Witnessing Body and States of Terror

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institution. The dissertation contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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Abstract

The dissertation addresses one question, fundamental for political life: how do we practice the ethical work of witnessing violence in states of terror, that is in social worlds that circulate terror in everyday life? To become witnesses to violence is a practice, I argue, a kind of work which requires an embodied attention to terror precisely when terror targets the body not only as fragile object easily destroyed, but also as the matter through which terror circulates. Thus, if terror needs its usable bodies, how do we take the feeling, sensing body back? This is where the labor an embodied attention unfolds, what I call witnessing as a practice to bring us slightly beside the body terrorized and terrorizing.

I offer a genealogical approach to the research of political violence in Israel/Palestine. This instance of militarized violence is dominantly analyzed as an entrenched local conflict and a case of violent dispossession and oppression of one people by another. The dissertation destabilizes these approaches in one sense, by asking how this locale might illuminate two general questions of politics: first, what is a people and how it comes into being as a political body that organizes affective attachments (love for those like us, hatred for the “enemy”). The second question concerns the conceptual approaches that largely organize the literature on “Israel/Palestine” as a local conflict. Instead, I offer a methodological proposition for an embodied attention to violence as it constitutes itself as a political discourse (“state” or “society” or “citizen”) through bodily gestures, affective circuits that weave the feelings that attach us to a “place.”

The first question returns to the problem regarding the production of a “people” as a reified, total body invoked in the literature on the conflict. Conceptually, this is organized as a question about power in two complex technologies that produce the people: sovereignty and biopolitics. These two technologies are generally regarded as lethal and caring powers, respectively. I complicate this view in order to reflect on obvious paradoxes of living as a Jewish citizen in a militarized society and state. The main paradox I follow in empirical analysis concerns moments in which those nominated and self-nominated as citizens and thus as valuable lives confront the actual lethal conditions on which their protection is premised. How does the citizen relate to one’s “home” and “society” when it becomes glaringly clear that they are made possible through violent means that directly and intensely contribute to making social worlds poorer and precarious? Equally relevant for this question concerning the making of the “people” is to historicize the sovereign and biopolitical strategies that make intelligible the valuable life and return that history of the state to its colonial condition of becoming the main relevant political entity.

The second question aims to destabilize some of the choices that the “researcher” might make when studying a conflict as a local instance of violence happening somewhere “there,” at a distance from where we happen to be and read about it, considering it as composed observers, analytically - safely. The danger, I argue, is analytical and ethical. In the more familiar manners of referring to a locale of violence, we risk reproducing an attitude that takes the researcher “out of the picture,” as the main subject researching his or her object of interest. Twice removed from the locale is the
reader, who must accept the authoritative narrative of the writer. What becomes increasingly objectified is the “thing” to be known, the place, “Israel” and “Palestine.” Instead, I offer a narrative that describes how I orient myself through claims of suffering, of feeling terror, and through actual responses to terror. I pay attention both to narrative acts and to affective states that are conducive to choices for the names of the feelings that the actors invoke. This offers, or at least this is the wager, a possibility for the reader to also begin a process of orientation through the scenes narrated. That orientation is not only analytical, but also embodied. In this more expansive manner of understanding attention to a locale of violence, the stake of my approach is to broaden the possibilities for our questions about the forces that make us as subjects responsible, or not, for violence.

The main argument that brings these two questions together appears more clearly as I invoke in my research an approach to an embodied attention to atmospheres of terror, meaning social worlds that circulate terror through mundane gestures and emotions in an environment that self-terrorizes its subjects. An embodied attention asks of this writer and of readers to consider how we find names -and circulate names- for what we feel. This consideration is, I argue, the main technique to emancipate ourselves from oppressive states.
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Prologue

October 2015, Jerusalem: waiting for the next intifada

Over the last few weeks, we have learned that when the light train stops in between stations, it means that someone has been shot somewhere ahead. The passengers of the light train that crosses from West (Jewish) to East (Palestinian) Jerusalem and all the way to the new Jewish settlements beyond the Green Line, outside Israel’s legal territory, get off when asked by the recorded female voice, without commotion and without visible anxiety. The voice is calm, even. I get off too. On one occasion, we had to wait inside the train, right before entering the East Side, which meant that the body, wounded or killed, was in the Old Town, where soldiers implement an informal but systematic shoot to kill policy. Damascus Gate is a lethal place that amasses more bodies than any other. We know they must have sealed the area of the killing temporarily. We have seen the photos in the media; the close-up of the body immobilized.

