

(Re)imagining Peace: Exploring Mediatized Everyday Peace in Israel/Palestine

by

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Dedication

To Noa

Acknowledgments

In 2016, I moved to Ann Arbor after completing my bachelor's and master's degrees in Jerusalem. Staying in my department was very appealing; it was, and still is, one of the world's leading departments in communication and media studies. I made meaningful connections with mentors and peers; I felt very comfortable walking around the beautiful Mount Scopus campus, overlooking the mountains, the desert, and the Dead Sea. Nevertheless, I needed to try something new and explore new horizons. In retrospect, and quite ironically, I could have never written a project about peace in Israel/Palestine without leaving. Distance summons yearning, reflection, and lucidity that are difficult to attain when entrenched in the eventfulness of a violent conflict.

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Abstract

Peace is usually studied through nation-states operating in the international system, but recently, peace scholars have underscored the need to research peace as a part of everyday life. I argue that communication scholars should join the new conversation about everyday peace. I discuss major peace theories in broadcast and digital media that either replicate the state-centered approach or struggle to find ways to reach reconciliation. Nevertheless, I argue that communication scholars are well equipped to study everyday peace by focusing on mediatized manifestations of everyday life in popular culture and digital platforms.

I demonstrate my claim by analyzing visual and sonic manifestations of everyday peace in Israel/Palestine. I investigate two Israeli television shows, *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*, focusing on Jewish and Palestinian men who try to pass members of the other community. Their identity work proves that national and ethnic identities are not stable but remain in flux, undermining Zionism which strives to silo Jews and Palestinians into separate categories. Nevertheless, *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* do not prescribe easy solutions to the conflict in their plots. Instead, they allow characters to work through the hardships of the conflict and its implications in their everyday lives. I study the texts of both television shows, illuminating the power of fiction to discuss taboo subjects at the core of the conflict. Moreover, I analyze the production of both shows. Based on interviews with creative workers, I contend that making quality TV is in itself a form of peacemaking because it brings Jews and Palestinian together, galvanizing them to process trauma and explore possible connections between the two communities.

I study the sonic expression of everyday peace through a second case study — *Border Gone*, a digital activist project publishing stories of ordinary Palestinians from Gaza in Hebrew online. I trace the project’s evolution, which initially centered around translating stories written by young adults with the help of hundreds of Israeli volunteers. The stories reveal the humanity of Palestinians, undermining the Zionist perception that all Palestinians are terrorists. Ultimately, *Border Gone* transformed into an independent news outlet; the managing team was resolved to provide the appropriate political context to Palestinian stories, showcasing how the Israeli occupation of Gaza affects everyday lives. I conducted interviews with *Border Gone*’s managing team, and with members of its volunteers’ community. I analyze posts appearing on the project’s Facebook page and investigate the various comments uploaded to the page between December 2019-May 2021.

May 2021 marked the peak of the project’s operation during a devastating war in Gaza. During the war, I joined the project’s managing team, conducting a participant observation on its news reporting process using the transcripts of a WhatsApp group where we communicated with each other. I conclude that *Border Gone* affords nonreciprocal listening to Palestinian stories, wherein Jews educate themselves about the reality of Palestinian life without expecting the other side to do the same. The stories captivate Israeli listeners and encourage them to engage in meaningful solidarity by insisting on lively descriptions of Palestinian experiences. *Border Gone*, as well as *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*, prove that peace is possible between Jews and Palestinians who use media to write and tell stories of everyday peace; moreover, media making draws members of these communities close, helping them process the horrors of violent conflict together.

Chapter 1 Why Communication Scholars Should Be a Part of the New Peace Conversation

1.1 The Blind Spots of Top-Down Approaches to Studying Peace

Peace is traditionally studied in international relations, which cohered as a discipline in the U.S. during the heydays of the Cold War. Consequently, many of its classical texts adopted a pessimistic approach to peace, in which it is seen as a lull in war, a temporary condition wherein powerful nation-states deter each other through economic and military means, making war inexpedient (Morgenthau, 1948; Schmidt, 1998; Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1988). The sweeping optimism of the early 1990s following the dismantling of the Soviet Union was celebrated as the ultimate triumph of Western liberalism and led to prophecies about the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). It begot a paradigmatic shift in the field towards theories that discuss peace as a derivative of democratic regimes (Deudney & Ikenberry, 1999; Russett, 1993) or as an idea that transforms international norms (Keck & Sikkink, 2014; Tannenwald, 1999; Wendt, 1992). Nevertheless, these theories still overwhelmingly emphasize nation-states and their official representatives – politicians and diplomats – who are ultimately responsible for making peace through formal agreements. Subsequently, the understandings inscribed into documents should trickle down to the people, leading to a more profound process of reconciliation (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004; Deutsch, 1957; Kacowicz & Bar-Siman-Tov, 2000).

Some critics of the state-centrist approach argue that it ignores the powers of globalization (Lacher, 2003) or perpetuates a European world order that ignores international politics elsewhere (Kayaoglu, 2010). However, these critiques maintain the focus on the international system and

struggle to ground peace. A new theoretical intervention is acute in intractable situations like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where diplomatic negotiations are either seen as missed opportunities (Podeh, 2015) or as a masquerade never designed to deliver true peace (Anziska, 2018; Said, 2000). In my dissertation, I focus on peace below the state level. Titled “everyday peace” (Mac Ginty, 2021) or the “local turn” in peace studies (Paffenholz, 2015), this new approach brings together political scientists, geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, and postcolonialism scholars interested in the everyday lives of ordinary people. It pays close attention to local practices that make peace possible. Since communication scholars have a long history of studying popular culture in media, I will argue that we can contribute to this conversation by showing how everyday peace takes shape in, by, or through media. I will begin my discussion with the contours of everyday peace to demonstrate how communication scholars can help bridge some gaps in this theory and how this theory can expand the existing investigation of peace in communication studies.

1.2 Everyday Peace and the Potential Contribution of Communication Studies

Roger Mac Ginty (2021) begins his book on everyday peace by describing children from Uganda, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo abducted to become child soldiers in guerilla militias. Some of them eventually return to their villages, and despite obvious concerns over their violent past, they are welcomed back and allowed to start their lives afresh (p. 1). government agencies or civil society organizations do not broker these reunions between villagers and soldiers. Instead, they are a pragmatic tool used locally to make life livable under dire political circumstances. Villagers know returning soldiers have nowhere else to go, and punishing them will only fuel violence. The local turn, whose foundations were laid in the late 1990s, sees peace in relationships between people based on fundamental values like mercy, truth, and justice

(Hirblinger & Simons, 2015; Lederach, 1997). Everyday peace does not ignore power structures in society; it can only exist when individuals from the two sides are respected and treated equally. Only then can they start building a line of communication that helps bridge differences (P. Williams, 2015, p. 3)

Everyday peace is a critical paradigm, pushing against the assumption that the local is an “empty space” awaiting the state or a foreign intervener (often a Western colonialist) to use it for their interests. It is hesitant towards problem-solving approaches to peace that prescribe immediate remedies but ignore structural problems (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013; Paffenholz, 2015). Scholars of everyday peace are interested in micro-level interactions between people, traditionally dismissed as insignificant in international relations. As Mac Ginty (2021) points out, one of the critiques commonly posed against this theory from within the discipline is its ostensible ability to be “scaled-up” to the state or international level.

The reorientation and the critical stance of the theory draw in scholars from other disciplines. For example, Bräuchler (2018) aligns the insights of everyday peace with changes happening in anthropology over the last 40 years, as both construe culture as a dynamic yet powerful force in society. She argues that her discipline’s strength in providing a thick description of culture means that anthropologists should get a seat at the table to discuss everyday peace (p. 31). I argue that communication scholars should also get a seat at the same metaphoric table because we are equipped to address one of the theory’s significant obstacles: the difficulty of “seeing” the local (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 778). Unlike official peace agreements, everyday peace happens informally and is rarely documented. Villagers embracing former child soldiers do not record these interactions, making it hard for researchers to “see” this type of peace and analyze it. Scholars of everyday peace also struggle with their positionality as external

observers since most come from western institutions. They need to be careful not to reify the top-down, Eurocentric approach everyday peace is set to critique (Hirblinger & Simons, 2015; Kayaoglu, 2010; Spivak, 1988).

The way to overcome the external positionality of peace scholars is by turning to texts. In his animadversion of anthropologists studying the civil war in Sri Lanka, Ismail (2005) lambasts the authoritative, so-called objective voice they use to construct the island as a place of violence based on limited interactions with locals. For Ismail, the only way to understand Sri Lanka is through texts that abide by it; although these texts are supposedly fictional, they provide intimate accounts of what it means to live in Sri Lanka. In other words, Ismail believes that everyday peace can only be understood through media. Indeed, media studies have a long history of thinking about everyday life. Williams (1958, 1977) highlights the question of culture in his work as a way of living. He critically analyzes novels written in Victorian England to show people's mundane desires and struggles in that time and place; for him, texts capture institutional constraints and unconscious individual behaviors, reflecting a whole way of life.

Media mark pathways to peace by representing the mundane experiences of social fractures and fissures. Media make peace possible through unexpected connections forged between people. Finally, media facilitate creative interactions among industry professionals where the complex dynamics of violent conflict are worked through in a production process. This project will demonstrate how everyday peace manifests in visual and sonic popular cultures in television and digital media. However, I will first turn my attention to the field of communication studies. I will argue that everyday peace is a useful theoretical framework because it offers a new perspective that current theories on peace and the media ignore.

1.3 Peace Theories in Communication Studies

Four major communication theories devote some, if not most, of their attention to peace: media events, peace journalism, media witnessing, and intergroup dialogues. In this section, I will discuss them in two clusters, demonstrating how they overlook the crucial intervention offered by everyday peace. This discussion will lead me to the same conclusion reached in the previous section: that everyday peace should be studied in popular culture and that communication scholars are equipped to analyze its manifestations.

According to Dayan and Katz (1992), media events are rare, preplanned events covered by multiple news outlets that interrupt their regular schedules to deliver live coverage of secular “high holidays” to audiences who gather together to watch with bated breath. Media events are integrative; Dayan and Katz imagined them as moments that bring a nation together and reaffirm its values. According to Couldry (2003), they do not merely represent such values but construct them. The very experience of watching media events tells its audience what it means to be a citizen. The formulation of this theory is closely tied to peace; Dayan and Katz were inspired to write their book after watching the live coverage of Egypt's President Sadat visit to Jerusalem in 1977, which was used to stage peace between Israel and Egypt to the Israeli public (Liebes & Katz, 1997). Indeed, media events often capture historical moments when old barriers between people collapse, whether the fall of the Berlin Wall (Sonnevend, 2016) or a rugby game in post-apartheid South Africa (Steenveld & Strelitz, 1998).

Similar to theories of democratic peace, the original work on media events reflects the optimism of the 1990s, when broadcast media, especially television, were the primary way people experienced these events. The deep mediatization of events and their global distribution (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Hepp & Couldry, 2010) mean that they are no longer exclusively relevant to a

single nation or appear on a handful of television channels. Viewers become active participants in constructing their meaning on social media, challenging the ability to cohere people around a clear set of values (Vaccari et al., 2015). Moreover, the 9/11 attacks and the pessimism that followed underscore disintegrative events like disasters, wars, and terror attacks, concluding that there is “no more peace” in media events (E. Katz & Liebes, 2007).

Media events pertain to rare moments when peace becomes exciting – the festive signing ceremony, the brave visit of a leader to the enemy’s land against all odds, or the fall of a grand monument that symbolizes long years of war. However, diplomatic negotiations are unappealing to journalists for the most part. According to Wolfsfeld (2004), journalists are drawn to wars because they make good stories - they are simple, eventful, and dramatic; they make it easy to distinguish the good guys (“us”) from the bad guys (“them”). Peace talks are slow and cumbersome; they complicate questions like “who is right?” and require elaborate considerations of complex situations that news outlets rarely have the time or space to discuss.

