

This publication shall not be considered a source of education on Palestine and the Palestinian plight for freedom. Plenty of those sources exist, and we hope you've taken the time to engage with them.

Nor does this publication posit arguments for the validity of Palestinian calls for freedom. Plenty of those voices have been shouting, and we hope that you've been paying attention to them.

Finally, and in no uncertain terms, this publication makes no feigned attempts at *neutrality*, the oft-misconstrued virtue that conveniently ignores the power disparity between oppressor and oppressed. The notion that it is unfair to "take sides" is perhaps one of the greatest wins for the perpetuation of settler colonial violence. We firmly stand with the oppressed in their fight against oppression.

This publication instead hopes to connect a few dots, helping us in navigating through the current wave of censorship in Europe against its backdrop of settler colonial logic and narrative violence. The censorship unfolding across Europe today is a logical progression of the narrative violence inflicted upon Palestinians over the past century.

AN (INCOMPLETE) TIMELINE OF CREATIVE PRACTITIONER CENSORSHIP IN EUROPE FROM OCTOBER 8TH, 2023 TO FEBRUARY 8TH, 2024

October 8th
The Poetry Foundation, US, indefinitely shelves Joshua Gutterman Tränen's review of Sam Sax's PIG.

October 10th
Southwark Cathedral cancels PalMusic UK.

October 11th
The Mayor of Choisy-Le Roi, France, cancels performance of "And Here I Am" by Palestinian theatre group The Freedom Theatre.

October 12th
The launch for Nathan Thrall's book 'A Day in the Life of Abed Safama: A Palestine Story' at Conway Hall is cancelled.

October 12th
Norwegian director Mats Gronud receives an email from the Paris education authority stating that all school screenings of his film 'The Tower' have been cancelled.

October 12th
Haus für Poesie Berlin cancels the launch of Arabic Poetry Anthology by Palestinian-Syrian poet Ghayath Almadhour.

October 13th
The Royal Geographical Society cancels the Palestine Festival of Literature.

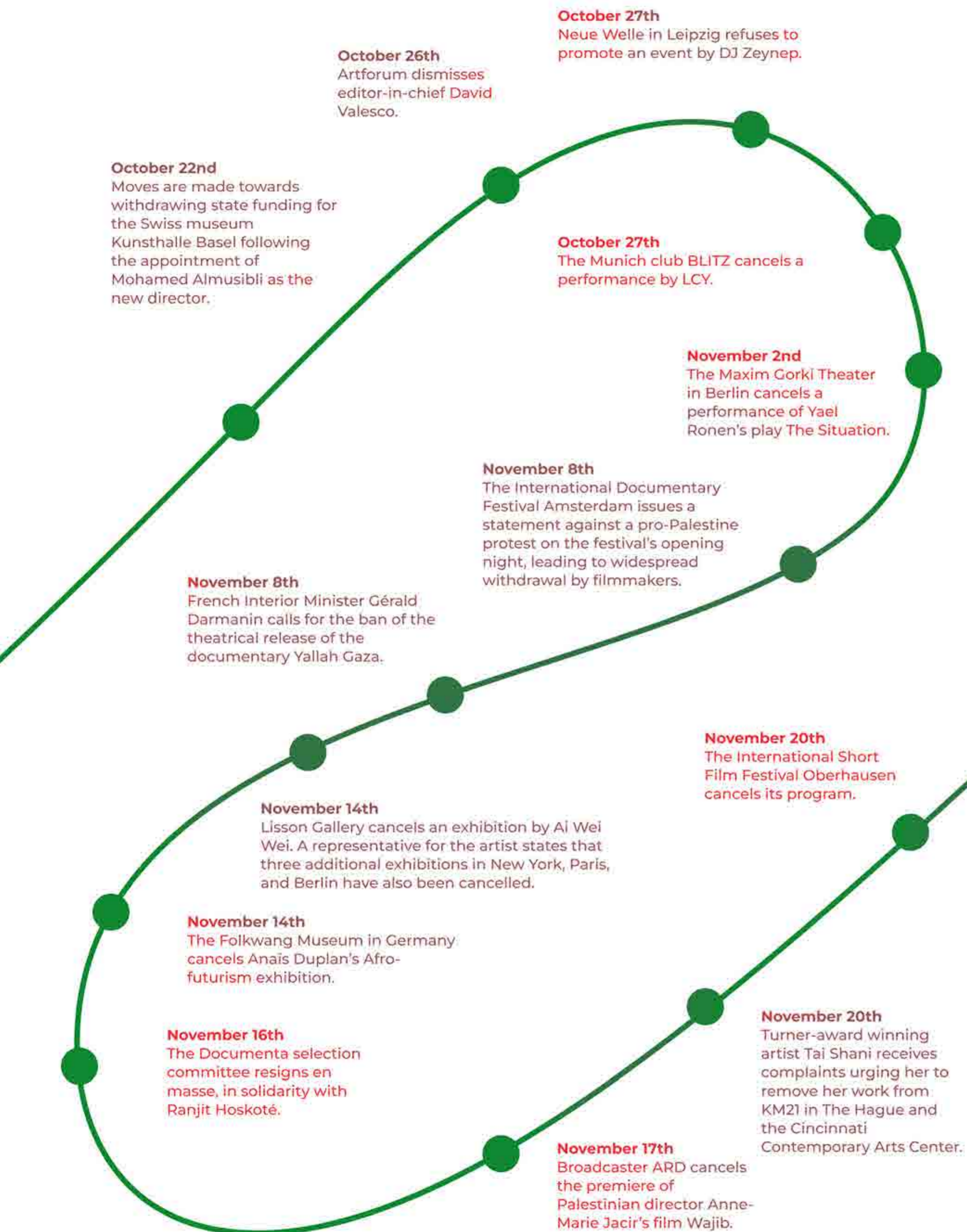
October 21st
92NY in New York pulls an event featuring Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen.

October 15th
Frankfurt Book Fair postpones the presentation of the LiBeraturpreis award to Palestinian author Adania Shibli.

October 16th
The Witness Palestine Film Festival in Rochester, New York, cancels its physical edition and opts for a virtual format.

October 19th
Omid Djalili's performance at the Festival Drayton Centre is cancelled.

October 20th
A talk by Palestinian artist Emily Jacir is cancelled at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.