Later, the dead get their public name, terrorists, and the news is announced in the media. “There is no way to make eye contact in this city,” I say to someone, and he nods as if to say I am merely stating something obvious. Everybody in this city has their eyes glued to their phones. I cannot know for sure, but I am guessing we all watch the bodies, the close-up photos in the news. First
comes the buzz, then the hand goes to the pocket, and out of the pocket comes the terror, framed, counted, immobilized to better fix in place what we see. The attackers, armed with small knives are very young, in one instance twelve and fourteen years old. In one image, the body of the “terrorist” is splayed on the ground; the bodies of standing soldiers encircle it in an orderly depiction of the act and its decisive conclusion. The bodies who watch the scene are terrorized - “this is obvious,” I am told. The newspaper photos convey a local shade of terror, not only because of what is happening, the killing, but because of what is awaited, the next intifada.

The wait is confirmed by a Jerusalemite, my informer, who offers an explanation about the circulating terror: “They have won the war,” Yehuda says. “They have won the war because now everyone stays at home and people have closed their businesses. My mother no longer visits me in town because she is too scared to take the bus.” The Palestinians’ will to terrorize the Jewish city is strangely confirmed by the actual bodies. Immobilized and framed, the bodies lie on the pavement surrounded by four soldiers standing over them. Hands firmly on their rifles, which are pointing at the ground, they have the place “secured.” The soldiers organize the scene, narrowing our focus inside the boundaries of the neat square shaping the location of their dead target. They look down on the body, and I look down on the whole scene on my screen. I cannot see anyone’s face, but the objective of the photo is obvious. What I, the viewer, must remark upon is the arrangement of bodies, the order of the living and the dead. Between the tall standing soldiers, the man’s body on the ground looks trapped. He is probably dead, and there is no sign of an ambulance. It is a war scene. I recognize the place, on the “Palestinian side,” a section of the stone wall that gives it that antique look of a fortress serves as a background. I consider the picture too long. It looks unnatural. The man’s body is contorted, having fallen in an odd position, on his belly, an arm twisted, his right hand still clutching a knife. I cannot tear my eyes away. The picture is
instructional, and I am reading its instructions. The body and its posture signifying: the hand still holds on to the knife, even when dead. The terror is transparent, pedagogical, and now tied to the ground.

“Jerusalem is even more mad than usual, bear with us,” one of my informants tells me, and I acknowledge the gesture of a polite host rather than the piece of information. He is explaining why I should not expect good manners in this brusque city; even less so now. “Jerusalemites are far less refined than people in Tel Aviv anyway, and these days they have an excuse at least.” The latest attacks made people recall the past Intifada, the bombs in buses, the familiar terror. We compare the cities and their atmospheres. “At least fewer soldiers are patrolling the streets in Tel Aviv, or they are less visible,” I respond, admitting my discomfort with the soldiers positioned in the light train on the morning commute. “They are more relaxed there. They live like Europeans in Tel Aviv,” he says and smiles, gesturing in my direction, a European.

**Learning to feel terror**

In late 2015, Jerusalem and other Israeli cities were waiting for a new Intifada. Jewish mainstream media named several attacks by young Palestinian men and women against IDF soldiers in Israel and in the West Bank as cases possibly amounting to a new period of unrest. Named after its signature weapon, small knives used by attackers, this was a “knives Intifada.” The attacks gathered sufficient weight to become recognizable for pundits, journalists, politicians as an instance of Palestinian violence after the First Intifada (1988-1993), with its signature mark of stones thrown at armed soldiers and less remembered massive public protests in the streets, and the Second Intifada (2000-2006), remembered mostly for its suicide attackers concealing explosive devices and detonating them in public places, such as cafes, markets, and buses, which harmed
civilians. A decade later, in 2015, the Palestinian attackers were armed with knives, and in a few instances managed to wound or kill others, soldiers most frequently, but also some civilians. Some of the attackers were killed on the spot by either soldiers or other armed forces. Politicians were openly calling on civilians to pick up guns when they went out and not to hesitate to kill if they happened to have to react to such “terrorist attacks.” De facto, the shoot-to-kill policy was in place, stated and enacted by public permission given to anyone to kill.