Peace journalism is designed to address this bias in the news. Galtung (2003) argues that there is a “low road” and a “high road” to reporting conflicts. He clearly distinguishes between conflict and violence; while the former is integral to every human interaction, the latter is not. Thus, the “low road” of conflict reporting assumes that every disagreement between people must be a zero-sum game; journalists taking this road see conflict as a gladiator circus, focusing on counting kills, wounds, and material damages. The “high road” taken by peace journalists pushes back on this assumption. It sees an opportunity for human progress in conflict, highlighting creative ideas and initiatives that avoid violence. Galtung’s approach is prescriptive; he assigns a list of tasks to peace journalists – urging them to study the roots of the conflict; search out new

ideas that do not lead to one side's violent domination; and highlight actors who work to prevent violence (p. 178).

These suggestions and others have led to heated debates within journalism studies on whether and how peace journalism should be practiced. Some scholars have argued that promoting peace proactively is not the job of journalists and that the gross division between war and peace journalism does not reflect the reality of news reporting (Hanitzsch, 2007; Loyn, 2007; Tenenboim-Weinblatt et al., 2016).

Both media events and peace journalism focus on how news reporting can make the public knowledgeable about peace moments and processes. Media events capture the rare instances when peace materializes, while peace journalism poses an ethical demand to journalists to create an informational environment that favors peace. However, journalists, and the news outlets that employ them, are a cultural elite often pressured to conform to expectations from the state (Arsan, 2013; Barrios & Miller, 2021), especially at times of war (Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Zandberg & Neiger, 2005). Similarly, when the news covers media events, there must be tight coordination between broadcasters and organizers to make the event successful (Dayan & Katz, 1992, pp. 65–68), wherein organizers are often government agencies.

However, in the years following 9/11, there have been numerous examples of western news media telling the stories of the enemy, reflecting a new openness to listen to the other side, and criticizing “our side” for perpetrating violence (Liebes & Kampf, 2004, 2009). Nevertheless, I argue that these more complex representations still do little to humanize the enemy or promote everyday peace based on equality. News stories about the enemy maintain a binary between a victim or a terrorist (or a victim turned a terrorist). Under such circumstances, the enemy can never become a whole human being who can have ordinary life outside of war. Moreover, " our "

journalists always tell stories about the enemy. Therefore, authentic stories are rare or lacking; foreign correspondents writing about war often know little about the cultures they cover and treat local fixers dismissively (Palmer, 2016).

Taken together, critiques of the state-centered approaches to peace research are also applicable here due to the symbiotic relationship between states and news organizations, resulting in journalists struggling to provide an authentic account of the everyday life of the other side. It does not mean that news cannot be a powerful tool for supporting everyday peace. The second part of the dissertation discusses *Border Gone*, an independent, digital news organization where stories written by Palestinians in Gaza are translated to Hebrew for Israeli readers. However, *Border Gone* is strikingly different from mainstream news coverage of Palestinians in Israel; run by political activists, it goes against the grain and forcefully pushes a new political agenda that humanizes Palestinians in Gaza and demands their liberation.

The second cluster of veteran communication theories includes media witnessing and intergroup dialogues. It has a different, seemingly more productive approach to “seeing” everyday peace. Instead of focusing on institutions (i.e., news organizations) and pondering whether their work can get people to believe in peace, these theories turn to the experiences of ordinary people encountering war stories.

Media witnessing asks what it means for audiences to bear witness to the suffering of others. According to Ellis (1999, 2000), television creates a new modality of viewing in which we can no longer say we do not know what is happening elsewhere in the world. Visual images broadcasted live make the experience of watching feel verisimilar and intimate. The news becomes a space for working through complex conflicts, similar to psychotherapy. However, a witness can never wholly recreate the original experience due to what Peters (2009) calls the veracity gap; the trauma

of war atrocities, combined with the unreliability of human memory, create a gap between the internal emotional experience of a survivor and the so-called objective reality of what happened. Witnessing is further removed from that reality because audiences watching from the comfort of their homes do not have the visceral experience so central to being a witness (Peters, 2009). Moreover, journalists inescapably frame war stories in a way they find newsworthy. They often ignore the suffering of Others who are not a part of their imagined national audience (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009) because war journalism is ethnocentric (Wolfsfeld, 2004).

Despite the shortcomings of witnessing, the power of media witnessing emanates from the demand posed to audiences to assume responsibility and speak up for justice. Media witnessing is a *seeing* followed by *saying* (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2014; Peters, 2009), and broadcast media allows it to reach a critical mass of people who can make a difference if they speak up, something that can never happen in a non-mediated setting. Nevertheless, Chouliaraki (2006, 2013) questions whether media audiences can be transformed from spectators to witnesses who feel responsible for the suffering of distant others. Acknowledging the ethnocentrism of the news, she argues that war in faraway places is often represented as an adventure to the spectator, maximizing the distance from survivors. Images of war can quickly become voyeuristic, even entertaining (see also Maoz & Frosh, 2020). Appeals to solidarity with distant suffering create an ironic spectator, who is ambivalent towards such pleas — willing to do something but always reluctant to put effort into their solidarity. A spectator more concerned with how mediated suffering makes them feel than worrying about the well-being of distant others.

All the theories covered so far explore the media's potential ability, especially televised news, to advance peace. However, learning about other people can also happen through interpersonal communication. Literature on intergroup dialogues, drawing heavily from

psychology, indicates how face-to-face encounters between individuals from hostile groups in deeply divided societies can reduce hostility. These dialogues are designed to familiarize participants with their alleged enemies and humanize them. The contact hypothesis poses that meetings adhering to specific criteria, like ensuring that all participants are treated equally and commit to the process, should reduce negative perceptions of the other side (Allport, 1954).

Maoz (2011), reviewing twenty years of organized encounters between Jews and Palestinians, dissects different models used to facilitate them; some deliberately stay clear of discussing the power dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the suffering resulting from it. The coexistence model focuses on folkloristic aspects of everyday life, like shared religious costumes or pursuing a goal unrelated to the conflict, like getting teachers to write school curriculums together (see also Maoz, 2000). Jewish participants often dominate these meetings, leaving Palestinian participants frustrated by their inability to discuss the perennial problems affecting their lives.

Responding to these shortcomings, Palestinian facilitators introduced a confrontational model that does the opposite — centering the asymmetrical power relations between Jews and Palestinians in dialogues without “sweeping political concerns under the rug” (R. Halabi & Sonnenschein, 2004, p. 374). Unsurprisingly, these dialogues often lead to the alienation of Jewish participants, who feel uncomfortable being blamed for Palestinian suffering (Maoz, 2011). Thus, it is difficult for Jews and Palestinians to overcome their differences in in-person and online dialogues (Mor et al., 2016). There is only so much dialogues can achieve in a handful of meetings held in an artificial setting where participants are asked to discuss readymade questions (see Bar-On, 2006). Ron and Maoz (2013) found rare exceptions among Jewish facilitators of these dialogues; some described their ongoing encounters with Palestinians as eye-opening,

transformational experiences, leading them to work towards social justice through activism and research. However, being facilitators means that these individuals are highly invested in these projects and get an opportunity to engage in deep soul-searching. Palestinian facilitators who enter these dialogues to push for political change finish them with limited belief in the program's power to transform participants' political and practical behaviors (Abu-Nimer, 1999: 119).

Unlike media events and peace journalism, which I critiqued for duplicating the state-centered approach of traditional peace theories, media witnessing and intergroup dialogues try to promote peace by examining what happens when individuals encounter harrowing war stories. However, media witnessing struggles to elicit empathy because others shown on the screen are distant, making their hardship feel irrelevant to the spectator's life. Intergroup dialogues are limited in scope because listening to the stories of the other side happens in small groups for a limited time. Furthermore, short, structured meetings are insufficient because they cannot drive a profound change in perceptions.

All the theories I discussed here were first conceived before the digital age. In the following section, I will examine the ongoing discussion about the power of digital media to connect people despite their differences, which has been foundational to early thinking about the internet. The shift from an era of exploratory anonymity on chatrooms to algorithmically-monitored interactions on social media has also changed the ability to negotiate everyday peace online.

1.4 Between Authenticity and Playfulness in Digital Media and Beyond

Early thinkers of the World Wide Web believed it had a new, exciting potential to connect people by transcending their physical bodies that have always constrained them to predetermined, unchangeable identities. They argued that the constant flow of information could recircuit people's

minds, making the digital network an extension of the nervous system (Turner, 2006). Following this vision, the shift towards disembodied models of human interaction should give rise to a society whose organizing principle is the network. In the network, accumulating knowledge and processing information through digital technologies become the main economic and cultural locomotives. Information is shared between peers rather than administered or ordered hierarchically, making power disperse horizontally rather than vertically. A new, hyperconnected self is created, operating within a space of flows where information moves dynamically between nodes without being anchored to a specific territorial space (Castells, 1999, 2010).

The idea of a network society operating within a space of flows is seen as overtly utopic by many scholars of digital technologies. One central line of critique points out how digital infrastructure, making the network society possible, is inescapably dependent on places, the people who occupy them, and how it is deployed (Plantin & Punathambekar, 2019; Starosielski, 2015; Tawil-Souri, 2015). Famously, scholarship on the digital divide discusses the differences between communities in terms of their physical access to the internet and the skills needed to benefit from digital technologies (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2011; van Dijk, 2006). Therefore, the network society must be analyzed in the context of the lived realities of specific people and cannot be studied exclusively in cyberspace (Brock, 2019).

Nevertheless, the old dream of a disembodied connectedness has excited scholars and industry professionals since the early days of domestic use of the internet despite the aforementioned realities of material constraint (e.g., Benkler, 2008; Rheingold, 2000). The anonymity offered by online communities in the 1990s afforded new ways of identity exploration, where all identities were constructed, and the self was built of multiplicities — every user could change their identity as they wish, making it malleable and playful (Turkle, 1995, p. 15). In

LambdaMOO, a chat-based online community founded in 1990, participants interacted with each other through avatars. They were expected not to reveal their real-life identity markers like race, considered “divisive issues” that could potentially ruin the fantasy. Nakamura (1995) argues that the ability to choose was an illusion, as whiteness was foundational to the platform and its social interactions. Still, even if disguising oneself as someone else was done in a distasteful, often racist manner, the early internet was fundamentally premised on exploration; using multiple online identities gave users an essential tool for boundary-crossing and experimenting with new worlds.

The centrality of exploration as a core value is captured by the metaphor of “surfing” the web, urging users to take advantage of the internet to expand their horizons (e.g., Herz, 1995). The surfing experience was embedded in the internet's design, mainly concentrating on clicking through hyperlinks, taking users on a journey from one website to the other, and encouraging them to curate a list of “cool” places they did not visit before (Ankerson, 2018). This openness, combined with anonymity, made connecting with strangers less intimidating because lying about one’s identity could be used for safety (Whitty, 2002). The disembodied expression of the self in online interactions can also be seen as meritocratic; when people interact without knowing who is on the other side, they should pass judgment based on wit or articulacy, not looks or identity (Baym, 2010). However, it is hard to trust someone when interacting anonymously, especially in a toxic online environment (Nakamura, 1995). Therefore, early internet users preferred connecting with people they knew or were inclined to disclose their identity if they felt safe on the internet (Uslaner, 2004). Anonymity has a dark side, and people fear it can be used nefariously to manipulate them. It is hardly surprising that contemporary anonymous digital platforms often become notorious for fostering hatred (Tuters & Hagen, 2020) or spreading rumors (Sharon & John, 2018) because anonymous users cannot be held accountable for their actions.

