

²⁸ Hassan, "Oslo Accords", 67.

²⁹ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 10.

³⁰ Hassan, "Oslo Accords", 71.

³¹ Mock, Obeidi, and Zeleznikow, "A Brief Outline", 1260.

determination.³² It is important to note, that after the eruption of the uprisings in the MENA from 2011 onwards, artistic expressions have increasingly gained popularity and importance. Graffiti, music, art, and performances constitute an important affective and political realm. It is this culture-conflict nexus that is highly political in the context of Palestine.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This thesis is concerned with and problematises the concept of beautiful resistance in Palestine. In the subsequent chapter, a theoretical framework is proposed in which beautiful resistance in Palestine. This framework will be substantiated in broader academic debates on the notion of cultural and arts-based resistance. In this theoretical chapter, analytical concepts that will ‘make sense’ of the context of beautiful resistance in Palestine, will be unpacked further. Scholarly debates on settler-colonialism, political economy, and normalisation and its complex relation with the art of resistance are to be discussed in the second chapter. Moving on to the third chapter, I discuss all that is considered with the settler-colonial context impacting and constituting the very concept of beautiful resistance. The chapter discusses examples from important figures in the artistic and cultural scene of the West Bank. This chapter illustrates how art is seen as an instrument to envision Palestinian freedom and as a tool to decolonise through beautiful resistance. The following fourth chapter portrays the complex dynamics of beautiful resistance in Palestine as it should be understood in its broader (global) political economy. Using examples given by the Palestinian artists and cultural curators in the field, I explain how beautiful resistance constitutes a political economy and vice versa. The chapter discusses the relevant actors within the political economy of beautiful resistance in Palestine. The fifth and final chapter elaborates on the formation of ‘normal’ relationships in maintaining the existence of beautiful resistance in Palestine. Within its political economy, I discuss how the “status quo” of the Israeli Occupation of Palestine is maintained by actors and practices of beautiful resistance. Understanding this process of normalisation in its context, helps us pave the way for the final answer to the question, of how in its turn, practices of beautiful resistance can be understood as a strategy to decolonise. The final section will thus synthesise the analytical chapters by answering each sub-question.

³² S. Bleibleh, “Walking Through Walls: The Invisible War”, *Space and Culture* (2014): 1-15, DOI: 10.1177/1206331213512919.

Chapter 2: Theorizing Beautiful Resistance, Settler-Colonialism, and Normalisation

2.1 Introduction

This theoretical framework critically engages with and discusses the different analytical concepts and existing debates surrounding those. This chapter functions as a point of departure in theory from which to problematise and criticize the core aspect of this thesis: the notion of beautiful resistance. The concept and its related academic literature require critical scrutiny. Empirical evidence from existing academic work demonstrates a complex and problematic interplay between the ‘beauty’ of the arts, resistance, cultural identity, and power. Therefore, this thesis’ central argument states that the application of the notion of beautiful resistance demands a context-specific framework adapted to the settler-colonial dynamics and oppressive circumstances the Palestinian people are subject to. Beautiful resistance can simply not be understood as underlying structures of settler-colonialism and its political economy are poorly understood.

This chapter thus discusses the analytical concepts that have guided the critical exploration of beautiful resistance in Palestine throughout this thesis. This framework commences by reviewing relevant academic debates on beautiful and cultural resistance. Thereby, I strive towards clarifying the notion of resistance as a first step before embedding the concept in the context of Palestine. Beautiful resistance has emerged in the settler-colonial project of Israel, and the theory on settler-colonialism, therefore, demands further unpacking. Within this context, we will see that beautiful resistance opposite to the Israeli settler-colonial project, is embedded in a local and global political economy. Deriving from this, beautiful resistance practices lead to the normalisation of the settler-colonial status quo. These abstract themes of beautiful resistance, settler-colonialism, political economy and normalisation will be discussed in this theoretical chapter.

2.2 Framing Existing Debates on Beautiful Resistance

Introducing the Concept and its Empirical Applications

The concept of beautiful resistance is relatively recent and does not have a vast body of academic literature dedicated to the concept itself. Yet, over the recent years, the concept of beautiful resistance has gained attention as a way of understanding acts of resistance and protest. Abdelfattah Abusrour is the general director of *Alrowwad* Cultural and Arts Society in Bethlehem and the founder of the concept of beautiful resistance. He grew up amid violent Israeli attacks and

Palestinian resistance and dreamt of peaceful means toward decolonisation. He developed the philosophy called beautiful resistance, which implies that people are resisting the ugliness of occupation and violence by using theatre, arts, culture, and education.³³ With the philosophy of beautiful resistance, Abusrour aims at helping people to see and reach their full potential creativity in creating a sense of hope. The concept's emergence stems from the Palestinian context as Abusrour's philosophy was developed within *Alrowwad* Cultural and Arts Society. The notion of beautiful resistance holds the belief that different types of (performative) art are a valid and powerful tool to deal with experiences of living under occupation and violence.³⁴ The people or organisations facilitating these platforms and tools of these artistic, performative practices aim to create agency enhancing life's circumstances and experiences. Abusrour defines beautiful resistance as a means to build peace within yourself through arts, education, and culture. As per his philosophy, "every resistance against injustice, oppression or occupation is a beautiful act of humanity".³⁵ Yet, in the spirit of beauty, this type of resistance specifically refers to engaged writing and cultural performances.³⁶

Additionally, Palestinians use the word *sumud* [steadfastness] to denote the art of existence.³⁷ The notion reflects on the decade-long Palestinian struggle for survival and existence and is a central cultural value.³⁸ In line with the notion of beautiful resistance, the *sumud* strategy is focused on developing self-sufficient structures. *Sumud* represents a future-oriented idea that rejects the current, and unjust dynamics between those in power and the subordinate.³⁹ In art, *sumud* is often expressed as a way to represent and preserve the Palestinian way of life. One of the empirical cases regarding beautiful resistance stems from critical pedagogical studies and art education. Mendoza states that art, Testimonio art in particular, develops resistance and functions as a practice of healing through collective memory.⁴⁰ His article concludes by stating how the use of Testimonio art constitutes what he refers to as beautiful resistance, without clarifying any on the notion itself. What thus remains unclear in the works discussed above: what makes something beautiful? Who

³³ A. Abusrour, "Beautiful Resistance", in *The Theatre of Naomi Wallace: Embodied Dialogues*, ed. S. Cummings and E. Stevens Abbitt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 231-234.

³⁴ A. Abusrour and J. Devaney, "Alrowwad Cultural and Theatre Training Center: A Narrative of Beautiful Resistance", *Practicing Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2006): 10-15, DOI: 10.17730/praa.28.1.78h6776841901257.

³⁵ J. Daitch, *Acting Out – Voices from the Theatre in Palestine* (Jerusalem/London: The Educational Bookshop/Nomad Publishing, 2021), 70.

³⁶ R. Holmes, "Beautiful Resistance", *Wasafiri* 29, no. 4 (2014): 1-3, DOI: 10.1080/02690055.2014.946667.

³⁷ R. Gould, "Sumud: The Palestinian Art of Existence", *World Policy Journal* 31, no. 3 (2014): 99-106.

³⁸ A. Rijke and T. van Teeffelen, "To Exist Is to Resist: Sumud, Heroism and the Everyday", *Jerusalem Quarterly* 59 (2014): 86-99.

³⁹ Rijke and Van Teeffelen, "To Exist", 89.

⁴⁰ A. Mendoza, "Beautiful resistance: Testimonio art, youth organizing, and collective desahogo", *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 17, no. 3 (2020): 288-294, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15505170.2020.1786749>.

is in command of deciding what is beauty and what is not? How can practices of beautiful resistance transform or resist its opposite: the ugly?

What is Resistance?

The concept of beautiful resistance is inherently twofold. Yet, the conceptualization of beautiful resistance lacks clarity on the two elements. To understand the coating layer of beauty in the conceptualisation of beautiful resistance, it is important to demount the concept of resistance first. Over the last decades, there has been an increasing academic interest in resistance, nonetheless, there appears to be little consensus on its definition.⁴¹ Particularly in the field of sociology and anthropology, the topic of resistance gains more attention and fits in the broader social academic debates on structure and agency.⁴² Moving beyond structural determinism, the notion of resistance seeks to explore how human action can oppose these structures and have reproductive and transforming powers.⁴³

In establishing the concept's vagueness and diffusion, Hollander and Einwohner refer to the use of the concept everywhere, yet nowhere, leading up to seemingly contradictory and misuse of the concept.⁴⁴ Moreover, the authors state that resistance is often used to merely depict the academic's political stance, rather than functioning as an analytical cornerstone in research.⁴⁵ In other words, the rhetoric of resistance gives scholarship a moral depth.⁴⁶ Scholars are using the term resistance to render actions ranging from revolutions to music and art.⁴⁷ Amid this conceptual chaos, the authors strive to clarify the notion of resistance by developing a seven-fold, distinctive typology of resistance. What is more important here, is that Holland and Einwohner highlight the most important characteristics of resistance, namely 1) its interactional nature, 2) the central role of power, 3) the fact resistance is socially constructed, and 4) its complex nature.⁴⁸

In line with these properties of resistance, referring to the well-known dictum, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a

⁴¹ J. Hollander and R. Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance", *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (2004): 533-554, DOI: 10.1007/s11206-004-0694-5.

⁴² Hollander and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing", 533.

⁴³ J. Fernandes, "From the Theories of Social and Cultural Reproduction to the Theory of Resistance", *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 9, no. 2 (1988): 169-180.

⁴⁴ Holland and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing", 534

⁴⁵ Holland and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing", 547.

⁴⁶ M. Brown, "On resisting resistance", *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 4 (1996): 729-735.

⁴⁷ J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

J. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

N. Belkind, *Music in Conflict; Palestine, Israel and the Politics of Aesthetic Production* (London and New York: Routledge, 2021).

⁴⁸ Holland and Einwohner, "Conceptualizing", 547-549.

position of exteriority to power”⁴⁹. In this sense, resistance is always seen as the irreducible opposite of power and thus exists in many forms in the field of power relations.⁵⁰ In the framework of this thesis, I follow these lines of thought, holding on to interactional and power dynamics inherently connected to the notion of resistance. Therefore, I zoom in on the important work of Scott, who aims to seek a way to understand the cultural patterns of power domination and inherently linked (resistant) subordination.⁵¹ In his book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, he proposes to understand the dynamics between domination and subordination in terms of transcripts, both publicly as well as “hidden”. According to Scott, each of these subordinating groups construct a “hidden transcript”, which forms a collective critique of those in the dominating position.⁵² In turn, those in power likewise establish a hidden transcript in which their practices of ruling are determined. Comparing these transcripts and their interconnectedness sheds new light on the notion of resistance.

It sounds logical, to understand what is going on inside the subordinate’s mind, to study the subject of resistance from an ethnographic epistemological stance. As Sherry Ortner already pointed out in the late 1990s, the most important works on the very topic of resistance lack the benefits of an ethnographic perspective.⁵³ The “thickness” of ethnography in the field of resistance leaves room for firstly understanding these infra politics of resistance, secondly maintaining the cultural authenticity of both the dominant and dominated.⁵⁴ Ethnographic research on resistance could therefore contribute to truthful depicts of the dominant and dominated groups in question. This thesis aims in turn to fill this academic gap.

How to Define Resistance in Terms of Art and Culture

As we have previously read, defining what is resistance, is often in the hands of the author in question and of those ‘who resist’. Consequently, following a critical literary review on beautiful and cultural resistance, the same problem arises here. Whereas we have established that the concept of resistance is ambiguous, the notion of culture is that just as much.⁵⁵ Ducombe’s work on cultural resistance and community development helps to understand the culture from two global perspectives. Firstly, culture can be understood as a shared set of norms and values determining a

⁴⁹ M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), 95.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *The History*, 96.

⁵¹ Scott, *Domination*, 4.

⁵² Scott, *Domination*, xii.

⁵³ Ortner, “Resistance”, 173.

⁵⁴ Ortner, “Resistance”, 190.

⁵⁵ S. Duncombe, “(From) Cultural resistance to community development”, *Community Development Journal* 42, no. 4 (2007): 490-500.

group's pattern of actions. Secondly, culture can be understood as an artefact, which in the context of resistance, can reflect and express a resisting act.⁵⁶ In the field of cultural studies, it is argued that the foundational models of (popular) culture and/or resistance were developed in the 1970s and gained academic interest in exploring how everyday practices could have transformational power in altering social relations.⁵⁷ It is clear that scholars like Scott in his work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* have explored (colonial) hegemony in various ways, but the way to understand art as creating alternative spaces, has not been studied much.⁵⁸ As Elsner argues, the analytical significance of art lies within the ontological stance to perceive the world as existing of a "cultural system of related spaces".⁵⁹ Through this lens, cultural resistance could be understood as the friction generated within the culture of the subordinate against its dominating power. Elsner often refers to the importance of self-definition and its room for manoeuvre, which may lead to self-affirmation subordinate.⁶⁰ Elsner's empirical work focuses on imagery of the people of Dura Europos, a city on the west bank of the river Euphrat and bordering the Roman Empire, as a form of cultural resistance against the Romanization of the city. He conceptualises cultural resistance, in this context, as "the internal friction – whether potential ... or actualized (that is, made concrete and public in some formal sense) – generated within the culture against its Romanness or Romanization".⁶¹ Through this imagery, he illustrates how a cultural system of related spaces creates space for self-determination. In line with the notion of beautiful resistance, it engenders the possibility of internally dealing with the experiences of the opposite dominant power.

Resistance that is expressed culturally can thus create a shared set of norms and values and imagine political subjectivities. It is often argued that resistance leads to development in a way that culture is a repository of the dominant's power and can create new forms of society. Yet, it is important to note that the idea resistance leads to development is naïve. In this light, resistance could be seen as a set of tools that just maintain the status quo.⁶² For the purpose of this thesis, it is to understand cultural resistance in a broader context of its political economy. Post-Oslo, much attention has been paid to settling down the 'conflict' through an ideational framework of human development. The volume of aid, donors, and involved (I)NGOs ballooned in Palestine and have

⁵⁶ Duncombe, "(From) Cultural", 490-491.

⁵⁷ K. Maase and M. Larsen, "Popular Culture, 'Resistance,' 'Cultural Radicalism,' and 'Self-Formation': Comments on the Development of a Theory", In *Resistance: Subjects, Representations, Contexts*, ed. M. Butler et al., Transcript Verlag, 2017.

⁵⁸ J. Elsner, "Cultural Resistance and the Visual Image: The Case of Dura Europos", *Classical Philology* 96, no. 3 (2001): 269-304.

⁵⁹ Elsner, "Cultural Resistance", 270.

⁶⁰ Elsner, "Cultural Resistance", 302.

⁶¹ Elsner, "Cultural Resistance", 271.

⁶² Duncombe, "(From) Cultural", 494.

thus played an important role in the political economy of Israel and Palestine since then.⁶³ The cultural landscape of the West Bank, and its cultural and artistic organisations, have been heavily shaped, and impacted by the international presence. As discussed by Duncombe, it is possible that these cultural forms of resistance are unable to move beyond the settler-colonial status quo and thus the dominant's power.⁶⁴ In this way, capitalism's celebration of cultural resistance is paradoxical in the sense, the settler-colonial as well as international powers maintain the status quo by commodifying and consuming the subordinate's cultural acts of resistance. Yet, moving beyond this structural capitalist determinism of resistance, it is important to state that resistance has potential. Cultural acts of resistance create the possibility for cultural representation as well as cultural production.⁶⁵ Cultural resistance has the potential for change once it challenges the settler-colonial power structure and its political economy.