THIS IS A BRIEF SELECTION OF THE 110+ CASES WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO IDENTIFY

Countless others may have been postponed or cancelled in silence, or never announced at all.

“... to silence Palestinian voices and narratives at this exact moment is not merely a betrayal of the fundamental principles of pluralism and freedom in the arts, it is also inhumane.”

Open letter signed by 1,323 cultural workers following censorship of Palestinian film and poetry by Bristol's Arnolfini — December 12th, 2023

“... we are witnessing unprecedented international censorship of artists and curators who have expressed their political views and support for the Palestinian people.”

The International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, January 15th, 2024

“Hunting for a particular combination of words in every single piece of writing – no matter its focus – is a strategy.

The goal is not to fight antisemitism. It’s to make people fearful to speak up against Israel’s ongoing genocidal violence for fear of being fired/smeared”.

Naomi Klein — October 28th 2023

“We know we have many allies behind the scenes, but everyone is scared. Scared of losing their business and livelihood. We understand that fear, but we have no option but to resist.”

Benjamin Huseby — February 7th, 2024

WHY

IS IT IMPOSSIBLE TO TALK ABOUT PALESTINE IN EUROPEAN ART SPACES?

Injustice operates across many different axes; alongside physical destruction of spaces and endangerment of bodies, a complex web of actors need to operate in unison to ensure that you, the taxpaying onlooker abroad, are fine with what's happening.

It has been made near-impossible to speak about Palestine without some form of repercussion. The accusations, intimidation, and character defamation tactics are eerily similar in each case. This situation often goes unquestioned, as most European governments unabashedly stand opposed to the rights of Palestinians; and thus to parrot the opinions of one's government is viewed as the safe, politically-docile position — even if that opinion has violent attitudes weaved within it.

There's a significant amount of nuance, and possibly too complex a web of actors to provide a simple and catchy answer. Regardless, here is our subjective, straightforward, and catchy take: the colonial logic that has long perpetuated the suffering of communities around the globe remains firmly in place.

Acknowledging the Palestinian struggle for freedom would involve recognizing an immeasurable amount of historical injustice and suffering of communities worldwide; all of which was spawned by the same colonial logic that keeps Palestine subjugated today.

European institutions have shown, in full display, their incapacity to reconcile colonial injustice, even as it stares them in the face, **demanding a ceasefire.**

Beyond white-cubed enclosures and capital-drenched grandeur, artistic practices have always been a critical component of the liberation toolkit. Palestine may remind us that art created in opposition to those who seek to quell its exposure ends up being the most urgent form of art, and the one that most critically demands our attention.

In this quick reader, we hope to introduce you to some of the revolutionary capacities of art-making, looking at the subversive techniques employed by Palestinian creatives as a source of inspiration. Given that subversion involves a politics of visibility, this survey of practices is by no means exhaustive. We could hypothetically argue that the practices most successful at subverting censorship are, by the very nature of subversion, undetectable to us. In any case, here's what we've got.

The Watermelon

For decades, Israeli authorities banned the Palestinian flag and any reproductions of it. A series of confiscations and arrests unfolded, as artists rebelled against the restrictions.

Consequently, the watermelon took hold as one of the defining visual motifs of the 1980's. Artworks that featured the red, green, white, and black fruit were understood widely to be an act of civil disobedience; a defiance to the ban of the flag bearing the same colours. Born of dissidence, the watermelon was imbued with a notable sense of victory, as creatives self-organised to outwit a force of censorship.

This symbol has come into use again in recent years, as the phenomenon of 'shadowbanning' on social media has led to an algorithmic silencing of Palestinian content.

Fig 1. @jam_musings, 2023, From the River - 15
 Fig 2. @estersscribbles, 2023, Stop Colonialism
 Fig 3. @MRCPPR_Design, 2023, Resistance
 Fig 4. Viviana Bonura, 2023, Artisti per la Palestina