New social media platforms have changed the rules of online interaction because they require users to identify by their real names or at least not pretend to be someone they are not; on Twitter, where real names are not required, users must be identifiable to the platform, drawing a line between pseudonymity, which is allowed, and fakeness, which is forbidden (Ingram, 2011; Peddinti et al., 2017). Social media companies see fake accounts as a significant problem and work hard to develop tools to remove them. Fake accounts can be mass-produced to serve special interests by generating, for example, thousands of favorable reviews on a product that nobody had bought. Additionally, fake accounts are often used to spread disinformation or conduct online fraud (Gurajala et al., 2015; Xiao et al., 2015). Collins and his colleagues (2021) go as far as arguing that “malicious users have not only plagued our online social media ecosystem into chaos, but [...] also meted untold suffering to humankind” (p. 247).

Fake accounts are based on anonymity, which is detrimental to the operation of social media; social media can be defined as algorithmically-driven digital platforms where users are expected to interact authentically. Algorithms are central to contemporary social media because they tailor content to users' (perceived) desires and interests; thus, algorithms determine what information will be visible to the user and what information will be left out (Gillespie, 2014). Beyond legitimate concerns about disinformation and manipulation, social media companies forcefully oppose fake accounts because they disrupt the work of algorithms that rely on users interacting as their authentic selves. When a person (or a bot) is an imposter, the data they produce is false, pointing the algorithm in the wrong direction. Algorithms have become powerful surveillance tools, and governments partner with social media companies to collect and analyze data about people at home and abroad (Cheney-Lippold, 2017; Magnet, 2011). Therefore, it is unsurprising that users who try to disrupt power, for instance, by creating political satire on social

media, prefer to use fake accounts to spread their message (Ferrari, 2018). They remain mostly untouched by the platform because the humorous nature of the content makes their fakeness explicit and warns the algorithm to treat them differently than identifiable accounts.

However, what about cross-cutting interactions on social media that could support everyday peace? Like political satire strives to poke at sacred cows, playing with identity is also iconoclastic. It invites one to question who they are, a taken-for-granted knowledge cultivated to them in many years of socialization. While afforded by the early internet through anonymity, it is unlikely that algorithmically-driven social media will allow their users to move across identity lines. According to boyd and Ellison (2007), social network sites, or social media, are web-based services that allow users to build a profile and a list of connections (p. 211). Therefore, social media are founded on stability — a derivative of authenticity; both assume that a person must have one unified identity and always interact with others sincerely (Handler, 1986; Trilling, 1972). Users on social media must stick to the same identity (i.e., “profile”) every time they enter the platform and are expected to interact with roughly the same people.

Social media companies go a step further by narrowing the exposure of users to new ideas and new people; critics of social media describe them as “filter bubbles” or “echo chambers” to argue that algorithmic selection and the nature of interactions on social media push users to converse with like-minded people, undermining democracy (Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2017). Bruns (2019) questions the existence of these circumscribed spaces, arguing that it is too easy to blame technology as the sole culprit of a divided and divisive political environment. Whether or not social media create filter bubbles, research demonstrates that cross-cutting discussions on social media are possible for people who hold opposing political opinions but only in particular circumstances: when an issue is perceived as important (Chen & Lin, 2021) or when people first make connections

with others based on nonpolitical issues (Kahne et al., 2012), they become more prone to participate in a cross-cutting discussion.

Moreover, popular culture can mediate cross-cutting connections by providing shared symbolic resources leading participants to see themselves as members of the same community; for example, online fan groups make the discussion about complex issues possible because they are based on strong in-group affinity exceeding political divides (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). Playfulness has a vital role in this context; for instance, media texts incorporating ironic humor can become a locus for connection across political divides, even within a contentious conversation. Jokes are often polysemic, making it hard to determine who is the butt of the joke. Therefore, a meme or a funny image can be interpreted as laughing at the other side by either group (Gal, 2019).

This ongoing discussion about digital media's ability to facilitate unlikely connections between antagonists brings to the fore two critical concepts explored throughout this dissertation. First, the ability or inability to move across identities or live in-between them is similar to the tension between playfulness and authenticity. Two popular Israeli television shows, *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*, tackle this tension heads-on. In the two chapters analyzing the texts and the production of these shows, I discuss the *hybridity* of Jewish and Palestinian identities, focusing on the act of *passing* between them. While the discussion on both shows focuses on ethnic and religious identities, I will also demonstrate the centrality of gender by looking into the *failed* and *toxic masculinities* of protagonists and actors on *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*.

The second key concept discussed in this dissertation is *nonreciprocal storylistening*. Listening is key to cross-cutting interactions on social media. Overcoming differences and creating everyday peace become possible when people find ways to listen to each other. Concerns over the

creation of echo chambers speak to an informational environment where challenging listening, one that forces the listener to step outside of their comfort zone, can no longer happen. Listening is also crucial to theories of communication and peace, particularly in intergroup dialogues. In most cases, it is understood through reciprocation, a *quid pro quo* – I will listen to your story only if you commit to listening to mine. However, reciprocation assumes an equal informational environment, where both sides have equal access to media platforms and audiences. I devote two chapters to analyzing *Border Gone*, an independent digital platform that defies reciprocal listening by insisting on telling the stories of Palestinians in Gaza in Hebrew without expecting Gazan to do the same thing in return. Discussing the establishment of this platform, its evolution, and its operation during the May 2021 war in Gaza, I will demonstrate the revolutionary potential of nonreciprocal storylistening to get Israelis to recognize the humanity of their ostensible enemies. I will point to the *descriptive* power of Palestinian stories that helps them reach Jewish audiences and reflect on the *solidarity* forged between Jewish and Palestinian members of the platform’s managing team.

The history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is enmeshed in ambiguous identities and conflicting narratives. It is made of a pendulum swing moving from closeness to alienation between Jews and Palestinians, infused with an unyielding battle over who gets to speak and who gets to be heard. In the next section, I provide a brief history of the conflict using these complexities as a roadmap.

1.5 Between Closeness and Alienation: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The origins of Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism can be traced back to the late 19th century and the early 20th century. The rise of nationalism during the Spring of Nations in Europe led Europeans to reconfigure the political entities controlling their lives. The American and French

revolutions illustrated the power of the nation-state over monarchies; this new political organization was able to unify people from different backgrounds as they became state citizens (Rapport, 2009). For Jews, becoming citizens held a great promise to end centuries of discrimination and persecution against them; many Jews sought to assimilate into the new European nations, making their Jewish identity less conspicuous (Laqueur, 2009).

However, Zionism, a Jewish national movement drawing inspiration from the European nationalist wave, argued that Jews would never be accepted as equals in their new nations after being emancipated from the ghettos (Sorkin, 2019). It asserted that Jews would continue to be hated until they emancipated themselves by building a nation in the historic land of Israel (Pinsker, 1906). Thus, living in-between a Jewish and a European identity could never work — it either leads to spiritual destruction through assimilation or physical destruction through extermination. The latter materialized in the Holocaust with the murder of six million Jews. Simultaneously, nationalism also affected Arabs living in Palestine, then a province of the Ottoman Empire. As the empire tried to modernize, different ethnic groups within it struggled to secure their autonomy. This process led to the rise of Arab nationalism, which later evolved into Palestinian nationalism (Muslih, 1987).

When the first Jews started immigrating to Palestine in the late 19th century, they wanted to create a New Jew — the Sabra — a strong, independent, secular man who works the land (Almog, 2000). Jewish immigrants sought to eliminate the diasporic Jew, the religious scholar who spent his days studying Jewish scripture. Caricatured as emasculated and feminine, he could not protect himself and his family from the murderous gentiles. The diasporic Jew was called a “Schlemiel” — an awkward loser who must remain behind when Jews immigrate to the land of Israel (Hollander, 2019). In its early days, the Yeshuv (the Jewish settlement in Palestine) drew

inspiration from local Palestinian communities to reinvent and shape a New Jew. For example, members of Jewish protection squads like the Shomer spent considerable time in Palestinian villages, learning Arabic, wearing traditional Palestinian garments, and embracing local costumes. They were mesmerized by the rustic Palestinian way of life and wanted to imitate it (Eyal, 2006; Hirsch & Kachtan, 2018).

However, the increasing Jewish immigration to Palestine created tensions and violence between Jews and Palestinians over the right to live and settle the land. At the time, Palestine was controlled by the British Empire through a mandate given to it by the League of Nations after World War I. Britain was inconsistent in its policies toward Jewish immigration; it first supported the foundation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine under the Balfour declaration (1917). Two decades later, following a vast Palestinian popular uprising, it withdrew from this policy and published Third White Paper (1939), limiting Jewish entrance through a quota system (Segev, 2000). Following the atrocities of the Holocaust, the international community convened in the newly formed United Nations. On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 - a partition plan for Palestine that ended the British mandate to create two separate Jewish and Palestinian states. The British mandate in Palestine was set to expire on May 15, 1948, and the Jewish leadership seized the opportunity to declare independence on May 14 (*Creation of Israel*, 1948, n.d.).

This festive moment happened amid a bloody war, which ended with an overwhelming Israeli military triumph. Territories designated to the Palestinian state were captured by Israeli forces and included areas heavily populated by Palestinians like the Negev and the Galilee. For Jews, it was a war of independence; Israel's victory marked the historic moment when they could finally be free in the land of their forefathers. For Palestinians, it was a "Nakba," a disaster; it

marked the beginning of a foreign colonialist regime that had taken away their lands, killed their people, and sent many to exile, turning them into refugees. It ended Palestinian aspirations to establish an independent state (Cohen, 2010; Manna', 2013; Morris, 2008; Teveth, 1990).

Israel's control over the Palestinians intensified after the 1967 War, when it occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, creating another wave of refugees. Subsequently, 3,000,000 Jews came to rule 1,200,000 Palestinians living "inside" and "outside" Israel. Indeed, the two wars mark the boundaries of legitimacy in the mainstream diplomatic discourse about Israel/Palestine. The borders of Israel established after the 1948 War are considered the state's legal territory by most of the international community. They are often named "proper Israel." The territories occupied in 1967, on the other hand, are considered illegal occupation (Alpher et al., 1999; Reuveny, 2008; Segev, 2007).

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is not confined to the land; equally important is the legitimacy to tell stories about it or claim one's right to live in it. Israel puts enormous cultural resources into vocalizing and solidifying its narrative about Israel as the historic homeland of the Jewish people and the source of its salvation. Suffice to look at the sequence of holidays held in Israel between April and May, which function as powerful political socialization tools from a very young age (Nasie & Bar-Tal, 2020). They begin with Passover, wherein the main ritual is a festive dinner, a seder. Every family must tell the story of the exodus from Egypt, turning the Israelites from enslaved to free people through divine intervention. Two weeks later, Israel holds Yom HaShoah, the Holocaust Memorial Day, which includes many special events commemorating the horrors of World War II, where participants pledge that such things will never happen again to the Jewish people. The day's highlight is a one-minute siren when life in Israel stops, and people stand still to honor and reflect on this tragedy. A week later, Israel mentions Yom HaZikaron

(literally, “memorial day”), in which Israelis remember the soldiers killed in the many wars the nation had to endure. A siren goes off twice that day. Finally, one day later, Israel celebrates Independence Day.

The transition from one of the saddest days of the year to one of the happiest days is very deliberate; it happens in a special ceremony held in the Wailing Wall, which is a part of the Temple Mountain, the holiest, most sensitive site in Eastern Jerusalem occupied during the 1967 War. All of these holidays, whether religious (Passover) or secular (Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, and Independence Day), are centered around building a collective memory that solidifies Zionist ideology in a short, condensed month (see also Tirosh & Schejter, 2015). A memory moving from tragedy and disaster to hope and redemption. In this narrative arc, God saved the Israelites from the evil Pharaoh, and Israel saves the Jews from contemporary Pharaohs, whether they are lurking in the death camps of Europe or the battlegrounds of the Middle East. Thus, Israel is an extension of God, its tangible manifestation.

