

## CULTURES OF RESISTANCE IN PALESTINE AND BEYOND: ON THE POLITICS OF ART, AESTHETICS, AND AFFECT

By Ruba Salih and Sophie Richter-Devroe

Traditional music must remain; it is a base and we listen to it. But the logic of our music is different. Traditional music is to show the identity of the people, their *huwiya*, but that is not the intention of our music. Our music is to show the problems of a people and how to get rid of them... Rap is poetry that is sung in a specific way. It's poetry. It is the music of change.

*Katiba 5, Shatila, Beirut, 2011*<sup>1</sup>

In the broad sense, I speak of an “aesthetic of the political,” to indicate that politics is first of all a battle about perceptible/sensible material.

*Jacques Rancière, 2000*<sup>2</sup>

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Katiba 5 is a Palestinian hip-hop band of young Palestinian refugees, together with Lebanese friends and second generation French-Syrians living in Europe. They meet in a smoky little room with walls covered with resistance graffiti, and floors strewn with musical instruments, on the outskirts of Shatila camp in Lebanon. Katiba 5 is one of the many art experiences of refugee youth in Lebanon that signal a radical shift in the relationship between culture and resistance in the Palestinian landscape. These young artists partake in the emergence of a counter or subculture that is at once local and transnational. They speak through a global genre, hip-hop, to express their anger at political and social predicaments in Lebanon and beyond, but they display no neat ideology or political project. Rather, they state that they compose rap by integrating the plurality of their views. This is one of the ways that they deviate from previous and more conventional nationalist genres that they perceive as “traditional,” to quote a band member.

Palestinian cultural production historically echoed and shaped a national identity struggling to survive.<sup>5</sup> Both Palestinian resistance and its cultural production have a long history, as Maha Nassar notes in this special issue of the journal. Yet, with the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964, much Palestinian art became more systematically a platform for the nationalist resistance movement. The PLO’s revolutionary 1960s and 1970s period saw the birth of what many now consider highlights of “classical” Palestinian art forms, such as Ghassan Kanafani’s literature, Mahmoud Darwish’s poems, and Suleiman Mansour’s paintings. These works voiced the nationalist aspirations of the Palestinian people, and often endeavored to depict their trauma of refugeehood and exile. The 1993 Oslo accords and the subsequent period of supposed state and “peace” building, however, signaled the emergence of a new political era. The Palestinian Authority (PA) had a contradictory double position: it sponsored “resistance culture,” on the one hand, and “normalized” the very occupying power that was being resisted, on the other. This new scenario had broad implications for Palestinian cultures of resistance, their forms, and the politics they conveyed.

As our own interviews with young Palestinian artists in Lebanon, as well as other research, have highlighted,<sup>6</sup> post-Oslo Palestinian art had now to engage with a matrix of intersecting forms of control, as exercised by,

first and foremost, Israeli occupation forces, but also the PA, the refugees' host states, humanitarianism, and neoliberal economic forces. In parallel, Palestinian artists engaged in an ongoing process of experimenting with new languages, symbols, and aesthetics. When we asked members of Katiba 5 how the outputs of their band compare to previous "classic" Palestinian resistance genres, such as the early writings of the late Mahmoud Darwish, the answers were revealing: "[Rap music] allowed the nationalist songs to evolve; [it is] a new modified form of nationalist music. [But] it's the same themes of suffering."<sup>7</sup> Another member of the band vehemently expressed the specificity of Katiba 5's rap: "[I]t relies on words [*haki*], we talk about socio-political issues, about youth [*shabab*] like us, about Palestinians living in Lebanon. . . . We spoke about the NGO system [*jam'iyyat*] and they are bastards. . . . This is the perspective of the ordinary people."<sup>8</sup>

These young artists/activists acknowledge the importance of established political-nationalist genres, which they consider part of their heritage, but they also underscore that cultural production shifts in conjunction with political developments and contingencies. Moreover, they also privilege ordinary people's views in their lyrics. The suffering of the people is ongoing, but the sources of oppression and the ways of expressing their plights vary.

### Cultures of Resistance

These movements in Palestinian cultural production, and more specifically in Palestinian cultures of resistance, are witness to the close connection between art and politics. Yet most mainstream academic literature on the Arab world's political systems and cultures tends to pay scarce attention to the culture-politics nexus. Although there are notable exceptions,<sup>9</sup> the focus on formal politics, high-level diplomacy, political parties, and NGOs continues to prevail in many studies, which have consequently neglected alternative, informal political expressions and subaltern political subjectivities. For example, despite the large number of studies that complicate and nuance the picture of the spaces, places, and actors of the "political" in Arab and Middle East contexts,<sup>10</sup> mainstream definitions of civil society remained biased towards a notion that privileges the "mélange of associations, clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations, parties, and groups that come together to provide a buffer between state and citizen."<sup>11</sup> Such an understanding largely

overlooks less formal avenues of affiliation and participation, as well as other modes of dissent and resistance, including the cultural.

This emphasis on political parties, elections, and formal associations may stem from the predominance of largely male-dominated approaches of Western political science over feminist methods of problematization. Anthropologists of the Middle East have been particularly active in overhauling such dominant paradigms. Yet these perspectives persist and continue to reflect Orientalist assumptions that Middle Eastern societies need to adopt certain forms of governance in order to “graduate” to being full-fledged democracies.