Fig 1. ←

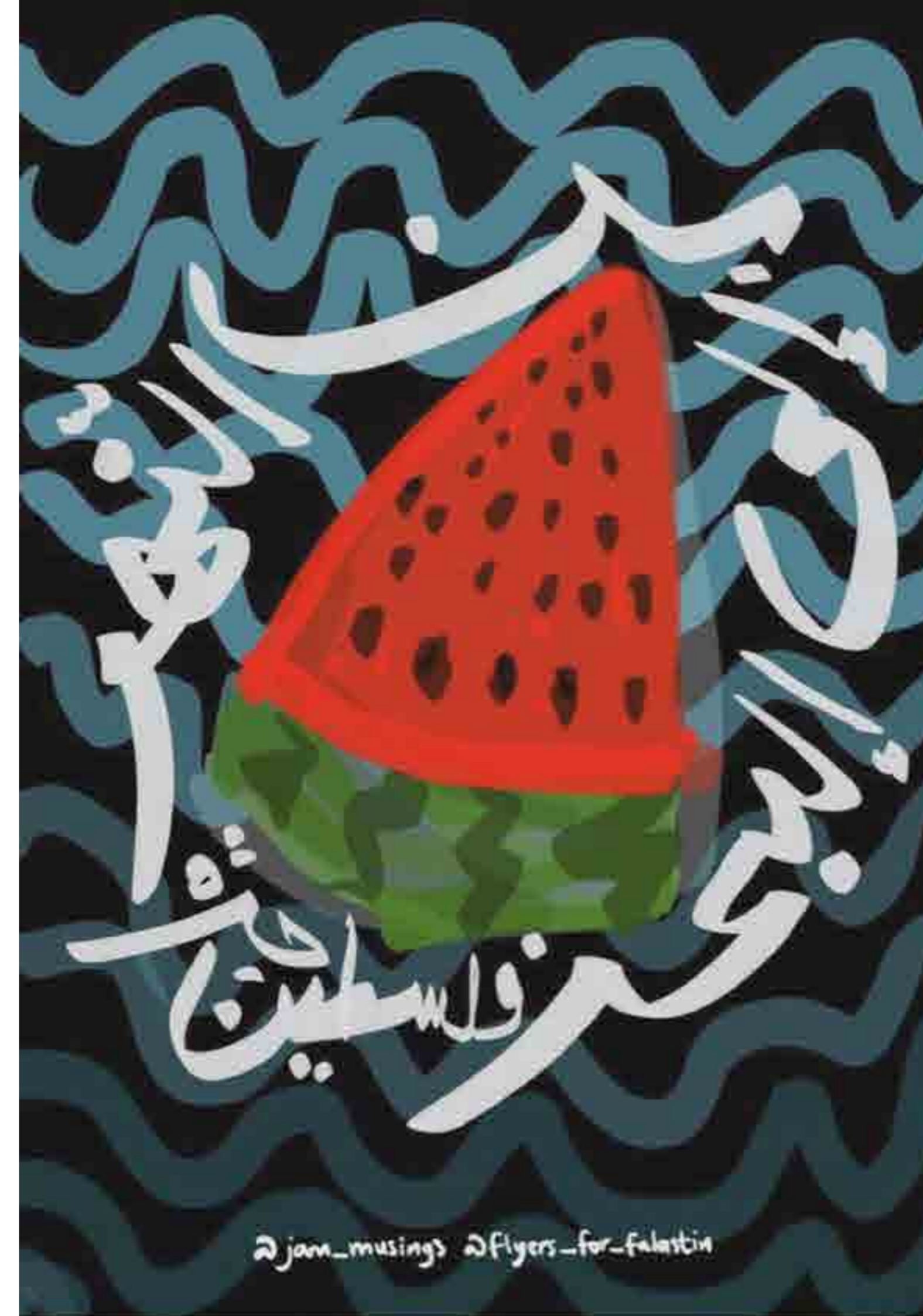


Fig 2. →

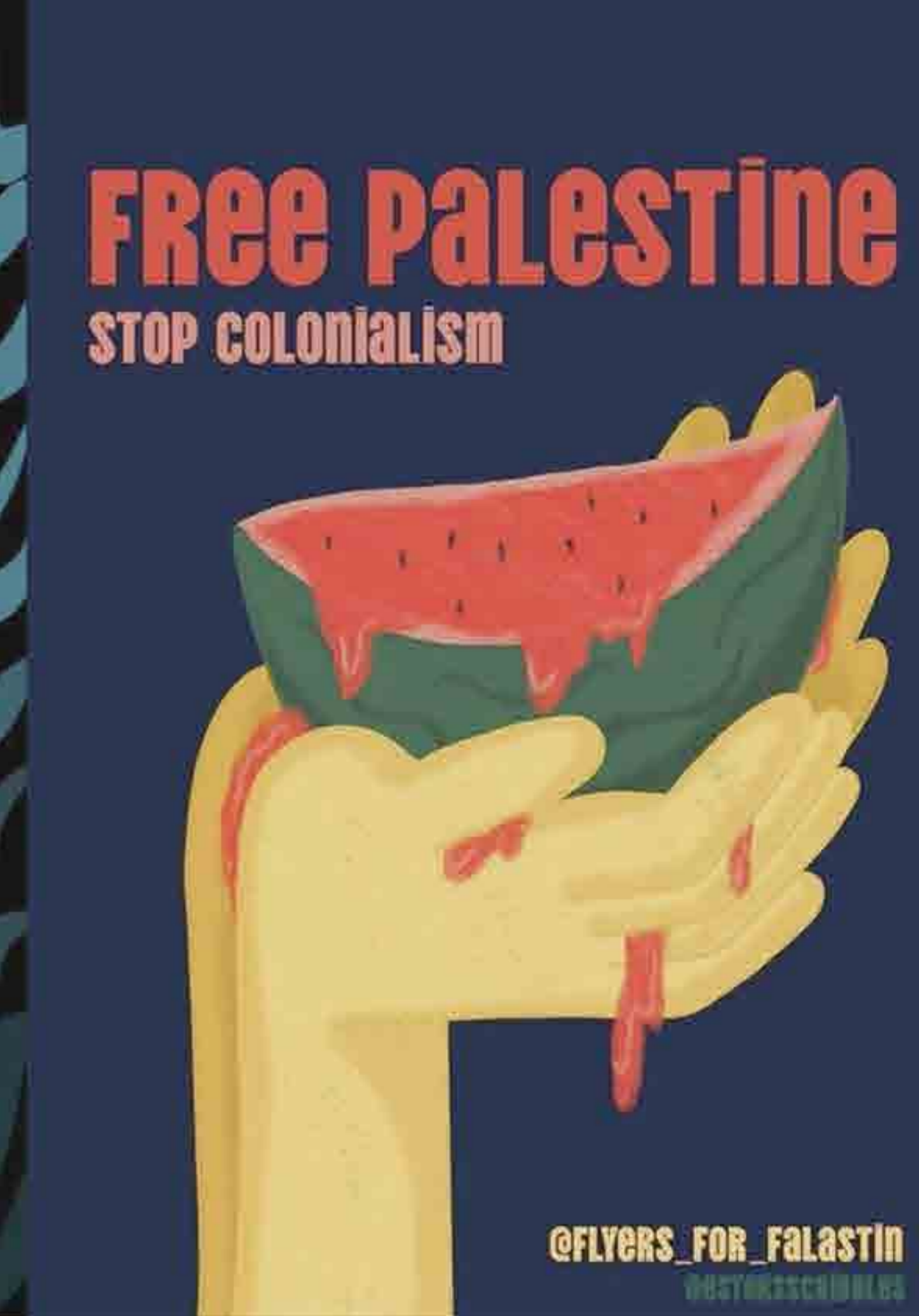
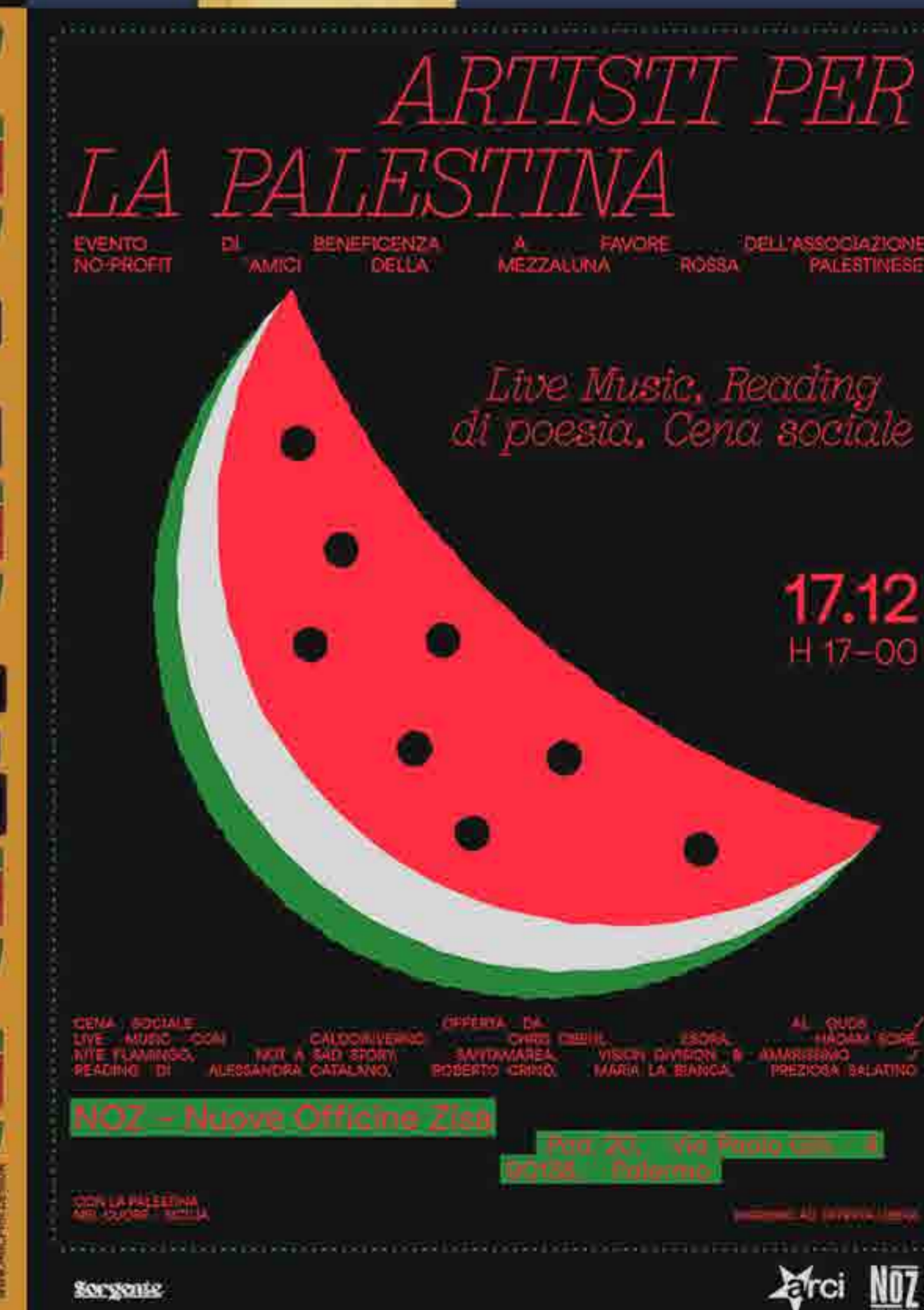