Scholarly attempts to unpack these cultural forms as resistance have been made, among others in the context of Palestine. In his book, *Music in Conflict; Palestine, Israel and the Politics of Aesthetics Production*, Nili Belkind ethnographically studies the complex dynamics between music and politics in the specific context of Israel and Palestine.⁶⁶ The book illustrates how power and aesthetics play an influential role in shaping the musical landscape in Palestine. Belkind offers a comprehensive exploration of the different social, political and cultural dimensions regarding cultural forms of resistance. Yet, critical notes to her work are evident. Belkind highlights the interconnectedness between music-making and political life in both Israel and Palestine and thereby illustrates the "larger puzzle of expressive culture in conflict".⁶⁷ Throughout her book, Belkind terms cultural politics of music as performative acts that have outgrown armed resistance and could contribute to coextensive projects between the Israelis and Palestinians. Belkind coins resistance as a "fetish of Western analyses", rather than grounding its grassroots importance in the context of Palestine, as it has both political and socio-collective relevance.⁶⁸

Yet, what forms of cultural practices are seen as resistant and have transformative potential, is socially constructed through reciprocal, dialectical perceptions.⁶⁹ Central to this thesis is the argument that no form of cultural practices or artistic artefacts are resistant on their own; they are

⁶³ M. Turner, "The Political Economy of Western Aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territory Since 1993" in *Decolonising Palestinian Political Economy. Rethinking Peace and Conflict Studies*, ed. M. Turner and O. Shweiki (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137448750_3.

⁶⁴ Duncombe, (From) Cultural", 495.

⁶⁵ Duncombe, (From) Cultural", 498.

⁶⁶ Belkind, *Music*, 3.

⁶⁷ Belkind, *Music*, 38.

⁶⁸ L. Brehony, "Review of *Music in Conflict: Palestine, Israel and the Politics of Aesthetic Production* by Nili Belkind", *Janus Unbound: Journal of Critical Studies* 1, no. 1 (2021): 115-119.

⁶⁹ Maase and Larsen, "Popular Culture", 46.

rather produced and perceived by existing power structures or dominators in their context. What demands further unpacking, is how cultural and artistic practices and their political potential are strongly interlinked with underlying power structures and the relation between the dominant and the subordinate. This will be furtherly explored and elaborated on in the following chapters, in which this argument will be invigorated through the context of Palestine.

2.3 Conceptualizing Settler-colonialism and Decolonisation

With the ongoing Israeli Occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza, the concept of settler-colonialism is of high importance in light of this thesis. The field of settler-colonial studies is relatively new as it gradually disentangles from the phenomenon of colonialism. Veracini argues that settler-colonialism can only be justly understood through its dialectical relation with power.⁷⁰ In the wake of the global process of decolonisation, Memmi wrote *Decolonisation and the Decolonised*, reactionary to this process. Ultimate success in settler-colonial projects is achieved when the settlers are “indigenised” in the occupied territories.⁷¹ Walter Hixson, presented a well-structured work, which conceptualises the United States as a centuries-long settler-colonial project. In the broader field of postcolonial studies, Hixson successfully unpacks the concept and processes of settler-colonialism. Settler-colonial projects aim to extenuate the subordinate’s existence and identity. In the process of settler-colonialism, settlers make claims on their new territories and thereby include the displacement of the indigenous subordinate.⁷² An important element in this process, as well as a crucial distinction between colonialism and settler-colonialism, is to supersede. Where colonial projects aim for perpetuation, where settler-colonial projects supersede themselves in the occupied context. In this light, Veracini argues that settler-colonialism should be understood as a social formation and demands Zionism to be understood as a settler-colonial movement in the context of Israel and Palestine.⁷³

Veracini established that the very language of settler-colonialism does not yet allow for a sufficient approach to a “post-settler passage”.⁷⁴ To illustrate this in the context of Israel and Palestine, proposed solutions for the “conflict” often build on the premise of transition from conflict to peace through peacebuilding and reconciliation tools and practices. The Oslo paradigm

⁷⁰ L. Veracini, “Introducing”, *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 1-12, DOI: 10.1080/2201473X.2011.10648799.

⁷¹ L. Veracini, “The Other Shift: Settler-colonialism, Israel, and the Occupation”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 2 (2013): 26-42, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2013.42.2.26>.

⁷² W. Hixson, *American Settler-colonialism: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

R. Rahman, “Settler-colonialism: A New Approach to Study Indigenous Rights Violations in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh”, *Journal of Legal Studies and Research* 7, no. 2 (2021): 162-171.

⁷³ Veracini, “The Other”, 28.

⁷⁴ Veracini, “Introducing”, 6.

is an example of this lack of contextual understanding. During Oslo, peace to the conflict and reconciliation were at the core of the peace process between Israel, the PA, and the international community. These works thus fail to understand the distinction between a two-sided conflict and settler-colonialism and its adherent process of settler decolonisation. Therefore, the propositions for any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian situation in this regard, are unproductive. In the framework of this thesis, it is thus important to focus on the understanding of settler-colonial projects instead. In doing so, this implies there is room to explore what the process of settler decolonisation exactly entails.

In the context of Israel and Palestine, the Zionist settler-colonial ideology found its roots over a century ago. The birth of Israel in 1948, the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza, and the ongoing settlement expansion reflect the settler-colonial project underpinning the Zionist ideology. Settler-colonialism's logic in the context of Palestine means "eliminating the native" and institutionalising settler-colonialism in every facet of the Israeli state.⁷⁵ As a result, Israel is expropriating Palestinian land, constructing and expanding Jewish-only settlements, and securitising all issues regarding Palestinian existence. Another element of its settler-colonial project is its national, as well as regional, and international economic power dominance. Yet, as Dana and Jarbawi illustrate, with a century of settler-colonialism in Palestine, there also exists a century of resistance. Palestine's resistance and liberation movements' foremost mission is to struggle against the settler-colonial structure and its adherent forces, as well as to achieve the right to self-determination.⁷⁶ Ultimately, these movements aim for the complete liberation of Palestine. It is precisely this self-determination that is often articulated through Palestinian art and culture and is at the core of practices of beautiful resistance. If cultural resistance echoes the desire and ideas for self-determination, within a free and decolonised Palestine, it is important to understand what this post-settler passage would look like. In light of the works discussed earlier, the existing literature on settler-colonialism and decolonisation in particular, raises questions on how a post-settler-colonial era is shaped and what role people as settlers and those being colonised take in this ongoing process.

What I problematise here, is that the Israeli Occupation of Palestine is virtually always perceived as a two-sided conflict, rather than a settler-colonial setting. Therefore, the 'post-conflict' era would be handled as peacebuilding and reconciliation processes. A question arising here is whether these peacebuilding and reconciliation tools can take place in a situation with a harsh power asymmetry as the settler-colonial context. The goals of reconciliation are often expressed in

⁷⁵ T. Dana and A. Jarbawi, "A Century of Settler-colonialism in Palestine: Zionism's Entangled Project", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 24, no. 1 (2017): 1-23.

⁷⁶ Dana and Jarbawi, "A Century", 17.

scholarship and practice as the share of aspirations and the aim for unity. Yet, particularly in the context of Israel and Palestine, this aim of reconciliation seems to misunderstand or oversimplify what is at stake.⁷⁷ Obscuring the issue as a conflict, settler-colonial history is erased or ignored. Caused by this misperceiving and misunderstanding of the settler-colonial context, rather than a conflict, leads to shortcomings in feasible solutions. In light of this thesis, it is, therefore, important to analytically distinguish reconciliation from decolonisation. Where reconciliation aims to reconcile based on symmetry, shared aspirations, and unity, decolonisation rather aims to dismantle the existing state structure of settler-colonialism.⁷⁸ Abdulla calls for the legal and political reform of the settler-colonial state and implies the disentanglement from institutionalised discrimination as the base for a peaceful solution. In this regard, decolonisation could reverse societal fragmentation and help to restore territorial integrity.⁷⁹ With Abdulla discussing the legal and political transformations necessary for decolonisation, the cultural realm (intersecting with the political, legal, and economic) remains understudied.

2.4 The Process of Political, Economic, and Cultural Normalisation: A Matter of Power

So far, I have conceptualised and framed debates on beautiful resistance and settler-colonialism, in the context of Palestine. This thesis aims to illustrate how ‘doing’ beautiful resistance can be detrimental to its essence and preserves the status quo of the Israeli Occupation. Normalisation practices are political, economic, and cultural. With an eye on the current dynamics of world politics, the quest for an orderly stratification is more prevalent in the form of normative categories.⁸⁰ Therefore, understanding the constituting of these norms through processes of normalisation is key. Processes in which practices become embedded in routine stem from the disciplinary field of sociology. Normalisation is about how they become routinized and integrated into their social contexts.⁸¹ May and Fitch define normalisation as follows:

⁷⁷ A. Little and S. Maddison, “Reconciliation, transformation, struggle: An introduction”, *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 2 (2017): 145-154, DOI: 10.1177/0192512116681808.

⁷⁸ R. Abdulla, “Colonialism and Apartheid Against Fragmented Palestinians: Putting the Pieces Back Together”, *State Crime Journal* 5, no. 1 (2016): 51-80, <https://doi.org/10.13169/statecrime.5.1.0051>.

⁷⁹ Abdulla, “Colonialism”, 72-73.

⁸⁰ G. Visoka and N. Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation in World Politics”, in *Normalisation in World Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022), 45.

⁸¹ C. May and T. Finch, “Implementing, Embedding, and Integrating Practices: An Outline of Normalisation Process Theory”, *Sociology* 43, no. 3 (2009): 535-554, DOI: 10.1177/0038038509103208.

“[...] the work that actors do as they engage with some ensemble of activities (that include new or changed ways of thinking, acting, and organizing) and by which means it becomes routinely embedded in the matrices of already existing, socially patterned, knowledge and practices”.⁸²

One of the most important grounding works on practices of normalisation concerning power is Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics*.⁸³ While his work is a strong and rich critique of disciplinary power practices, insufficient scholarly attention has been devoted to the concept of normalisation.⁸⁴ In the Foucauldian realm of analysing power dynamics, normalisation is the process in which certain institutions, individuals and practices establish social rules, subjectivities and produce knowledge. Foucault posits that the construction and articulation of the norm is playing a central and fundamental role in the legitimation of modern power.⁸⁵ The process of normalisation is one of social and political construction, reinforcing power structures and societal control. Foucault's work helps us to understand these normalisation practices. His work particularly critiques liberal principles and thereby capitalist society in itself. He argues normalisation and standardisation are capitalist society's goals, wherein individuals are forced through mass consumption.⁸⁶ Foucault is correctly pointing at the economic underpinning structures of society. More importantly, all social transformations demand an ideology “to support the economic rationality underpinning them”.⁸⁷ Normalisation could be seen as (one of those) ideologies allowing people to function in a community while being normalised.

The concept of normalisation and normalcy play an important role in understanding political power, agency, structure and social change.⁸⁸ In this regard, the very process of determining normalcy inherently constitutes new subjects and (re)produces marginalised groups. In the context of this thesis, choosing normalisation as an analytical concept could offer us a better understanding of normalising practices and the discourses, ethics and organisations that are a result of these practices. In doing so, we gain insight into how international systems function, and how power balances and inequalities are constructed.⁸⁹ In the specific context of Palestine, this thesis sheds light on the different dimensions and actors practising this normalcy in maintaining the status

⁸² May and Finch, “Implementing, Embedding”, 540.

⁸³ M. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, ed. M. Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁸⁴ Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation”, 22.

⁸⁵ D. Taylor, “Normativity and Normalisation”, *Foucault Studies* 1, no. 7 (2009), 52.
<https://doi.org/10.22439/fs.v0i7.2636>.

⁸⁶ Foucault, *The Birth*, 113.

⁸⁷ M. Oliver, “Capitalism, disability and ideology”, in *A Quarter-Century of Normalisation and Social Role Valorization*, ed. R. Flynn and R. Lemay (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 1999), 166.

⁸⁸ Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation”, 21.

⁸⁹ Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation”, 22.

quo. According to Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, the most important feature of normalisation is the fact it has the power to invent and govern social relations. This is done through creating ‘the Other’ and otherness, succeeded by the social subjects being pressured to follow a discourse of normalcy. Another important element inherently connected to normalisation, is its politics. It represents structural and systemic violence or oppression as normalisation practices preserve subordinating structures by their gradual acceptance and internationalisation.⁹⁰ Zooming in on the practices of normalisation in world politics, the quest for order and hegemony is in fact a process of establishing, preserving and repairing discourses on normalcy. In practice, these normalising discourses take form in interventions ranging from military ones to those of peacebuilding and economic reconstruction.⁹¹ Thus, international structures are exploring different techniques of normalisation. According to Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, regional organisations and nongovernmental organisations are in power to survey, judge and socially transform the contexts in question. Strongly linked to the processes of normalisation is therefore benchmarking, whereby a normalised reality is constructed to conform to. Through these processes of benchmarking, state and community behaviour can be regulated, monitored and judged.⁹²

Until this point, the concrete categories and techniques of normalisation have yet not been discussed. Visoka and Lemay-Hébert their categorisation exist of three categories, which will briefly be elaborated on here. The first set of normalising interventions particularly focuses on contexts that are impacted by violent conflict and are therefore perceived (by the West) as ‘fragile’. These contexts are framed in a discourse of exceptional abnormality. The normalisation interventions are characterised by judicial-political methods, and they target both states and their civilians. The goal is to improve society and thus reduce risk stemming from societal differences. The second type of intervention covers the restorative attempt to society to bring it back to its “previous condition of normalcy”. These interventions are specifically targeting societies afflicted by disasters and acute crises. Thereby, it lies in the hands of the international normalising order when the context in question is determined as stable, or normal. The third and last category of normalising interventions targets the onanist or suppressive states that engage in practices, which have been prohibited through social norms. The frameworks of normalcy in this category have been designed to tolerate and accept the order and position of these states to maintain political alliances and strategic relationships.⁹³

⁹⁰ Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation”, 33.

⁹¹ Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation”, 38.

⁹² J. Joseph, *The Social in the Global: Social Theory, Governmentality and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 72.

⁹³ Visoka and Lemay-Hébert, “Mapping Normalisation”, 45-49.