With the popular uprisings that erupted in several countries across the Middle East and North Africa from 2011 onwards, street protests—in the form of ordinary people’s creative and challenging artistic expressions—could no longer be left unnoticed. From Tahrir Square to Gezi Park, public spaces came to be inhabited by graffiti, music, art, and performances, which engendered and conveyed new affective and political ties. Academic and non-academic writing increasingly emphasized the pervasiveness of art and music in streets, squares, factories, and neighborhoods where crowds gathered and protests assembled.

Yet some observers were too quick to celebrate artistic and cultural production as a driving force of the recent uprisings and as naturally defiant and oppositional.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the artistic productions stemming from and deployed as soundtracks of the political protests were varied and complex. Even when they were explicitly calling for a radical change of existing social and political orders, the oppositional and disruptive potential of these artistic expressions has sometimes been at risk of neutralization at the hands of political co-optation or market commodification. In a similar vein, protest art proved to be resistant to some oppressive structures, while contributing to strengthening others at the same time. Thus, protest art revealed the potential to challenge one established aesthetic regime, while simultaneously conforming to another.

Moreover, the unprecedented and enthusiastic interest in the political facets of protest art has often overlooked the performative or affective dimension of music, graffiti, and poetry in the highly political, but also emotional moments that occurred in places such as Tahrir Square or Gezi Park. Rap, graffiti, stencils, songs, music, plays, and slogans of the uprisings did not

necessarily carry clear militant messages. They sometimes operated as affective or performative arenas activating political subjectivity in their own terms, rather than merely visualizing or echoing political events or slogans.<sup>13</sup>

Mona Abaza notes, for example, how the graffiti in Muhammad Mahmud Street in Cairo documented and narrated the battlefields. The graffiti offered a “dramaturgy of the revolution” and gave the possibility to an absent audience to “be there.” It also infused Muhammad Mahmud Street with a new meaning and purpose. After the revolution, plastic chairs transformed the street into an open-air, informal café, where ordinary people sat drinking tea and observing the events unfolding around them: “It seemed that those who sat at these cafés, gazing for hours at the life of Tahrir Square while sipping their tea, were watching a performance free-of-charge.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Ted Swedenburg argues that protest music on Tahrir Square aimed “to move the crowds (and the musicians themselves) into a sentimental or affective state, such as anger, mourning, nostalgia or patience.”<sup>15</sup> The meanings of the songs “were not just already inherent in the lyrics and melody or in the associated memories and resonances, but ... were also forged in performance.”<sup>16</sup>

Rather than considering protest art as singularly revolutionary, disruptive, or unsettling to established power structures per se, this special issue explores the complex relation between cultural politics, aesthetics, affect, and resistance. Many of the articles contextualize the ambivalent and nuanced relationship between works of art, culture, and resistance within wider, constantly shifting, multiple, hegemonic discourses, and power structures. These contributions cast a skeptical eye on the notion of resistance. They complicate our understanding of how political and economic contingencies, colonialism, neoliberal market-driven policies, and global and local discourses can work to normalize, appropriate, co-opt, and commodify protest art and resistance. Moreover, they shed light on the transformative potential of art that focuses on the ordinary, or activates affective ties by disrupting hegemonic imaginaries and sensibilities.

### **Resistance and the Transnational Social Life of Artwork**

The study of resistance, revolutions, and varied forms of protest is central to many disciplines. It is, however, mainly anthropologists who trace informal manifestations of resistance, micro-politics, the political cultures that emerge

in mundane and everyday acts, and who analyze how they challenge the macro-political level.<sup>17</sup> Some critics have even argued that the notions of resistance and hegemony have come “to monopolize the anthropological imagination,” thus losing their analytical utility.<sup>18</sup>

This state of affairs may have resulted from a sometimes uncritical adoption of Michel Foucault’s position that “[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.”<sup>19</sup> What follows is that every act (dressing, eating, gestures) might potentially be a form of resistance.<sup>20</sup> Attempting to redress this bias, Lila Abu-Lughod long ago warned against “romanticizing resistance,” and suggested instead that scholars study resistance as a “diagnostic of power.”<sup>21</sup> Such an approach helps us to better understand the material and ideational matrix of power in which and against which actors are strategizing and resisting. Sherry Ortner similarly stressed her discomfort with resistance studies and suggested the need for a “thick description”<sup>22</sup> of the broader political, cultural, and economic contexts in which cultures of resistance emerge, as well as the internal politics and subjectivities of those who produce, market, and consume them.<sup>23</sup> In addition, artwork has a social life that extends beyond borders, as the contributions by Hanan Toukan and Yazid Anani, Craig Larkin, Rania Jawwad, Maha Nassar, and Miriyam Aouragh and Helga Tawil-Souri highlight in this special issue. Global market forces, discourses, and transnational political solidarity campaigns can help circulate, but also commodify, co-opt, or empty protest art of its political message, leading to depoliticization and possibly normalization.