After the first few such scenes of violence reported in the media, Ophir, a new acquaintance, advised me to install a phone app of a popular media outlet, Ynet, to stay safe; for instance, to know when to avoid using public transportation. Ynet had an intense deep red background on the phone screen, announcing the breaking news frequently, with a sound that soon started signifying the next body shot. East Jerusalem, the home of a large Palestinian community, and under military occupation since its annexation following the Six Day war (1967), was the site of most attacks, the place of most killings and the area which most Jewish Jerusalemites living on the other side avoided for fear of being attacked. This is what Ophir explains to me. She has not travelled on the other side for years. Most Jerusalemites have not. I understand that this is a rule for “normal” people who mind their own business, without complications. I do not ask her how she knows they would recognize her “Jewishness” there. Ophir is my temporary host and genuinely takes care of me with sharp, decisive gestures. I should learn what to do, and when not to do anything, that is to stay at home. She takes my phone without hesitation and offers to search for the right app. A few weeks later, I uninstall it.

The “almost” Intifada, or the “knives Intifada, “dominated the autumn of 2015 with the peculiar weight of an atmosphere of expectation, a collective wait. Many of the attackers were legal residents of Israel, a fact that increased the urgency of the situation, as the border checks could not
“filter” the danger, usually expected from the other side of the wall, from the “territories” separated from Israel through an infrastructure of passes and border points controlled by the army. As a named fear of a repetition of what was familiar, what was pending - the terror of bombs in public places stabilized in the collective memory as the signature of the previous decade. “Intifada” had a performative force. It made the present recognizable, familiar to orient yourself through it. It made obvious the distinction between the bodies that knew what to do, and what is logical to look for and feel, and those that did not. I did not. Various Jewish acquaintances offered hints for orientation, advice, with the solicitude of a host. Some offered friendly acts of commiseration for my unfortunate arrival “in these times,” for not enjoying the city as I would have in better times. “Of course, you look like a tourist,” Ophir says, knowing that I do go to East Jerusalem frequently, meaning that I am safe, no one would attack my body, while hers is not safe there. She knows the terror, I do not. While her body knows it as she moves through town, I walk without carrying the terror, my body oblivious to its weight, which others have learned to carry by now. Ophir shares sternly and matter-of-factly, her knowledge of where to be and what to feel. Although she is in her early twenties, what she knows is inherited and activated when needed to discern what I, the “European,” and looking out of place, “like a tourist,” cannot.

**Intifada or terror. The principle of separation**

As Edward Said (1992) wrote in 1978, at some point “Palestinian” become another word for terrorism in the parlance of most Western public spheres. As a Palestinian living in exile, teaching and writing in the US academia, this was something that made him feel lonely, he wrote, in an austere but poignant manner to express the fate imposed on a people excluded from public appearance, conversation, and political negotiations regarding their fate. This was the period of peace negotiations at Camp David (1978) between Israel, the US, and Egypt and for the sake of a
durable peace between Jews and Palestinians. Indeed, the Palestinians had not been included in the “talks” and the diplomatic game deciding their fate. Still, the plan was promising for a population caught in a regime of military administration after the June 1967 war, when Israel had occupied the whole remaining territory of Palestine. Camp David had been a beacon of hope to returning Palestinians to civilian life and rule by political principles. The talks concluded with a promise to confer “full autonomy” on the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in the next five years. It was not followed by any tenable measure.

Ten years later, the first Intifada (1988-1993) started, and the “uprising” in Arabic, brought this undecided condition to public attention. This was a period of intense and passionate civic expression in the Palestinian public spheres, a multitude in fact, and divergent in their plans regarding autonomy and emancipation. (Abdulhadi 1998; Shehadeh 2020) It was also a time of dialogue between Palestinians and Jewish Israeli intellectuals and civic actors. The rich creativity of grass-roots activism, importantly structured by a feminist ethos and activism practicing autonomy (Abdulhadi 1998), the values and ethos of a public life, were obscured by the role that “intifada” gained later; terror that is. Its official end was marked by the much-acclaimed Oslo Peace Process, during the mandate of the Israeli prime-minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Jewish figure representing peace and hope among Israelis, or at least for the large majority then still behind his Labor Party. For the Palestinians, his figure carried other meanings, more ominous. Rabin’s long military career and role in the previous wars was glaring to the occupied, for instance his order to the IDF soldiers in 1988 during the Intifada, to “break the bones” of protesters with the infamous clubs produced on a mass-scale at the beginning of the uprising for the occasion. Furthermore, not a small reason for suspicion was Rabin’s proposal in 1993 to erect a wall between Israel and the
West Bank to separate “Gaza” from “Tel Aviv,” in other words to control movement of Palestinians.