This brings us to how these practices of normalisation engage with the context of Palestine. The normalisation of the Israeli-Palestinian situation is drenched in the political, economic, and cultural realms. These realms are strongly intertwined, and particularly the Palestinian cultural scene has been impacted by processes of economic and political normalisation. Tariq Dana has discussed the symbiosis of economic normalisation and security coordination between Israel and Palestine.⁹⁴ He illustrates how Israel's strategy of economic peace (EP), the US economic peace plan of 2013 and the emergence of Palestinian *Fayyadism* encourage economic development and joint economic projects as the road towards sustainable peaceful and secure relations between the two sides (read economic and political elites).⁹⁵ Several scholars have proposed how political and economic strategies of normalisation between Israel and Palestine are meant to create the proper conditions for building strategic relationships with Arab states, with the West and a global network of (I)NGOs.⁹⁶ The politics of normalisation have ironically been applied to 'apolitical' fields such as art and sports. Belcastro shows how football politics are "showcases" of the strategies of normalising the status quo and building relationships with strategic allies.⁹⁷ Sport here can both be used as a peacebuilding or reconciliation tool or play a significant role in constructing narratives of conflicting actors. In the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) and Red Card Israel Campaign (run by the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement) attempted to contrast the normalisation of the Israeli status quo, by shedding light on their violations of international law, Israel's preventing Palestinians to travel for training and matches. This illustrates the Palestinian struggle for recognition and legitimacy and illustrates Israel's dominant position in political power. The political and economic strategies of normalisation impact the cultural realm and those dynamics should therefore be understood altogether. In *Aren't we human? Normalising Palestinian performances* by Rania Jawad, cultural production is taken under the loop to explore the relationship between performance art, normalisation and resistance. In line with the discussion of normalisation above, she illustrates how the US proposed a road map 'producing' today's Palestine in terms of local and international politics, settler-colonialism, state building, as well as security and violence. Jawad explores cultural performances and how their

⁹⁴ T. Dana, "The symbiosis between Palestinian 'Fayyadism' and Israeli 'economic peace': the political economy of capitalist peace in the context of colonisation", *Conflict, Security & Development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 455-477, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2015.1100013.

⁹⁵ Dana, "The symbiosis", 456-457.

⁹⁶ S. Tamari, "Normalcy and Violence: The Yearning for the Ordinary in Discourse of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 4 (2013): 48-60, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2013.42.4.48>.

M. Awwad, *Israeli strategy to normalize relations with Arab countries* (Beirut: Center of Arab Unity Studies, 1988).

⁹⁷ F. Belcastro, "Sport, politics and the struggle over 'normalisation' in post-Oslo Israel and Palestine", *Mediterranean Politics* 27, no. 5 (2022): 644-664, DOI: 10.1080/13629395.2020.1845938.

normative dimensions produce and reproduce the “normal” or “new” Palestinians.⁹⁸ In post-Oslo development discourse, art, creativity, and humanity have been used as tools for peacebuilding, and reconciliation. Art and cultural practices are “transformative tools away from violence ... An attendant discourse of art as a marker and maker of humanity is an art as proof of normalcy”.⁹⁹ The cultural sphere in Palestine, cultural resistance, she argues, has become a locus in which “normal” Palestinians deal with the everyday through artistic and cultural practices. This thesis builds upon her work and explores how the philosophy of beautiful resistance in the West Bank reproduces non-violent behaviour and normalises and thus maintains the status quo of the Israeli Occupation.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

In this theoretical framework, I have conceptualized the themes of this thesis. The notion of beautiful and cultural resistance is explored through the analytical categories of settler-colonialism, political economy and the process of normalisation. This chapter presented the existing scholarly debates on these categories. At the core of this theoretical framework lies the notion of beautiful resistance, embedded in the broader debates on cultural resistance. In consensus, both elements of beautiful resistance have been defined poorly. As an additional problem, the concept often fails to address and understand the underpinning power dynamics between the dominant, subordinate and in-between moving institutions.¹⁰⁰ Critical analysis thus demands a thorough understanding of these dynamics and the analytical element of power should be considered. Departing from this theoretical framework, this thesis continues to problematise the concept of beautiful resistance. For the purpose of this thesis, it is important to analytically frame the context of Palestine as a settler-colonial project to understand the underpinning element of beautiful resistance. This moves away from the reconciliation and peacebuilding paradigm that dominates the scholarly and practical debates on the issue of Israel and Palestine. Therefore, I will discuss how practices of beautiful resistance are currently embedded in a political economy of reconciliation and peacebuilding, rather than decolonise. Following the discussion of settler-colonialism brought in relation to beautiful resistance, I will discuss political economy as a category through which beautiful resistance can be analysed. The last of these categories is normalisation. Deriving from a comprehensive and critical review of theories of normalisation, it becomes clear there is a lack of empirical work demonstrating

⁹⁸ R. Jawad, “Aren’t We Human? Normalizing Palestinian Performances”, *The Arab Studies Journal* 22, no. 1 (2014): 28-45, www.jstor.org/stable/24877898.

⁹⁹ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, *Domination*.

these practices of cultural, political, and economic normalisation in reality. Therefore, this thesis continues to question how the status quo of settler-colonialism in Palestine is maintained and what role global actors play in these processes. Altogether, this thesis will discuss how beautiful resistance holds the potential for change, providing that its local and global political economy and its adherent processes of normalising the status quo through the economy, politics, and culture are sufficiently understood.

Chapter 3: The Question of Decolonisation in Relation to Beautiful Resistance

In preparation for the eight weeks in the field, I deemed it a first to question what is being colonised, and what is being resisted and decolonised in the context of Palestine. This chapter discusses and visualises the interconnection between settler-colonialism and decolonisation in relation to beautiful resistance. Beautiful resistance and its art cannot be understood in isolation from the many elements of the Occupation, which I will demonstrate here. More importantly, who are the people resisting those in power in the context of art creation in Palestine? This chapter aims to answer the first sub-question: How are beautiful resistance and settler-colonialism related in the context of Palestine? Thereby, Israel's settler-colonial project is historically unpacked in a few of its practices and strategies, by discussing its implications on Palestinian society. Here, the link between settler-colonialism and beautiful resistance is illustrated through empirical observations and conversations between several key agents (to whom you will be introduced in this chapter) in the Palestinian landscape of art and culture.



Figure 2: Entrance Aida refugee camp, Bayt Lahm (photo: author's archive)

3.1 Unpacking the Settler-Colonial Project in Historical Retrospect: What is There to Resist?

On the first Saturday upon my arrival, I enter the Aida refugee camp in the city of Bethlehem. The entrance of the Aida camp is shaped like a keyhole, carrying the key on top of its arch. The key is

in Palestine widely used as a symbol referring to the *Naqba* of 1948. This year marked the birth of the State of Israel as declared by the UN, known for Palestinians as the ‘catastrophe’. In the wake of the *Naqba*, approximately 900.000 Palestinians fled or were expelled to neighbouring countries such as Lebanon, Egypt, and Jordan.¹⁰¹ Simultaneously, Israel implemented laws enacting the “Zionist Dream”, whereby any Jew has the right to return to their homeland and settle. Many Palestinians kept the keys to their indigenous homes, from which they were exiled. The key symbolizes the wait for return as well as the right to return home one day. The entrance of the camp is the place where most of the riots against the Israeli military begin. “It is all about the suppressing and denial of Palestinian existence, everywhere.”, Sliman Mansour tells me. The well-known and important Palestinian artist himself had been detained by the IDF based on his important artistic role in Palestinian society under the guise of espionage against Israel.¹⁰² For three weeks, Sliman was held in an Israeli prison. For a photography project, Sliman was given a camera by a German friend, for which he ultimately was captured by the IDF. This example illustrates one of the manifestations of settler-colonial practices, with its goal moving beyond oppression, namely, to eliminate and displace the indigenous population of the Occupied territories.¹⁰³ Israel’s state ideology derives from a larger settler-colonial movement, which distinguishes itself by a fluid idea of nationalism (built from the collective of settlements) and a colonial model.¹⁰⁴ As Theodor Herzl, the founding figure of Zionism, metaphorized in his novel, “If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct”.¹⁰⁵ Building upon this ideology, Veracini theoretically defined settler-colonialism as the multiplicity of dynamics collectively leading to the “extermination, expulsion, incarceration, containment and assimilation for indigenous peoples”.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the Palestinian presence and everyday forms of resistance form structural blockages on Israel’s path towards the “Zionist Dream”.¹⁰⁷ Israel’s settler-colonial project employs itself in many different (military) actions and practices until this day. More generally speaking, the Israeli occupational strategy is designed to cause uncertainty and societal instability. With the IDF’s unpredictable attacks and invasions, Palestinian everyday life is highly disrupted to this day.

¹⁰¹ Mock, Obeidi, and Zeleznikow, “A Brief Outline”, 1254.

It is important to mention here, that what is known as the West Bank and Gaza, was annexed by Jordan and Egypt at the time.

¹⁰² Sliman Mansour, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 5, 2023.

¹⁰³ Rahman, “Settler-colonialism”, 163.

¹⁰⁴ Dana and Jarbawi, “A Century”, 2.

¹⁰⁵ T. Herzl, *Old-New Land*, trans. Lotta Levensohn (New York: M. Wiener, 1941), 38.

¹⁰⁶ L. Veracini, *Settler-colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

¹⁰⁷ P. Wolfe, “Settler-colonialism and the Elimination of the Native”, *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387-409.

Previously, we have established settler-colonial projects built upon the premise of expansionism and the aim to achieve the creation of a “Greater Israel”.¹⁰⁸ After the 1967 war and the Occupation of the West Bank, 1.5 million Palestinians remained residents of the area, which can be seen as a failure of the settler-colonial ideology. With its aim to remove the indigenous people and the denial of their existence through many measures, the project was deemed defeated. However, since the Occupation of the West Bank, the settlements became a cornerstone of Israel’s settler-colonial project.¹⁰⁹ Throughout the weeks I travel across the West Bank, I am starting to recognise the settlements in the Palestinian landscape. The orange-tiled roofs of the all-same buildings rafter against the clear blue skies. The settlements are often built on top of hills. I wonder why and ask one of my Palestinian friends.¹¹⁰ She explains how most settlements are built this high, as they will be safer from possible Israeli airstrikes. This is not the only strategical element of the settlement’s design. They are built to exploit natural resources, prevent the expansion of Palestinian communities and serve as expanded military formations in Occupied territory.¹¹¹ The settlements create *de facto* settler-colonisation by changing the demographic climate of the West Bank. Yet, the same walls dividing the West Bank from Israel are built around the settlements in its miniature version. With the segregation of the settlement’s residents and the Palestinians remaining to live on the West Bank, they preliminary resist the expansionist project by Palestinian existence in the area.

In the broader Israeli narrative of its defensive security strategy, and the right to self-defence, Israel adopted many strategies to perform their dominant power over the Palestinian subordinate. Policies of targeted killing have been adopted and marked as “effective . . . in providing retribution and revenge for a population under siege”.¹¹² Following the Second Intifada, security measures have been intensified through the construction of the Segregation Wall, the enforcement of strong controlling and monitoring measures and arbitrary detainment policies. Checkpoint 300 and Qalandiya are examples of these restrictive measures, shrinking the freedom of movement of Palestinians travelling through the West Bank as well as between Jerusalem and the West Bank. The turnstile fences allow only a handful of people to pass the fences at a time. Passing the checkpoints by foot implies a waiting time varying from several minutes to several hours. Bags are checked, as well as residency papers and passports. Fully armoured Israeli soldiers supervise the process and seem to arbitrarily yell at someone now and then. Ironically, I receive a look with a

¹⁰⁸ Dana and Jarbawi, “A Century”, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Dana and Jarbawi, “A Century”, 11.

¹¹⁰ Anonymised, personal communication with the author, March 21, 2023.

¹¹¹ Dana and Jarbawi, “A Century”, 11.

¹¹² S. David, “Fatal Choices: Israel’s Policy of Targeted Killing”, *Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies* (2002): 1-28.

raised eyebrow, or I am warmly welcomed with my Dutch passport. Meanwhile, a woman, holding a green Palestinian passport in her hand, is brutally pushed aside. Crossing the checkpoints by car or bus does not bring you anywhere any faster. Travelling by any vehicle often results in hours of traffic and vehicles being checked by the IDF.

[27-3-2023 – fieldnotes: on my way home, I am driving back in a taxi as we have to pass through checkpoint 300. Right before the checkpoint, there is a roundabout, where cars, taxis and trucks come together from three different directions to pass through the checkpoint. The sun starts to set, which means it is nearly Iftar-time: it is the holy Islamic month of Ramadan. My taxi driver is sounding his horn. He raises his hands in the air as we are waiting. He tells me, without any notice, the checkpoint is closed temporarily. Collectively, all the trucks and cars surrounding us hoot.

...

Nearly 1,5 hours later, the shared taxi I am travelling with, reaches the outskirts of Ramallah. It is a few minutes after the sun has set, which means Muslims are allowed to eat and drink again after a day of fasting. Like checkpoint 300, the Qalandiya checkpoint had been closed right before sunset, resulting in traffic chaos in and surrounding the city. Young Palestinian boys carrying carton boxes are starting to distribute small cans of water to all the people waiting in the cars and trucks as they will be late for the collective moment of Iftar dinner at home or elsewhere.] – excerpt from author's fieldnotes, March 27, 2023.



Figure 3: Ramadan decorations adorning Damascus Gate, Al-Quds (photo: author's archive)

Reading from the excerpt above, Ramadan started on March 23, 2023, during my stay on the West Bank. The streets of Jerusalem and Ramallah have been filled with lanterns and garlands to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan. Each year, Ramadan marks a point in the yearly calendar, in which confrontations between the IDF, settlers and Palestinians erupt. In 2022 and 2023 in particular, the Islamic month of Ramadan, the week-long Jewish holiday of Passover and Christianity's Easter coincided for the first time in three decades. Clashes between the IDF, settlers and Palestinian Muslim worshippers are portrayed as ensuing from the long-lasting historical conflict of interest in the Judaic Temple Mount, or *Al-Aqsa* Mosque and *Haram al-Sharif*, including the Dome of the Rock [*Masjid Qubbat As-Sakrah*] as holy sites at the core of the city of Jerusalem. In mainstream media, the "raised tensions" are presented as equally equipped sides who clash based on religion. On April 1st, I was informed the IDF raided the Al-Aqsa under the guise of the necessity to clear out armed "masked agitators", who locked themselves inside the mosque.¹¹³ According to the Palestinian Authorities, more than 300 Palestinians have been arrested following the IDF's raids at the holy site. The attacks during Ramadan are perceived by many Palestinians as an annual reoccurring peek into the IDF's use of violence and brutality. The IDF's raids at *Haram al-Sharif* lasted for days, resulting in retaliatory actions in Tel Aviv and an increased number of raids in the cities of Jenin and Nablus in particular. The events surrounding the Al-Aqsa are embedded in a pivotal moment in time, because of Israel's renewed ultra-right-wing cabinet and plans for radical reforms in the country's judicial system resulting in the weakening of the system's independence from the government. In the government's guidelines document, a commitment is made to promote and develop settlements, thereby reverting to "the exclusive and inalienable right to all parts of the Land of Israel".¹¹⁴ Bearing the new government's plans in mind, I argue the fatal and disastrous attacks at Al-Aqsa and elsewhere in the West Bank are an existential threat to Palestinian's religious identity, with 85% of the population holding the Islamic religious belief.¹¹⁵ With the IDF's actions, this element of Palestinian identity, disparaging a central element of Palestinian existence is denied by the Occupier. Brought into relation with the ongoing expansion of legitimising settlers and settlements their existence, this strategy fits into the broader settler-colonial ideology.

¹¹³ "Israeli forces attack worshippers in Al-Aqsa Mosque raid", Israel-Palestine conflict, Al-Jazeera, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/5/israeli-police-attack-worshippers-in-jeruselems-al-aqsa-mosque>.

¹¹⁴ L. Kurtzer-Ellenbogen, "What Does Israel's New Government Mean for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict?", United States Institute of Peace, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/01/what-does-israels-new-government-mean-israeli-palestinian-conflict>.

¹¹⁵ "Palestine Religion, Economy and Politics", World Population Review, accessed June 24, 2023, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/palestine-population>.