A case in point is Tunisian rap artist El Général. The mainstream media celebrated him as the voice of the Tunisian uprising and described his song “Rais Lebled” which directly targeted former president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, as the “anthem” of the revolution.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to compare the circulation and “social life” of El Général’s art to the rap of his counterpart Psycho M, whose songs contain many Islamic religious references. While El Général’s largely secular and outspokenly anti-regime lyrics attracted a broad international audience and circulated globally, Psycho M’s music found little international support or audience.<sup>25</sup> The transnational or global trajectory and consumption of music infringes upon local meanings and registers, promoting some music to resistance art while condemning others as forces of stagnation.

The poststructuralist emphasis on power as decentralized risks overlooking how power structures and market dynamics set the frames and the boundaries in which artistic productions and related political subjectivities can emerge (and be seen by different audiences) as oppositional forces. In this light, Aouragh and Tawil-Souri's contribution to this issue underlines the need to study cultures of resistance in their original context as a diagnosis of power. Their analysis of "internet activism" in the Palestinian context contends that the internet can indeed be an empowering space for grassroots activism. At the same time, online activism, and its empowering potential, requires a dialectical understanding of both settler colonialism and what the authors term "cyber-colonialism."

In his article on graffiti and commercial advertising on the apartheid wall in the West Bank, Larkin similarly argues that there is a global language for resistance and solidarity that is at times at odds with the local one. Local, material, mundane realities and needs can influence how different audiences and subjects make use of the wall and its public nature. At one extreme, rather than painting graffiti, many Palestinians find that commercial advertising on the separation wall better enables them to resist the material disenfranchisement ensuing from the occupation and from Israel's multiple devices for fragmenting their land and lives. Just as with any act of resistance, studying cultures of resistance thus necessitates situating the artwork, music, internet, or other forms of creative protest in the global and local material and structural contexts which enable and constrain them. Only in doing so can we gain a more nuanced understanding of their transformative potential.

### **Culture and Counter-Hegemony**

The interpretation of "culture" and "cultural meanings" has long marked Middle Eastern scholarship, especially through the contributions by classic anthropology on systems of kinship, religious beliefs, rituals, and social structures, as well as, more recently, on popular culture, media production, and consumption. Cultural studies, on the other hand, only more recently started to influence the vast literature on the Middle East.<sup>26</sup> Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg have noted a lack of thorough engagement with the

culture-politics nexus in this literature, especially in the context of Palestine/Israel.<sup>27</sup> Even when the field of cultural studies was center stage, it tended to be heavily influenced by Marxist political economy approaches or a nation-state-centered paradigm. These views either understand power and resistance through an economic, class-based angle, or one where the state and its bureaucratic institutions are the main enforcers of power. Both the political economy and the nation-state approaches thus consider cultural politics as a binary or a byproduct of the economic and the political.

Similarly, our emphasis in this issue on the material context of occupation and settler colonialism does not propose the cultural as epiphenomenal to the political. Rather, in line with Stein and Swedenburg, we consider the political, economic, and cultural to be closely intertwined and mutually constitutive. In the context of Palestine, Helga Tawil-Souri has elsewhere argued that the specific relation between the political and the cultural “coerc[es] the political back into cultural studies.”<sup>28</sup> Taking issue with the fact that “on the whole, contemporary studies of culture are often void of larger political discussions,” Tawil-Souri foregrounds the political. She explains “that the spatial-political conditions of Palestinians function similarly to the ‘base’ and do in many ways determine the ‘superstructure’ of the cultural realm.”<sup>29</sup> The Palestinian case of continued settler colonialism, political violence, and more recently the PA’s adoption of neoliberal policies necessitates the integration of complex and layered axes of political oppression into any analysis of cultures of resistance. The contributions by Toukan and Anani, as well as by Aouragh and Tawil-Souri articulate this integration.

The Gramscian attention to the role of the state and other authorities or institutions in forging norms, beliefs, and practices to promote cultural hegemony without the need for overt coercion is also crucial to this special issue.<sup>30</sup> States and national elites in the Middle East (including Israel) rely heavily and strategically on cultural production. Often artworks, be they music, paintings, poems, or other genres, function to construct, reify, and normalize national(-ist), patriarchal, or tribal identities and ideologies. Contributions in this special issue interrogate when art and cultural production become oppositional and subversive tools and highlight how they dissent from and unmask hegemonic cultures in contexts of authoritarianism, censorship, occupation, and violence.



Many artistic expressions of the Arab uprisings contained clear and vigorous anti-regime slogans that demonstrated the disruptive potential of political art. For example, the powerful graffiti on Cairo's Muhammad Mahmud Street reflects the resistance of protest artists who did not succumb to Egyptian authorities' industrious attempts to erase their work, strenuously repainting and rewriting on those whitewashed walls. Similarly, the writings by political prisoners in the darkest Moroccan "years of lead" that Brahim El-Guabli explores in this issue, operated as "hidden transcripts of resistance," defeating the oppressive hand of the regime's prisons. State censorship and sponsorship of cultural production are thus a response to art's revolutionary potential.<sup>31</sup>

Art can dissent in less explicit ways, however. Tripp suggests that there are three specific links between artistic interventions and the politics of resistance. Firstly, art "has a powerful way of signaling presence" and "reclaiming public space," and thus can show the limits of the centralist state. Secondly, artistic interventions create "a powerful shared vocabulary" that can foster solidarities and collective identities. Finally, art can create "a common, mutually reinforcing imagery" which might challenge established hegemonic narratives and create alternative interpretations and imaginaries of past, present, and future.<sup>32</sup> "Resistance art," for Tripp, does not only challenge the status quo through alternative political messages. It may also disrupt established hegemonic aesthetic forms or act as visualized evidence of political, social, and cultural imaginaries and identities that counter those that regimes impose.