However unsettling the terms of the new plan were for some critics, Said included, “Oslo” was then a word that preeminently carried a sense of hope for many, for a while. The signature of the Accords in 1993 and 1995 was followed by Rabin’s murder (November 1995) by a right-wing student who found himself in disagreement with Rabin’s plan regarding the future of the state neighboring a Palestinian autonomous entity. The decade that followed was marked by the ascendancy to power and the consolidation of the Likud party, which was considered more conservative, further to the right, illiberal (and distasteful) for the left and middle-class intelligentsia, as well as being more transparently hawkish regarding the reality of military rule of the stateless Palestinians under Israel’s de facto military control. This was a period of intensification of the process of expansion of Jewish occupation of the land in the West Bank and Gaza, which meant an intensification of dispossession of Palestinians from their lands by legal and infrastructural techniques (segregated roads; the destruction of agricultural lands; the “fragmentation” of access between villages and orchards etc.) that literally made their territory patchy and impeded movement.

In the Israeli society inside the so-called Green Line, the territory obtained in 1948, the illegal settlements were then seen by many with worry and outspoken criticism regarding their long-term logic, detrimental to the “peace process” and corrupting the democratic character and ethical principles of the Jewish population in the democratic state. Rabin was a staunch critic of that expansive logic, being worried about what this might mean once Jews and Palestinians were left living together in the same territory. Though rhetorically veiled, the worry was in fact a politically transparent reason for concern. The military rule imposed on the population in the West Bank and
Gaza was difficult to sustain as a democratic Western state. It remains an untenable compromise between the colonial fact of the state’s regime of citizenship and the rhetoric (the only democracy in the region) in sharp contrast to a transparent rule by exception “in the territories.”

Against “mingling” of Jews and Palestinians

Ophir’s warning not to travel to the Eastern side in troubled times is a concrete indication of the contentiousness of the “place” called Jerusalem/Yerushalayim/al-Quds. The Palestinians living there had been ruled by Jordan until 1967. Subsequently, they became residents, but not citizens, under Israeli jurisdiction. Their permanent residency is an insubstantial guarantee of their right to stay, as the Israeli authorities use a plethora of techniques to remove them from their homes in Jerusalem and push them into the West Bank. Officially Israeli territory, Jerusalem is a disputed land, not in the least reflected by the precarious legal condition imposed on the “residents.” The limits of the city are shifting, in an ongoing process of setting boundaries through manipulations of the actual positioning of the “Green Line.” The light rail that crosses from West to East is both an instrument and a sign of the contentious process of ongoing “place making” in Shlay and Rosen’s (2010) conceptual terms. The train crosses the city from the Jewish West Jerusalem and connects it with East Jerusalem, before continuing further, to a more recent area of Jewish settlement in a contentious region in the West Bank, beyond the Green Line. To that extent, the semblance of a separation between inside the Green Line and outside it is tenuous.

Referred to as the “Old Town” sometimes, East Jerusalem is a prominent place of religious worship for the Muslim, Jewish and Christian faiths are located. A walk through the Old Town can be a highly enjoyable tour among objects considered old and “oriental,” along with an atmosphere infused with the buoyant energy of the narrow alleys where people buy, sell, eat, and drink. The
contentious narratives regarding the genealogy of the “place” and of its rightful owner/worshiper are however brewing right under this commercial layer, and more intensely so once you learn to discern the multitude of uniformed Israeli soldiers and the even more numerous security personnel in civilian clothes. The latter are not even trying to disguise themselves as they stroll in pairs and wear their automated weapons visibly, half-stuffed in their belts or back pockets of jeans, mingling among tourists, shop owners, locals going about their day. Their civilian-armed presence marks yet another layer of the military presence that is made visible, and enacted as disciplinary, proximate surveillance.