The settler-colonial project of Israel thus results in a diffuse number of deeply rooted and problematic consequences for the Palestinians. In the context of the cultural and artistic scene in Palestine in particular, the Israeli strategy results in strong monitoring of organisation and their closure or their cessation of activities. The strategies and actions of the IDF attributed to the Israeli settler-colonial project resulted in the discontinuity of artistic and cultural activities as well as the discontinuity of Palestinian everyday life in general. For example, many of Sliman's expositions and art galleries were closed by the Israeli legislative administration under the guise of "crossing the line of" anti-Semitism.¹¹⁶ Likewise, artworks created by children from Gaza were requested by UK Lawyers for Israel (UKLFI) to be removed from a hospital in London as Jewish patients felt "harassed and victimised". In reaction to the demand, the artworks have been removed from the hospital hallways.¹¹⁷ In the West Bank, many cultural and artistic organisations have been cautious as a result of the increased number of raids during the daytime as well as through the night. Performing or providing art and culture is thus not without risks in Palestine. Artistic and cultural spaces have often been made inaccessible by checkpoints and dividing walls. Those spaces additionally face many closings by the IDF, particularly in Jerusalem.

3.2 Beautiful Resistance: What Makes the 'Beauty' of Resisting?

With nearly a century of Occupation and expansion of Israeli settler-colonialism, Palestinian resistance has become a substantial part of Palestinian identity, culture, and society. Its mission aimed at self-determination and the liberation of Palestine.¹¹⁸ Palestinian cultural resistance became a systematic platform in which these desires were articulated following the establishment of the PLO in 1964.¹¹⁹ With the voicing of the Palestinian call for political liberation through art and culture, the culture-politics nexus became highly visible in the Palestinian artistic and cultural landscape.¹²⁰ In this light, I argue that beautiful resistance cannot exist outside its relationship with the politics of settler-colonialism. As I will now illustrate, the performative acts and practices of beautiful resistance are, therefore, highly political and complex. I am on my way to visit *Abrownwad*,

¹¹⁶ Sliman Mansour, conversation with the author. Al-Quds, April 5, 2023.

¹¹⁷ H. Sherwood, "London hospital takes down artwork by Gaza schoolchildren after complaint", *The Guardian*, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/27/artwork-gaza-schoolchildren-removed-chelsea-and-westminster-hospital>.

¹¹⁸ Dana and Jarbawi, "A Century", 17.

¹¹⁹ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 9.

¹²⁰ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 10.

[‘Pioneers of Life’] Cultural and Arts Society. As I walk through the Aida camp, the streets are filled with colourful, yet poignant illustrative street art.



Figure 4: Street art in Ida St., Aida Camp, Bayt Lahm (photo: author’s archive)

Graffiti of tanks, boys who did not get a chance to become adults, peace doves, branches of olive trees and Palestinian flags are filling the concrete walls characterizing the streets in the camp. The area characterizes itself by heavy confrontations between the IDF and the Palestinians living in and surrounding the camp.¹²¹ As I walk by, my thoughts are drifting away to the creators and owners of the graffiti; what were their motivations behind them, and how do they translate their perceived reality into their works of art?

I visit *Alrommad* to discuss the concept of beautiful resistance with its creator Abdelfattah Abusrour. I am warmly welcomed with a cup of tea and Abdelfattah tells me how *Alrommad* came to existence in the aftermath of the First Intifada. Soon, we start talking about the essence of beautiful resistance.

“Beautiful resistance is a peaceful and dynamic resistance against the ugliness of Israeli Occupation and functions as a means to build peace within yourself as to be able to build peace with others.” – Abdelfattah Abusrour, (conversation, Bethlehem, March 4, 2023).

Abdelfattah believes every resistance against injustice, oppression or Occupation is a beautiful act of humanity. Therefore, resistance through arts, education, and culture are also beautiful acts of

¹²¹ Daitch, *Acting Out*, 69.

resistance, in Abdelfattah's opinion.¹²² It is generally assumed, all art is beautiful, yet not all beauty is art. With beauty and art's interchangeable use, it appears to be that the art's eulogy lies in the fact humans have the right to decide what is art and what is beauty and that it creates new perspectives to perceive the world as it is.¹²³ Knox proposed the idea that the subject of art is life: art reflects the panorama of life and aims for a deeper comprehension of human experiences of life.¹²⁴ Knox's view is that art possesses an architectural component, which creates "a logic of experience". Following this line of thought and listening to Abusrour's notion of beautiful resistance, the arts, culture and its interconnectedness with education in Palestine, enable practices of expression and cooping within the Self.

With Abdelfattah's philosophy in mind, I visit different cultural organisations and meet Palestinian artists mainly in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem. Two weeks later, on a rainy Sunday, I take a shared taxi to Bir Zeit, to meet Mohammed Rabah. Mohammed is the executive



Figure 5: PCS's circus tent, Bir Zeit (photo: author's archive)

director of the Palestinian Children's Circus School (PPCS). I meet him in the PCS office. Together, we leave the building as Mohammed wants to show me the big white circus tent outside. PCS aims

¹²² Abdelfattah Abusrour, conversation with the author. Bethlehem, March 4, 2023.

¹²³ I. Knox, "Beauty and Art", *The Journal of Philosophy* 28, no. 18 (1931): 484-489, DOI: 10.2307.2016935.

¹²⁴ Knox, "Beauty", 487-488.

to teach, create, perform and program circus arts to strengthen (young) Palestinians' creative and social potential. Additionally, PCS aims to raise both local and international awareness about Palestinian potential and its challenges.¹²⁵ Mohammed tells me that he considers circus art not necessarily as a form of resistance. Rather, “art is more about agency, critical thinking and dialogue”.¹²⁶ In line with the conceptualisation of beautiful resistance, deduced from Mohammed’s perception of this type of resistance, the core of the concept appears to stem from an inner base. The inner capacities for envisioning coexistence in a free Palestine are expressions of self-determination. As Elsner conceptualised cultural resistance as the internal friction with an opposing power, expressed in cultural spaces, these spaces in its turn enable the creation of alternative spaces.¹²⁷ In the case of the PCS, the programs are led by the children themselves who are involved with the circus school to envision a future Palestine. As Mohammed tells me, the circus offers a place where children acquire skills such as organising, and collaboration to teach children how to deal with each other’s commonalities and differences. Mohammed is not the first who asks how the Palestinian people are going to coexist once they are free. The question here is how practices of beautiful resistance can function as the instrument to envision this Palestinian freedom and thus as an instrument to decolonise.

3.3 Resisting with Beauty: Art as a Strategy to Decolonise

“Art breaks stereotypes. Theatre, dance, photography, cinema, painting and drawing are ways to express yourself in a nonviolent way. It is a way of coping with reality.” – Abdelfattah Abusrour (conversation, Bethlehem, March 4, 2023).

During the conversation with Abdelfattah, he explains to me how different types of (performative) art are means to build peace within yourself. Through this line of thought, the liberation and ‘beauty’ of this peace within the self opposes the ‘ugliness’ of the Israeli Occupation. This can be deduced from a diffuse number of (artistic) practices. Abdelfattah and Mohammed passionately work on the capacity building of children in Palestine using artistic means such as theatre, photography and the performance of circus acts. The PCS and Alrowwad educate children by strengthening their inner capacities using different art forms. Sliman, Ashraf and Ahmad create either paintings, electronic music or practice (fiery) acrobatics in the streets of Jerusalem to express

¹²⁵ “Vision and Mission”, Palestinian Children’s Circus School, accessed June 23, 2023, <https://palcircus.ps/en/about-us/#vision>.

¹²⁶ Mohammed Rabah, conversation with the author. Bir Zeit, March 20, 2023.

¹²⁷ Elsner, “Cultural Resistance”, 271.

their human experience with the everyday Occupation. The use of art enables the possibility for these artists to deal with and express the current lived experiences of the Occupation. Ahmed tells me that the self-expression put in his art is reflecting on his experiences of the Occupation and is therefore an act of resistance. It is about the fact that Ahmed is present and existing in the streets, of his own environment, the Christian quarter of Jerusalem.¹²⁸



Figure 6: Ahmad Ju'beh performing circus arts in the streets of Al-Quds (photo: Ahmad Ju'beh sent to author)

A returning element of many of the Palestinian forms of (performative) arts, is their link to Palestinian identity and culture. Symbols of the key and the olive tree particularly refer to the fundamentals of Palestinian culture.¹²⁹ Central to Palestinian identity is the sense of nostalgia, particularly regarding the pre-*Naqba* era. According to Sliman, the lived days of this period are kept very much alive. Grandmothers and fathers pass stories of pre-*Naqba* Palestine on to their children, and in turn, to their grandchildren. Sliman states this sense of nostalgia lies at the base of Palestinian culture and portrays this in his work. He aims to depict Palestinian identity and heritage, including references to the Occupation, “as it is an undeniable fact of life”.¹³⁰ With the passing of the 75-year memorial of the *Naqba* and the ongoing occupation in mind, less and less Palestinian folklore survives to be narrated to younger generations.

“For us as youth, it is harder, because I guess people who were born in the 90s and after were not able to enjoy the beauty of the occupied cities [Yafa, Haifa, Aka, Nazareth

¹²⁸ Ahmad Ju'beh, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 2, 2023.

¹²⁹ Rijke and Van Teeffelen, “To Exist”, 87.

¹³⁰ Sliman Mansour, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 5, 2023.

etc.], while our families were always telling us stories about their journeys back in the days because it was way easier.” - Ashraf Taha, 377 (conversation, Ramallah, March 12, 2023).

Ashraf’s song “Wrap” is an expressive reflection of his “nostalgic feelings and memories” of the period around the Second Intifada and the construction of the Segregation Wall.¹³¹ Ashraf explains how in this period relationships between Palestinian neighbours and families were stronger, because of the collective suffering under Israeli violence. This characterised Ashraf’s childhood and causes him to cherish these memories. Next to this sense of nostalgia, a strong sense of solidarity is intrinsic to the Palestinian people. In the cities of Nablus and Jenin, many raids occur during my stay in Palestine. In response to the raids, gunfire is shot in the Palestinian night skies in solidarity with the martyrs, who died during the day, and the resistance fighters who undertake reactionary action. In the first two weeks of my stay in Ramallah, I start to understand that every time a Palestinian loses his or her life as a consequence of the Occupation, is followed by a general strike in the subsequent day or two. Schools and shops remain closed and festive and leisure activities are cancelled. This sense of collective sorrow is often felt regarding performative arts as well. Amer Khalil, general director of the *Al-Hakawati* theatre in Jerusalem, experiences dissension about whether art is to be seen as “entertainment” in times of despair and pain. Some of his guests ask the shows not to reflect life in any regard of the Occupation as their daily lives are already full of it. Others particularly request these topics, as they assist people to deal with the difficulties of life.¹³² Jawad illustrates in her article on performance politics in Palestine that theatres embody all different elements of performance: performers, spectators, and the stage/context. With the extreme international invisibility of the Palestinian matter, the visibility of performances, in which the “global spectator” is central, speaks to its need.¹³³ Yet, this poses the question of to what extent theatre performances concerning the experiences and coping with the Occupation are produced and performed for Palestinians themselves and why Palestinian performative art needs to “prove” their humanity in broader processes of normalisation.¹³⁴

Commonly, these art-based practices are perceived to enable people to construct an idea of reconciliation in a post-colonial era. This is perceivably done by strengthening individual capacities as is done by *Alrowwad* and the PCS. It is done by “resisting through existing”, as Ahmad claims in his lived space in Jerusalem.¹³⁵ In the philosophy of beautiful resistance, building peace within

¹³¹ 377, “Wrap”, <https://youtu.be/ooShUAH7en8>

¹³² Amer Khalil, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 4, 2023.

¹³³ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 31.

¹³⁴ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 37.

¹³⁵ Rijke and Van Teeffelen, “To Exist”, 86.

oneself is the precondition for building peace with others and thus functions as a peace-building tool. The problem here, however, is that traditional peace and development initiatives, proposed by many international actors, see the reality as one of an Israeli-Palestinian conflict, rather than a settler-colonial project.¹³⁶ Focusing on peacebuilding in a post-conflict era, underexposes the current Israeli atrocities, its discriminatory policies and acting towards the Palestinians, resulting in their societal fragmentation and oppression. Earlier, I discussed how Abdulla theoretically conceptualised decolonisation rather as a dismantling of the settler-colonial power structure, through political, and legal reforms. The question is here, how the cultural in Palestine can attribute to the dismantling of Israel's settler-colonial power dominance through practices of beautiful resistance, reversing societal fragmentation and restoring Palestine's territory?¹³⁷ With the non-violent practices of beautiful resistance, aiming to build peace, the vacuum of Palestinian resistance is likewise furtherly fragmented as I will illustrate next.

3.4 “Imagine Throwing Flowers”: the More Complex Reality of Palestinian Resistance

On the outside terrace of the Ambassador Hotel in Jerusalem, I meet Sliman Mansour and his son Fares. I explain to them what my research is about. With a precious smile, he tells me that not many Palestinian artists will consider their artworks to be resisting the Occupation. It is not that simple. “Art is art, theatre is art and resistance is resistance”, Amer confirms also.

“Imagine if we instead of throwing rocks, would throw flowers. Very poetic and all, but it is not reality. Resistance has to do with violence, resisting the Occupation in that way. But theatre, no, that is not resistance.” – Amer Khalil (conversation, Jerusalem, April 4, 2023).

We have established beautiful resistance mostly as having to do with non-violent acts such as art production and education that constitute resistance. These forms of beautiful resistance oppose the ugliness and violent action of the IDF. These acts, or forms of art, reflect upon the Palestinian struggle for survival, freedom and rights.¹³⁸ This logic of beautiful resistance proposes a dichotomy between non-violence and violence, in which the former is glorified with beauty and the latter is labelled as ugly. It raises questions on the morality behind non-violence and violence. In his article on terrorism and morality, Khatchadourian particularly questions to what extent we can morally

¹³⁶ Abdulla, “Colonialism”, 51.

¹³⁷ Abdulla, “Colonialism”, 51.

¹³⁸ Larkin, “Jerusalem's Separation Wall”, 161-162.

judge the use of force at all by its actual or probable consequences.¹³⁹ Beautiful resistance in itself not just opposes the Israeli occupation, but it also moralises the use of violence or armaments in general. The concept dichotomises beauty and ugliness just as much as good or bad, justice or injustice, violence and non-violence. This brings me to the question, who are the ones finding themselves in a position to exert power in determining what is right or wrong and who in the context of Israel and Palestine is ‘justifiably’ using violent means? This element of moralisation within the notion of beautiful resistance leaves little room for Palestine’s important reality of armed resistance in its context.

In the Palestinian liberation struggle, for example, different resistance groups take an important and undeniable place in Palestinian society. The social support for these groups is widely carried. I was told multiple times during my stay in Palestine that “even the sweetest, pacifist people are in favour of armed resistance here”. Previous research on social ties of oppositional organisations has shown that resistance groups with great ties to the civilian population are more likely to also sustain nonviolent acts of resistance.¹⁴⁰ Yet, the Palestinian people, as well as the resistance groups have been more fragmented, polarized and controlled than ever before.¹⁴¹ This fragmentation is one of the many consequences of Israel’s Occupation. In the legacy of the decades of Occupation and the Oslo Accords, this fragmentation is also deeply rooted in the PA.¹⁴² The lack of governance, and unable to strengthen the sense of unity among the Palestinian people, deepen the hopelessness and societal grievances. Despite the resilience and diverse forms of resistance of the Palestinian people, the situation worsens in terms of the lack of dialogue, rising substance abuse, increasing unemployment rates, financial problems and for some, the desire to leave Palestine. We have seen the concept of beautiful resistance thus lacks the understanding of Palestinian resistance as a whole. Palestinian resistance is most often associated with “fighting”, equipped and violent resistance. I particularly refer to equipped, instead of armed resistance, as it illustrates the inequality between the IDF and Palestinians to what to resist. Beautiful resistance thus merely functions as an inner form of expression in dealing with the Occupation. It is aimed to preconditional build peace through artistic tools with yourself: by dealing with and expressing the experiences of the Occupation. This would ultimately build the stage for building peace with others and thus functions as a peacebuilding and reconciliation tool rather than decolonisation.

