A Cross-Cultural Comparison, Mexican-American and Palestinian Identity: Women's Stories in Occupied Lands

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Introduction

Initially developed during a 1999 AHA/CCHA Library of Congress Summer Seminar entitled, "Globalizing Area Studies," this essay called "globalization" into question and sought to employ subaltern studies in the process. Beverley, in *Subalternity and Representation*, asserts that subaltern studies emerged from "an academic practice in a contemporary setting in which globalization is producing new patterns of domination and exploitation and reinforcing older ones" (28). Reading Guha, Beverley notes that the "project is to recover or re-present the subaltern as a subject of history... from the welter of documentary and historiographic discourses that deny the subaltern that power of agency..."; in short, "subaltern studies is not only a new form of academic knowledge production...; it must also be a way of intervening politically in that production on the side of the subaltern" (Beverley 27-28). That is at the root of this endeavor: by creating a cross-cultural mosaic, one composed on women's experiences – as they confront oppressive, expansionist forces, and as they fight for their rights to life and land – their related yet untold stories will be reclaimed and counted. In this process, it will be crucial to avoid false or forced analogies. While bearing in mind both the distinctions and the linkages, there are several unifying themes which may be explored in a comparative study of Mexican-American and Palestinian women's experiences. These women's stories, their common struggles for survival under occupation, regularly reveal nationalist, anticapitalist, and counter-hegemonic acts of resistance.

In *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*, Marcus argues that:

> *identity processes in modernity concern a >homeless mind' that cannot be... resolved as... coherent or... stable... in theory or social life itself. However, its changing permutations, expressions, and multiple determinations... can be systematically studied and documented as the ethnography of identity formation* (60).

When national boundaries are redefined, an individual's identity and her sense of place in the world is challenged. National identity and nationalism may require more than one period of negotiation and more than one mode of understanding. To write a cross-cultural comparison about national identity within lands

beleaguered by contested boundaries, it is helpful to operate under a broad definition of the word *nation*: Beverley describes subaltern studies as a means by which "the figure of the nation" may be "reimagine[d]"; while creating the "possibility of a 'nationalism against the state;'" by extension theories of subalternity may also encourage the formation of a "*new kind of state*" (Beverley 23, author's emphasis).

To complicate matters, many claim that a description of the U.S. Southwest as "occupied territory" is representative of a marginal or radical position taken by only a handful of scholars. In this essay I support González's contention in *Harvest of Empire*:

> *along with conquered lands came unwanted peoples: Native Americans... several million Mexicans, Cubans, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans... were placed under US sovereignty. Even when Congress officially declared some of the conquered peoples US citizens, the newly arrived Anglo settlers routinely seized their properties, and those seizures were then upheld by the English-speaking courts the settlers installed. The Mexican-Americans of the Southwest became a foreign minority in the land of their birth* (30).

Similar words spoken by a twenty-eight year old Palestinian woman may have been uttered just as readily by a Mexican-American living in the Old Southwest:

> *They don't want to know that there is another nation here... But it is our fault too, for not... trying to let [them] know who we are... we have a feeling that the authorities know everything about us... They're the bosses, the security agents, the state...* (Grossman 3).

Identity is produced by the stories people tell about their lives; life stories, as best as they may be told, construct individual and national identities. In a 1995 interview, Arias commented upon the ways in which human rights abuses, in Guatemala, weighed upon the national and individual psyches. Arias' observations are germane in the case of Mexican-American and Palestinian identity as well:

> *the culture of death creates a culture of silence in which one cannot speak for fear of being caught... to the degree that you do not speak, to the degree that you do not name yourself, you can never heal. That is a basic psychoanalytic principle – that the process of healing begins with being able to name yourself... At the same time, it is through learning to use words, through learning to master words not only that you come to terms with*

> *yourself but that you come to terms with naming what is wrong with... society... To be able to name the names of the oppressors, the oppressing system – that requires words, that requires courage... words become both an instrument of liberation but also a peril and a risk because their usage can spell death* (Arias, Personal Interview).