The second Intifada started here. The Palestinians refer to it as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, after the name of a Muslim place of worship desecrated by Ariel Sharon in 2000. Then the leader of the Israeli rightwing opposition, Sharon had decided to visit one holy Jewish sanctuary in a location sacred for both Jewish and Palestinians, who refer to it as the Temple Mount and the Noble Sanctuary respectively, where the Al-Aqsa Mosque is also located. His visit, preceded by episodes of land dispossession in the West Bank, was considered a violation prefacing further state and settler encroachments on Palestinian places. Jewish moderates also judged this move unwise. It was in any case a consequential choice: years of popular revolt followed, bombs were detonated by suicide, and there were lethal military reprisals. Civilians on both sides were affected yet soon after, Sharon still became prime minister.

The second Intifada is considered to be the official stepping stone for the transformation of the entire security regime in Israel into a more systematic lethal apparatus (Gordon 2008; Azoulay and Ophir 2013; Ophir 2007). This is embodied most tangibly in the construction of the Israeli West Bank “barrier”, or “wall of separation” in Israeli mainstream parlance but an “apartheid” wall for others, who discern broader connections with other colonial contexts of rule through the
production of confinement and separation. (Stoler 2016; Mbembe 2019; Brown 2010; Gregory 2004) Many agree that after the second Intifada a decidedly necropolitical regime (Mbembe 2019) came into being; a rule of a population not in order to govern their lives, but as a torturous regime of suppression. (Ghanim 2008) However, the idea of a wall necessary to separate the Israeli society from the Palestinian one has a long history. It had been imagined by Theodor Herzl back in the European age of Zionism and during the high period of a discourse on European civilization carried by its “superior races' ' outside Europe for the sake of civilizing the inferior races. To that extent, Herzl imagined a future wall as a European civilizational rampart, “an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism.” (Gregory 2004, 79) More practical, in the 1950s, Moshe Dayan, Defense Minister and a war hero after the 1948 “war of independence,” suggested it once more, this time as a means of consolidating security against the Palestinians turned into refugees in 1948 who were waiting in neighboring countries, in squalid refugee camps for permission to return to their homes. To return to their homes in this decade meant to become an “infiltrator” according to the new laws, and to risk being shot or, at best, imprisoned. The plan for a wall of separation returned in the 1990s, and with a new purpose once more. In Rabin’s imagination it was a solution to stop the suicide attackers coming from the West Bank and Gaza. The wall would bring an infrastructure to screen the safe population, those who would be afforded travel passes. Reacting in a public speech after a Palestinian terrorist attack in Tel Aviv which had left dozens of people dead, he announced the necessity of separation and the cessation of “intermingling” between “Jews and Arabs.” He also urged Jewish citizens to stop employing the cheap labor of Palestinians without work permits who were, therefore, deprived of social protection. Against that slacking of civil loyalty too, which made the “mingling” of undocumented bodies banal, the wall was a salutary solution for a more efficient state control of entry and exit not only of terrorists, but also of workers.
Although he is still considered the main figure of hope in a lasting peace, it is useful to remember that Rabin, in the same speech, also demanded full rights for the military to torture the “terrorists” and asked the judiciary to remove the last obstacles against that necessary work of the army and intelligence forces. Rabin explicitly asked to no longer operate with “kids’ gloves” and instead receive liberty to use “any means necessary” to stop the terror, including the right to apply collective punishment to the villages, and families of the ones declared terrorists. In that speech, he asked for a permanent state of exception for the army’s operations in the occupied territories:

There are those who believe it is possible to fight HAMAS with kid gloves, taking into account the demands of Israeli law against using physical force. But it is inconceivable that a HAMAS terrorist who participated in a murder would be able to bring a case to the High Court of Justice complaining that he was not given enough hours of proper sleep and win the case, because that is the law. I have nothing against the High Court of Justice. I just want to be able to order the administrative detention of HAMAS leaders in the territories under our control without complicated legal nonsense, and I do not want to have to provide any explanation that intelligence is not always able to provide for legal authorization. I believe we need to find methods so that HAMAS’ suicidal murderers will know that not only are they liable to be killed during their activities, but that their homes, the homes of their families, could be damaged. (Rabin 1994)

Two decades later, Israel is one of the two democracies that has legalized torture. Rabin’s “policy” of terrorizing the families of those suspected of terrorism is in full swing and has an operational name in IDF tactics: “making felt the presence” of the military in the everyday life of the West Bank population.