The significance of the Arab uprisings' cultural production might lie exactly in their potential to disrupt established state-led cultural regimes of knowledge. As Ives Gonzalez-Quijano notes, the creativity of the uprisings might "represent the prelude to a new phase in the cultural history of the modern Arab world, a phase that might enable new players to elaborate artistic propositions to new audiences, bypassing the mediation of 'learned elites.'"<sup>33</sup> This perspective echoes the view of celebrated graffiti protest artist 'Ammar Abu Bakr who suggested that the revolutionary moment of artwork resides in producing culture that is situated "outside of the old boundaries." In his powerful words:

Today, in the midst of our revolution, I would not be content to offer something in a gallery. Who goes to a gallery to see art? Maybe you

or me, or people willing to pay for it, but nobody else. What about the people for whom we came out to protest? The people we have belonged to since before the revolution?<sup>34</sup>

The significance of the Arab uprisings' creative and artistic initiatives thus lies not only in their attempts to overthrow the political systems, but also in their endeavor to undermine and challenge the existing elites' cultural hegemony. These artistic proposals might signal a reordering of the top-down state- and elite-led culture industry in the Arab world in favor of a model that allows for alternative aesthetic expressions and new cultural politics to emerge as forces of change.

### On Dissensus and Dismantling the Flag

French philosopher Jacques Rancière has famously theorized how art and aesthetics are integral to the construction of community identities. It is Rancière's notion of "dissensus," in particular, that connects the political and the aesthetic: "A dissensus is not a conflict of interests, opinions, or values; it is a division inserted in 'common sense': a dispute over what is given and about the frame within which we see something as given."<sup>35</sup> While "consensus" reduces politics to authoritarian actions of "the police" and, as such, is not politics, the essence of the political, according to Rancière, is to be found in "dissensus." Art, by disrupting the senses, as well as consensual and established aesthetic forms, can dissent and perform the political in the most radical ways.

Yet Rancière is also critical of attributing a direct causal relationship to art and politics. Not "everything is political,"<sup>36</sup> and one must be particularly suspicious of art that explicitly wants to emancipate a supposedly ignorant passive spectator. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Rancière critiques self-proclaimed "political" art, which wants to teach the spectator through political messages. He argues that such art did not actually produce new political or revolutionary subjectivities, but merely relied on revolutionary ideologies.<sup>37</sup> "Resistance," "revolutionary," or "political" art might thus not be so resistant, revolutionary, or political after all. "Political" art can also become integrated into established institutionalized cultural networks, which are often sustained by market relations. As we have already suggested, some of the uprisings' cultural productions might indeed have followed

such a trajectory of co-optation and integration into established cultural industries. Criteria for political art therefore do not merely lie in the art's explicit message and form, but in art's ability to rework "the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects," and to generate new forms of political subjectivity.<sup>38</sup>

Much recent post-Oslo Palestinian cultural production breaches "common sense" and urges a reworking of "the frame of our perceptions" in Rancière's terms. Focusing on the powerful paradoxes of everyday normal(ized) life under occupation, this art often proposes cynical, humorous, or ironic genres to engage the dark reality of occupation and siege. This is not to claim that humor or irony are post-Oslo phenomena, nor that the Israeli occupation and military attacks have become a mere joke.

On the contrary: as Sharif Kanaana<sup>39</sup> notes, during the first intifada jokes and humorous registers were ubiquitous. They even gave birth to a new genre that he defines as "intifada humor," which was tied to resistance and mainly targeted the Israeli army. The jokes that Kanaana collected show the powerful, vernacular, and subversive ways through which ordinary people, often women and children, ridiculed the occupiers and represented the reality beneath the one imposed on them. Humor and jokes circulated extensively in pre-intifada times as well, but they also differed in genre and spirit from what we see in post-Oslo cultural production. The former, according to Kanaana, echoed frustration or mirrored deprecatory self-representations that reflected people's inability to challenge the occupation.<sup>40</sup> Post-Oslo black humor, on the other hand, emerges from a context of social and political fragmentation, stagnation, and disenchantment. It is a reflection of the paradoxical juxtaposition of colonial and post-colonial realities, a predicament that Anani describes as "schizophrenic" in this issue.