Palestinians also wish to tell their story and make their voices heard. However, Israel tries to prevent a conversation about the national catastrophe of the Nakba. After seizing lands, houses, but also libraries, schools, private archives, and archeological ecofacts reflecting the diverse cultural history of Israel/Palestine, Israeli state institutions sought to erase this multiplicity. They Judaize places like Jerusalem, giving Palestinian neighborhoods new Hebrew names and settling Jewish immigrants in houses that belonged to Palestinians (Masalha, 2012). The dramatic shift in Palestinian life after 1948 is reduced to a problem of ill-fated refugees at most, a situation not different from what many nations experienced in the years following World War II. For Israel, Palestinians are not a people with a right to self-determination, and their internal division created by Israel's presence, which I discuss below, continues to fragmentize them. It keeps farmers away

from their lands, families away from their loved ones, and the dream of a Palestinian nation impossible. Tragically, the perpetuation of injustice makes the trauma of Nakba itself the most prominent site of Palestinian collective memory (Abu-Lughod & Sa'di, 2007). The silencing of Palestinian stories led to Said's (1984) plea to finally let Palestinians narrate what happens to them. In recent years, Palestinian demands have been increasingly heard in progressive circles worldwide, especially as the Palestinian struggle for freedom is compared to other similar struggles of marginalized communities (Davis, 2016; Purnell, 2021; Salaita, 2016).

1.6 Group Subdivisions in Israel/Palestine

I want to linger on some of the internal divisions in Israel/Palestine, crucial to understanding the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and my discussion throughout the dissertation. The 1948 and 1967 wars and the peace agreements between Israel and Egypt (1979) and Israel and Jordan (1994) have divided the Palestinian society into four distinct groups. While Palestinians of all groups see themselves as parts of the same people, their legal status and lived experiences are dramatically different and determined by their engagement with the state of Israel. Ironically, while Palestine was lost in wars, it cannot return because peace agreements Israel signed with Egypt, Jordan, and other Arab nations normalize Palestinian statelessness (Anziska, 2018; Guzansky & Marshall, 2020; Zahran, 2012).

Some Palestinians live inside “Israel proper”; they reside in the territories occupied in 1948. They study and work alongside Israeli Jews and enjoy civil rights, including the right to vote and get elected to the Israeli parliament. However, there is still structural segregation between this group and Israeli Jews; they usually live in separate towns and villages and reside in different neighborhoods in mixed cities. They are often discriminated against despite their Israeli citizenship

in terms of access to quality education (Golan-Agnon, 2006), infrastructure and essential services (Meallem et al., 2010), and in legislation that impedes their freedom of expression, association, and the ability to settle freely across the country (Nakhala, 2012). Nevertheless, this group is the most privileged of the four; many of its members work for Israeli state institutions; a small minority even volunteer to serve in the Israeli security apparatus (Kanaaneh, 2003). Thus, this group finds itself in a very tricky situation, torn between its desire to live a peaceful life as citizens while enduring discrimination and watching the suffering of fellow Palestinians who do not enjoy the benefits of Israeli citizenship.

The ambiguity of this group is also reflected in the difficulty of naming it – while Israel prefers to call them “Israeli Arabs,” a name that erases their Palestinian identity, other names minimize their connection to the state, like “Palestinians with Israeli citizenship,” and even “Palestinians in Israel” (Zidani, 2021). I will call them “Israeli Palestinians,” which is not a perfect solution; I discuss the problem of terminologies in the following section. Israeli Palestinians are the most dominant Palestinian group in this project; they are the focus of attention on *Arab Labor*, and the Palestinian cast on *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* is strictly comprised of Israeli Palestinians. Some managers and volunteers working for *Border Gone* also belong to this group.

Two other groups form the Palestinians who live in the West Bank – Palestinians from East Jerusalem should be seen as a separate group because they enjoy certain privileges like being able to travel freely across Israel and the West Bank, unlike other Palestinians who live in this area (Jefferis, 2012). Overall, Palestinians in the West Bank are the ones who feel the presence of the Israeli military occupation more than any other group. They live in cities and villages in a mountainous terrain of 2,183 square miles, which Israel occupied in 1967. Although the Palestinian Authority should control the West Bank, 60% of the territory is defined as “Area C,”

where Israel retains complete military and civilian control. Israel invests in settling its citizens in this area, suffocating the development of Palestinian cities and villages, creating a de-facto annexation of Area C (Acting the Landlord, 2013). Palestinians living in the West Bank have to endure checkpoints, curfews, and the presence of settlers trying to seize their lands (Hammami, 2019; Shulman, 2018). Israel's tight control and the creation of infrastructure that only serves Jewish settlers have been described as a form of apartheid (Petee, 2016). Unfortunately, this is the Palestinian group most underrepresented in this manuscript; although much of *Fauda's* plot takes place in the West Bank, it is a show written by Israeli Jews, whose Palestinian actors are Israeli citizens and wherein shooting locations are only inside Israel proper.

The fourth group of Palestinians lives in the Gaza Strip. It is a small, 140 square miles territory that includes Gaza City and adjacent villages and towns, where 2 million people live. The political situation in Gaza used to be similar to the West Bank; Palestinians who lived there were officially controlled by the Palestinian Authority and had to deal with the presence of the Israeli military and settlements. Things changed dramatically in 2005 when Israel disengaged Gaza by unilaterally pulling back its forces (Brown, 2010). Two years later, the PA's government in the strip was toppled by Hamas, a religious, Islamic organization. While Israel argues that its disengagement ended the occupation of Gaza, it also imposes a suffocating siege on the strip and does not allow any transportation of people or goods in or out without Israeli oversight. Israel continues to have overwhelming control over Palestinian life in Gaza - it limits Gaza's access to electricity, restricts fishers' ability to go to sea, and confines its access to digital services, just to name a few. Israel goes to wars in Gaza every few years; since the disengagement, Israel went into extensive military operations in Gaza in 2005, 2006, 2008, 2008-2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021, in addition to regular clashes across the border during the Return Marches of 2018-2021. There is a

growing humanitarian crisis in the strip due to its density and deteriorating infrastructure; experts worry that it will soon become uninhabitable, and critics of Israel describe Gaza as the “largest open-air prison in the world” (Abu Salim, 2016; Abusalim, 2018; Azoulay & Ophir, 2012; Chomsky, 2012; Dawes, 2015; Levy, 2014; Tawil-Souri, 2016; United Nations, 2011).

The Israeli presence in Gaza is different from the West Bank; it controls the strip from a distance. While Palestinians in Gaza feel Israel’s power in their everyday lives, many have never met Israeli Jews in person. They differ from Palestinians who live inside Israel or in the West Bank who interact with Jews regularly as fellow citizens, in the illegal settlements, as soldiers in roadblocks. In chapters 4 and 5, I analyze *Border Gone*, a digital project devoted to telling stories from Gaza to Israelis in Hebrew.

This internal identity division into subcategories is not unique to Palestinians. It can also be found inside the Israeli-Jewish community. Soon after Israel was founded, around 600,000 Jews immigrated to the country from different places in the MENA region (Meir-Glitzstein, 2018). Ancient communities in Morocco, Iran, Yemen, Libya, and Syria completely disappeared. In Iraq, there was a flourishing community of 125,000 Jews, who had been living there for more than three thousand years, most of whom enjoyed a middle-class life. Nevertheless, the foundation of Israel meant that they were seen as enemies of the state and experienced growing hostility and violence. Many of them fled to Israel (Shiblak, 2005). Upon their arrival, Jews from these countries were expected to integrate into an Israeli society controlled by an Ashkenazi (Eastern European) elite (Kimmerling, 2001). By blending into the Jewish community, these Jews had to forego their Arab identities because that identity was associated with the enemy. They then became Mizrahi (literally, eastern) Jews. According to Shohat (2017b), the category of the Mizrahi had to be

invented to trap Arab Jews in a purely Jewish-Zionist imaginary, forcing them to forget their cultural and historical association with non-Jewish Arabs.

Israeli and Palestinian identities are therefore complex. They are not clear-cut. As I explained, there are many Israeli Jews who are culturally Arab yet are denied from exploring or expressing that identity. Palestinians who live in “proper Israel” experience a similar duality of feeling a cultural connection to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip while still being Israeli citizens who speak Hebrew and interact with Israeli Jews (Shimony, 2013). Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism are based on these divisions. Ze’ev Jabotinsky, one of the early thinkers of the Zionist Right, insisted on a clear division between Jews and Palestinians that must be secured by building an “iron wall” between the two communities. For him, there is only one way to keep Israel safe - making sure that Palestinians will not even consider challenging its Jewish identity, which he saw as detrimental to the Palestinian identity of the “Oriental East” (Shlaim, 2000, 2012). Similarly, Arab nations convening in Khartoum, Sudan, vowed to isolate Israel immediately after the 1967 War by saying no to negotiation, recognition, and conciliation with it (“Summary of Resolution of Arab Summit Conference,” 1969). This notion that contact with Israel is a form of legitimization and therefore forbidden remains popular among many Palestinians today (Di Stefano & Henaway, 2014).

Nevertheless, there are opportunities to overcome these divisions embedded in everyday life and popular culture through media. This manuscript aims to demonstrate that media is a crucial site for exploring everyday peace, using Israel/Palestine as a case study. Elsewhere, I have shown that peace as a diplomatic solution has fallen out of favor for Jews and Palestinians in Israel (Y. Katz, 2022). Therefore, reimagining peace as an everyday practice exercised in, by, and through media provides an opportunity to salvage this concept and give it a new flare it desperately needs

in the current political situation in Israel/Palestine. Insisting on peace means not giving up on hope, the future-oriented essence of peace without which it cannot exist (Y. Katz, 2020). It means rejecting depressing alternatives that have begun surfacing in the Israeli political discourse, like “minimizing the conflict” (Goodman, 2018) or “managing the conflict” (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2007) in which the unjust status quo is maintained and where war is considered an inevitable evil.

In the four chapters of this manuscript, I will exemplify how a media-based analysis of everyday peace can be done by looking at television and digital media. Before turning to the chapter breakdown, I will make a quick yet crucial note about the trickiness of language in a project where every word is loaded with powerful connotations.

1.7 A Note about Terminology

The first time I talked with a Palestinian scholar about my research, I told him I was interested in studying peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I naively assumed that “peace” and “conflict” were relatively neutral terms that should not face any resistance. I was wrong, as this scholar rightfully argued that both concepts are quintessentially Israeli because they contain an implicit assumption that the situation between Jews and Palestinians is symmetrical. Therefore, it is much more appropriate to talk about an “occupation” or “settler-colonialism” to describe the current status quo between Israelis and Palestinians and insist on “justice” rather than “peace” when discussing a desirable solution. Indeed, there is an inherent tension between justice and peace, recently popularized by the Black Lives Matter movement, which I will discuss in my concluding remarks.

In this manuscript, I do not treat these sets of words as mutually exclusive, meaning that if I choose the “Palestinian” words (e.g., “occupation,” “settler-colonialism”), I cannot use the

“Israeli” words (e.g., “conflict,” “peace”) or vice-versa. I believe both are appropriate depending on the context; for example, when addressing the ideological rift between Jews and Palestinians over the historical rights to live on the land, “conflict” is appropriate. However, when I zoom in on how the Israeli security apparatus controls and oppresses Palestinians in Gaza, “occupation” is the right word. This project can be understood as an attempt to take an “Israeli” concept — peace — and radicalize it by imbuing it with a “Palestinian” meaning. My goal is to imagine peace, not as a way to sustain an unjust reality with minimal violent disruptions, which is how Israelis tend to think about this concept. Instead, I am interested in talking about peace as an agent of change, a type of peace that ensures equal rights for both Jews and Palestinians. In the concluding chapter 6, I elaborate on these ideas by analyzing drawings of peace made by Israeli and Palestinian college students.