The wall was not built during Rabin’s lifetime but did come up slowly throughout the next decade, first by erecting small sections around Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Soon, the idea was embraced as state policy by a Likud government with Ariel Sharon at its head. Since the erection of wall, the access of Jewish Israelis in the West Bank has been significantly reduced to either those who serve their conscripted or reserve military service, thus wearing a uniform and the signs of the occupation for the local Palestinians, or as settlers violently expanding the zones of exclusive
Jewish habitation illegally according to international law, and oftentimes also in violation of formal Israeli law. For the younger generations of Israelis with no memory of the past of “intermingling” prior to the wall, the West Bank has become an imaginary geography (Said 1979; Ghanim 2008, 71) of constant danger, of sheer terror, of generalized hatred against Jewish Israelis. As Gordon (2008, xvi) narrates his dismayed realization in front of a class of university students, his story of riding through the West Bank employing Palestinian taxi drivers was met in the 2000s with shock and disbelief at such a possibility of “mingling,” reflecting a solid cultural sense of a separation dehistoricized in the public memory: the territories as a place opaque, savagery with no words.

I take the wall and the rail as fleeting images to convey a concomitant will to create distance and connection to the territory that stands contiguous to Israel’s sovereign space. In this territory, a disenfranchised, stateless Palestinian population is confined in a regime of rule by exception, present in the imagination of Israeli Jewish citizens as a space beyond the pale, and to that extent out of mind, out of sight. The trope of savagery is pregnant, and auspicious for various interpretations. The “territories” make everyone mad, in fact. This is one strong meaning circulating among those critical of the military among the Left. In 2019, a news host in tears appeared in front of the camera reporting a story about IDF soldiers having abused Palestinians in one of the routine patrols in the West Bank. As she tries to hold her tears, without success, she calls them “animals.” “They go there for service for two or three years and they return animals,” she continues. She addresses the Jewish citizens, who surely had not expected this emotional outburst from their evening news host. In fact, it is obvious that she herself had not expected this outburst from herself. While reporting a piece of “news,” the anchor is taken aback by the story of the news. As she translates the soldiers’ acts of arbitrary violence - of torture in that case - from
the perspective of the citizen, the explanation suddenly renders the “territories” into a phantasmatic place: they have become animals because the nature of the military service does this to anyone who would be there.

This public outburst is symptomatic. It is a sign of the condition of citizenship created by the very “principle of separation.” (Azoulay and Ophir 2013) Among the leftist Israelis, the “territories” is a region sealed in the public imagination, a space opaque, unknown, inhabited by angry Palestinians and unpleasant settlers who take their Zionism too far (for the middle class, liberal strata) and soldiers who do their legal and/or civic duty (for the civilian) and who often commit admittedly unpalatable gestures of arbitrary violence, acts of savagery that would never be imaginable “in Israel,” and which most of them regard in shock years after.

**Sovereign/Colonial presence makes absence**

This brief historical background has a tactical purpose for my thesis. It structures a field of tensions looking back, before the wall, and forward, after the erection of the wall. There are two points I want to clarify about this. Firstly, *intifada* became another name for “terror” at some point in the 2000s, and this terror has been localized as coming from the “territories” back to the Israeli democracy and the normal life of the “city.” However, the period between the First and the Second Intifada reveals a systematic tactic, which I do not attribute to any one protagonist, but to the very logic that infuses the “principle of separation” (Azoulay and Ophir 2013) which has existed since 1948 and consists of destroying the public appearance of Palestinian voices as political actors, and *visible* political bodies that make demands through their very appearance.

Thus, my second point is about the present terms of Jewish citizenship as necessarily a militarized condition of inhabiting the enclosure of the “democratic” state that is increasingly untenable as
democratic in public speech. A closer look at the intensely garrulous public life during the First Intifada (Shehadeh 2020; Abdulhadi 1998; Lavie 2014) together with the serious Jewish critical views that condemned military repression of people protesting in the streets of cities during that period, reveals a danger of rendering publicly questionable the very fact of the military rule that organizes the lives of the people occupied in the “territories.” The intense publicity of their protests, as bodies that appeared in public spaces, and occupying those public spaces by their outspoken presence (Butler 2011; Butler and Athanasiou 2013), the NGOs, activist groups, and unaffiliated citizens were asking in ways difficult to ignore who governs them, and in the name of what principle of authority. (Azoulay 2008; Azoulay and Bethlehem 2012) The same question also applies to the Israeli Jewish citizens, who were becoming the actual, minute, embodied instruments for subduing civil protests in the West Bank and Gaza. They were agents of policing protesters (Ben-Ari 1989), armed with clubs when bones had to be broken, when movement in the streets had to be slowed down. Protesters were disabled literally and physically, and the will to protest was muffled by the fear of being wounded. In brief, the point was to terrorize people back into their homes. (Shehadeh 2020) This is the dilemma of Israel’s untenable compromise of two conditions, as a democracy and as a colonial occupying power.