Women's stories in occupied lands, are important also because "relatively little is known about how women make cross-cultural transitions... [or how they] analyze and interpret" the process of border transgression (Bystydzienski and Resnin 3). The following questions, therefore, will be central to the ensuing analysis: In what ways are the words *land, home, memory,* and *identity* intertwined? What do they signify beyond themselves? And how do displaced populations, specifically women, adjust to land expropriation and border reconfiguration?

Both Mexico and Palestine passed through a stage of European hegemony: Spain dominated Mexico until the 1910 Revolution and the "British colonization of Palestine, which began in 1920 was accompanied by an influx of European-Jewish settlers" (Abdo-Zubi 15). In both regions as well, there is a history of land grabs and externally imposed cartography. In the first chapter of *Occupied America*, Acuña argues that:

> *the tragedy of the Mexican cession is that most Anglo-Americans have not accepted the fact that the US committed an act of violence against the Mexican people when it took over Mexico's northwest territory. Violence was not limited to the taking of land: Mexico's territory was invaded, her people murdered, her land raped, and her possessions plundered. Memory of this destruction generated a distrust and a dislike that is still vivid in the minds of many Mexicans, for the violence of the U.S. left deep scars...* (1).

Similarly, from the perspective of Palestinians, the land upon which they lived and farmed – the land which they perceived to be theirs – dwindled or disappeared. This trend began long before the establishment of the Israeli state. In *Family, Women, and Social Change in the Middle East: The Palestinian Case*, Abdo-Zubi describes the British land law in Palestine which, at length, displaced the peasant farming class:

> *As a result of [the 1920 Land Transfer... Ordinance]... thousands of [Palestinian] peasants found themselves landless and were*

> *forced to leave their villages [to look] for work and shelter in the cities* (15-16).

Home/Land

"Land" and "home" are loaded words. A person's place in the world may be contextualized through a principle of inheritance: land is passed, in most cases, from father to son; it may be shared without written documentation by generations of subsistence farmers, or it may be lost below the plow or behind the obstructions of barbed wire and legal restrictions. Likewise, the word home bears multiple significations: it may be a dwelling occupied by blood relatives, an abstraction, a memory, or an evasive and perpetual longing.

> *Roots are in a certain place. Home is [and is (in)] a place... How do places get produced? The first point to note is that places are not static, they are always changing [but]... Places should always... be seen in an historical and economic context* (Sarup 4).

For the United States, the historical and economic factors elemental to the creation of the nation are expansionism and capitalism. The bedrock of Manifest Destiny is that land, across the continent, was limitless and that all (white, rich/middle class) men were entitled to ownership of that land. U.S.

> *attitudes toward the conquest of the home continent were intimately connected with American desires for international expansionism... without... exploitation of our own continent we would not be in a position to assert our... economic superiority... in underdeveloped markets* (Vervier 296).

In one instance, the impetus to expand the States' properties led to the Mexican-American War and ended, in 1848, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Although the northern half of Texas had already been annexed to the US as a slave state in 1845:

> *The provisions of the Treaty called for Mexico to cede 55% of its territory (present-day Arizona, California, New Mexico, [the rest of] Texas, and parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah) in exchange for fifteen million dollars in compensation for war-related damages to Mexican property* ("The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo").

And despite the fact that Articles VIII, IX, and X of the Treaty make direct reference to and, in some cases, set out specifically to protect the rights of former Mexican

citizens there is general consensus that those Articles were either summarily dismissed or unapologetically ignored. Briefly, Articles VIII and IX guarantee Athe rights and duties of American citizenship; [Mexicans] would have some special privileges derived from their previous customs in language, law and religion" (Acuña 19). However, when Article X was deleted – it protected "all prior and pending titles to property of every description" – the Mexican government protested loudly. The effects of that deletion would reverberate in the lives of Mexican-Americans for generations: their land and their homes were put in jeopardy.