The terminology problem expands beyond the descriptors of the situation between Jews and Palestinians. I apply similar sensitivity when talking about the names of groups of people — as noted earlier, I choose to call Palestinians who live in Israel “Israeli Palestinians” while acknowledging that some members of this community will prefer a name that maintains a greater distance between them and the state (Zidani, 2021), while others affiliate with the state and distance themselves from other Palestinian groups (S. Halabi et al., 2021, p. 362). Names of events and places create the same problem — wars between Israel and the Palestinians usually have different names with dramatically different connotations; see my previous discussion about the War of Independence vs. the Nakba. Historic cities like Jerusalem have other names in Hebrew and Arabic — Yerushalaim vs. al-Quds. In both cases, the English name usually offers a solution, yet it can never be perfect. Thus, the title “1948 War” avoids marking this event as either a moment

of liberation or destruction; the English name “Jerusalem” provides an internationally recognizable signifier, although it is closer to Hebrew than Arabic.

1.8 Chapters Breakdown

The dissertation is divided into four chapters covering two case studies. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the popular Israeli television shows *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, illuminating the power of the televisual to promote everyday peace through popular culture. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on a digital activist project, *Border Gone*, where I will primarily examine the sonic potential of digital media to facilitate a listening that enables everyday peace.

Specifically, chapter 2 looks at the texts of *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*. The shows focus on male protagonists and investigate what happens when an Israeli man, Doron Kabilio, and a Palestinian man, Amjad Alian, try to pass as members of the other community. The circumstances of their passing are strikingly different; Doron passes as a Palestinian as a part of his job as an undercover agent entering Palestinian territories to arrest and kill suspects. Amjad passes as a Jew in an attempt to blend into the hegemonic Jewish society in Israel. However, both of them miserably fail in their efforts, evoking a failed masculinity that underpins the traumas of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Exploring secondary characters on *Arab Labor* and subplots on *Fauda* provide opportunities to move beyond these masculinities into new models of everyday peace anchored in forging an authentic connection to one’s identity.

Chapter 3 focuses on the production process of *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*. I interviewed the creators, producers, directors, writers, and program managers of these shows and collected information about them online. My analysis reveals that everyday peace is embedded in the process of television production itself. While still evoking questions of toxic masculinity, this chapter

shows how the set or creative meetings provide opportunities to work through complex issues, demonstrating that television making can be therapeutic. I will argue that the ambiguity of the creative process of television, where there is no clear conclusion to a show, creates creative polysemy. The issues underpinning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are evoked and contested in television making.

Chapter 4 discusses the creation and evolution of a digital activist project called *Border Gone*. Founded by a group of Jewish and Palestinian activists, its purpose is to bring the stories of Palestinians living in Gaza to Israelis in Hebrew. The project began in a partnership with *We Are Not Numbers*, a Gaza-based creative writing organization that sponsors and mentors Palestinian youth who write about their lives in English. After over a year of operation, *Border Gone* split from this partnership and began producing original content as an independent news organization focusing on Gaza. I interviewed the managing team of *Border Gone* and representatives of the hundreds of Jewish volunteers who devoted their time to translating Palestinian stories and posting them online. I conducted the interviews right when the project began transitioning to a new phase, allowing me to reflect on this transformation. I argue that *Border Gone* affords nonreciprocal storylistening in digital culture, wherein Israeli Jews get to listen to stories from Gaza and learn about everyday life there without posing a demand that Palestinians listen to their story too. Demonstrating a deep commitment to solidarity with Gaza, *Border Gone* avoids the creation of false symmetry between Jews and Palestinians. I will argue that nonreciprocal storylistening generated by this project is much more radical in its intentions than listening afforded by media witnessing or intergroup dialogues.

Finally, chapter 5 looks into the reactions to *Border Gone* and its operation during the peak of its activity throughout the May 2021 war in Gaza. I triangulate two methodologies in this

chapter: first, a textual analysis of comments and posts uploaded to *Border Gone*'s Facebook page from its launch in December 2019 until the end of May 2021. Second, I include a participant observation on the WhatsApp group of the managing team during the war, which I joined when it began. While many reactions to the content created by this platform were vicious and cruel, I demonstrate how everyday peace can be found in short, graceful moments when Jewish readers realize how little they know about life in Gaza or when managers of this project, Jews and Palestinians alike, express solidarity with each other.

Chapter 2 Peace as Hybrid Nationalities on *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*

2.1 Oscillating between Stable and Unstable Identities in Israel/Palestine

Abu Fadi, a Palestinian boxing coach, is training at a boxing club in Dhahiriya, a small town located south of Hebron. After finishing his morning practice, he boils himself a small cup of Turkish coffee on the stove and then drinks it while smoking a cigarette on a balcony overlooking the neighborhood. Soon after, he goes to the local mosque and purifies his body with water in preparation for prayer. He is joined by Bashar, a young Palestinian who is an up-and-coming boxer. Abu Fadi is his trainer. After praying together with a group of other men and listening to the Fatiha¹ chanted by the Imam, they rush back to the boxing club where Abu Fadi prepares Bashar for his big match in Amman, Jordan. As they are walking to the club, people in the street greet Abu Fadi, showing that he is an honorable person in this town. Bashar invites him to the big party held in his house later that day, which will celebrate the return of his father, Jihad, from the Israeli prison after 20 years. Bashar has not seen much of his father growing up; Abu Fadi, who has become a father figure to Bashar, reminds him that even if Jihad was away for many years, he still loves him (*Fauda*, S3E1).

Daniel Epstein is one of the new contestants on the Israeli version of the popular reality TV show *Big Brother*. As the tenants in the house start to get to know each other, Daniel tells the group, after being asked about his strange accent, that he spent his childhood in Albania since his

¹ The first chapter of the Koran.

father, Nahche², was sent there to represent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He lauds his father's heroism, who immigrated to Israel from Krakow with no family³ and then joined the Palmach⁴ where he killed Abd el-Kader Husseini⁵. Daniel himself was born in Kibbutz Baram⁶ and served in the army at the Nahal brigade⁷ as a paratrooper. Daniel tells his new friends that it was important for his family to return to Israel so that he could serve in the army – since they believe that army service is a sacred mission. Daniel develops close relationships with most tenants except Itzik — a Mizrahi Jew — and he starts gossiping about him with his new friends (*Arab Labor*, S3E1).

What creates the drama in both episodes is that the audience knows something important that the contestants on the Big Brother show or Bashar fail to see — that neither Abu Fadi nor Daniel Epstein are the real identities of the people with whom they interact. Bashar does not know that Abu Fadi is actually Doron Kabilio, an undercover soldier; the tenants do not know that Daniel is Amjad Alian, a Palestinian journalist from Jerusalem. In other words, both Doron and Amjad manage to pass as members of identity groups to which they do not belong. This chapter aims to explore this movement between Israeli and Palestinian identities on *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* to think about the meaning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for ordinary people on both sides while looking at how everyday peace is manifested in this hybrid situation.

I will argue that television texts are ideal for exploring such identity crises as they manifest in everyday life. Specifically, I will investigate the lives of the two male protagonists of these

² A nickname for Nahum that is commonly used among Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jews in Israel.

³ Insinuating that his father is a Holocaust survivor.

⁴ The commando unit of the Haganah, the militia that predated the Israeli army before Israel was established.

⁵ The commander of the Palestinian troops in the 1948 War, killed in one of the battles over the road to Jerusalem.

⁶ The Kibbutzim are small villages based on communal life closely affiliated with the Ashkenazi elite in Israel.

⁷ A brigade whose soldiers mostly come from the Kibbutzim.

shows — Doron Kabilio (Lior Raz) on *Fauda* and Amjad Alian (Norman Issa) on *Arab Labor*, whose failed masculinities lead to repeated tragedies, making both exemplars of the personal toll of a violent conflict. Television has become a central cultural space for discussing changing gender roles. The rise of a new class of working women led to a crisis in masculinity in the U.S. According to Lotz (2014a), men could no longer reinstate women's subordination, thus finding the meaning of being a man much more perplexing than what their fathers had experienced. Shows like *The Shield* (2002-2008), *Dexter* (2006-ongoing), or *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013) represented distressed male minds that were far from the flawless breadwinner patriarch.

The ability to discuss these shifting identities could not be possible without transformations in the television industry. The increasing popularity of cable television in the U.S. in the 1990s led to more versatile content (Lotz, 2014a). It changed the narrative structure of television in what Mittell (2015) calls “complex TV,” which assumes that the television storytelling is cumulative and builds over time within and across seasons; moreover, complex TV does not attempt to reach a clear closure; unlike films or novels that tell a big story at one sweep, serial television's repetitive nature allows characters to accumulate depth (Pearson, 2007). Israeli television went through a similar transformation which I discuss at length in the next chapter.

A show that heralded Israeli complex TV is *Be'Tipul* (2005-2008). Later bought by HBO, it looks at therapy sessions the protagonist Reuven holds with several patients. One of them, Yadin, is an Israeli fighter pilot who embodies the ideal of the New Jew; a strong, independent man fighting for his country. However, Yadin suffers post-trauma after killing 12 Palestinians in a single raid. Being forced into therapy, Yadin he uncomfortable in this situation, yet he is well-versed in therapeutic terminology; he has a castrating relationship with his father, who shows him no affection; his father serves as a symbol of the Israeli nation. Yadin feels he must sacrifice

everything for his father and the nation but does not know how to express his frustration about it (Harlap, 2017). Yadin's behavior is self-centered; Palestinians are only a side note in his conversations with Reuven; they never appear in person on the screen. Like the ironic spectator (Chouliaraki, 2013), Yadin is more concerned about his feelings than reflecting on his responsibility for Palestinian death.

Amjad and Doron are much less secure about their masculinity than Yadin, and their struggles are the core of the narrative on both shows. Their failures as men are the result of a compulsion to pass. Passing is premised on the assumption that identity, especially a gender identity, is not a congenital trait but a form of doing that manifests in the body through the repetitive performance of a role (Butler, 1988), like being a "Jewish man" or a "Palestinian man." It does not mean that individuals have complete agency to explore any identity; institutions in society, many run by the state, are designed to discipline people into desired behaviors; into specific types of "doing" (Foucault, 1995). On the one hand, passing challenges distinctions dictated by society; the dichotomy between "Jewish" and "Palestinian" is foundational to contemporary Zionism (Eyal, 2006; Shohat, 2017b). By passing as a member of the other group, a hybrid is created; an individual neither here nor there, whose identity performance defies deterministic perceptions about discrete categories (Garfinkel, 1967). However, passing also comes at a great personal cost because it is often used as a survival tactic to escape stigma (Goffman, 1963). Not all types of passing are the same; there is a difference between passing to attain privilege (a black person passing as white) and abuse privilege (a white person passing as black, see Ahmed, 1999).

Fauda and *Arab Labor* demonstrate this difference. As a Palestinian, Amjad acts like a Jew to attain privilege by desperately attempting to fit into the Jewish cultural hegemony. For Doron,

acting like a Palestinian is seemingly an abuse of privilege; he is an undercover agent whose passing terrorizes Palestinians (Reinhart, 1993). Nevertheless, Doron is also a Mizrahi Jew whose passing functions as a tool for exploring his Arab roots. *Fauda* deals with Doron's tormenting efforts to be an Arab while remaining a Zionist. This chapter will demonstrate how two television genres, sitcoms and action thrillers, manage to tackle these complexities.