We suggest, however, that dealing with the unbearable through irony, intimacy, and humor highlights artists' and people's quest for a normal life despite the abnormality around them. This quest is echoed in the work of writers such as Suad Amiri and Liana Bader, but also, to an extent, in some of the final poetry of the late Mahmoud Darwish.<sup>41</sup> One of the most prominent examples of this genre is arguably Elia Suleiman's semi-autobiographical film *The Time That Remains*, in which the filmmaker portrays Palestinian history since 1948 through detachment, irony, and black humor.<sup>42</sup>

In 2007, Rancière illustrated his understanding of political art as

“dissensus” by referencing Suleiman’s work.<sup>43</sup> Rancière finds that Suleiman disputes the dominant regime of representation that reserves fiction and “the luxury of playing with words and images” for Israelis, and limits Palestinian cinematic expressions to the medium of the documentary film. By producing a darkly comic film about Palestinians’ everyday life under occupation, Suleiman reworks hegemonic aesthetic frames and potentially activates new radical sensibilities and subjectivities. The spectators are confronted not with pedagogical political art in which the artist teaches them. Instead the spectators’ senses and aesthetics are challenged so that they themselves can imagine something new. It is this disruption, this reworking, that, in Rancière’s understanding, makes art political.

Reflecting on his own art practice, Elia Suleiman finds that

There is still some work to be done about “dismantling the flag.” I am trying to deconstruct this imposed national image, this image constructed by all these cultural actors who are always droning on about what Palestine means to them and who seem to fear that if this image disappears their artistic inspirations will disappear with it.<sup>44</sup>

This urge to “dismantle the flag” and go beyond the forms and content of classic nationalist resistance art marks not only Suleiman’s, but also other contemporary Palestinian cultural production. In this issue, Toukan and Anani discuss the Palestinian art scene, and the developments in it that break with classic nationalist tropes.

Similarly, Sunaina Maira found that the younger generation of Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and Jerusalem are challenging the political consensus.<sup>45</sup> This post-Oslo generation, she argues, is disillusioned with existing political frameworks, in particular with that of post-Oslo state building, but also, to a certain extent, with a confined narrow conceptualization of resistance art. Some of the rappers she interviewed expressed being stifled by the demands on them to produce “proper” nationalistic, political, or resistance music.<sup>46</sup> They take issue with the limiting of culture and cultural production to a narrow nationalist conceptualization of resistance, which could constrain artistic and political creativity. The young Palestinians that Maira interviewed, as well as our interviewees in Lebanon, are engaged in “dissensus.” They strive to shift the parameters and aesthetics of politics and,

in doing so, fashion novel youth political cultures. These youth subcultures, by operating outside the hegemonic Palestinian cultural field of classic nationalist resistance art, reorder and rework “the frame of our perceptions and the dynamism of our affects.”<sup>47</sup>

The diversity of post-Oslo Palestinian cultures of resistance described above propose seemingly “normal(ized),” “apolitical,” or “a-nationalist” art which does not thrive on pre-established tropes of resistance against Israeli occupation, siege, and settler colonialism. In Palestine, the normal is the exception and the abnormal (of occupation) is the everyday. Consequently, resistance and classic nationalist art function as cultural hegemonic meta-frames. Prioritizing and seeking the normal, the mundane and seemingly “apolitical” or “a-nationalist,” on the other hand, disrupts common sense and reorders the realm of the sensible. It is thus through such dissenting aesthetics, which operate as politics of the senses and of affect, that new subjectivities, identities, and imaginaries can emerge.

### **Cultures of Resistance: Contributions to This Special Issue**

Most contributions in this issue revolve around whether, why, and how art and cultural production function as resistance or “dissensus” or alternatively become a form of normalization or consensus, with a focus on the Palestinian case. Adila Laïdi-Hanieh argues that the *100 Shaheed-100 Lives* memorial exhibition, which portrayed the lives of one hundred Palestinian martyrs, was able to create a “dissensus.” It endowed the martyrs with an individuated, ordinary humanity despite the occupation. This newly visible subject ruptures the regime of visibility of Palestinians abstracted in a nationalist collective, or as militant noise. It indexes political rights to life itself, not to factional affiliation or heroics.

Laïdi-Hanieh stresses the exhibition’s “indeterminacy of the political effect on audiences.” While some attributed a strong political dimension to the memorial, others blamed it as contributing to depoliticizing and normalizing death under occupation. What might constitute a “dissensus” with the ordinary in one community might well serve the consensus of another. By presenting martyrs as ordinary people rather than heroes, suicide bombers, or terrorists, the *100 Shaheed-100 Lives* exhibition disrupted and challenged both Palestinian and the international aesthetic regimes and representa-

tions. Yet other Palestinian cultures of resistance might better conform to the standards and tastes of the international art scene.

Toukan's interview with Anani engages this question of consumption, audiences, and commodification of art. In their contribution, they consider how the global art market influences local Palestinian art practices, as well as the risks of co-optation and commodification. Ultimately, Anani argues that international curators and museums have become obsessed with symbolic representations of Palestine and the Palestinian struggle, such as the wall, checkpoints, or Palestinian refugees. This commodification of Palestinian oppression "turns artists into 'sentuaris,'" and blocks alternative political imaginaries. In this case, again, the global art market maintains and reproduces the consensus of the established aesthetic regime. Catering to broader international audiences, it recycles established hegemonic symbols of checkpoints or the wall, thus reifying and normalizing the Palestinian as victim. As such, global art settings and market dynamics can actually contribute to preventing "dissensus." They might be blind to alternative artistic interventions or they may commodify and imprison resistance art into established political and commercial structures.