After the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed, seventy-five thousand Mexican nationals decided to remain in the U.S. rather than pursue repatriation. "A scant six years after Texas independence, thirteen Anglos had gobbled up 1.3 million acres in 'legal' sales from 358 Mexican landowners" (González 100). Due to the high rate of illiteracy, most of the landowners "didn't understand their rights and those of their grandparents. Anybody could tell them 'your grandfather lost his land, sold it' and they couldn't prove otherwise" (González 100). It is also crucial to recognize the class division in mid-nineteenth century Mexican society. As was typical of nineteenth century Latin America, Mexican nationals living in the U.S. could be divided into two distinct classes: the rich (*los ricos*) and the poor (*los pobres*). More often than not, *los ricos* suffered from the illusion that through cordiality and cooperation with the Yankees and through calculated campaigns to assimilate, they could maintain a position of socioeconomic power equivalent to that before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Despite those efforts:

> *Anglos were not about to elevate Mexicans to the level of European whiteness; their own sense of superiority turned [Mexican-Americans] into a people lesser than themselves... racism['s]... roots were planted in the... psychohistorical experience of the white... pioneers and settlers* (De Leon 8, 12).

The Mexican populace, who lived in California and had, for some time, managed to function with relative autonomy, at a vast geographical distance from the Mexico City capital, began to call themselves "Californios"; their identity was independent – neither Mexican nor American – and whatever land they had Athey had held long enough to cherish... should anyone threaten to seize it" (Pitt 13). The "gold rush" came only a year after Mexican lands were officially transferred (from the perspective of the US government) to Anglo owners. Once the mines lost their profit-appeal, thousands of Anglo settlers and squatters "shifted their attention to the state's most enduring wealth, its soil... Within two decades of the Sutter's Mill discovery, most Mexicans [in California] had been driven off their land" (González 46).

The Californios' predicament was a prevailing one for most of the Mexican folk who remained in the US Southwest and were "denied citizenship, the vote, and appropriate legal recourse for injury." They became the brunt for racial discrimination" (Kanellos xviii). In *The Decline of the Californios*, Pitt explains that, tragically:

> *of the forty-five Californios representing the twenty-five families... of the old regime, the vast majority went to their graves embittered... they had retained little else beside their religion and a thin residue of honorary political influence* (278).

This condition became pervasive throughout the newly "acquired" US Southwest.

In New Mexico, the story of Nina Otero-Warren stands out. The Oteros, along with the Bacas, the Chaveses, and the Lunas were among the first to "persuade fifty [Mexican] families to settle in the New Mexico colony" and the Otero name, in New Mexico, commanded the same sort of dignity that is associated with names such as the "Lowell[s], Cabot[s], and Lodge[s]... in New England" (Whaley 10-11). Nina Otero-Warren's parents, Eloisa Luna and Manuel Otero, were representative of the established class in late-nineteenth century New Mexican society. "Before the United States occupied New Mexico..." Nina's paternal grandfather, Manuel Antonio Otero, "purchased land from the Mexican government paying 500,000 pesos for half of the Bartolomé Baca grant that encompassed the Estancia Plains... in almost the exact center of New Mexico. His brother, Miguel bought the other half bringing their total holding to 1,232,000 acres" (Whaley 14-15). Unfortunately, after the deaths of her paternal grandfathers, Nina Otero-Warren's own father, Manuel, was shot and killed during a property dispute "in the doorway of his family's... ranch house" on August 18, 1883 (Whaley 18).

How did Eloisa, the young widow, and her twenty-month old daughter, Nina, interpret *home* from that bloody moment onward? In *House/Garden/Nation*, Ileana Rodríguez theorizes that *home* may sometimes signify *nation*; that is, conceptually, *home* may function on a metaphorical level:

> *... a small house inside a big house... inside the world – [individuals may] translate these micronarratives into macronarratives and... extrapolate or read nation into house, and history into family... the hacienda is the only country the woman without a country, the 'gypsy of nowhere' has..."* (Rodríguez 102, 189).

For the Otero women, the sacred space of home, the *hacienda* doorway, became a headstone, a painful reminder. The man accused of murdering Manuel Otero, a

James Whitney of Massachusetts, had sent an Aarmed posse to take possession" of Otero's "valuable land" and despite the public outrage – encapsulated by one local news editorial which described Manuel as one of "New Mexico's most promising young men" – Whitney, the accused killer, paid two prestigious attorneys, bribed the judge, and got away with murder (Whaley 20, 23).