The second subsection of this chapter will be devoted to everyday peace found within the alternative narratives of these shows. On *Arab Labor*, the engagement of other Palestinian characters with the Israeli-Jewish society is productive rather than destructive. Unlike Amjad, who hopelessly tries to become Jewish without having the necessary cultural capital to do so, other characters — namely, Maya, his daughter, Amal, his friend, and Abu Amjad, his father, understand the power dynamic between Jews and Palestinians in Israel rather than believing they can fit in. Tough, often infuriating situations in their lives push them to find creative ways to express their national pride and fight for justice.

On *Fauda*, a deep truth about his Arabness is revealed in the rare moments when Doron is not preoccupied with fighting. It is expressed through Doron's tragic relationship with Shirin, his Palestinian lover; in the similarity between him and his father, Amos, an Iraqi Jew; and in a surrealistic stroll when he wanders through the West Bank. These situations demonstrate that Doron is naturally drawn to Arab culture and sees himself as a person of the Middle East, defying the Zionist ideology of separatism and distinctiveness of Jews in this region.

2.2 Failed Masculinities, Desperate Passing

Amjad Alian, a middle-aged Palestinian journalist, works for a local Jewish newspaper in Jerusalem. After living in a village adjacent to the city with his parents — Um Amjad and Abu

Amjad, during the first season, he decides to move to the city at the beginning of the second season with Bushra, his wife, Maya, his daughter, and Ismail, his baby boy, to improve their lives and explore new opportunities. *Arab Labor* focuses on Amjad's tenacious attempts to find his way into the Ashkenazi hegemony of the Israeli society. The show is a sitcom, meaning that it has a relatively rigid and repetitive narrative structure that is easily recognizable; every episode focuses on a problem that violates the status quo, and by the end of each episode, the order is eventually restored (Mills, 2009; Staiger, 2000).

Thus, most episodes discuss various attempts made by Amjad to resemble his Jewish surroundings; the restored order manifests in Amjad's failure to be accepted into the Jewish society as an equal member. A few examples include his decision to become a vegetarian (S3E7), celebrate Jewish holidays (S1E5), or learn proper manners when a reporter from the BBC comes to interview him (S3E6). Other episodes address stigmas attached to Palestinian people that make them easily recognizable (Goffman, 1963), like the assumption that they are too loud (S3E8) and that dogs do not like them (S2E3), or that Palestinians are careless drivers (S1EP1).

In other words, most episodes in *Arab Labor* explore stereotypes of Palestinians; consequently, Amjad's attempts to find his way into the Israeli society and combat these stereotypes involves removing himself from Palestinian culture. These narratives exemplify the construction of the Oriental as inferior by posing it as a diametrical opposition to the Occidental Israeli-Ashkenazi society, constructed as superior (Said, 1978). From the second season onwards, Amjad's Jewish neighbor, Timna, becomes the emblem of Amjad's domestication as she tries to make him more "civilized" (Gitlin, 1979). Ironically, Timna represents the liberal, leftwing Ashkenazi Jew, a self-declared ally that constantly proclaims her support for Palestinians while making Amjad feel bad about himself through passive-aggressive tactics. Thus, many episodes

begin with a seemingly “innocent” comment made by Timna about something that “Arabs do” (e.g., being loud), which is then embraced as undeniable truth by Amjad, who immediately tries to change his entire lifestyle to meet her expectations while dragging his family into the affair.

Amjad’s destructive behavior manifests in many interactions with his Jewish surroundings. On season 1, episode 5, the Alians are invited to a Passover seder. The grandfather, running the traditional dinner, does not like the fact that Arabs are invited over. He welcomes the Alians with hostility and equates them to the evil Pharaoh from the biblical story. Bushra decides to reciprocate by inviting their hosts to celebrate Eid al-Adha so that they will feel similar awkwardness and discomfort. Yet when they get back home, Amjad tells her:

Know that you have done a great thing today by inviting them over. This is going to change a lot of things. You will see what I will do in the holiday this year...starting today, there will be no lamb, no barbecue and no blood. From now on, we will have new rules. And just so you know, this is why they [the Jews] are always winning. It begins with small, I mean, big things. It stems from the fact that everybody sits around a table, singing songs and reading stories together [unlike Eid al-Adha, which is mostly about eating meat around the barbeque]. If we want to be real people one day, we need to learn from them a little bit (S1E5).

The narrative created by *Arab Labor* does not end there; the show is ironic because Amjad constantly falls short of carrying out his plans. When he informs his parents that he wants to change the holiday so it would resemble the Jewish seder, he reluctantly needs to bribe his father into doing it, who, in turn, comes up with an improvised ceremonial dinner that has nothing to do with the actual celebration of the Muslim holiday. The wine used for traditional blessings in the seder is replaced with Diet Sprite; instead of traditional songs, Abu Amjad invites his Jewish guests,

who do not speak Arabic, to join him in a song about “peace and tolerance” in what is actually a popular song by Egyptian singer Farid el-Atrash about a quarrel between two men.

Alsultany (2012) discusses the portrayal of Muslims on U.S. television during the post-9/11 era, arguing that while explicit racism was not common in these representations, it was still implied in many shows by framing it as a necessity to maintain the safety of Americans during turbulent times. Therefore, torture against Muslims in shows like *24* was rendered legitimate. *Arab Labor* first season aired two years after the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005), in which thousands of Palestinians and Israelis were killed in violent confrontations (Esposito, 2005; Ochs, 2011). Unlike *24*, it does not deal with the politics of the “war on terror” (Croft, 2006), but with the internal conflicts Amjad and his family need to face as they try to fit into the Israeli-Jewish society. Similar to Alsultany’s case study, Palestinians are always seen as a threat to the nation.

The same perception of threat is transported back to the realm of ‘war on terror’ in *Fauda* — An action thriller that focuses on the explicit violence that emerges from the Israeli-Palestinian situation. The show continues the long tradition of action cinema beginning in the 1980s with movies like *Rambo* and *Terminator* and their sequels that centralize men with ultra-muscular bodies sent to carry out dangerous missions while incorporating a spectacle of violence fueled by frequent use of special effects. By embarking on such dangerous missions, the hero of the action film reaffirms myths of his culture, its purity, and its enemies (Tasker, 1993, 2015). Following 9/11 and the rise of the homeland security discourse, central tropes of the action film have been transported to established television genre like the crime drama, where heroines who used to fight against drugs or crime were now fighting against terror (Alsultany, 2012; Tasker, 2012).

This long tradition clearly inspires Fauda in both cinema and television. We can draw parallel lines between *Rambo*, especially in the first two movies of the series, *First Blood Parts I*

(1982) and II (1985), and Doron, the main protagonist in *Fauda*. Both begin their journey as ex-military men who are no longer involved in active fighting. While Rambo becomes an outcast nomad who ends up fighting law enforcement, symbolizing the mistreatment of Vietnam veterans in the U.S. (Sweeney, 1999), Doron lives in a small village with his wife Gali and their two children, Ido and Noga, where he owns a winery (S1E1). Doron's rustic, romantic family life demonstrates that veterans of elite units in the Israeli army are the aristocracy of the Israeli society. They can retire from active duty and live a life of leisure.

After being captured by the police, Rambo is eventually forced back into action in Vietnam in exchange for his freedom. Doron is also called back into action by the commander of his old unit, Moreno, who pays him a visit to the winery. After tasting the wine, they have the following conversation:

Doron: “why did you come here?”

Moreno: “Abu Ahmad is alive. *Your* Abu Ahmad, the Panther”

Doron: “that’s impossible, I killed him”

Moreno: “I’m afraid it is possible. But don’t worry, he won’t live for long. We will kill him tomorrow, at his brother’s wedding. We have intel that he’s going to be there. probably”

[...]

Moreno: “I’m not entirely sure that the unit will be able to recognize him out there. I could use the eyes of the person who already killed him once. If you feel uncomfortable going out there with the unit, you can stay back in the headquarters, we will put cameras on your comrades, they will finish him off while you *eat some pastries*. It’s only for two hours, it will be fun”

Doron: “no, no way, I can’t”.

Moreno: “that’s a pity. You have a chance here to finish the business”

Doron: “finish the business? I’ve finished my business with the Panther long ago. I have a life, *I’m happy*”

Moreno: “I wasn’t talking about the Panther. I was talking about finishing the business *with yourself*” [S1E1, emphases added]

Unsurprisingly, Doron goes ahead and participates in this operation. He did does settle for staying at the headquarters and eating pastries like a “jobnik”⁸. Doron joins his old unit and infiltrates Bashir’s wedding, Abu Ahmad’s brother, held in Silwad, a Palestinian town north of Ramallah. Doron disguises himself as a Palestinian waiter serving sweets; he does it with Eli, an old friend, and a senior unit member. The mission goes terribly wrong. Doron can not identify Abu Ahmad among the guests; as people begin suspecting the two, Doron and Eli are interrogated, but Doron, who struggles to keep calm under pressure, eventually blows their cover. The unit finds itself in a “*Fauda*,” which means chaos in Arabic, and in the context of the show, it means that the unit was exposed and faced an imminent threat from the Palestinians surrounding it. After a short brawl, Boaz, a member of the unit and Doron’s brother-in-law, kills Bashir, the groom. Doron identifies Abu Ahmad while walking towards the wedding wearing a costume. Ignoring orders from command, he starts chasing Abu Ahmad on foot through the streets of Silwad while putting himself and other members of the unit at risk. Doron manages to shoot Abu Ahmad and injure him, but he eventually escapes as the others catch up with Doron and force him into the getaway car (S1E1).

⁸ Derogatory term used to describe non-combating soldiers for whom being the army is no different than having a day job. The jobnik is diametrical opposition of the warrior (see D. Inbar & Barak, 2020).

The tropes appearing in the first episode of the first season continue to characterize Doron throughout the three seasons of *Fauda*. Doron embodies the male Israeli hero; while Rambo is characterized by his ultra-muscular body and his guerilla warfare skills (Tasker, 1993), Doron is also celebrated for his bravery, his skills in operating weaponry and carrying out missions under difficult circumstances. However, Doron is not particularly muscular and occasionally jokes about being a little chubby (S3E1). Instead, his main power is his ability to disguise himself as a Palestinian, enter Palestinian territories undetected and arrest or kill suspects as needed. The importance of passing as Palestinians is embedded in the unit's name, “Mistaarvim,” a word in Arabic that is also used in Hebrew and literally means “those who turn themselves into Arabs.”

The most important tool for maintaining this disguise is speaking flawless Arabic. This is not an obvious skill for Jewish Israelis; while a fifth of the Israeli population is Palestinian and while Arabic is the native language of most people in the Middle East, only a small fraction (4%) of Jewish Israeli high school students decide to study take it as a second foreign language (O. Inbar et al., 2001). Arabic in Israel is perceived as the language of the enemy and thus a tool to be used only in a military context. The military intelligence in Israel is highly involved in shaping “Israeli Arabic” within the education system by motivating teenagers to study the language so they could use it during their service (Mendel, 2014). Indeed, Doron and his unit can be seen as one of the greatest achievements of these efforts.

While Doron operates within a commando unit of the Israeli military, his investment in missions is always very personal. The main antagonist of the first season, Abu Ahmad, is “his” Abu Ahmad, which leads Moreno to ask Doron to come back. Doron’s brother-in-law, Boaz, also a unit member, is captured in action by Abu Ahmad’s men (E5) and later killed in a failed attempt to carry out a prisoner exchange. A bomb planted in Boaz’s stomach detonates before Doron’s

eyes (E7). During the same failed exchange, Doron and his unit murder Sheikh Awadallah, Abu Ahmad's mentor, in the same gruesome way (E8) after kidnapping him as a bargaining chip (E6).