The role of different audiences and their symbolic and aesthetic references is a theme that Rania Jawwad takes up in her article "'Aren't We Human?' Normalizing Palestinian Performances." She analyzes how the Palestinian theater project, *The Gaza Mono-Logues*, is framed and performed for and toward a world audience. Jawwad maintains that "the anticipated spectator's gaze shapes the ways in which practitioners frame their performances." Palestinian cultural production, its aesthetic forms, frames, and contents, is situated within and responds to broader global financial, discursive, and aesthetic structures. More specifically, Jawwad argues that the play's main actor's "plea 'Aren't we human?'" speaks to the ways in which Palestinian theater production in the occupied territories is embedded within a performance-based political sphere." Her article brings to light the discrepancy that this "performance-based logic" entails. *Gaza Mono-Logues* are framed within a humanitarian discourse so as to be seen and heard by international audiences. The art itself, the *Mono-Logues*, however, documents the daily violence of Israeli settler colonialism and military occupation.

A neat juxtaposing of “local” versus “global,” as Jawwad’s contribution shows, is misleading and overlooks how different aesthetic regimes or cultural hegemonies are in fact closely interwoven. What Rancière terms “the distribution of the sensible,” or what is possible to be heard, seen, felt, and done, does not happen in isolated cultures or communities, nicely sealed off from each other. Rather, the conditions and contexts for the possibility of perception are set on a global stage. The global spectator is part of the Palestinian stage, and what is legible, sensible, and thus possible “here” depends also on the “there.”

Craig Larkin’s discussion of the multiple and ambiguous functions of resistance graffiti also highlights the role of different local and international art practices, discourses, and audiences. He takes issue with the work of internationally celebrated graffiti artists, such as Banksy. By performing “resistance art,” Banksy’s work conforms to the consensus of the international aesthetic regime prescribed to “political art.” His graffiti works have received much praise from international solidarity circles, but local perceptions, as Larkin shows, are much more critical. Palestinians (in particular East Jerusalemites who are the focus of his study), whose lives and livelihoods have been destroyed by the wall, might express their resistance and use the wall differently. They tend not to rely on internationally legible symbolic imagery such as checkpoints, peace doves, or balloons flying over the wall. Instead, they engage with and reflect on daily problems and grassroots initiatives, such as the Palestinian prisoners’ hunger strikes. They use different slogans, aesthetics, and artistic expression, and might even use the wall for commercial advertising to gain their livelihoods. The various “wall interventions,” Larkin writes, “attest to the paradoxical predicaments of Palestinians and the different audiences they hope to address.” Overall, Larkin’s account of the varied uses and audiences of the wall engages powerfully the debate on resistance and normalization.

El-Guabli, in his discussion of Moroccan prison writings, provides a lucid example of resistance art. In Ahmed Marzouki’s and Aziz BineBine’s writings the prison becomes “a space that the detainees managed to tame, conquer, and surpass.” The effects that the prison and regime authorities had intended for the prisoners, to render them powerless and without agency, are defied. El-Guabli also stresses that the authors’ “hidden transcripts of resistance” have influenced Moroccan society more broadly. By publicly

demonstrating the limits and failures of the state's authoritarian policies to break the prisoners' will, these writings contribute to "helping Moroccans reconstruct and reinterpret their modern history."

Nassar, in her contribution, also shows the crucial role played by cultural production in countering the political and geographical isolation of Palestinians in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s. Palestinian intellectuals in Israel, through publications in Arabic supported by the Israeli Communist Party such as *al-Ittihad* and *al-Jadid*, firmly inscribed themselves in the anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles that were taking place around the Afro-Asian worlds. These publications, which featured writings by prominent intellectuals such as Emile Habibi, Mahmoud Darwish, and Salim Jubran, countered Zionist narratives by drawing a clear connection between Israel and other imperialist and colonial forces. These publications hosted revolutionary poetry and intellectual productions, often in the shape of translations of anticolonial intellectual leaders' writings such as Nkrumah or Kenyatta. They also featured debates on the role of Arabic, poetry, and literature in resistance struggles and cultural liberation, especially in Algeria. The poetic, political, and intellectual discourses employed in the publications acted simultaneously as affective and political registers, which connected Palestinian political and intellectual figures, and more generally Palestinians in Israel, to the wider wave of anticolonial and liberation movements around the world.

Tawil-Souri and Aouragh's article on "intifada 3.0" is interested in the dialectics between the local and global. Situating their analysis in a theoretical framework of settler colonialism, they counter celebratory stances, which regard the internet as a place of borderless resistance. They instead stress that material realities also limit the seemingly unlimited worldwide web. Palestinian internet resistance takes place within and against different political structures of oppression (Israeli settler colonialism, factionalism, the PA, and Hamas), as well as global-capitalist structures of "cyber-colonialism, whose roots are deeply embedded in local and international interests." They conclude that if "an intifada 3.0 [is to] serve as the model of a new paradigm of resistance in our hyper-capitalist global yet disparate and asymmetrical new network age," it would have to confront both Israeli settler colonialism as well as global cyber-colonialism.