With this tragic start, it is somewhat surprising that Nina Otero did not simply slip into obscurity. Instead, she became a "[s]uffragist, educator, politician, homesteader, writer, and business entrepreneur during the early decades of the twentieth century" (Whaley 1). In part, her success may be attributed to her family's initial socioeconomic privilege. When Nina Otero married an Anglo man, she took his name. A prejudice against Mexicans and against people with Latino surnames had developed at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War: "Hispanophobia, with its vitriolic anti-Mexican variant... served as a convenient rationale to keep Mexicans in their place" (Whaley 61). Despite this prejudice, Nina Otero-Warren managed a professional and a political career; by adding Warren to her name, although she left her husband only two years later, she attained wider credibility in the New Mexican Anglo community.

By 1910, Nina Otero-Warren became involved with the suffragist movement:

> *like her reform-minded friends, [Nina] wanted the same opportunities as men: to participate in political power, to influence social choices, to be economically secure... she became involved... in the pursuit of voting rights for women.*

And during her political ascent, Nina began a "twelve-year career as superintendent of public schools for Santa Fe." In the end, although she ran for a seat in the House of Representatives, and appeared to have a "better-than-average chance of winning," the "diminutive, woman politician" lost by a vote of "less than nine percent" (Whaley 75, 94-98). If the political and historical racialization and sexualization of these events are taken into account, this loss, in a manner, must be rearticulated as a victory. Nina Otero-Warren exemplifies the realizable woman leader Lorber anticipates (280); hers was a feminist political consciousness raised to action.

What does it mean to be a woman without a state or a nation, a country or land that she may call distinctly by name, a place that is singularly her own? Imagine having no place to call home: your personal possessions, if you have any, are scattered. Imagine the anxiety and noise that accompany constant motion – never being still – knowing all the time that you cannot put your feet down (or up, for that matter, for a moment's rest) – because you are looking for a place, a *homeland* that is your own. You would like to go home, but you are not sure where that is; you would like a piece of land B if not to cultivate or upon which to

build a home – at least a plot, a bit of land where your body may be interred. You seek a name, a present, a history, a future. You search for Palestine.

In *Land Before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories*, Warnock claims that although most women do not become "leaders or political theorists," all women are

> *individuals with homes and families, and as individuals they react strongly when their families' safety, freedom, and property are attached. With whatever means they have, they oppose the brutalities of... occupation* (Warnock 138).

Coming to terms with women's realities and their roles in the Occupied Territories, Warnock records the ways in which Palestinian women have participated in the struggle for nationhood. She notes that for more than twenty years, Palestinians have "identified themselves as a nation, and as such" seek all the same rights and protections of people in nations around the world; furthermore, for Palestinians, the incursions perpetrated under the aegis of a Zionist ideology which lays claim to "exclusive possession of the land [and] displac[es] or desires to displac[e] an entire population, and [forces] them all to emigrate and leave their beloved land" is no longer a tolerable situation (Warnock 135).

The original 1920 Land Ordinance Transfer which followed Britain's 'mandate' over Palestine, coupled with increasing British taxation, and a steady flow of Jewish settlers to the region forced many Palestinian peasant farmers off their land. Following WWII and the UN partition of Palestine, the State of Israel was formed. As a result, between 1948-49, seventy-five percent of the Palestinian people fled or were "driven from Palestine and forced to take refuge in the neighbouring Arab countries" (Abdo-Zubi 23). Published in 1994, *Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians* documents the decimation of the Palestinian population. In 1948:

> *there were two Arabs for every Jew. Now, there are more than three Jews for every two Arabs, distributed (very approximately) as follows:*
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | *Jews within Israel* | *4,250,000* |
> | *Jews within the Occupied Territories* | *150,000* |
> | *Arabs within Israel* | *730,000* |
> | *Arabs within the Gaza Strip* | *715,000* |
> | *Arabs in the West Band, including Jerusalem* | *1,075,000* |
>
> *[By the mid-1990's], more than three million Palestinians live[d] in diaspora outside Palestine* (10).

Decades before the foundation of Israel, women in Palestine had already become involved in the struggle for liberation. Their roles were diverse and, for the most part, predetermined by socioeconomic class. While women from the middle and upper classes formed groups to "support men," to stage nonviolent demonstrations, and to "submit petitions, and arrange for the care [of]... martyrs' sons and prisoners' families," peasant and working-class women were involved in more clearly combative undertakings (Abdo-Zubi 21).