After Abu Ahmad is killed at the end of the first season, the entire second season revolves around the return of Nidal Awadallah, the Sheikh's son, who was fighting for ISIS in Syria and returned to the West Bank to avenge his father's death. Nidal specifically targets Doron and his family. He finds out where Doron's father lives and executes him by slithering his throat as he wears an orange jumpsuit, following the ISIS protocol (E8). Later, Nidal kidnaps Doron and his son Ido and almost kills both; at one point, he holds a gun to Ido's head (E12). In season 3, Doron lives as an undercover spy and develops a close relationship with the Hamdan family, particularly Bashar, whom he trains in boxing. Doron uses Bashar to get to his cousin, Fauzi, who is a wanted Hamas militant and kills him. After Bashar witnesses the killing (E2) and realizes Doron lied about his identity, he is pushed into being a Hamas activist himself; he kidnaps two Israeli teenagers (E5) and transports them into Gaza (E6). After one of the hostages is rescued by Doron's unit, Bashar manages to cross into Israeli territory, locate her house and eventually kill her as a personal revenge against Doron (E12).

Underneath the heroism of a soldier in a commando unit, Doron is a tragic character. Throughout the show, he loses almost everything he has, demonstrating that the Israeli warrior, the epitome of Israeli masculinity (Sasson-Levy, 2002), only brings death and destruction to himself and his loved ones. He loses his father; he loses Avichai, his comrade, who dies in his arms in Gaza, after he tries to protect Doron (S3E9). Shirin, a Palestinian doctor, an agent, and Doron's secret lover, hangs herself after she realizes there is no way for her to get her old life. Doron finds her body and tries to resuscitate her to no avail (S2E9). One of the earlier losses Doron has to endure is breaking up with Gali, his wife. Boaz's death and Doron's renewed commitment

to his unit push Gali to cheat on Doron with one of his comrades, Naor. When Doron finds out, he confronts her:

Doron: “you have a new love, you’re sleeping with Naor”

[Gali ignores him, Doron pushes her]

Doron: “answer me! answer already!”

Gali: “what do you want me to tell you?”

Doron: “I’m dying to hear why you’re sleeping with my friend behind my back”

Gali: “because he loves me and he likes sleeping with me... tell me, what are you fighting for? Are you fighting for me? this [our relationship] was over a long time ago, and you know it. You never fought for me”

Doron: “and did you ever fight for me?”

Gali: “I’ve been fighting for you for years; you just weren’t around to see it. You didn’t see me in the nights waiting for you to come back home; lying to the kids, lying to myself, loving you, loving you although I’m afraid of you”

Doron: “why are you afraid of me? I’ve done everything for you! I did everything to bring back your brother!”

Gali: “yes. And you brought him back to me dead”. (S1E11)

Doron’s aggressive outbursts on the people closest to him are intense and frequent throughout the show; they serve as a defense mechanism, covering a deep sense of guilt. Doron is constantly caught between watching the calamitous consequences of his actions that affect his personal life directly and his commitment to serving in the unit. The national commitment to saving Israeli lives is secondary to Doron and his comrades; for them, the unit is an obsession, almost a

cult; they cannot escape it. Following Avichai's death, Steve, another member of the unit, asks Doron why he had to take risks that led to Avichai's unnecessary death; Doron replies by saying it is a curse while counting all the wrongdoings of the other member of the unit who keep betraying the people closest to them for the sake of the unit. Doron explains that this is their second nature (S3E11).

Similar to Rambo, what fuels this self-destructive urge is post-trauma (Morag, 2009). Israeli cinema (Morag, 2013) and television (Harlap, 2017) have begun paying attention to the traumas soldiers have to endure after returning from the battlefield in recent years. According to Morag (2013), the perpetrator's trauma does not negate the trauma of war victims or wrongdoings of military occupation. Contrarily, the perpetrator's trauma completes the victim's trauma; it shows that in the context of a new war, which no longer takes place between regular armies and where violence is directed towards civilians, the state (in this case, Israel) has a responsibility not only towards the Palestinians but also towards its own soldiers, who are sent to carry out acts of violence in its name. The inability of Doron and his comrades to come to terms with their trauma is related both to memories of the past and fears of the future (Gertz & Yosef, 2017). Avichai, the unit's sniper, killed a fellow Israeli soldier in action (S3E3). He wanted to be found guilty during his interrogation, as he remembered the faces of the innocent people he killed by mistake throughout his career, all of them Palestinians (S3EP4). Yet Avichai's commanders, Eli and Gabi, want him back - they cover up the case and send him to Gaza (S3E6) — a mission in which got him killed because he hesitated in action in fear of repeating the same mistake (S3EP9).

Taken together, *Fauda* reflects the undeniable harsh reality of the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Doron's fake identity as Abu Fadi, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, is used as a part of his work, in which deception and cunningness are key for penetrating enemy lines and arresting

suspects. Yet these attributes spill over to Doron's personal life and lead into dire results. They make peace an implausible option; Doron's actions create a snowball effect as they pull more and more people into an endless cycle of violence.

Amjad, and his fake identity as Daniel Epstein, is seemingly very different from Doron and Abu Fadi due to his motives. Unlike Doron, Amjad crosses identity lines because he has no other choice; he needs to become a part of the Israeli-Jewish society and concludes that the only way to do that successfully is to alienate himself from his Palestinian-Arab culture and heritage. According to Shimony (2013), the state of Israel has failed to provide its Palestinian citizens with a national identity. Amjad is the result of this failure - he reflects a new identity category of a Jewish-Arab who is rejected from both the Arab identity that he leaves behind and from the Jewish identity that refuses to accept him. Unlike Doron, who denotes the masculine archetype of the Sabra, the New Jew, Amjad is marked as the New Schlemiel. The fragile, awkward diasporic Jewish man resurrected in the body of a Palestinian man. Thus, the Jews around him find themselves in a new situation, whether they are blatantly racist like the grandfather at the seder dinner or see themselves as progressives like Timna. In both cases, Jews are instigating the schlemiel's self-loathing after centuries where being in this position was part and parcel of the diasporic Jewish experience. The connection between the schlemiel and the diaspora suggests that Palestinians feel like they live in a diaspora even if they have never left home. Just like Jews persecuted for centuries, Palestinians in this situation have very little control over their lives.

Amjad's double bind is tragic, and just like Doron, it leaves him utterly alone. It affects Amjad's relationship with his family — many episodes feature a repeated joke in which Amjad complains to his father about his failure to become a Jew; in response, Abu Amjad, ashamed that his son jettisons his Palestinian identity, starts cursing and throwing his shoes at him. Bushra,

Amjad's wife, is also often angry at him for not helping around the house because he is preoccupied with silly things (e.g., S2E4) or for being indifferent to the needs of his family when he is indulged in his efforts to resemble the Jews (e.g., S3E7).

The deep meaning of Amjad's efforts is revealed in one rare instance where he openly talks about the trauma underlying the façade of the Palestinian aspiring to be a Jew. The Alian family is stuck in their apartment building's bomb shelter with Jewish neighbors when a war breaks outside; the long, strenuous wait inside the small space sparks many tensions at first. Yet as time passes, the conversation becomes deeper and leads into painfully honest confessions. At some point, the residents start playing truth or dare. Yoske, an older Jewish man asks Amjad: "if you were given a choice, would you prefer living in Israel or one of its neighboring Arab countries?" Amjad hesitates; Natan, one of Amjad's closest friends in the building, is surprised by this reaction and says it is obvious that Amjad would choose to live in Israel. After a short pause, the following conversation unfolds:

Amjad: "I know this might come across as a little bit odd, but if I weren't a stranger then yes, I would rather be born somewhere else like Egypt or Syria or any other country in the world."

Yocheved [Yoske's wife]: "So why don't you just get up and leave?"

Amjad: "because I'm tired of feeling like a stranger"

[..]

Yoske: "give me a break, Amjad, what would you do over there [in Arab countries] with all the hunger, filth, poverty and dictatorship?"

Amjad: "you know what Yoske? I remember when I was twelve or thirteen, I took the bus for the first time. My father wanted me to bring something from the pharmacy, which was

located in downtown [Jerusalem]. I was so excited to take the bus for the first time on my own. I wore my fanciest clothes. I remember standing in front of the mirror for like an hour or so, it truly felt like a holiday. And then I went to the [bus] station next to the village... the moment I boarded the bus, I felt like a stranger. You should have seen their looks. The driver looked at me like I was an alien or a suspicious object. 'where are you going?' [the driver asked, in a suspicious voice] 'what? where are you from? what is your name?' I remember he asked the last question in Arabic because I didn't know Hebrew at the time. And then, when I got to the city, the moment I got off the bus, the policeman [Amjad silently imitating the policeman telling him to come over with his finger]. I was so humiliated. 'pharmacy, pharmacy' I told him in Arabic, and presented the note my father gave me. I was crying. People were passing by and I was crying. On that moment I decided that I don't want to be a stranger anymore. That I wanted to feel like I have a place [in society] and that I will do anything so I can to feel this way. But nothing helps. It will never work". (S3E10).

In this heartbreaking monologue, Amjad describes an almost identical reenactment of the scene that Althusser (1970) uses to explain the process of interpellation; for Althusser, the moment when a policeman calls "hey, you!" and the person being called upon turns around is the moment when that person accepts being a subject of the state (p. 118). However, there is a major difference between the two scenes. Althusser's policeman call demonstrates authority, but it is also an act of inclusion; the person turning back accepts the authority of the state and its representative, seeing themselves a citizen of the state (p. 104). Yet for Amjad, this is not only an experience of accepting authority, but even more so, one of fear and humiliation. When Amjad is called over by the

policeman, he is singled out, because he is not a citizen in the full sense of the word; Jewish passengers on the bus were not called over. This traumatic experience, cemented in his mind as a teenager, becomes Amjad's compass that guides him through his adult life.

The case studies of Doron and Amjad illustrate intractable lived experiences that mirror the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both Doron and Amjad's failed masculinities result in a deadlock where no better future seems possible. Whether a Sabra or a Schlemiel, both models of masculinity perpetuate internal and external conflicts. Doron illustrates that Israelis must always fight to protect themselves and that they need to outsmart their Palestinians enemies to do so successfully. Amjad shows that Palestinians will never be accepted into Israeli society no matter how hard they try to change themselves to fit in. These plots show that attempts made by Doron and Amjad to pass as someone they are not ultimately destroy them. Amjad finds himself caught in a limbo of identities from which he cannot escape (see also Druks, 2020); Doron's weaponization of a Palestinian identity acts as bad karma that brings death and horror to his doorstep. Doron's success at passing as a Palestinian is what leads his Palestinian antagonists to seek personal revenge.

Yet occupying the liminal space that exists in-between Jewish and Palestinian identities is not always destructive. In the everyday experiences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict Jews and Palestinians have to live together; Amjad and his family can dream about living in a different country, but they are Israelis whether they like it or not. Additionally, Palestinians and Jews have very similar cultures because many Israeli Jews are Mizrahim — they are Arab Jews whose families immigrated from countries in the MENA region (Shohat, 2017b). In the following subsection, I will examine supporting characters on *Arab Labor* who find creative ways to navigate their Israeli identity without disconnecting themselves from their Palestinian culture; by insisting

on their national identity, they manage to fight for their equal rights. I will also look into subplots on *Fauda* that reveal Doron's deep connection to his Arabness. I will argue that in both cases, the engagement with the second identity, which stems from everyday life rather than from a preplanned scheme to pass, encompasses a way of thinking about everyday peace.

2.3 Finding Ways to Authenticity

In this section, I will explore how everyday peace is achieved in *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*. Moving beyond the main plotlines of Amjad and Doron and their failed masculinities, *Arab Labor* shows how young, powerful Palestinian women and an older Palestinian man find ways to express their identity without fawning over their Jewish environment. On *Fauda*, a series of subplots allow Doron to explore his identity in new and surprising ways, creating an authentic connection to his Arab roots. As I will discuss in the next chapter, authenticity was a central goal for the creators of both shows, who wanted to provide a trustworthy account of what it means to live in Israel/Palestine. Authenticity, in this sense, is deeply related to sincerity; it is a deep connection to one's inner self. Simultaneously, it is crucial to establish honest social relationships with others (Handler, 1986). Thus, if my analysis so far has pointed to male protagonists who struggle to find their authentic selves, this section will point to the alternative ways it can be achieved, as presented in *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*.