¹³⁹ H. Khatchadourian, “Terrorism and Morality”, *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (1988): 131-145.

¹⁴⁰ C. Thurber, “Social Ties and the Strategy of Civil Resistance”, *International Studies Quarterly* 63 (2019): 974-986, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqz049>.

¹⁴¹ D. El Kurd, *Polarized and Demobilized: Legacies of Authoritarianism in Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁴² D. El Kurd, “Armed Resistance versus Nonviolent Strategies: An Analysis of Palestinian Opinion”, *AlMuntaqa* 3, no. 2 (2020): 80-86.

Yet, the notion lacks understanding of the Palestinian resistance in its diffuse forms, thus including forms of violent resistance. The concept not only moralizes the dichotomy between violence and non-violence but also nuances the relationship between resistance and art. When keeping a sceptical eye on the concept, it fails to address that the political and economic contingencies are inherently linked to arts-based and cultural resistance. The political economy of beautiful resistance, as it unpacks in the context of the West Bank, will be elaborated on next. In its turn, I will depict how this political economy of beautiful resistance in Palestine commodifies and normalises the status quo of the ongoing Occupation.

Chapter 4: The Political Economy of Beautiful Resistance

“This idea of beautiful resistance is a commodification or commercialization of resistance. You should not cover up the ugliness of the Occupation with a blanket of ‘beauty’.” – Amer Khalil (conversation, Jerusalem, April 4, 2023).

After Sliman, Fares and I had enjoyed our coffee in the Ambassador Hotel, Sliman’s son shows me around in the lobby of the hotel. Many of Sliman’s artworks are hanging on the walls. Colourful paintings of Jerusalem and greyish charcoal sketches decorate the hallways of the hotel. Sliman does not walk with us. According to Fares, he dislikes the works that are depicted in the hotel. Not long before that, Sliman tells me how complicated the dynamics are between art, art production and the economy around art in Palestine. “You know who decides what good art is? The buyer.”,

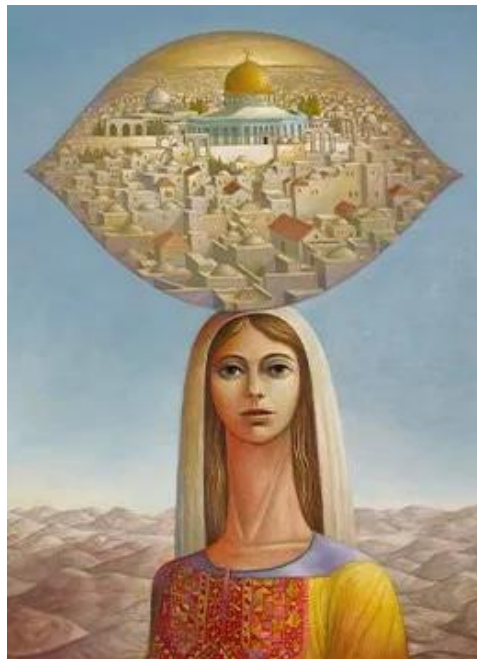


Figure 7: "Woman with Jerusalem", Sliman Mansour, 1978

Sliman says. The dynamics of the market, as well as power structures, are often overlooked as an important factor in determining the boundaries of art productions and the related political subjectivities that emerge within this frame.¹⁴³ Practices of beautiful resistance are embedded in a broader local and global political economy. This chapter of the thesis is, therefore, concerned with the sub-question of how practices of beautiful resistance can be understood in their local and global

¹⁴³ Salih and Richter-Devroe, “Cultures of Resistance”, 14.

political economies. This chapter illustrates this through the concepts of political economies and commodification. The political economy is deeply interrelated with social loci and in the context of Palestine, Occupation. In connection to the previous chapter, settler-colonialism, the ‘peace’ process, as well as the global economy have distinct, yet entrenched political economies. Palestine’s notion of beautiful resistance in relation to development aid sharpens our understanding of how political subjectivities like the Palestinians fall trapped under the context of settler-colonialism and its local and global political economies. Situating this dimension of beautiful resistance in its local and global context helps us gain a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of beautiful resistance in Palestine. Additionally, zooming in on the political economy of beautiful resistance, enables us to understand the commodification of artistic expressions of resistance in Palestine. The cultural political economies, in which practices of beautiful resistance are embedded, have enabled a centrality on the individual artist as a form of self-expression, that in fact creates social norms inducing capitalist individual behaviour.¹⁴⁴ In sum, this chapter aims at understanding how the concept of beautiful resistance contributes to the constitution of Palestine’s political economy. This chapter paves the way for illustrating how practices of beautiful resistance, normalise the status quo of Palestine’s settler-colonial context.

4.1 Historical Formation of Palestine’s Political Economy of Art and Culture

The study of political economy, here that of beautiful resistance, converges on at least the following two points: 1) understanding the historical formation of processes of global capitalism and 2) understanding the dynamics between institutions, relations of power, and social conflict.¹⁴⁵ Zooming in on the context of Palestine, the Oslo Accords mark a pivotal point in Palestinian history regarding its political economy. In the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, nearly twenty-five years ago, promises for peace between the Israeli government and the PA were abundant and fuelled by neoliberal political and economic policies.¹⁴⁶ In the context of Palestine, this is often called the “Oslo peace paradigm” and concerns the Western donor aid and their peace and reconciliation programs, which has a major impact in shaping Palestine’s political economy.¹⁴⁷ Through a political economy lens, the Oslo framework is underpinned by a global framework of

¹⁴⁴ J. Seitz, “The Political Economy of Creativity”, *Creativity Research Journal* 15, no. 4 (2003): 385-392, DOI:10.1207/S15326934CRJ1504_6.

¹⁴⁵ B. Haddad, O. Dahi, Z. Abu-Rish, J. Beinun and S. Seikaly, “What is Political Economy?” in *Political Economy Project Series, JADMAG Pedagogy Publications* 4, no. 2 (2016).

¹⁴⁶ M. Pace and S. Sen, *The Palestinian Authority in the West Bank: The Theatrics of Woeful Statecraft* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁴⁷ Pace and Sen, *The Palestinian Authority*, 4.

capitalist interests and assumptions. This followed the global sparking interest in and expansion of capitalism. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the so-called New World Order, led by the U.S., liberal democracy and a free-market economy led to neoliberal policies characterizing the world of development aid in these decades. The peace process between Israel and the PLO in the 1990s, I argue, has *de facto* created an illusion of hollow liberal peace and development. Within the Oslo paradigm, the developmental practices and funding were simply a distraction from the reality of Israel's settler-colonial project.¹⁴⁸ In this light, the PA emerged as a new actor in Palestine's political economy. With the centrality of reconciliation and peace agreements in the portrayed two-sided conflict, the Oslo Accords, however, formed a distraction from Israel's expanding settler-colonial project.¹⁴⁹

Earlier, we have established there seems to be a vacuum ranging from reconciliation and decolonisation. The former is merely discussed within the international community and the Palestinian context is therefore misunderstood, or even deliberately constructed in a way to maintain the economic order. Here, it is important to understand reconciliation as an objective of the Oslo process, which prescribes the establishment of sustainable economic relationships between Palestine, Israel, and the international community. From a decolonial perspective, aiming to dismantle the settler-colonial structure, this objective of the peace process follows the settler-colonial dynamics, hindering Palestine to develop economically, to maintain Israel's dominant position. The terminology used by the involved international actors has strong implications on how the ongoing situation between Israel and Palestine is perceived and handled to this day. Turner correctly points out that some of the settler-colonial practices the Palestinians are subject to are indeed the result of the Western frameworks of peacebuilding and reconciliation.¹⁵⁰ The peace agreements were meant to pave the way for an internationally desired two-state solution. In addition, in this framework of liberal peace, a "functioning" state was deemed a condition for a successful peace.¹⁵¹ Palestine was seen as being developed for the enhancement of Israel's economic and military safety. An important actor in the process around the Oslo Accords here was the World Bank and later the EU.

From this moment onwards, Palestine gained interest in the field of development and state-building programs. Yet, the flows of development aid to the PA fell into the hands of Israel and the international community who "engineer" legitimacy for the newly established authority. In the

¹⁴⁸ Tartir, Dana and Seidel, *Political Economy*, 18.

¹⁴⁹ Tartir, Dana and Seidel, *Political Economy*, 18.

¹⁵⁰ Turner, "Completing the Circle", 492-493.

¹⁵¹ A. Hanieh, "The Political Economy of State Formation in Palestine" in *Rethinking Statehood in Palestine: Self-Determination and Decolonisation Beyond Partition*, ed. L. Farsakh (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 33.

shadows of the Oslo Accords, development aid rather served to exert Israel's settler-colonial power in terms of administrative control.¹⁵² This way, further fragmentation and weakening of the Palestinian society was enacted.¹⁵³ Instead of any concern with the Palestinian right to self-determination and agency, development aid, state-building programs, and reconciliation processes have become a strategy in Israel's prolongation of its Occupation. Palestine's population became the largest beneficiaries of (foreign) development aid per capita in the world in the form of a corrupting game. To illustrate this, many donors and partners wanted to collaborate with Palestinian (cultural) organisations like *Al-Hakawati* in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords, according to Amer, the director of *Al-Hakawati*. However, as he says, this was only for a very short period, approximately 6 months.¹⁵⁴ In the wake of Oslo, events such as the 9/11 attacks and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq have drastically redefined the focal points of international foreign aid policy. Many of the theatres and cultural centres I visited in the West Bank have felt the impact of the global political and economic climate. Already during my first meet-up in the cultural and artistic scene in Bethlehem, it becomes evident how major the presence of aid and humanitarian assistance is in the West Bank. In the context of beautiful resistance, Abdelfattah, director of *Alromwad*, tells me how international (non)governmental organisations define how to work and with whom to work. Abdelfattah tells me how development organisations and (I)NGOs have come to link requirements to the existing programs of *Alromwad*. They demand adaptations of political agendas, and budgets and condemn any collaboration with possible terrorist organisations or individuals.¹⁵⁵

So far, I have discussed the stage in which Palestine's current political economy could emerge with the failed Oslo Accords as an important point of departure. In this light, we can zoom in on the actors constituting the cultural political economies in which beautiful resistance is embedded. In the aftermath of the 'peace'-agreements, Palestinian art and culture started to engage themselves with Israel's Occupation, and peacebuilding within a neoliberal political economic climate.¹⁵⁶ Western social norms on self-interest and self-determination have strongly impacted the artistic and cultural scene in Palestine. With beautiful resistance's central focus on individualistic experiences and coping with the Occupation, we see how the philosophy of beautiful resistance is

¹⁵² Hanieh, "The Political Economy", 35-36.

During the Oslo peace negotiations, the Occupied West Bank has been divided in three non-contiguous zones: Area A, B and C. Only in Area A, the PA has been granted full responsibility and authority to govern the area in terms of internal security, public affairs and police activity. Area A only constitutes 18% of the entire West Bank. (See also: J. Singer, "West Bank Areas A, B and C - How Did They Come into Being?", *International Negotiations* 26 (2021): 1-11.

¹⁵³ Turner, "Completing the Circle", 494.

¹⁵⁴ Amer Khalil, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 4, 2023.

¹⁵⁵ Abdelfattah Abusrour, conversation with the author. Bethlehem, March 4, 2023.

¹⁵⁶ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 9-10.

embedded in these political economies of peacebuilding and economic stability. I problematise the notion of political economy by arguing that because of this aim for “colonial peace”,¹⁵⁷ peacebuilding and settler-colonialism have an enormous impact on the prospects for beautiful resistance. Under the guidelines of the political economy, the essence of beautiful resistance has moved beyond at the expense of the Palestinians' need for resisting the settler-colonial structure oppressing them.

4.2 Commodification of Beautiful Resistance in Palestine: International Aid, Funding and Global Market Forces

In this political economy of settler-colonialism, Palestinian art and culture as a form of resistance have been commodified in a framework of peacebuilding and reconciliation tools and practices. As Seitz argues, art and culture of self-expression can only emerge in a larger socio-political matrix, whereby these artistic practices are commodified and valued by socio-political institutions.¹⁵⁸ In the context of Palestine, this self-expression is at the core of beautiful resistance. Its practices and tools to “build peace within oneself”, have been commodified and valued in the framework of Israel’s political economy, and are financially supported by the international community. *Alrowwad*, the PCS, and the *Al-Hakawati* theatre are (partly) depending on external funding and donors. In the case of *Alrowwad* and the PCS, the cultural organisations target children to strengthen their (artistic) capacities and to offer them an escape from the reality of the Occupation. Yet, they are unable to request the children’s parents to financially contribute to the organisation’s programs.

“From some parents, the PCS could get a contribution of 1000 NIS a month, from other parents nothing. I do not want to differentiate that way.” – Mohammed Rabah (conversation, Bir Zeit, March 20, 2023).

¹⁵⁷ M. Turner, “Completing the Circle”, 494.

M. Turner, "Peacebuilding as counterinsurgency in the occupied Palestinian territory", *Review of international studies* 41, no. 1 (2015): 73-98, DOI: 10.1017/S0260210514000072.

Turner describes ‘colonial peace’ as what was the aim of the peacebuilding processes of the Oslo Accords. This notion is pointing to the developmental policies being favourable to Israel at the expense of a strategy for decolonisation of Palestine. This ‘colonial peace’ is close to what this thesis argues for as the ‘normalisation of the status quo’.

¹⁵⁸ Seitz, “The Political”, 387.

With the financial insecurity and societal disruptions that the Palestinians have to face, it is well-nigh impossible to depend on parents' financial contributions. Earlier, we have seen how Palestine's society is highly disrupted in many aspects as a consequence of the Israeli Occupation. Unemployment is among these consequences. These aspects illustrate how Israel has been able to restrict the Palestinian economy and how the economy runs along settler-colonial lines: with Palestine's weak economic infrastructure, Israel can deliberately and systematically dismember and



Figure 8: Map of the Aida Camp (source: UNRWA)

distort the indigenous economy from the dominant economy of Israel.¹⁵⁹ Taking the Aida refugee in Bethlehem as an example, the camp faces high unemployment rates. In the camp, about 70% of the inhabitants are unemployed.¹⁶⁰ With the camp's proximity to the Segregation Wall, the camp is isolated from neighbouring areas and the city of Bethlehem itself. The wall additionally prevents the people living in the camps from getting access to the (Israeli) labour market.¹⁶¹ Abdelfattah, Mohammed and many of the other cultural initiators say that the economic wealth distribution is becoming more and more visible in Palestinian society as a result of the high fragmentation and polarisation of the state. In the case of Alrowwad, Abdelfattah tells me how most of the funding comes from "Friends of Alrowwad". Abdelfattah wants to welcome everyone who wants to be a

¹⁵⁹ Turner, "The Political Economy", 44.