> *This militant form of struggle was most obvious in the mid-thirties and particularly throughout the 1936-9 revolution. An example of this was the May 14, 1936 strike by 600 female students who decided to boycott Zionist and foreign goods* (Abdo-Zubi 21).

Women from the peasant classes also helped to transport Aarms, ammunition, and provisions to the fighters in the hills... some women bore arms and participated in the armed struggle" as well (Abdo-Zubi 22). The first known Palestinian woman to be killed in combat is Fatmeh Ghazzal; she died on June 26, 1936, laying down her life in defense of her homeland (Peteet 55). She was not alone. Between 1936-7, five Palestinian women were reported to have "fallen" as "martyrs" (Abdo-Zubi 22).

Beyond question, the right to land has always been the most crucial topic in Palestinian-Israeli relations:

> *All Palestinians live with the consciousness of loss – loss of their land and loss of what land represented... For the predominantly peasant Palestinians, land was not just their material home and livelihood, but also the basis of social organisation and self-evaluation. Land is homeland, the foundation without which a community and its members feel incomplete* (Warnock 136).

On the heels of the 1967 Israeli occupation, three distinguishable groups of displaced Palestinians developed: those who remained in Israel, those who established residence in the West Bank and Gaza, and those families who lived in Lebanese camps (Abdo-Zubi 22-23). Peteet, who made the women in Lebanese refugee camps her focal point of study wrote "During the period between 1948-1969, few women were politically active in pan-Arab political organizations"; however, with men typically being absent, "in flight, hiding, or under periodic arrest, women remained at home to shoulder family responsibilities" (Peteet 77). These

> *[w]omen often bore the brunt of... encounters with the Lebanese state. Usually it was women who were home when the police*

> *arrived and they were compelled to deal with the intrusion into their homes by unknown and sometimes violent men* (Peteet 77).

During and after the 1975-76 Lebanese civil war, there was a

> *concerted campaign to assault women in order to ensure a Palestinian (and Muslim) flight from East Beruit, as well as to make tangible their increasing vulnerability. Such a policy reached its apogee in the 1982 Sabra-Shatila massacres where women and children were specific targets of rape, atrocities, and murder* (Peteet 80).

Despite the many similarities between Chicana and Palestinian women's experiences in occupied lands, two discrepancies should be addressed. First, as a consequence of the Civil Rights and Women's Movements, in the 1960s and 70s, women of Mexican-American heritage living in the United States have been afforded privileges yet to be experienced by a majority of Palestinian women. Although racial (economic and professional) discrimination continue to be real threats, Chicanas, in relationship to the other U.S. Latina subgroups, have experienced the most cultural prominence. The names of renowned Chicanas are too many to list. In addition to the foremothers such as Nina Otero-Warren, Emma Tenayuca and Lucy González, there is Dolores Fernández Huerta (CSO, UFA, and NFWA), Vilma Martínez (MALDEF), and Ellen Ochoa, "the first Latina in space" (de Varona 314-18). There is also a significant body of literature which reflects the diversity of Chicana voices: Anzaldúa, Castillo, D. Chávez, Cisneros, Mora, Moraga, and Viramontes are, most likely, today's best known Latina writers. Even if the "achievements of [Latinas] [were] difficult to document during the colonial period [and] prove[d] even more elusive after the American takeover of the Southwest," Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories has engendered a more significant problem (Rebolledo and Rivero 9). It has stymied what may be written/recorded and published/disseminated regarding the lives and histories of Palestinian women. Even though there are many excellent accounts of Palestinian women's experiences, gathered painstakingly by ethnographic researchers like Warnock and Peteet, the extent to which these accounts have been translated, analyzed, or made available to a broad readership seems remote.

Second, the feminism which may be associated with Chicanas varies significantly from the evolving Palestinian women's movement. For Peteet, the:

> *use of the term* feminist *in the Palestinian context can be problematic... Women's position is conceptualized as inextricably embedded in the larger national question... [for most Palestinian women], gender equality is not an issue to be left until national*

> *liberation; it should be an integral part of the national struggle* (Peteet 97-8, author's emphasis).