Fig 3. ←



Fig 4. →



The Intifada Thobe

Palestine has a long history of embroidered garments, which are typically decorated over time by the garment's wearer. Textiles, colours, embroidery patterns, and stitching techniques served as markers of identity, together forming a complex vocabulary of belonging.

Prior to the forced displacement of 700,000 Palestinians from their homes in 1948, embroidery patterns told stories of what women in different villages saw in their daily lives, be it Palestine's mountains, shorelines, or deserts. Regional and hyperlocal embroidery patterns emerged over time, as the evolution of motifs was subtly negotiated over communal stitching sessions.

During the First Intifada, these same embroidery skills were redeployed to subvert the Israeli military's crackdown on the Palestinian flag. Women embroidered flags, doves, olive branches, and other symbols of Palestinian identity onto their garments, visually imposing these motifs in defiance of the military occupation's censorship.

This later became known as the Intifada Thobe.



Fig 5. <https://watanpalestine.com/products/palestinian-intifada-thobe>

Fig 6. Model clad in a Palestinian handmade embroidered Thobe produced by INAASH, 1970

Fig 7. Fatima Yousef Sewing a Palestinian Thobe, Kobar-Ramallah, the 1970s

Fig 8. Abna' al-Domou' Troupe During Performing a Show at Bethlehem University, 1980

Fig 9. Musa Awwad and Jamiia Burbar, Jifna, 1933



Fig 7.



Fig 9.

Fig 8.



موسی الخوري عوده عواد من جنفا
 و زوجته جميله ايوب حنا بريار
 عام ١٩٣٣

Fig 6. ←

Beyond the Gallery

Posters, situated at the intersection of art, political urgency, and communal mobilisation, were once the preferred medium of Palestine's leading artists. During times of urgency, artists adapted their practice to extend beyond the gallery space, instead flooding the streets with evocative imagery and centred calls to action.

Lightweight and easy to reproduce en masse, these posters played a crucial role in subverting military impositions.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, during the Israeli military's imposition of military law in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem, posters were distributed clandestinely by neighbourhood residents who knew how to evade the watchful eye of the surveilling Israeli soldiers. Under the cover of darkness, the posters were put up, only to be swiftly torn down by the soldiers once they were exposed to sunlight.



Fig 10.



Fig 11.