¹⁶⁰ "AIDA CAMP", Noor Women's Empowerment Group, accessed July 29, 2023, <https://noorweg.wordpress.com/aida-camp/>.

¹⁶¹ "west bank unrwa profile: aida camp", UNRWA, accessed July 9, 2023, https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/aida_refugee_camp.pdf.

“true” partner in support of his cultural centre. He particularly stresses the hesitancy and concerns regarding true and honest partnerships.

Earlier, I established that the War on Terror and counterterrorism rhetoric has drastically altered the landscape of funding and foreign aid.¹⁶² In its aftermath, central actors such as USAID and the World Bank and their state-building and peacebuilding programs targeting Palestine have been shaped by the joint US-Israel relationship built upon the very topic of weakening security.¹⁶³ According to some of the cultural initiators I speak with, many of the donors and funding I(N)GOs are embedded in networks involved with the US, EU and World Bank. In the early 2000s, Amer tells me how funding and partnerships had drastically decreased.¹⁶⁴ With the Western War on Terror rhetoric, these donor and aid organisations have shown their “truth and dishonesty” by demanding to condemn any ties of the Palestinian organisation in question with terrorist organisations. Since 2002, USAID has implemented the so-called “Anti-terrorist Certification (ATC)” in every contract between Palestinian organisations and partners to legally ensure that no funding would fall into the wrong hands.¹⁶⁵ In the context of Palestine, Hamas, Fatah and the PIJ are internationally recognized by many Western countries as terrorist organisations.

“Why do Palestinians not have the right to fight back against the IDF? Why is that internationally seen and recognised as terrorism?” – Abdelfattah Abusrour (conversation, Bethlehem, March 4, 2023).

With the strong ties between these influential development actors such as USAID, much of the development aid or funding is meant for “combating, neutralizing and preventing terrorism against Israel”.¹⁶⁶ It is this, that Turner illustrates as the settler-colonial power determining with whom donors are allowed to work. Those are who she calls “partners for peace”, rather than Palestinian organisations who support regime change and make an end to the settler-colonial project of Israel.¹⁶⁷ In this larger framing of Palestinian development aid functioning as counterinsurgency against terrorism, Palestinian (cultural) organisations become subject to Israel’s dominant settler-colonial power.¹⁶⁸ With Israel’s power to regulate ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ flows of funding in a broader framework of anti-terrorism, counterinsurgency and global security, Palestine’s political

¹⁶² M. Bose, “Comment: Defining U.S. Foreign Policy in the Post-9/11 World”, *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 4 (2002): 619-626.

¹⁶³ Turner, “Completing the Circle”, 497.

¹⁶⁴ Amer Khalil, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 4, 2023.

¹⁶⁵ Turner, “The Political Economy”, 41.

¹⁶⁶ L. Bhungalia, “Managing violence: aid, counterinsurgency, and the humanitarian present in Palestine”, *Environment and Planning A* 47, no. 11 (2015): 2223-2426, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X15598263>.

¹⁶⁷ Turner, “Completing the Circle”, 500.

¹⁶⁸ Turner, “Peacebuilding”, 74.

economy is strongly shaped, monitored and controlled by Israel, fuelled by its strongest international allies. Amer, general director of the *Al-Hakawati* theatre, illustrates the problematic political economy in which his theatre is embedded:

“Theatre is important, as it can give people hope, it can make people laugh, it breaks away from the ugliness of the occupation. [...] Yet, it is very hard to maintain a theatre, as you do not want to or can't rely on (Western) donors, as the Palestinian context and thus the occupation do not allow for stability, the Israeli shape, influence and monitor the Palestinian economy, and the theatres have been made inaccessible because of walls and checkpoints.” – Amer Khalil (conversation, Jerusalem, April 4, 2023).

As Amer sums up how the political economy impedes the course of affairs regarding his theatre, collectively we ponder about *room de manoeuvre* he and fellow cultural initiators have. This context of a powerful international architecture in which Palestinian cultural organisations are monitored and regulated, has thus been the consequence of a logic of peacebuilding and economic development and has furtherly hollowed the quasi-autonomy Palestine was given under the Oslo Accords.¹⁶⁹

Not only the cash flows between I(N)GOs and Palestinian cultural organisations are monitored and managed, their programmes and activities have to adapt to I(N) GOs' political agendas. This not only applies to international (non)governmental organisations. These actors operate in a broader global network defined by a combining of different, yet adjusted political agendas. This does not come out of nowhere: neoliberal policies have promoted foreign direct investment and free markets, which in its turn increased dependency on development in Palestine.¹⁷⁰ As Amer showed, it is an impossible internal struggle as a theatre director, having to (partly) depend on this foreign intervention, rather than support. The same goes for Abdelfattah. He gives me an example of a time in which Alrowwad collaborated with a foreign NGO. He tells me how the children from the camp got the ‘opportunity’ to paint the concrete walls in Bethlehem. Abdelfattah deliberately puts the word opportunity between brackets.

“The children were assigned to paint their experiences of the Occupation on the wall. One of the kids was drawing a tank. The kid was bossed around by the NGO worker and told that he missed his opportunity. He, later on, was punished and had to remove the painting. Where do you think these children have been used to seeing tanks? We,

¹⁶⁹ Turner, “Completing the Circle”, 499.

¹⁷⁰ Turner, “The Political Economy”, 46.

Palestinians, do not own tanks, the Israelis do and yet our children are familiar with them.” – Abdelfattah Abusrour (conversation, Bethlehem, March 4, 2023).

Embedding this event into the broader political economy of beautiful resistance, I would argue that the interference and influence of these organisations determine art and cultural production in Palestine. Proposals, project plans, and evaluations are versed in the neoliberal jargon inherent to the world of foreign aid. Practices and acts of beautiful resistance are rephrased in abstract terms of human development, human rights, and self-determination. This is at the core of what is defined as commodification. According to Bradshaw, McDonagh, and Marshall, in the context of the political economy of art, art and culture become objects (commodities) with an abstracted exchange value.¹⁷¹

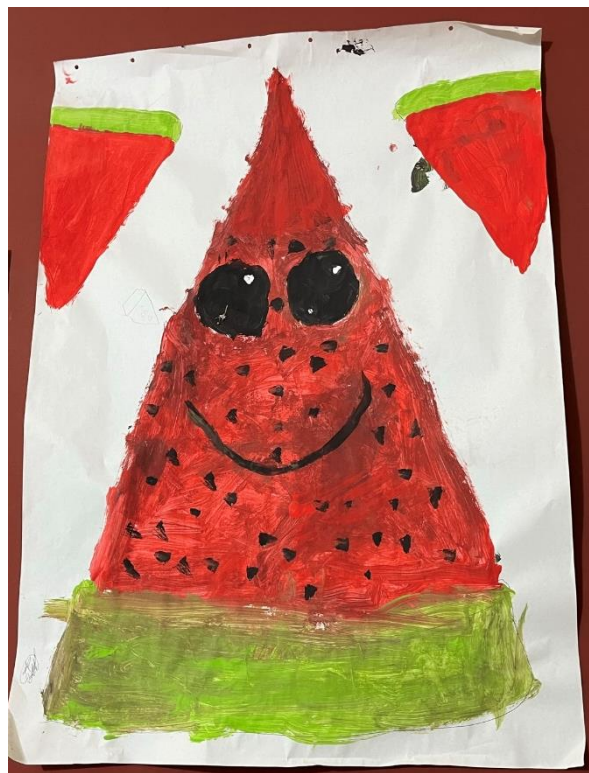


Figure 9: Example of Symbol of the Palestinian Struggle (photo: author's archive)

As Anani argues, the international community has become intrigued by symbolic and artistic representations of the Palestinian struggle for survival against the Israeli Occupation and adopted those in frameworks of peacebuilding and reconciliation.¹⁷² Through this lens, Palestinian oppression portrayed through art and cultural activities has been commodified. Afresh, the

¹⁷¹ A. Bradshaw, P. McDonagh, and D. Marshall, “The Alienated Artist and the Political Economy of Organised Art”, *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2006): 111-117, DOI: 10.1080/10253860600633622.

¹⁷² Salih and Richter-Devroe, “Cultures of Resistance”, 21.

decolonial aspect of the Palestinian struggle expressed through acts of beautiful resistance is overlooked or ignored because the context is perceived as a conflict rather than a settler-colonial project. The Westerly dominating organisations seek to reproduce the international consensus of the established cultural regime by those in power. As Salih and Richter-Devroe correctly point out, the conditions for the possibility of Palestinian beautiful resistance are determined by a global audience and have thus conditioned the discourses and frameworks of Palestinian society and resistance in general.¹⁷³ These preconditions for the very existence of beautiful resistance and its practices highlight the hegemonic cultural regimes inherently connected to the political economies surrounding them.

4.3 Decolonisation and the Political Economy of Beautiful Resistance: The Palestinian Marathon

As I have unpacked the global hegemony surrounding the politics, cultures and economics of beautiful resistance, I will now depict examples in which acts of beautiful resistance manoeuvre within the lacework of its political economy. So far, we problematised the complex dynamics between beautiful resistance and politics, and how they are strongly interlinked with neoliberal and global economic processes. Yet, as Salih and Richter-Devroe have likewise pointed out, the contextualizing of beautiful resistance in its political economy not only complicates but also nuances the relationship between art and politics.¹⁷⁴ Through this nuanced optic, cultural production holds the potential to challenge existing power structures and generate new political imaginaries. In the settler-colonial and political-economic context of Palestine, we have seen how society has deliberately been fragmented. As this thesis explores how beautiful resistance could also be seen as a strategy to decolonise, this section illustrates an empirical example of a cultural production aiming to overcome this societal fragmentation: the Palestinian Marathon.

Abusrour's philosophy of beautiful resistance aimed at stimulating Palestinian's full creative potential to gain hope in navigating towards a free future. As art is often defined as an experience or expression of skill or imagination, the marathon and cultural activities intertwine within the event. In this light, I will discuss the Palestinian Marathon as an act of beautiful resistance. The event positions itself amid Palestine's political economy, flourishing Palestine's tourism sector and depending relatively little on international development aid actors.

¹⁷³ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 21.

Turner, "Completing the Circle", 502.

¹⁷⁴ Salih and Richter-Devroe, "Cultures of Resistance", 23-24.



Figure 10: Palestinian Marathon Starting Point, Manger Square, Bethlehem (photo: author's archive)

During my field visit to Palestine, I am invited to a women's football team in Ramallah. The team participates in the Palestinian Marathon in Bethlehem. As we are preparing for March 6, I am starting to understand that the magnitude of the event is enormous. All participants receive a yellow shirt and a starting number. As we arrive at Manger Square in Bethlehem, the square is filled with around 10.000 participants. During the day, cultural activities such as *Dabke*, Palestine's traditional dance, performances on the side of the roads take place, as well as music groups, and children's groups who perform circus art. This year's edition included many Palestinians, yet 1800 participants from 90 different other countries participated as well.¹⁷⁵ The marathon's main goal is to shed light on the lack of freedom of movement that Palestinians experience, as well as make a valuable contribution to the Palestinian tourism sector and economy.¹⁷⁶ The racing route of the marathon starts at Bethlehem's Church of Nativity and crosses the refugee camps Aida and Ad Dheisheh. As the route passes the Segregation Wall that separates Bethlehem from its surrounding areas, including Jerusalem, the participants have to run in loops. In doing so, the limited freedom of movement in Palestine is depicted and experienced by the marathon's participants. With the unification of all participants from all over Palestine and all over the world, the event seems to transcend the societal fragmentation caused by the Israeli Occupation. This opposes and resurrects

¹⁷⁵ "Palestinian Marathon", Facebook, accessed July 10, 2023.

¹⁷⁶ "Mission and Vision", Palestinian Marathon, accessed July 8, 2023, <https://www.palestinemarathon.org/info/10.html>.

the type of community action, which was reduced by the enhancement of the Oslo framework.¹⁷⁷ The economic, social, and political fragmentation of the Palestinian society is at the core of the aim of Israel's settler-colonial project to exert its power over the Palestinian people. The marathon is built upon partnerships between foremostly Palestinian (N)GOs, municipalities, youth councils and cultural organisations. The marathon's aim to 1) unify the Palestinian people, as well as

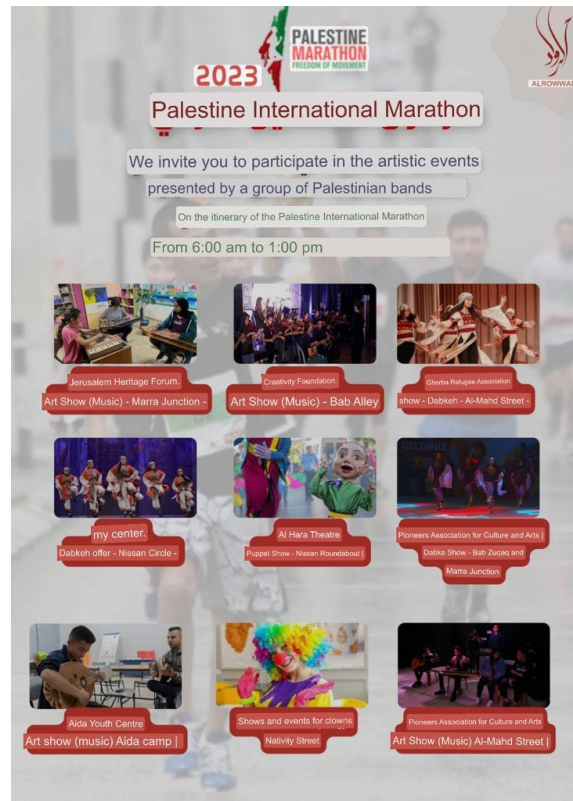


Figure 11: Poster Palestinian Marathon with Cultural Activities (photo: author's archive)

international participants, 2) shed light on the settler-colonial oppression of the Palestinian people, by limiting their freedom of movement, which could be seen as what Abdulla described as a process of decolonisation. It vests the power to reverse fragmentation in the people in opposition to the dominant settler-colonial hierarchies and aims at the dismantling of the state structure.¹⁷⁸ What the case of the Palestinian Marathon additionally illustrates here, is that the search for discrete, decolonising solutions, will prove to be promising once the Palestinian population is seen as a whole.

¹⁷⁷ Turner, "Peacebuilding", 85.

¹⁷⁸ Abdulla, "Colonialism", 72-73.

Chapter 5: Beautiful Resistance and Normalising the Status Quo

“What if we decide to decorate the checkpoint? It comes with pain. If you have to pass the checkpoint, you do so, because you have to. It became part of our daily life. But if you accept the checkpoint as being part of your life, you accept something that should not exist.” – Amer Khalil (conversation, Jerusalem, April 4, 2023).