The right to land and life remains the fundamental concern of all Palestinians. While Chicanas were developing and continue to forge a feminism for women of color and women in the developing world, during the 1980s and 90s,

> *seventy-percent of the land in the West Band [was] made available for exclusive Jewish use under a variety of administrative and legal instruments... outright property expropriation, closure for security or military purposes... [and] confiscation for public purposes* (Najjar and Warnock 69)

provided the usual excuses. For that reason that the GUPW (General Union of Palestinian Women) made the implementation of "international resolutions [to] ensure the legitimate national rights of Palestinian people, the right [of refugees to] return, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital" its foremost political objective (GUPW, "The National Strategy for the Advancement of Palestinian Women," Section 1). Aisheh Shamwali shares a story of land loss that is remarkable in its similarity to Nina Otero-Warren's.

The story of the expropriation of Aisheh Shamwali's family farm was recorded by the local Palestinian press and was well-known to many of her neighbors. When Najjar and Warnock interviewed Shamwali, during the summer of 1986, they made the dramatic decision to conduct the conversation at the site of the Shamwali family's former home. Standing upon the confiscated property, Mrs. Shamwali said:

> *My brothers and I inherited the land from my father, and he got it from his father. We did not expect [the] Israelis to believe us, so we produced the inheritance papers and records that showed we paid taxes on the land to the British, and above all, we said, 'Here is the land that we have planted all these years, look at the crops, look at the trees'* (Najjar and Warnock 77).

Despite the Shamwalis' protest and an embittered battle in the Israeli courts, in the end, the farm was destroyed, plowed under by "fifteen men, all armed," who rode roughshod over the land in "three bulldozers" (Najjar and Warnock 78). Near the end of the same interview, Mrs. Shamwali articulates her consternation; she believes that to be a farmer and to be stripped of one's land is a death sentence, and that sentence is extended not only to one or two people: the expropriation of land kills entire families and wipes out whole villages. It also sacrifices cultural stability.

In examining the Shamwalis' case, Emma Pérez's interpretation of subalternity may provide both solace and solution; she argues that the impulse to "locate silences within the interstices" and uncover "the great silent, motionless base," become the process through which a "third space agency" may be "articulated" (Pérez 5). The possibility of recuperating history and staking a claim to the present, and of hearing inveterate silences as "negotiating spaces for the decolonizing subject" represent alternatives, not only for today's Chicanas and those Mexican-American women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also for the current and historical circumstances of Palestinian women. As Pérez notes, "Equality must be secured for all people..." and the application of a "third space feminist perspective" may provide the most trenchant methodology for "unveil[ing] women's desires through their own agency" (Pérez 21, 102).

Memory/Identity

"I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why I was ever born at all" (Rodríguez [citing Rhys] 196). For most people, identity means having a familiarity with oneself, one's country, and one's history. It is helpful to know one's own identity (should authorities ask) and for one's own edification.

> *Identities are not free-floating; they are limited by borders and boundaries... we are born into relationships which are always based in place... Our identity is not separate from what has happened [to us]... we construct our identity at the same time as we tell our life-story* (Sarup 3, 5, 15).

Owning a little land is as good as having a name, and becoming a speaking subject, telling a life story, denotes identity.

When home and land are taken, what is left in their absence? From a Lacanian perspective, "it is only through entering the symbolic order as a speaking subject that full consciousness is possible... Language acquisition is the central process whereby subjectivity is produced" (Sarup 36). Here, subjectivity should not be misread as synonymous with identity. However, it seems nearly impossible to attain identity without the first step, without becoming a speaking subject. One follows the other; in speaking one's way to subjectivity, in telling a story, women in occupied lands may emerge with an understanding (even if unstable or irresolute) of their distinct national, political, and gendered identities. Therefore, in claiming a language, and I would argue, in speaking a particular language, *particular* inasmuch as a language may represent a culture, a territory or a people, is vital when that language is endangered by extinction. When home

and land are obliterated, memory and language endure or they survive only in traces; at other times, the memory is immediate and the language is a form of resistance. In occupied territories the first language may operate covertly; it is a code, it represents belonging, it signifies difference, and it may also be flung in the face of the (hostile) "Other".