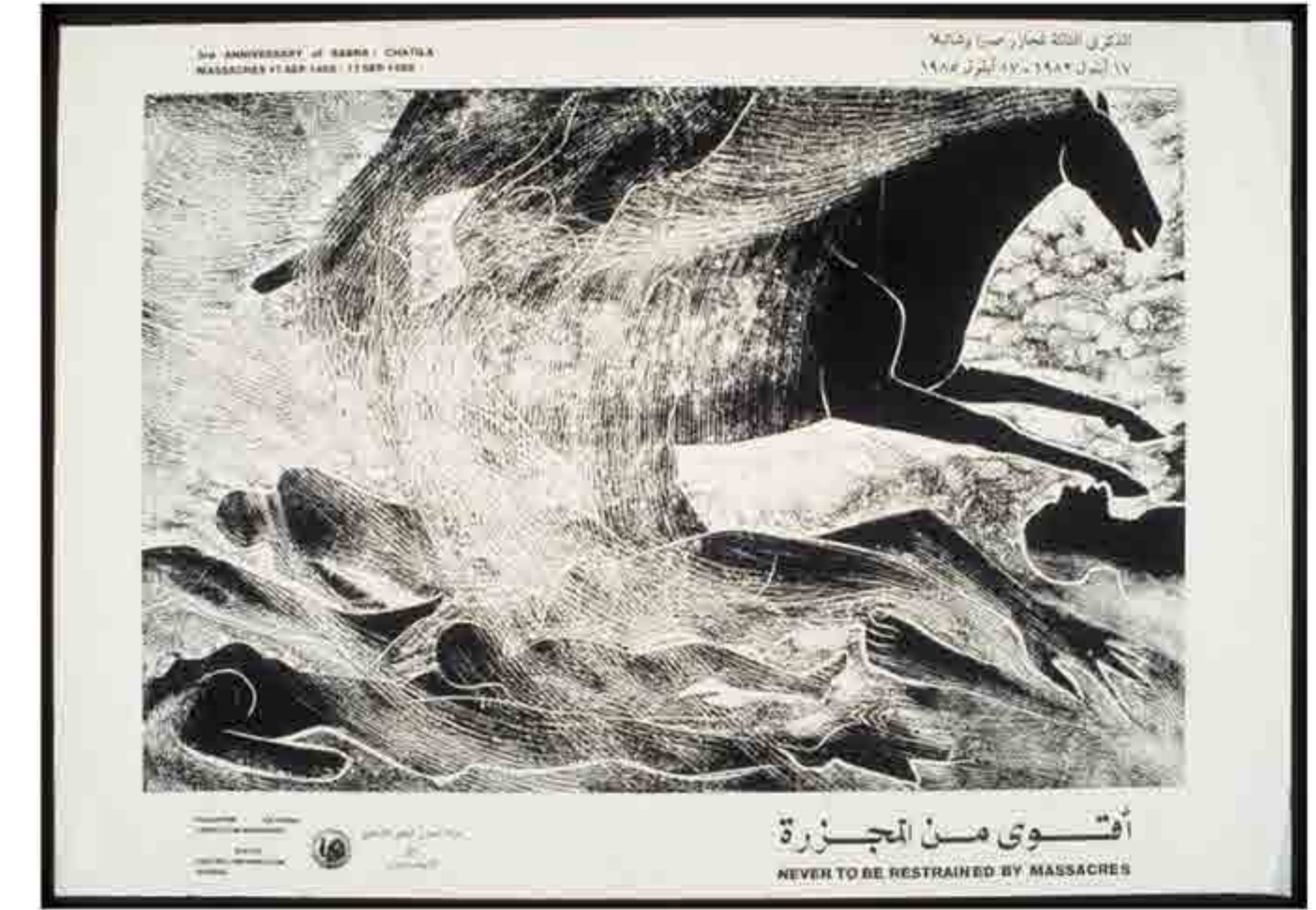


Fig 12.

In that fleeting liminal period—when the posters were up, and just before they were taken down—the call to action could be glimpsed. The subversive efforts of the poster distributors allowed the message to continue spreading through word of mouth, despite the soldiers' attempts to suppress it.

Esteemed artists such as Ismael Shammout, Suleiman Mansour, Mustafa Al Hallaj, and many others showcased their visual prowess through these artworks. These pieces adorned the walls of occupied Palestinian cities long before they gained recognition in prestigious institutions globally.

Fig 10. Ne Laissez Pas Tomber, Ismail Shammout, 1974

Fig 11. Palestine Is Arab, Ismail Shammout, 1976

Fig 12. Never To Be Restrained, Mustafa Al Hallaj, 1985

Ya Taaleen al-Jabal

Within the Israeli military court system, Palestinians may be imprisoned without trial or evidence through a process called 'administrative detention.' Israel maintains that individuals under administrative detention pose security threats. However, human rights observers argue that without a fair trial and just cause, administrative detention can be misused as a tool to suppress dissent without any accountability.

The song "Ya Taaleen al-Jabal" (Ascenders of the Mountain) became a covert means of communication between Palestinian women and their imprisoned loved ones; sung during prison visits, with guards only a few metres away.

The song's lyrics were modified by adding the letter "L" to certain words, creating a somewhat coherent sound that required a keen ear to decipher. Given the surveilling soldiers were not native Arabic speakers, these coded messages would rarely be picked up.

This seemingly innocuous alteration created a secret code, allowing them to convey messages, exchange vital information, and provide support to imprisoned loved ones without arousing suspicion from the surveilling soldiers.

Although the era of encryption and covert communication may have faded, the legacy of Ya Taaleen al-Jabal continues in the form of tributes by renowned Palestinian musicians like Reem Banna and Rola Azar.

يا طالعين الجبل
يا طالعين عين لل الجبل يا مولل الموقدين النار
بين للل يامان يامان عين لل هنا يا روح
ما بدي منكي للكم خلعة ولا لالا لابي ملبوس
بين للل يامان يامان
عين لل هنا يا روح

ما بدي منكي للكم خلعة ولا لالا لابي زنار
بين للل يامان يامان
عين لل هنا يا روح

إلا غزال للللذي جوين لللكم محبوبس
بين للل يامان يامان
عين لل هنا يا روح

إلا غزال للللذي جوين لللكم ما يدوم
بين للل يامان يامان
عين لل هنا يا روح

The Keffiyeh

Since the early 1900's, the Keffiyeh has been worn by rural Palestinians as a practical garment to protect from the sun during field work. City dwellers, meanwhile, would don the less practical tarbush.

The keffiyeh first became a symbol of revolution during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt against British imperialism in Palestine, as working class and rural Palestinians took the lead at the revolution's forefront. In 1938, the revolution's leadership instructed urban Palestinians to wear the keffiyeh, aiding in camouflaging their rural counterparts and evading British military detection. The tarbush was promptly abandoned, as Palestinian society unified in their keffiyehs to subvert British colonial powers.

In recent decades, it has also proven to be practical in protecting against teargas during crackdowns by the Israeli military.

This textile continues its impressive streak of practicality, having recently been adopted as a method to cover one's face and undermine the Israeli military occupation's use of facial recognition technology.