In sum, the articles in this issue offer rich material that complicate and nuance the relationship between art and politics. The analyses warn



against romanticizing resistance and instead use resistance as a “diagnostic of power” to understand broader dynamics of oppression and control.<sup>48</sup> Some contributions highlight the important role that political and global economic structures play in delineating possibilities and limitations for different cultures of resistance to emerge. Others point to the engagements and links between politics, affect, and aesthetics. Cultural production, whether in the forms of openly political graffiti, an ironic or humorous engagement with the paradoxes of normality under occupation, an exhibition that humanizes the hero, or intimate political prison writings, has the potential to challenge our senses, and generate new affects and political imaginaries

#### ENDNOTES

- Authors’ Note:** We would like to thank the ASJ editorial team for their support in putting this special issue together and for their comments on this introduction. This special issue stems from a workshop on the same theme, held in May 2012 at the European Centre for Palestine Studies and the Exeter Centre for Ethnopolitical Studies at the University of Exeter. We would like to thank all participants in the workshop for their insightful contributions.
- 1 Katiba 5, interview by authors, Shatila, Beirut, Lebanon 2011. The Council for British Research in the Levant and the Gerda Henkel Foundation provided funding for this fieldwork and research project. We are grateful for this financial support.
  - 2 Solange Guenoun, James H. Kavanagh, and Roxanne Lapidus, “Jacques Ranciere: Literature, Politics, Aesthetics: Approaches to Democratic Disagreement,” *SubStance* 29, no. 2 (2000), 11.
  - 3 Charles Tripp, *The Power and the People: Paths of Resistance in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 258.
  - 4 Ibid.
  - 5 Space does not allow a detailed overview of the historical developments in the Palestinian cultural scene here. For such a more detailed overview see, among others: Joseph Massad, “Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music,” in *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*, eds. Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 175-201; Joseph Massad, “Permission to Paint: Palestinian Art and the Colonial Encounter,” *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (2007), 126-33; Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Helga Tawil-Souri, “The Necessary Politics of Palestinian Cultural Studies,” in *Arab Cultural Studies: Mapping the Field*, ed. Tarik Sabry (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011).
  - 6 See for example, Massad, “Palestine Put to Music,” 193; Tawil-Souri, “The Necessary Politics, 146”; Sunaina Maira, *Jil Oslo: Palestinian Hip Hop, Youth Culture, and the Youth Movement* (Washington DC: Tadween Publishing, 2013).
  - 7 Katiba 5, interview by authors, Shatila, Beirut, Lebanon, 2011.
  - 8 Ibid.
  - 9 See, for example, the several studies that paid attention to subaltern politics in the context of the Middle East before the Arab spring: Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Subalterns and Social Protest: History from Below in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press,

- 1997); Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Juan Cole, *Colonialism and the Revolution in the Middle East: Social and Cultural Origins of Egypt's 'Urabi Movement* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999); Jack Crabb, "Politics, History, and Culture in Nasser's Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 6, no. 4 (1975), 386-420.
- 10 An example is the literature on women's political activism in the Middle East, which often focused on hidden or alternative spaces of the political. See Diane Singerman, *Avenues of Participation: Family, Politics, and Networks in Urban Quarters of Cairo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Julie Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991). Works that might be considered as laying the foundations for cultural studies of the Middle East are: Stein and Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*; Tarik Sabry, *Arab Cultural Studies*; Sherifa Zuhur, ed., *Images of Enchantment: Visual and Performing Arts of the Middle East* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1998); Walter Armbrust, *Mass Mediations: New Approaches to Popular Culture in the Middle East and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- 11 Augustus Richard Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 7.
- 12 This tendency has been particularly visible in the discussions on rap music and graffiti, which have often been touted as driving forces behind the revolutions in mainstream media outlets. See, for example, Mia Gröndahl, *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt* (Cairo: Cairo University Press, 2012); Jean-Pierre Filiu, *The Arab Revolution: Ten Lessons from the Democratic Uprising* (London: Hurst, 2011); Robin Wright, *Rock the Casbah: Rage and Rebellion Across the Islamic World* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2011); Cordelia Hebblethwaite, "Is Hip Hop driving the Arab Spring?," BBC, 24 July 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14146243>; Vivienne Walt, "El Général and the Rap Anthem of the Mideast Revolution," *TIMES World*, 15 February 2012, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2049456,00.html#ixzz2vek9rlCW>.
- 13 The following works raise similar critiques: Ted Swedenburg, "Egypt's Music of Protest: From Sayyid Darwish to DJ Haha," *Middle East Report* 265 (Winter 2012); Ted Swedenburg "Hip-Hop of the Revolution (The Sharif Don't Like It)," MERIP Blog, 11 January 2011, <http://merip.org/hip-hop-revolution-sharif-dont-it>; Ives Gonzalez-Quijano, "Rap, an Art of the Revolution or a Revolution in Art" in Proceedings of the Conference "Inverted Worlds: Cultural Motion in the Arab Region," Beirut, October 4-8, eds. Syrinx von Hees, Nadia von Maltzahn, Ines Weinrich (Orient Institute Studies, 2), [http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/orient-institut-studies/2-2013/gonzalez-quijsano\\_rap](http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/orient-institut-studies/2-2013/gonzalez-quijsano_rap).
- 14 Mona Abaza, "The Dramaturgy of A Street Corner," *Jadaliyya*, 25 January 2013, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/9724/the-dramaturgy-of-a-street-corner>.
- 15 Swedenburg, "Egypt's Music of Protest," 40.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 The list could be endless. See for example: Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); and James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
- 18 Michael F. Brown, "On Resisting Resistance," *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 4 (1996), 279.
- 19 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (London: Pantheon Books, 1978), 95-96.
- 20 See the following works for scholarly engagements with the notion of resistance in particular: Lila Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power Through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990), 41-55; Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, "Conceptualizing Resistance," *Sociological Forum* 19, no. 4 (2004),