Through language, women in occupied lands are able to reterritorialize, slip under the wire, return home. Rima Othman, a twenty-three year old Palestinian woman, who lives in Beit Safafa, "a village nestled between Jerusalem's old and new southern neighborhoods," told interviewer David Grossman that she believes Palestinians need a separate state, but they must assert a collective identity first:

> *Many long years will pass before we become a real people... That's the way we are... We never went with our feelings... with what we believe and want. Ever since the Turks, the British, the Jordanians, our nation has had no say in its own affairs. They always told us what to say... Look how I'm talking. How I jump from one thought to another. No stability of thought, of nerves... I remember when I was little, there was a terrorist attack in Jerusalem and we were going home on the bus. My mother told me, 'Shh! Don't talk in Arabic!' Something like that always stays with you. When I have my own children, I already know I'll be afraid to go into town with them [but]... my children, when I have them, will not speak in generalizations, that's certain* (Grossman 162, 165, 168-9).

With its long history of statelessness, the Palestinian experience is emblematic of what Marcus calls the "homeless mind." To (re)claim a homeland and nationhood, the stories of Palestinians must be recorded by and transmitted to a global audience. As Marcus acknowledges:

> *collective memory is more likely to be passed through individual memory and [that] autobiography [is] embedded in the diffuse communication between generations... Collective representations [are thus] most effectively filtered through personal representations* (Marcus 64).

Identity is as inextricably bound to land as it is to memory: who we are is produced as much by our homes as it is by our stories. For Palestinian and Mexican-American women, political activism, in the form of counter-hegemonic acts of resistance, those perhaps most frequently expressed in the recollection

and telling of personal stories, may become a unifying ensign, a profound statement of self-identification and self-definition.

In *Songs My Mother Sang to Me: An Oral History of Mexican American Women*, Livia León Montiel, who was born in 1914 and can claim kinship to the first Mexican pioneers to settle Tucson, describes the domestic minutia of her childhood; she states, "We were poor, but we felt rich... we didn't feel we need[ed] money." Yet, near the conclusion of the interview, Mrs. León Montiel outlines her regrets about life in the U.S. and her hopes for her children:

> *What we live with is our memories... That is the only thing we have left in the end... The only way you can hold your family together is by uniting with them... I'd like to leave this piece of land just as a gathering place [for my family]... If it [were] only possible to hold onto this little piece of land... This is my hope and my legacy* (Martin 22-23).

Related more to labor policy than to land ownership, the story of Lucy González belongs here as well. Lucy González was "born in Johnson County, Texas, most probably in 1852"; in 1871, she married Albert Parsons, and shortly thereafter, they moved to Chicago: there it became evident that Lucy was "much more than a loving wife and mother – she was an intelligent companion and a labor leader and organizer in her own right" (Mirandé and Enríquez 86). The Parsons became involved in the labor rights struggle. Both Lucy and her husband, Albert, were committed to improving the working conditions of the poor; they fought relentlessly for the rights of laborers and helped to push forward the eight-hour work day.

During the first weeks of May, in 1886, several strikes and riots in Chicago drew the wrath of armed police who were paid by company owners to suppress the labor movement. The Haymarket Meeting, scheduled for May 4, 1886, was planned as a response to police brutality, and, by most accounts, was a peaceful gathering until the police arrived and "Captain Bonfield... [ordered his troops to] rush the crown [and as they did], someone threw a bomb into the ranks and killed several police. While the identity of the bomber was never" determined, the Chicago power brokers and police used the "incident as a pretext to persecute" the labor movement leaders (Mirandé and Enríquez 89), including Albert Parsons who was not present "when the bomb went off" was convicted for agitation and sentenced to death. Lucy led the

> *legal battle to reverse the decision, which lasted a year and a half and went all the way to the Supreme Court. But the appeal failed, and... [on the day of Albert's execution] Lucy pleaded to see her husband one last time*.

Instead of being permitted to visit Albert, Lucy Parsons and their two children were "locked in a cell" at the exact moment that her husband was executed (Mirandé and Enríquez 90).