As of 2024, Israeli surveillance companies have been using military checkpoints in the West Bank as a testing site for facial recognition technology; a practice that has raised concerns among human rights groups and digital rights activists.

- Fig 13. Student Council Elections at Birzeit University, 1992
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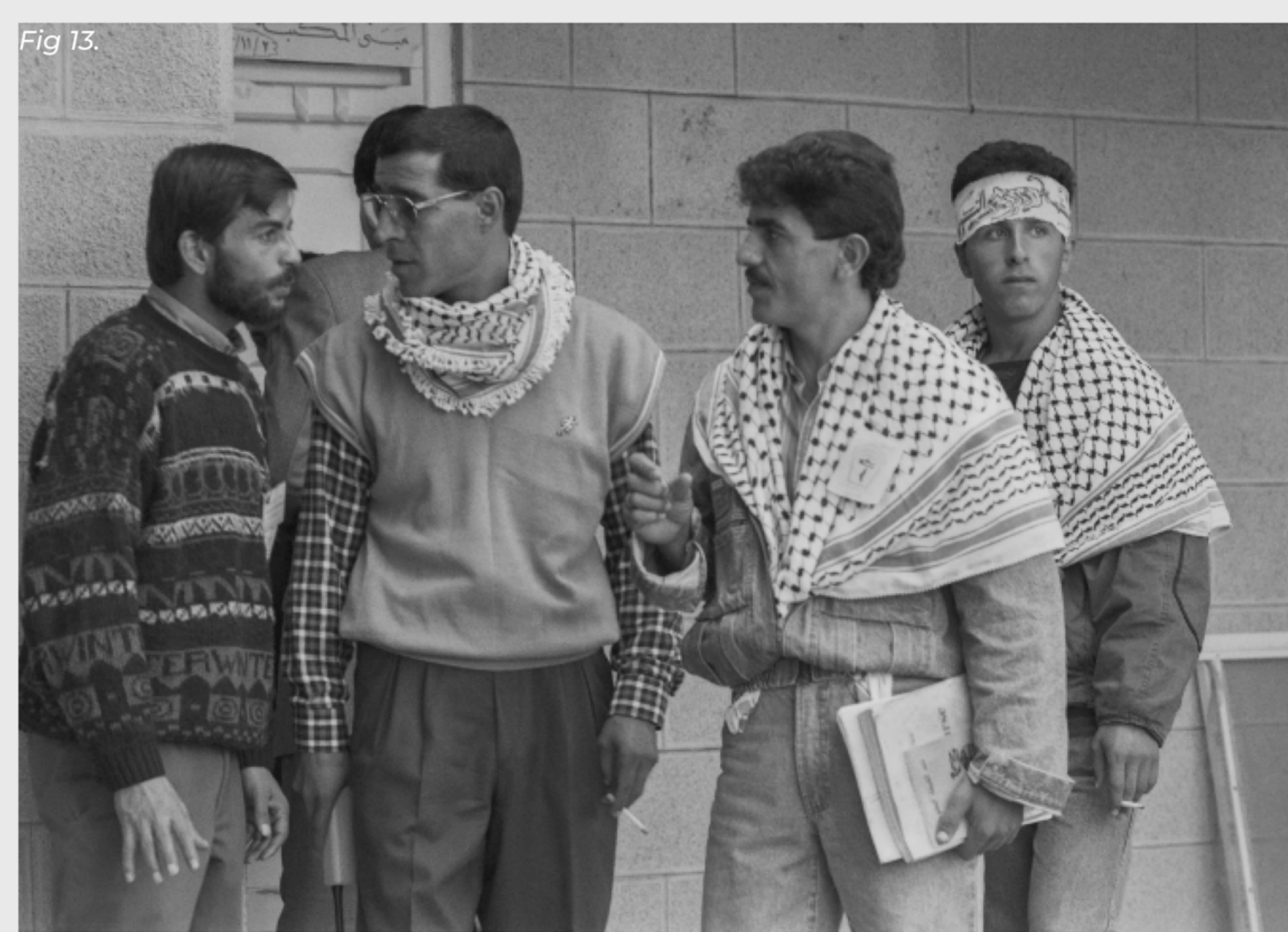


Fig 14.





Fig 15.

Fig 18.



Fig 19. ↑



Fig 16.



Fig 20. ←

Fig 21. ↓

Fig 17.



The Intifada 1987

The Intifada is a musical tribute to the First Intifada, a popular uprising that occurred in response to the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and East Jerusalem. This significant event began on December 8, 1987, and was a collective effort by Palestinians to demand an end to oppressive measures such as curfews, raids, deportations, and more.

During the uprising, musician Riad Awwad, along with his sisters Hanan, Alia, and Nariman, and renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, collaborated to record 11 songs that served as a historical document reflecting the turmoil of the time. These heartfelt songs became a powerful expression of the Palestinian struggle for existence, serving as both a tribute to the homeland and a guide for revolution.

The music itself embodied the DIY and community-based spirit of the First Intifada, as the album was recorded in a living room using instruments crafted by musicians themselves.

The lyrics, characterised by their simplicity and repetition, lend themselves to collective singing, similar to chants.

Home-made cassettes were distributed throughout Jerusalem and the West Bank, passed along by friends and trusted revolutionaries.

The Israeli military seized a majority of the album's original 3,000 copies, rendering it a lost manifesto that remained unheard for years, and largely forgotten.

In 2020, Mo'min Swaitat, founder of the British label Majazz Project, rediscovered and purchased thousands of tapes from a closed music store in his hometown of Jenin, in the West Bank. Among these tapes was a copy of the album, which was subsequently reissued as "The Intifada 1987."



Fig 22.



Fig 23.



Fig 24.



Documentarians

In 2002, the Israeli Defense Forces launched Operation Defensive Shield and invaded a densely-populated Palestinian refugee camp in the city of Jenin.

The refugee camp was left in complete isolation for several days after the invasion, with access strictly controlled by the Israeli military. Rumours of a massacre spread across the globe, but facts could not be confirmed without access to Jenin.

The Israeli military cited "safety concerns" as grounds for barring journalists and human rights organisations from entering the camp during and after the invasion.