I ask the director of the Palestinian National Theatre, Amer, how to deal with this internal struggle of accepting or rejecting the diverse elements of Israel’s settler-colonial project. He looks at me and answers that this is something impossible. How to accept facets of the settler-colonial project that has been nationally and internationally perceived as “normal” or “the status quo”? Does opposing the checkpoints, the Segregation Wall, and other practices of settler-colonialism make you “anti-normal”? The debates on normalisation are contentious in the midst of the Palestinian public sphere.¹⁷⁹ This last analytical chapter is concerned with the sub-question of how practices of beautiful resistance can be understood as a process of normalising the status quo in Palestine. The Palestinian struggle for existence and survival, often articulated through Palestinian art and culture, is defined as the question of “the normalisation of the status quo” and often connotated with acceptance of defeat, and the embrace of the current settler-colonial order.¹⁸⁰



Figure 12: "Harmony, Peace, Love", in Arabic, English and Hebrew, Bethlehem (photo: author's archive)

¹⁷⁹ M. Albzour, S. Penic, R. Nasser and E. Green, “Support for “Normalisation” of Relations Between Palestinians and Israelis and how It Relates to Contact and Resistance in the West Bank”, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 7, no. 2 (2019): 978-996, <https://doi.org/10.5964/jssp.v7i2.877>.

¹⁸⁰ Belcastro, “Sport, politics”, 645.
Albzour, “The Deconstruction”, 2.

The very matter of settler-colonialism has turned into a matter of rejection or acceptance, which conditions both are put forward by the Israeli coloniser.¹⁸¹ We have seen how beautiful resistance is embedded in the predominant narrative of cultural resistance in which art is aimed to build bridges and reconcile. The everyday lives of the Palestinians as well as their practices of beautiful resistance have been conditioned by these discourses of peacebuilding and reconciliation by Israel's controlling political economy. According to Turner, the Oslo Accords have in its resulted in a "global neoliberal developmental consensus", and thus lead to the acceptance and normalisation of the settler-colonial status quo.¹⁸² Yet, normalisation is not only economic but also cultural and political, as this chapter will illustrate. The notion of beautiful resistance has so far shown a problematic relationship between culture, arts and conflict. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how the notion of beautiful resistance normalises the Israeli "status quo" and how cultural resistance is hollowed as a consequence of the powerful political economy it is embedded in.

5.1 Normalising Relationships with the Occupier Post-Oslo: Adopting the Human-Development Rhetoric

In a broader framework of peacebuilding and reconciliation, the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO were meant to build bridges between the two framed sides. This turning point in the history of the ongoing situation questioned for whom it was and is important to build peaceful relationships. The economic initiatives central to the post-Oslo era are consonant with an agenda aiming at political and economic normalised relationships with Israel.¹⁸³ Normalisation is defined as follows:

"[Normalisation is] the process of building open and reciprocal relations with Israel in all fields, including the political, economic, social, cultural, educational, legal, and security fields".¹⁸⁴

Under the status of settler-colonialism, particularly in Palestine, normalisation is by researchers agreed to mean to recognise Israel in its very existence and entails the establishment of normal relationships on social, political and economic grounds.¹⁸⁵ These normal relationships maintain the

¹⁸¹ Albzour, "The Deconstruction", 17.

¹⁸² Turner, "Completing the Circle", 502.

¹⁸³ Turner, "Completing the Circle", 502.

¹⁸⁴ W. Salem, "The anti-normalization discourse in the context of Israeli-Palestinian peace-building", *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 12, no. 1 (2005), <https://pij.org/articles/334/the-antinormalization-discourse-in-the-context-of-israelipalestinian-peacebuilding>.

¹⁸⁵ Albzour, "The Deconstruction", 37

status quo, which is not meant for any time of regime change reached through resistance. For particularly the Palestinian people, the notion of normalisation acquired a negative connotation, because the Oslo era reminds of normalising coexistence with the Israeli occupier.¹⁸⁶

Albzour's analysis of normalisation in the context of Palestine dates back to the aftermath of the 1967 War. Before this period, the political representations of a Palestinian national identity rejected Israel's settler-colonialism. The use of the term normalisation was a result of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreements in 1979 and further adopted in UN resolution 242, which among other things called for the further withdrawal of Israeli troops from the recently occupied West Bank, and Gaza. Recognising this resolution, however, conditioned to accepting the occupying, settler-colonial structure of Israel and Palestine. It is this dichotomy, which Albzour describes as the duality of acceptance and rejection of settler-colonialism in Palestine.¹⁸⁷ This period, thus, marks a shift from rejecting the power structure of Israel for the sake of the liberalisation of a free Palestine, to accepting UN resolutions, implicitly accepting the internationally proposed two-state solution.¹⁸⁸ With the Oslo Accords, interactions between the PLO, eventually the PA and Israel were legitimately normalised and became the core of the 'reconciliation' process. With the establishment of the PA, "business as usual" could be restored and was a turning point for some Arab states to build economic and diplomatic relationships with those parties before full Palestinian justice (read ending the Occupation) was restored.¹⁸⁹ More than thirty years later, the current position of the PA in relation to the Palestinian people is just as fragile and contested as it was after its establishment. The ruling PA emphasizes the existence of normalised relationships with Israel. The PA thereby condemns the use of violent and armed resistance to settler colonial practices.¹⁹⁰ The PA is therefore heavily despised by a large part of the Palestinian people. When their governance of Palestine is discussed, I notice the PA is not highly spoken of. Mohammed, directing the PCS, tells me how he is disappointed by the fact the PA is unable to set an example for Palestine on how to coexist. Because of its ties with Israel, the PA would rather keep it the way it is. The PCS would rather "anti-normalise" the governance of Palestine. He tells me about the corrupt practices and ties of the PA and hopes that the children who joined the PCS learn the skills to eventually lead the country in transparent and democratic ways.¹⁹¹ The PCS aims to empower children to become

Awwad, *Israeli strategy*.

M. Awwad, *Israeli strategy to normalize relations with Arab countries* (Beirut: Center of Arab Unity Studies, 1988).

¹⁸⁶ Tamari, "Normalcy and Violence", 51.

¹⁸⁷ Albzour, "The Deconstruction", 10-12.

¹⁸⁸ Albzour, "The Deconstruction", 10.

¹⁸⁹ Tamari, "Normalcy and Violence", 54.

¹⁹⁰ Albzour, Penic, Nasser and Green, "Support for Normalization", 979.

¹⁹¹ Mohammed Rabah, conversation with the author. Bir Zeit, March 20, 2023.

constructive actors in Palestinian society. Circus art within the PCS promotes agency, critical thinking and dialogue. As we look back at the conceptualisation of beautiful resistance, acts of beautiful resistance promote the creation of peace within the self as a reflexive inner tool.¹⁹²

Under the status of settler-colonialism, I argue that in the aftermath of Oslo, Israel has influenced relationships between NGOs, donors and Palestinian (cultural) organisations in two ways, whereby ‘normal’ relationships 1) have the aim to work towards reconciliation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and thus demand the acceptance of the currently existing artificial borders, under the premise of a two-state solution and 2) require the rejection or condemnation of any terrorist ties in Palestine, thereby adopting the rhetoric that Palestinian armed resistance is equal to terrorism against Israel (and the West). Beautiful resistance offers the tools to ultimately deal with and enhance life under Occupation. This vision of the PCS and *Alrowwad* fits into a broader post-Oslo developmental framework, which focuses on individuals as ‘change agents’ in a moral economy of human rights.¹⁹³ According to Nicholson, this way, artistic products or performances of universal human rights shape Palestinian calls for justice in the existing rhetoric of the international community.¹⁹⁴ Thus, in this light, development frameworks cannot be seen as inseparable from practices of beautiful resistance. The performative nature of beautiful resistance in Palestine has led towards an alternated logic for Western NGOs and donors that fit into a development or aid frame. Even though cultural organisations are cautious of these influential global political agendas, the financial dependency caused by the Occupation remains. Ironically, as the Palestinian cultural scene thus shed light on the Occupational practices of Israel, and violations of human rights in many regards, yet the international community appears to be unable to stop Israel’s settler-colonial practices. In doing so, the international community maintains mechanisms in which Palestinians are the normalised subject to the atrocities of the settler-colonial power of Israel.

To continue on this cultural element of normalisation, I will illustrate the relationship between performativity and the human-development and human rights narrative. The adoption of this ‘human development’ and human rights rhetoric, focusing on rejecting the Israeli Occupation within the Self, is at the core of beautiful resistance.¹⁹⁵ The international community, NGOs, and donors have actively implemented these narratives within artistic practices of beautiful resistance. The political economy, which I have discussed in the previous chapter, has shown how Israel and

¹⁹² Abusrour and Devaney, “Alrowwad”, 13.

¹⁹³ R. Nicholson, “On the (Im)possibilities of a Free Theatre: Theatre Against Development in Palestine”, *Theatre Research International* 46, no. 1 (2021): 4-22, DOI: 10.1017/S0307883320000553.

¹⁹⁴ Nicholson, “On the (Im)possibilities”, 11.

¹⁹⁵ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 38.

the international community are in charge of setting political agendas aiming to maintain economic (relatively) stable relationships, in order to maintain the economic order as it is. This means cultural organisations in Palestine are often bound to adapt cultural productions, that will be evaluated and judged by (international) development actors in exchange for funding and “partnerships for peace”.¹⁹⁶ This illustrates the performative character underpinning cultural production in post-Oslo Palestine. Jawad refers to this as the “global spectatorship”, which plays a significant role in Palestine’s cultural scene.¹⁹⁷ Illustrating this through the Palestinian Marathon, one of the aims of the event is to shed light and create international awareness of the limited freedom of movement that Palestinians experience. Paradoxically, the event is organised to unify Palestinians (and international participants) on the one hand and to ‘perform’ the marathon for a global audience to draw attention to the Palestinian struggle on the other. Another example is the *Al-Hakawati* Theatre. I visited one of the theatre’s shows. While waiting for it to start, I fell into conversation with a group of Swedish NGO workers, based in Jerusalem. One of them tells me how their organisation’s project is interested in Palestinian theatre, and, therefore, they visit the show. The artists of the show perform Sufi music and dance. In the background of the stage, pictures are shown of Palestinian cultural heritage, the old city of Jerusalem, and Palestinians decorating the streets with lights for the holy month of Ramadan.



Figure 13: 'The Sufi Musical Show', Al-Hakawati theatre, Jerusalem (photo: author's archive)

¹⁹⁶ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 31.

Turner, “The Political Economy”, 33.

¹⁹⁷ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 31.

The composition of the content of the show and the attracted public (largely consisting of an international audience), illustrates what Arafat called for in 2001, “the world is the audience for nationalist performances”.¹⁹⁸

The normative political economy of the international community has in its turn hollowed the very notion of beautiful resistance. The Occupation of Palestine has been transformed into a developmental issue and has been depoliticised.¹⁹⁹ Beautiful resistance practices have been made into a tool to deal with the everyday experiences of the Occupation and perform this to the ‘outside’ world, yet it does not propose long-term, political solutions to the issue here. Per definition, resistance constitutes the human interactions opposing their repressing structures by dismantling their power. However, through the logic used by the cultural organisations discussed above, empowerment of the Self appears to be at the core of beautiful resistance. Yet, through this idea, there is thus no interaction with the occupational dominating power, as the definition of resistance is promising. This implies, in its turn, that the internal, peaceful and reflexive tools offered by beautiful resistance, diametrically oppose the interactional dynamics of armed and violent resistance. The children of *Alrowwad* abstain from violent action by participating in acts of beautiful resistance. This enables Israel and the international community to deepen the moral judgement underpinning armed resistance in the context of Palestine and puts the very existence of it in jeopardy. This morality, with the Palestinians being subject to Israeli and international bodies, is the so-called “normalizing gaze” and enacts the Palestinian people to be “described, judged, measured and compared with others”.²⁰⁰ It made me think of what Ashraf told me about the track “Wrap”, using the video of the construction of the Segregation Wall: “I wanted to visualise how a bunch of other people are working to build your cage”.²⁰¹ The process of normalisation is another diminishing of Palestinian’s right to self-determination.

5.2 Beautiful Resistance: Anti-Normalisation as a Way to Decolonise?

“You know, there is only one store, here in Jerusalem, that sells circus materials and attributes. It is an Israeli store. My brother helps me supplying materials from Barcelona because obviously, I am not going to buy my stuff from an Israeli store.” – Ahmed Ju’beh (conversation, Jerusalem, April 2, 2023).

¹⁹⁸ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 33.

¹⁹⁹ S. Roy, “Reconceptualizing the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Key Paradigm Shifts”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 3 (2012): 71-91, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2012.xli.3.71>.

²⁰⁰ Foucault, *The Birth*.

²⁰¹ Ashraf Taha, conversation with the author. Ramallah, March 12, 2023.

Ahmed draws on his personal experiences as a Jerusalemite Palestinian, living in the Old City, where the communities of the cities face complex battles. His very existence, Ahmed tells me, him walking around the streets of the old city, is resisting the abnormalcy of the Occupation. As we talk, many children stop by to greet Ahmed with a high-five or a hug. As he performs his circus art near Damascus Gate or the Christian Quarter, he claims the street as the place, where he belongs. He tells me how one time, an Israeli officer was checking his papers and surprisingly said that “As someone of the Old City, you have nothing on your record”.²⁰² As we are having coffee, a police officer comes around the corner of the street. He grabs his sunglasses, and his body cowers. Following his stories about his experiences, I sense his fear. Ahmed's example shows how ‘normal’ relationships between Israeli police forces and Palestinians from the Old City are built on the premise of violent clashes between them, and detention. The example of Ahmed can be understood as his performing acts of resistance is him claiming his human right to existence opposing the core of the settler-colonial ideology. However, these and other acts of beautiful resistance do not target elements of the settler-colonial dominant power structure in the broader sense.

Moving beyond the normalising practices resulting in the maintaining of the Israeli status quo, I question how beautiful resistance could be seen as a form of anti-normalisation, in other words, as a form of decolonisation. Salem argues that anti-normalisation might reject the current status quo, but might accept “normal” relationships with Israel after the real achievement of decolonisation and peace.²⁰³ We have established that beautiful resistance has been drenched in a discourse of human development centred on the individual and fits in a broader framework of human rights. In this light, the essence of beautiful resistance has been distracted from its call for anti-settler-colonial protest and is foremostly targeted at the call for Palestinians to be “deserving of human rights”.²⁰⁴ In this regard, it appears to me as if Palestinian art or performances are concerned with the Palestinian identity, to defend their very existence and not about normalising the status quo. The Palestinian people have been mired into a position of invisibility and, thus, it speaks for their need to perform acts of beautiful resistance. Taking Sliman Mansour’s art as an example, a reoccurring topic is the preservation of Palestinian identity, culture and heritage. In Sliman’s paintings, he therefore often refers to the mother figure, the key to return and olive trees. All are important symbols of Palestinian identity. The symbols portray the rootedness of the Palestinian people on their land. In Figure 15, this claim on the Palestinian land is portrayed using these key symbols.

²⁰² Ahmed Ju’beh, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 2, 2023.

²⁰³ Salem, “The Anti-Normalization Discourse”.

²⁰⁴ Nicholson, “On the (Im)possibilities”, 12.



Figure 14: "From the river to the sea", Sliman Mansour, 2021

Acts of beautiful resistance have become a representation of the imbalanced dynamics between colonisers and colonised. The call for human rights equals the call for the existence of the Palestinian people. The normalisation and acceptance of the relationships between Israel, Palestine and the international community as it is now, has become palpable in the human development narrative in which beautiful resistance is embedded. Through beautiful resistance, Palestine has been pushed into a road map that includes neoliberal Palestinian institutions (e.g., the PA), economic infrastructure (monitored by Israel), and a human rights-based regime established from human development structures.²⁰⁵ Within this broader framework, Israel and the international community have created the “normal” Palestinian, abstaining from violent and armed resistance, and disciplining to the settler-colonial order Israel has maintained. As we have discussed earlier, one of the central goals of Israel’s settler-colonial project is the denial of the existence of the subordinate group. Thus, as practices of beautiful resistance have been distracted from actually resisting the settler-colonial structure the concept emerged in, Israel has been given the time and opportunity to maintain the status quo.