Lucy González's political activism did not end with her husband's life; she continued to fight for worker's rights. Lucy González, a Chicana from Texas, claimed her identity by acting in the interests of working class people and by opposing the exploitation inherent to capitalist labor practices.

State retaliation for political dissent has never been gender specific. Sarona grew up listening to her grandfather's stories about Palestine before 1948; he claimed that Jewish immigrants, the minority at the time, would often find work as "hired labor" for Arab farmers (Lynd, Bahour, and Lynd 81). A twenty-four year old Sarona, during the time of this 1994 interview, claimed that the *Intifada* of her generation was not produced in a vacuum; the *Intifada*, which means "uprising," was formally organized in December 1987, but it developed over roughly a decade in response to prolonged human rights abuses in the Occupied Territories. In the spring of 1981, during a Women's Day Celebration, thirteen year old Sarona joined in the march. She was arrested, beaten, and detained for two days by Israeli soldiers. She asserted that the "incident changed [her] personality. [Her] life was no longer to be spent having a good time. There were more important things to do" (Lynd, Bahour, and Lynd 82). Through her association with women's organizations before the 1987 *Intifida* took tangible form, Sarona realized that a "democratic secular state in the whole of what used to be Palestine" was the only solution (Lynd, Bahour, and Lynd 82).

At present, the possibility of such a state appears less and less likely, and the second *Intifada* which began in September 2001 rages on. In the winter of 2002, several Palestinian women acted upon their people's anguish and desperation; they carried out suicide bombings. After the first bombing in January, a Reuters article reported:

> *The idea that a Palestinian woman had carried out a fatal bomb attack set a macabre precedent in the 16-month-old uprising against Israeli occupation. It set new security standards for Israel. Officials now say that every Palestinian, whether man, woman, or child, is a suspect... Idrees [the bomber] was hit by Israeli rubber bullets and attacked by soldiers during the course of her work [as a paramedic]... Idrees' sister-in-law Wisam described her as angered by the type of casualties she treated. 'She used to come and tell us about the children who were shot and killed during such confrontations... She was not religious, she didn't pray and didn't cover up... She was very active but one could never believe she would actually carry out a bombing'* (Amr 1-2).

When women strap on vests loaded with dynamite, when they park cars jammed with explosives in heavily-trafficked streets, the United States is culpable. The ceaseless dispatch of homegrown U.S. global capitalism is, in part, to blame. The unwillingness of the U.S. to negotiate with Arafat and our blind allegiance to Sharon – since the current *Intifada* erupted – has served only to increase the carnage and devastation for all people living in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

> *Anyone who wishes to understand the why and wherefore of [such] events must study the historical and political record of the U.S. in the Middle East... The unrelenting efforts of American imperialism to secure domination over the oil resources in the region... has entailed, among other things, unstinting support for the Israeli state's oppression of the Palestinian people* ("The political roots of the terror..." 1 of 2).

This essay celebrates women's political agency and activism, but in regard to the most recent suicide bombings, and the brutal Israeli retaliation, a line must be drawn. Violence, in all of its forms, is unconscionable; it only breeds more violence. And even though "some attempts at organised non-violent protest, using women and the feminine role to appeal to institutional and public opinion" have been endeavored in the Occupied Territories, "they have come to seem more ritualistic than hopeful... since the Israeli army ha[s] no scruples about using force to crush" organized resistance (Warnock 144-5). The murder of scores of innocent civilians in Jenin (Spring 2002) is yet another example, another terrorist crime against humanity. Nonetheless, Warnock asserts that a coordinated and extensive plan for civil disobedience which "women would be well placed to carry out" provides a potential solution: women "become politically effective when they cross the boundary from individual into collective action" (Warnock 144-5, 141).

Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval offers this additional possibility:

> *US third world feminism provide[s] access to a different way of conceptualizing not just feminist activity but oppositional activity in general: it comprise[s] a formulation capable of aligning US movements for social justice not only with each other, but with global movements towards decolonization* (Sandoval 41).

Women can be at the forefront of such a global movement: one that makes peace, human rights, and economic justice its objectives. In other words, as Castillo puts it, "Until we are all represented, respected, and protected by society and the laws

that govern it, the status of the Chicano [the Palestinian, and every woman of color] will be that of a countryless woman" (Castillo 41).

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