Various casualty figures were circulated, with a senior Palestinian official accusing Israel of massacring over 500 people in the camp. Israeli sources, however, stated the number was between 53 to 56. But alas, a UN fact-finding mission was denied access to Jenin.

By controlling access to Jenin, Israel could — hypothetically — evade accountability for any events that occurred there. Without photos, videos, or testimonies, it would be impossible to challenge the version of events presented by the Israeli military.

Fig 25. †

Mohammad Bakri, a Palestinian documentary filmmaker, managed to enter Jenin covertly with his camera to conduct interviews shortly after the invasion, posing residents of the refugee camp with a simple: "What happened?" His resulting documentary, *Jenin Jenin*, presented testimonials of a massacre that was almost concealed. This documentary film therein took the place of the human rights observer, in an active fight against misinformation.

The documentary was banned from screening in Israel.

Since then, Human Rights Watch has reported that "Israeli forces committed serious violations of international humanitarian law, some amounting prima facie to war crimes." The charge of war crimes in Jenin was echoed by Amnesty International.

Ambiguous Cartoons

From 1963 to 1987, renowned Palestinian cartoonist Naji Al Ali managed to insert a range of subversive messages through his cartoons, which were published in newspapers throughout the Middle East and worldwide.

As a medium that relies on hyperbolic visuals and minimal text, cartoons offer a unique set of propositions to the subversive creative.

Sarcasm and irony were interwoven into the cartoons' political provocations, offering up ambiguity as a shield. This ambiguity provided the artist with the ability to criticise the status quo more intensely than most journalists could, in widely circulated media that would typically be more apprehensive of political consequences, no less.

Fig 26. He Will Be Planted More Firmly, Naji al Ali, 1980
Fig 27.- 30. *Untitled Cartoon*, Naji Al-Ali, date unknown



عندما تبتتر ساقك ووطني،
ينغرس أكثر في أرضه

IF A PATRIOT'S LEG IS SUBJECTED TO AMPUTATION
HE WILL BE PLANTED MORE FIRMLY
INTO THE GROUND OF THE HOMELAND



Fig 31.

Fig 32.

Fig 33.

Fig 34.

Fig 35.

Photography as Evidence

In a context where reality is under constant renegotiation — and where Palestinian suffering can be downplayed or outright denied — Palestinian photographers have been active agents in the subversion of censored narratives and the combating of misinformation.

Palestinian photographer Rula Halawani is renowned for her compelling images that depict the intricacies of life under occupation. Her photography often delves into themes of identity, displacement, and resistance.

Negative Incursions, one of her well-known series, showcases photographs of Israeli military incursions into Palestinian territory. The images, created in negative, underscore the dislocation of normalcy in conflict zones, lending them an eerie, almost surreal quality. Through a blend of documentary and artistic intervention, the artist leverages photography to challenge viewers' preconceptions of the depicted realities.

Fig 36.

Fig 37.



Fig 38. ↓



Fig 39. ↑

Photographing Genocide

In times of crisis, the Palestinian photographer may become burdened with the task of documenting atrocities.

As the 2023-2024 genocide in Gaza unfolded, journalists and photographers on the ground bore the heavy burden of relaying images of destruction to the rest of the globe — not least because of Israel's restrictions on the entry of foreign journalists.

Motaz Azaiza is a photographer turned photojournalist who gained recognition for his documentation of war crimes committed against Palestinians by occupying forces. Prior to the genocide, Motaz's photography aimed to capture beauty within everyday life in Gaza.

The globe owes gratitude to Motaz Azaiza, Bisan Odeh, Hind Khoudary, Plestia Alaqad, Wael Dahdouh, Doaa Mohammad, Hamza Wael, Hosam Salem, Ahmed Hijazi, and many others – for using photographs to subvert the narrative violence that attempts to minimise the loss of life in Gaza.



Fig 40. ←



Fig 41. ↓



Fig 42. ↑

The Film Archive

During Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Palestine Film Unit was believed to have been destroyed in an airstrike, resulting in the loss of decades of collected film material documenting the Palestinian struggle.

A process of erasure ensued, in which the social memory preserved in this archive was downgraded to the merely hypothetical; the abstracted; the nearly-forgotten. What remains are scattered images, sounds, and film fragments stored in boxes across the globe, chanced upon only by those who search diligently enough.

The 2008 documentary film, "Kings & Extras", follows the director's quest to uncover the fate of the film archives, and whether any remnants still exist. The film ends on an unsatisfying note, having encountered numerous deadends. In 2017, it was discovered that the archive had been looted and is now guarded under the highest level of authorization in the Israeli military archive.

In his film *Off Frame, AKA Revolution Until Victory*, Mohanad Yaqubi undertakes archival film restoration to construct a coherent image of the Palestinian struggle from the 1960s to the 1980s. A subsequent project, *R21 AKA Restoring Solidarity*, gathered material from the Japan Solidarity Movement with Palestine, which the director stumbled upon during a screening of his first film in Tokyo.

In reviving social memory from the brink of extinction, these fragments of film serve as an embodiment of defiance to the repeated attacks on Palestinian archives. Contested histories are only contested in the absence of an archive; archival restoration therein becomes a revolutionary act of subversion.