²⁰⁵ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 30.

Jawad correctly points at the fact that to be recognised as a human being, is not the same as to live freely, and not under Occupation.²⁰⁶ I suggest the notion of beautiful resistance should be conceptualised for Palestinians, by Palestinians, but foremostly, be understood in a settler-colonial context. In this light, acts of beautiful resistance could constitute an anti-normalisation narrative, renouncing the determinable settler-colonial facets of life. In other words, once practices of beautiful resistance commit decolonisation, these practices would challenge the settler-colonial logic and practices of the Palestinian erasure, and de-fragmentation of Palestinian society, as suggested by Tartir, Dana and Seidel.²⁰⁷ In Palestine, as well as internationally, these discourses of anti-normalisation are growing. To an increasing extent, anti-normalisation organisations and advocacies gain prominence in the Palestinian scene of resistance.²⁰⁸ Campaigns such as the Boycott Disinvest and Sanction (BDS) movement boycott Israel's economy as well as organisations and brands that support the Occupation in different ways.²⁰⁹

A commonly discussed topic with cultural initiators, and Palestinian artists, is the preservation of the Palestinian identity. Its culture and heritage are at the core of Palestinian society and often relate to the societal grievances and experiences with the Occupation. An example as



Figure 15: Artwork of traditional Palestinian embroidery and *Kuffiyya* in the form of Palestinian map, Bethlehem (photo: author's archive)

²⁰⁶ Jawad, "Aren't We Human?", 36.

²⁰⁷ Tartir, Dana and Seidel, *Political Economy*, 6-7.

²⁰⁸ Albzour, Penic, Nasser and Green, "Support for Normalization", 991.

²⁰⁹ Belcastro, "Sports, politics", 650.

depicted in Figure 15, is the *Kufiyya*, the chequered black and white Palestinian headscarf, which has become a cultural artefact with deeply rooted political significance. It represents an exemplifying symbol of solidarity and social justice against the Israeli Occupation.²¹⁰ Bearing in mind the societal fragmentation the Palestinian people face as a consequence of the Israeli settler-colonial project and international interference, a unifying narrative on Palestinian identity and culture could transcend the societal cracks left by the Occupation. What is important here, is that this preservation of Palestinian identity and the artistic and cultural expression of the Palestinian struggle could be seen as an “anti-normalisation” position. Salem poses that these positions should reflect the deeper roots of how these positions came into place through all Palestinian experiences. This would pave the way, on a popular level, for solidarity, sympathy, and dialogue.²¹¹ Abdelfattah Abusrour, director of *Alronmad* poses the following question on this: “How to preserve the idea of fighting for the homeland through the use of arts?”²¹² How to preserve Palestinian resistance in arts, when the “normalising gaze” has continuously moralised, judged, and combated any “anti-normal” Palestinian fighting against the Occupation? According to Jawad, one of the problems underpinning this logic of cultural resistance could be that acts of beautiful resistance attract international solidarity and are therefore performed for the outside world.²¹³

Palestinian beautiful resistance falls under the trap of universal (and Western) notions failing to understand the uniqueness of the settler-colonial context of Palestine. The discrepancy here lies between the international development frames dominating the cultural organisations in Palestine. Moving beyond this discrepancy, an alternative configuration of beautiful resistance is necessary, disengaging with the currently existing international humanitarian frameworks. Performing beautiful resistance within the organisations and theatres I talked to, is often rather seen as a place for distraction of the situation. In these loci for beautiful resistance, Palestinian cultural identity seems and should be celebrated to varying degrees. The beauty of lies then in the coalescence of Palestinian culture, where ways to actually resist the existing settler-colonial structures outside of the international community are yet to be explored. They can form places in which Palestinian cultural identity can be kept alive, to promote the “anti-normal” Palestinian. Where the PCS offers the children a place for joy and a break from everyday life²¹⁴, the *Al-Hakawati* Theatre aims at giving people hope and making them laugh. Amer tells me how these spaces are

²¹⁰ E. Renfro, “Stitched together, torn apart: The keffiyeh as cultural guide”, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 21, no. 6 (2018): 571-586, DOI:10.1177/1367877917713266.

²¹¹ Salem, “The Anti-Normalization Discourse”.

²¹² Abdelfattah Abusrour, conversation with the author. Bethlehem, March 4, 2023.

²¹³ Jawad, “Aren’t We Human?”, 38-39.

²¹⁴ Mohammed Rabah, conversation with the author. Bir Zeit, March 20, 2023.

used for breathing, laughing and thinking of something else.²¹⁵ Ahmed performs his street circus, high-fiving and connecting the Palestinian children from the old city of Jerusalem.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Amer Khalil, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 4, 2023.

²¹⁶ Ahmed Ju'beh, conversation with the author. Jerusalem, April 2, 2023.

Conclusions

This thesis aimed to explore the notion of beautiful resistance in a settler-colonial context. Altogether, this thesis questioned how practices of beautiful resistance could be understood as a strategy of decolonisation in the context of Palestine. Based on eight weeks of ethnographic fieldwork, the notion of beautiful resistance was problematised in the context of the West Bank, Palestine. Cultural organisations and Palestinian artists have illustrated how practices of beautiful resistance are embedded in both local and global political economies. Because of this, beautiful resistance has been drifting away from its essence: rather than resisting the Israeli Occupation and its broader settler-colonial project, it maintains the status quo of the ongoing situation. Processes of normalisation are drenched in the cultural, political, and economic facets of Palestinian life and thus refine Palestine's status quo. Normalising the oppression of the Palestinian people, manifested through cultural ideas such as “dealing with the experiences of the Occupation”, and “creating peace within an individual, to build peace with others”, has led Israel to play out its settler-colonial project as desired. This final chapter of the thesis will synthesise the answering of the different sub-questions on settler-colonialism, political economy, and normalisation in relation to beautiful resistance, and aims to answer the all-embracing question of how practices of beautiful resistance can be understood as a strategy to decolonise Palestine from its Occupier.

How are beautiful resistance and settler-colonialism related in the context of Palestine?

In the third chapter of this thesis, I have unpacked the emergence and continuation of Israel's settler-colonial project and how it relates to the existence of beautiful resistance in Palestine. Settler-colonialism aims to extenuate the subordinate's existence and identity. In settler-colonial projects, settlers (or institutionalised settlers) make claims on territories intending to expand them, while displacing the indigenous inhabitants of that territory. In the context of Israel and Palestine, the Zionist ideology underpins the settler-colonial claim on the disputed Holy Land. In 1948, the state of Israel was declared, by the Palestinians remembered as the *Naqba*, the Catastrophe. The settler-colonial project of Israel expanded with a pivotal point in 1967, the year in which the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza were occupied by the IDF. The Israeli expansion is characterised since then by the judicial enforcement of many security laws and the construction of settlements in the West Bank. Israel's settler-colonialism manifests itself in many ways, as empirically discussed in the third chapter. Security and defence mechanisms, monitoring, raids, and detention are among these facets discussed. However, with nearly a century of Israel's settler-colonial project ongoing, a century of

resistance has defined and shaped Palestinian identity, culture, and society.

In this light, beautiful resistance emerged in a broader context of cultural resistance as a systemic platform to articulate the Palestinian call for political liberation from the Occupation through artistic and cultural practices. Therefore, I have argued that beautiful resistance cannot exist outside its connection with settler-colonialism in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Beautiful resistance is concerned with non-violent artistic and creative practices that build peace within oneself, before building peace with others. Other cultural organisations, such as the Palestinian Children's Circus School accordingly state that these practices promote individual agency and critical thinking. The individual, inner core of acts of beautiful resistance expresses the internal friction with the opposing power, Israel. In this context of settler-colonialism about beautiful resistance, it appears that many of the artistic and cultural practices are constructed as an idea of reconciliation rather than decolonisation. Building peace within yourself through these practices seems to be a precondition for peacebuilding with the other, Israel.

The Occupation of Palestine is internationally most often perceived and treated as a two-sided conflict and reconciliation and peacebuilding tools are used for a suggested post-conflict era. Decolonisation rather targets dismantling the dominant settler-colonial power structure. What is at stake here, is that practices of beautiful resistance have been adjusted into frameworks of reconciliation and peacebuilding, rather than resisting and opposing settler-colonialism and its adherent institutions. Through these narratives, beautiful resistance becomes the opposite of violent resistance, which is largely supported in Palestine, and is being moralised by Israel and the international community. This fragments Palestinian resistance, and Palestinian society as a whole. This entanglement of beautiful resistance and settler-colonialism is reflected in a broader moral structure of violence and non-violence.

How can practices of beautiful resistance in Palestine be understood in its political economy?

Political economies are constituted through processes of local and global capitalism and can unpack the dynamics between institutions, power dynamics and social conflict. The practices of beautiful resistance, artistic and cultural forms of resistance, are embedded in a political economy that ultimately normalises the settler-colonial project of Israel as the "status quo". In the context of Palestine, it is important to understand the Oslo Accords, the peace agreements of the late 1990s, as a pivotal point in history, which has drastically impacted cultural and artistic organisations. Central to the so-called Oslo paradigm, are the developmental frameworks of peace and reconciliation. What is at stake here, is that these frameworks are built upon capitalist interests and assumptions. Concerning the Palestinian context, tension arises between the framed Israeli-

Palestinian 'conflict' on the one hand and the settler-colonial project on the other. In the fourth chapter, I empirically illustrated how Palestinian cultural organisations have been demanded to adapt their programs, activities, and practices to these Western frameworks.

As a result of the Oslo Accords, backed up by the US, and other international actors, the Palestinian Authorities were established as a "peaceful partner". De facto, the PA became a political actor through which Israel could prolong and strengthen its settler-colonial power. As the objective of the peace agreements was foremostly meant to build sustainable economic relationships. From a decolonial perspective, this rather aimed at hindering the Palestinian territories from economically developing. As Western development actors gained interest in the peace process between Israel and Palestine, cultural organisations and theatres, such as Alrowwad and Al-Hakawati experienced an increased number of requests for collaboration. Considering the Oslo paradigm, Palestinian art, and culture as a form of non-violent resistance, have been commodified into tools and practices of peacebuilding and reconciliation. This way, Israel and the international community are in control of when, how, and whom to in- or exclude from developmental aid and in a broader sense, the political economy. This causes the Palestinian economy to be dependent, fluctuating, and heavily monitored by Israel.

The interference and influence of these foreign actors on the Palestinian cultural and artistic scene, have led artistic and cultural practices to be rephrased in abstract terms of human development, human rights, and self-determination. This is what is referred to as the commodification of art and culture and these commodities become embedded with a (normative) exchange value in a political economy of settler-colonialism. In this chapter, I have discussed the example of the Palestinian Marathon as a case in which the event withdraws itself as much as possible from this political economy, building on its own. The sportive event has the objective to gather the Palestinian population, as well as drawing international attention to the settler-colonial limiting of Palestinian freedom of movement. The case offers a promising decolonial perspective on cultural and artistic events and practices in Palestine.

How can practices of beautiful resistance be understood as a process of normalising the status quo in Palestine?

The last analytical chapter of this thesis is concerned with how the settler-colonial context of Palestine enacts processes of normalisation to maintain the current status quo of the Israeli Occupation. Through the political economy, which has emerged in this settler-colonial context, I unpacked how practices of beautiful resistance are in reality maintaining and normalising the existing power structure, rather than resisting it. Amer Khalil posed the question of why the

Palestinians should accept elements of settler-colonialism (he refers to the bordering checkpoints) as normal when these should not exist at all. Normalisation is defined as the process in which reciprocal relationships are built with Israel in all fields. In light of this thesis, I sought to explore how this process of normalisation has shaped and impacted the artistic and cultural scene in Palestine. With the Oslo peace agreements, establishing “normal” relations between Israel and Palestine have been framed under the name of building peace and reconciliation. However, these relationships were targeting political and economic stability and prosperity for Israel. Following the settler-colonial line, these political and economic ties (practised through the newly established Palestinian Authority) were rather a way to hinder an autonomous Palestinian society from economically developing.

In a framework of human development and human rights, Palestinian cultural and artistic organisations have been wrought into “politics of performance”. Beautiful resistance aims to deal with experiences of the Occupation and the Palestinian struggle for survival within oneself, and in turn, this leads to building peace within the Self. This individualistic focus on well-being and development has been adopted by foremostly the international community (and by extension, Israel) in the broader political economy of cultural resistance. The individualistic focus of beautiful resistance normalises the settler-colonial structure as it is and has led to a distraction of the essence of resisting the dominant power structure. Cultural and artistic practices in Palestine have become a vocalization and expression of calls for recognition and existence. Enacted by the settler-colonial project and the reaction of the international community, theatre, music, and paintings have been subjected to a “global spectatorship”. I have illustrated this through the examples of the Palestinian Marathon and a theatre show in Jerusalem. The normalisation of the status quo in Palestine has led to the performativity of proving to be “deserving of human rights” and leads to the further diminishing of Palestinian’s right to self-determination.

Moving beyond the current cultural normalisation of Israel’s ongoing expansion of its settler-colonial project, I additionally questioned how beautiful resistance could be seen as an anti-normalisation practice. Salem has posed that “normal” relationships with Israel come into play after the real achievement of decolonisation and peace. A central topic among Palestinian artists and cultural curators is the Palestinian identity. Symbols of unity, collective suffering, and identity have largely constituted Palestinian identity. With this centrality, artistic and cultural practices have the power to transcend societal differences and de-fragment Palestinian society. This “anti-normal” unification through arts and culture has the ability to reflect the deeper roots of their position and pave the way, on a popular level, for solidarity, sympathy, and dialogue.

Deriving from this critical analysis of beautiful resistance in Palestine, its philosophy and practices are embedded in a problematic and complex political, economic, and cultural structure of settler-colonialism. This thesis aimed to contribute to decolonial research in the context of Palestine. I have illustrated how settler-colonialism, its political economy and normalizing practices complicate the relationship between art and politics. Yet, from a decolonial perspective, beautiful resistance has also offered nuanced insight into the power that art and culture in Palestine hold in challenging the settler-colonial structure it is embedded in. Ethnographic research on resistance has opened the possibility to shed light on the dominant power structures and helps to further unpack those. Decolonisation in Palestine is aimed at reversing societal fragmentation by vesting the power in the people to ultimately dismantle Israel's settler-colonial state structure.

Altogether, this thesis has explored the notion of beautiful resistance in Palestine. Thereby, I have problematised the conditions and dynamics in which these artistic and cultural practices in Palestine are embedded. This thesis does not, however, deny and problematise the existence of a philosophy, such as beautiful resistance, that helps the Palestinian people to cope with the everyday experiences of the Israeli Occupation. Rather, this thesis sheds light on the problematic and complex dynamics of the current settler-colonial structure. Following the rhetoric of decolonisation, these dynamics demand further dismantling, so that the essence of beautiful resistance can come to fruition in Palestine.

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Appendix: Plagiarism Awareness Statement

Utrecht University, Faculty of Humanities - Version September 2014

PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be

marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;

- copying sound, video or text materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name: Ellen Maria Johanna van Werkhoven

Student number: 2575280

Date and signature: July 31, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellen Maria Johanna van Werkhoven', written over a horizontal line.



Utrecht University