However, a case must be made for the much more extended timeframe for the systematicity of the project of creating absence – absent bodies, absent collective bodies, in this project of producing sovereign presence in the land of Palestine for much longer than the Intifadas. This thesis does not dwell on that history, and even less on the important history of relations in this land since the 1880s and the first wave of Jewish migration in Ottoman Palestine and, after the first world war, the installation of the British Mandate. However, the facts of this continuity are relevant and essential in order to consider the history of the imaginary geography of terror, and thus I keep them in sight.
For instance, I will return to the continuity between the British and Israeli regimes of military administration of Palestinian subjects first inside Israel until 1967 and then in the occupied territories after 1967. (Robinson 2013; Ben-Eliezer 1998)

Considering the techniques of land dispossession and the efforts to remove the Palestinian people in waves of ethnic cleansing (Pappé 2006), this locale reflects a case of a settler colonial power (Robinson 2013; Wolfe 2006; Shenha 2013) engaged in a continuous, although not always explicitly stated plan to populate a contested territory with a desired (Jewish) population, despite the stubborn persistence of an undesirable Palestinian population. It is a presence that must be enforced, in other words, and which has been performed various forms of dispossession, ethnic cleansing and militarized control since 1948. However, in 1967 Israel intensified its own dilemma of a colonial democracy once it occupied the West Bank and Gaza in a period of global decolonization (Robinson 2013). The population was forced into a military regime while the rest of the world was struggling in the painful wars for independence and political autonomy of peoples ruled by European colonial states. The tension could only intensify in the next decades and their string of failed promises of autonomy.

The refusal to respond to the most basic question raised during the Intifada by the protesting population, namely who governs them (Azoulay 2008), has brought the concrete wall to reveal not the will to separate (Weizman 2006), but to terrorize, curb the collective mobilization of large masses of bodies appearing in public and relations between citizens and non-citizens. The citizen operates this regime and its manifold torturous logic of implementation. And as the military service has become an increasingly evident function of policing civilians, the very meaning of “war,” and thus of the soldier as a combat figure, a hero, and a figure of sacrifice for the preservation of the nation and of the state risk loses its relevance in producing the body of the Jewish nation: a body
of sacrifice for a necessary cause of self-preservation. (Weiss 2003; Bilu and Witztum 2000; Ben-Eliezer 1998)

“Terror,” once it fully occupied the meaning of Intifada in the 2000s, restored the more familiar meaning of the soldier as a figure that combats something, a kind of distinct enmity was restored to military service. That figure of enmity was no longer being uncomfortably (for the state) attached to the embodied figure of a citizen asking, in his or her very bodily appearance in the streets, fundamental questions regarding the principles of government pertaining to their lives. The result is that the body of the Palestinian subject is solidly divorced from its appearance as political life that makes demands, as the embodiment of a citizen and as a body governed, even as this government is calculated at the threshold of “disaster” most obvious in Gaza. (Azoulay, Danieli, and Skomra 2005) Instead, the “enemy” more concretely embodies the figure of the terrorist. In this light, what appears with more prominence is the hypothesis that the most important subject in the logic of the occupation is not the unruly, stubborn population of the undesirables, but the very meaning, unstable as it is, of citizenship, and the uneven status of the citizen in his or her role of soldier, who therefore acts as an agent employed in the increasingly transparent mission of a settler project, a terrorizing project of occupation of land and civilian lives. The publicity of that discontent with being a “perpetrator” (Azoulay, Danieli, and Skomra 2005) in virtue of the militarized condition of citizenship, a “cognitive militarism,” (Kimmerling 1993) is what seems to be the dangerous realization to be deferred.