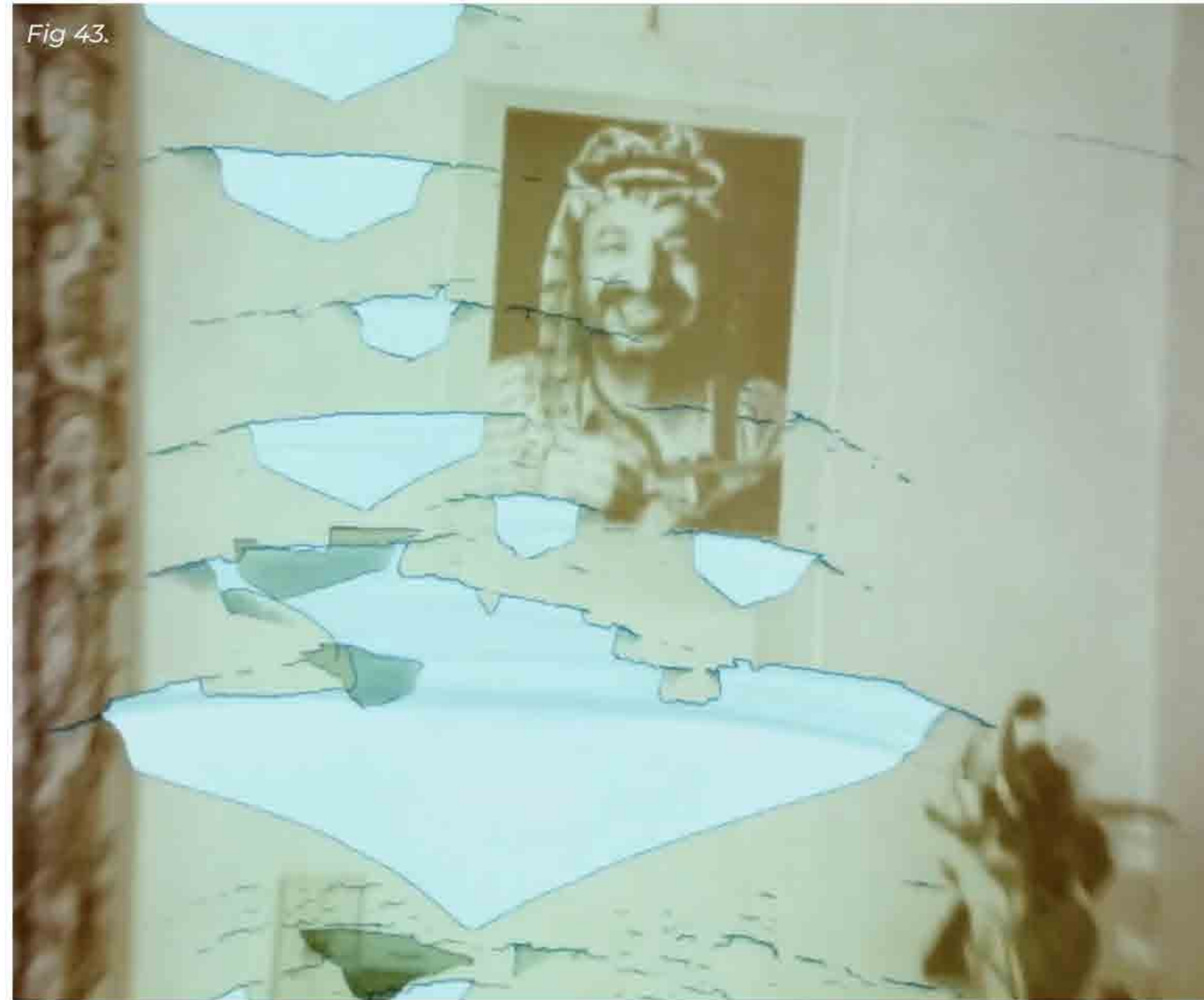


Fig 44.
Fig 47.

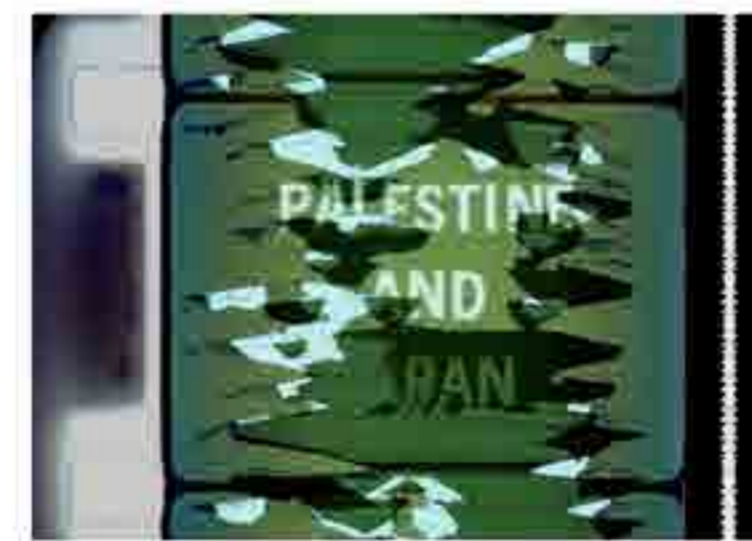


Fig 45.
Fig 48.



Fig 46.
Fig 49.





Fig 50. Pasha's Palace Museum, Gaza City, 2019



Fig 51. Pasha's Palace Museum, Gaza City, 2024

Decentralised Collections

Palestinian cultural production and antiquities bear a heavy burden as historical documents — proof of existence, effectively; in a context that has repeatedly brought into question whether Palestinians even exist.

As of February 1st, 2024, more than 200 cultural heritage sites, museums, and archives have been demolished in Israel's indiscriminate bombing of Gaza in 2023 and 2024. This ravaging of cultural heritage in Gaza brings grim immediacy to the fears that have halted the development of a national museum in Palestine.

Creating a national museum in Palestine would consolidate a significant portion of Palestine's cultural heritage in one location, which could potentially put valuable art, artefacts, and antiquities at risk.

Therefore, the idea of dispersing and decentralising Palestine's heritage is considered a safer approach to ensure its long-term preservation.

The Palestinian Museum thus launched in 2016, without a collection, and with no intention of developing one in the foreseeable future. Temporary exhibitions bring together cultural relics, which are ready to be dispersed upon closing date.



Fig 52.



Fig 54.



Future Infrastructures

The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Palestine is, at current, a hypothetical future museum, set to house the artistic heritage of Palestine and its supporters. Taking inspiration from the Museum in Exile established in apartheid-era South Africa during the 1980s, the project aims to create a solidarity collection through artist donations.

Currently, the collection is housed and managed by the Institut du monde arabe in Paris, serving as a temporary anchor point. The necessary infrastructure for the future museum is currently in development, pending the establishment of a safe environment — a free Palestine, to be specific — to relocate it to its intended home.

Fig 55. →



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Fig 25. *Jenin Jenin*, Mohammad Bakri, 2002

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Fig 43. - 49. Mohanad Yaqubi. *R21 AKA Restoring Solidarity*, 2022

Fig 50. *Pasha's Palace Museum*, Gaza City, 2019

Fig 51. *Pasha's Palace Museum*, Gaza City, 2024

Fig 52. - 55. <https://www.imarabe.org/en/exhibitions/for-a-museum-in-palestine>