- 533-554; Jeffrey Rubin, "Defining Resistance: Contested Interpretations of Everyday Acts," *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society* 15 (1996), 237-260; Sherry Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no.1 (1995), 173-193; Bayat, *Life is Politics*; Brown, "On Resisting Resistance."
- 21 Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance," 42.
- 22 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Book, 1973).
- 23 Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal"
- 24 See for example, Ulysses, "Hip Hop Revolution," *Open Democracy*, 16 December 2011; Filiu, *The Arab Revolution*; Walt, "El Général and the Rap Anthem."
- 25 See Gonzalez-Quijano, "Rap, an Art of the Revolution" for a detailed analysis of this case.
- 26 Important works in the study of media, literature, music, poetry, cinema and popular culture more widely include, Stein and Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*; Sabry, *Arab Cultural Studies*; Zuhur, *Images of Enchantment*; Tawil-Souri, "The Necessary Politics of Palestinian Cultural Studies"; Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986/2000); Walter Armbrust, *Mass Culture and Modernism in Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Armbrust, *Mass Mediations*; Karima Laachir and Saeed Talajooy, *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2013). For works on cinema see, for example, Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989); Hamid Nafisi, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema, vol. 1-4* (Duke University Press, 2011/12); Hamid Dabashi, ed., *Dreams of a Nation: On Palestinian Cinema* (New York: Verso, 2006); Haim Bresheeth, ed., "The Conflict and Contemporary Visual Culture in Palestine and Israel" (Special Issue), *Third Text* 20, no. 3-4 (2006). On music, see, among others, Martin Stokes, *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); David MacDonald, *My Voice Is My Weapon: Music, Nationalism, and the Poetics of Palestinian Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Yiannis Kanakis, "Singing a Story, Building a History: Kurdish Women's Sung Word in Present-Day Turkey," *Middle East in London*, December 2012; Massad, "Palestine Put to Music." The emergence of the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, and recently several special issues (e.g., *Anthropology of the Middle East* 8, no. 1 (2013) on Art in the Middle East, or *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (2010) on Visual Arts and Art Practices in the Middle East) also highlight the increased interest in the topic.
- 27 Stein and Swedenburg, eds., *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*.
- 28 Tawil-Souri, "The Necessary Politics of Palestinian Cultural Studies," 154.
- 29 Ibid, fn 8.
- 30 See also *ibid* for such a Gramscian approach.
- 31 On this point of censorship see also Tripp, *Power and the People*, 305. See also Samia Mehrez, *Egypt's Culture Wars: Politics and Practice* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010).
- 32 Tripp, *Power and the People*, 307.
- 33 Gonzalez-Quijano, "Rap, an Art of the Revolution or a Revolution in Art," no page number provided.
- 34 Sarah Mousa, "Ammar Abo Bakr: Committing Murder, then Marching in the Funeral Procession", *Jadaliyya*, 27 January 2014, <http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/16192/ammara-bo-bakr-committing-murder-then-marching-in->.
- 35 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2010), 69.
- 36 Guenoun, Kavanagh, and Lapidus, "Jacques Ranciere," 17.
- 37 Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009).
- 38 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 151.

- 39 Sharif Kanaana, "Humour of the Palestinian 'Intifada,'" *Journal of Folklore Research* 27, no. 3 (1990), 231-240.
- 40 Ibid., 233.
- 41 In her novel *Sharon and My Mother in Law*, Amiry details the travails and absurdities of Palestinian everyday life under occupation; see Suad Amiry, *Sharon and My Mother in Law* (London: Granta Books, 2006). Badr, in her short story "The March of the Dinosaurs," also tells in a humorous way of people's quest for normal life during the Israeli army attacks on the West Bank in 2002. See Liana Badr, "March of the Dinosaurs," in *Freedom: Short Stories Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (London: Mainstream Publishing, 2009). For Darwish's poetry, see his *Memory for Forgetfulness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 42 *The Time that Remains* (2009). Directed by Elia Suleiman. Israel/Palestine: multiple production sources including Nazira Films, France 3 Cinema, Artemis Films, Radio Television Belge Francophone.
- 43 Jacques Rancière, Fulvia Carnevale, and John Kelsey, "Art of the Possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in Conversation with Jacques Ranciere," *Artforum*, 2007, 256-69.
- 44 Elia Suleiman, quoted in Tawil-Souri, "The Necessary Politics of Palestinian Cultural Studies," 153-154.
- 45 Maira, *Jil Oslo*.
- 46 Ibid; Tawil-Souri, "The Necessary Politics of Palestinian Cultural Studies".
- 47 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 151.
- 48 Abu-Lughod, "The Romance of Resistance," 42.