Maya, Amjad's daughter, turns from a child into a teenager throughout the show's four seasons. She is very close to her grandfather, Abu Amjad, who teaches her things that her father does not appreciate, like belly dancing (S1E3) or how to play the oud, because Amjad wants her to learn Western classical music (S2E7). Abu Amjad, a retired teacher and school principal, maintains Maya's connection to Palestinian culture as long as he is allowed to play an active role

in her education; he counteracts her father, who distances himself from Palestinian culture and tries to convince his family to do the same.

The adults in the Alian family try to navigate an impossible situation — on the one hand, they want Maya to fit into her new environment after the family moved to Jerusalem; they want her to succeed in school and make new friends. On the other hand, they fear that her exposure to Jewish-Israeli culture will make her forget her Palestinian identity. What makes this transition particularly challenging is that by living in a Jewish environment and learning Zionist history at school, Maya's cultural heritage is not only forgotten; it is erased. When Maya asks Abu Amjad who are the Halutzim she learns about in school, he explains that these were soccer players (S2E5)⁹, where in fact, these Jewish settlers who built villages and towns in rural areas mostly did that at the expense of Palestinian farmers (Shafir, 1996). Therefore, if the Alians could turn a blind eye to the fact that Maya does not speak Arabic at home (S2E1), finding a way to handle her exposure to Zionism would be much more challenging.

The explosive potential of the Zionist intervention in the life of a Palestinian family is exposed to its full extent when the Alians have to deal with the meaning of the Israeli Memorial Day, whose symbolism was discussed in the previous chapter. In season 2, episode 8, Maya, who is ten years old at the time, wants to participate in the annual ceremony at her school by singing in the choir with her Jewish friends. Bushra, her mom, strongly resists this idea initially but eventually allows Maya to do it. She realizes marking her as different at school would do more harm than good. Yet Maya finds an original way to express her Palestinian memory within the context of the Zionist ceremony. She meets with her grandmother, Um Amjad, who shows her old pictures from

⁹ The word Halutz (literally pioneer) has two meanings in Hebrew — it is a general name for the first Jewish people who settled in rural Israel/Palestine prior to the establishment of the state of Israel; the second meaning of the word is the striker position in soccer.

Palestine before the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Yet, unlike the conflict narrative, which either portrays images of liberation (on the Israeli side) or destruction (on the Palestinian side), these photos are dated before the 1948 War, thus diverging from the prevalent history of the conflict that divides Jews and Palestinians into discrete peoples with competing narratives. It allows Maya to participate in the ceremony from an informed position of power after she has been familiarized with Palestinian history from the perspective of its everyday lived experience unassociated with violence (Azoulay, 2013; Goren, 2014).

The pinnacle of the episode is its final scene, when Maya sings the Reut¹⁰, a song often used in Memorial Day ceremonies; while the original song was intended to commemorate Israeli soldiers, Maya uses its polysemic words to remember “everybody” as the words of the song suggest; while the original intention was to remember all Israeli soldiers, this new interpretation of the song truly allows the commemoration of everybody – both Jews and Palestinians. This interpretation is evoked through cross-cutting editing in which there is a constant movement between a close-up of Maya singing the song and the photos her grandmother showed her (Goren, 2014). While Maya cannot protest the one-sided ceremony that excludes the Palestinian experience, her interpretive agency becomes a form of resistance that allows her to remember her silenced Palestinian history under the most unexpected circumstances.

As Maya grows up, she finds ways to express her Palestinian identity more explicitly by protesting the oppression of Palestinians as an activist. She secretly meets with friends and writes graffiti calling to “free Palestine” in English on the doors of the offices of a governmental ministry (S4E9). Yet her most defiant form of resistance happens when she is invited to represent Israel in an international competition in Judo. While training for a local club, Arik Ze’evi, a former Olympic

¹⁰ The Reut (comradery in Hebrew) is an iconic song strongly associated with the 1948 War. It talks about the friendship between living soldiers and those who died in battle.

medalist who plays himself in this episode, recognizes her potential and invites her to the training camp of the Israeli national team for youth. By the end of camp, three young athletes will be chosen to represent Israel in the European championship. Maya faces direct racism from her teammates, as one of them remarks after a huddle: “yuck, the Arab girl just touched me.” Depressed by how her peers treat her, Maya decides she does not want to compete anymore. As she comes to the club to return her equipment, she is approached by the janitor of the building:

Janitor: “excuse me, your name is Maya, right?”

Maya: “right”

Janitor: “I’m sorry if I’m bothering you, but why aren’t you training with the others?”

Maya: “I can’t stand this place; I want to collect my things and I don’t want to come back”

Janitor: “why, because of these [Jewish] girls?”

[Maya doesn’t respond, but her silence indicates that this is indeed the reason]

Janitor: “Are you going to let them win? This is what they want. I’m sorry that I’m speaking to you this way, you don’t know me. But me and many other workers here are very happy to see you training”

Maya: “really?”

Janitor: “the moment you got here, all the Arabs in the club became proud”

Maya: “there are other Arabs beside me in the club? I didn’t know that”

Janitor: “yes, there are many! You have Wael [who is cleaning] the showers, and Shahira in the laundry room, and also Bader and his brother Rabi’a in the cafeteria – and there are many others. Like I told you, all the people here are Arabs and we all hope that you’ll make it to the competition in Europe”.

Maya: “and who am I going to represent there? Them? [the Jews]”

Janitor: “no, you will represent *us*” (S4E8)

This interaction shows that representation matters even if it happens under dire circumstances. It is easy to relate to Maya, who does not want to represent the people who degrade her and make her feel like an outsider. Still, the conversation with the janitor shows Maya that being a Palestinian who participates in a major international competition under an Israeli flag does not mean that she celebrates her oppressors. Contrarily, this means that she can step into the Israeli-Jewish hegemony to become a force to be reckoned with for Israelis; while Israeli Jews can overlook the desires and needs of a Palestinian janitor, they cannot ignore an athlete who represents Israel in an international setting. Maya ultimately competes in the European championship and wins a gold medal; as she stands on the podium and the Israeli national anthem plays in the background, she raises her arm silently to reveal a bracelet of the Palestinian flag, denoting the iconic image of Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos identifying with the Black Power movement at 1968 summer Olympics in Mexico City (Davis, 2008). By embracing this gesture, Maya shows how Palestinians are not only similar to African Americans in their experience of oppression but can also be inspired by their symbolic struggle for equal rights (see Purnell, 2021).

While Maya learns throughout the show what it means to be a Palestinian and how to navigate her national identity in the Israeli context, Amal, a close friend of the Alians, is very confident about her identity. A Palestinian in her late 20s or early 30s, Amal is a lawyer with a master’s degree in human rights. She went to school in Boston and works for the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. Amal is also a feminist, a title Amjad sometimes uses to mock her (S1E5). Therefore, she is deemed “problematic” twice; she directly flouts Israeli policies against Palestinians through her work by representing Palestinians who fight for equal rights (e.g., S1E8).

Yet as an educated and opinionated young woman, Amal also rejects the traditional and patriarchal Palestinian society that still struggles to find ways to treat women equally (Allabadi, 2008). These cultural hurdles are no less suffocating — for example, when Amal moves into the old house of the Alians in the village, Abu Amjad watches her closely, ensuring that she does not meet with single men (S2E4).

Ironically, Amal makes the most significant impact throughout the show through her relationship with Meir, an Israeli-Jew, and Amjad's coworker and close friend. He meets Amal through the Alians, and the relationship is difficult for both sides from the beginning. Meir loves Amal but finds it hard to give up his Zionist values (e.g., S2E8). They both face awkward situations with their families — Meir knows his mother will not approve of the relationship — so he introduces Amal to a fake family (S1E9). As for Amal's parents, the first time they meet Meir is during a war when he goes into Gaza as a part of his reserve military service (S2E11). Even when things seem to work out, Amal's subconscious anxiety about being in a relationship with a Jew, and later, about having a child with him, still overpowers her. When she is about to give birth, she keeps losing her contractions because she repeatedly encounters depressing situations that remind her of the reality of discrimination against Palestinians — thus making the baby resist coming out (S3E1).

On the professional level, Amal is frustrated by her inability to offer real change to Palestinian lives, given the complex political reality of constant wars and violence in Israel/Palestine (S4E8). Her direct efforts as an activist seem futile and lead nowhere. Her biggest success in promoting the Palestinian cause happens inadvertently. At the beginning of the fourth season, Meir and Amal realize that they can no longer afford to live in the Western Jewish part of Jerusalem (S4E1). With the help of Abu Amjad, they move to a Palestinian village in the West

Bank, where they live under the supervision of Abu Muhsen (S4E2). While having a Jewish resident in his house is uncomfortable at first, Abu Muhsen soon befriends Meir, who, in turn, finds out about the lack of basic infrastructure in the Palestinian village. Meir realizes that the only way to get access to this infrastructure is by making the Israeli authorities think that he is a settler who lives there. Therefore, Meir disguises himself as an Orthodox Jew working to establish a new settlement in the village called “Beit Meir” (literally, Meir’s home). He soon manages to connect a telephone line to his house, which serves the entire village (S4E2). Through his actions, Meir uses the colonialist distribution of infrastructure by the Israeli authorities to his advantage (Shlomo, 2017; Tawil-Souri, 2015).

According to Druks (2020), this move to the West Bank reflects the political ideology of the Israeli right and its desire to build settlements in Palestinian territories. Meir, a secular Jew, easily manages to pass as a settler. Druks explains that his unintentional passing is “motivated by an unconscious to compensate for his transgression” after he “breaks the ultimate Israeli taboo by marrying Amal” (p. 11). Yet as mentioned earlier, this is not the first time Amal and Meir face difficulties in their relationship and still manage to overcome them; while the fake settlement ultimately has to be “dismantled” after Amal finds out about it, she plays along at some point as she realizes the settlement serves the village and its people. Amal even hands Meir his machine gun as he gets ready to go to the Israeli authorities as a settler and convince them to build a sports center in the village. She does that because she sees Meir’s interactions with the people of the village and understands that he developed a genuine connection with them (S4EP8).

Therefore, even if Amal fails in her direct efforts to improve Palestinian lives, she indirectly transforms Meir into an important ally who can use his Jewish privilege and his ability to pass as a settler to benefit his new friends. For Meir, the personal encounter with Palestinians in the village

changed his entire politics because the abstract political statements constantly made by Amal in their conversations suddenly become a lived reality, turning into everyday peace. Therefore, Meir exemplifies an intentional form of passing motivated by his recognition of Palestinians as human beings (Honneth, 1995) that emerges from living among them. When Amal watches news reports about violence against Palestinians and yells at Meir for not reacting in the same way, she asks him frustratingly: “do you even know what happens in the West Bank?”; only then can he finally reply, “of course I know, I live there” (S4E8).

While Amal learns through her experience with Beit Meir that overlooking what is right by law, like living in a fake settlement, can often bring more justice to people, Abu Amjad uses this logic as an essential life principle. He avoids the direct political action taken by Amal and Maya — instead, he uses the Jewish prejudice towards Palestinians to reap personal benefits. In this process, he often uses his son’s naivety, who does everything his Jewish environment expects him to do. In season 1, episode 2, Amjad is asked by his editor, Amnon, to write a “sexy” article for the newspaper. Amnon rejects Amjad’s suggestion to write about the separation wall¹¹ or land confiscations and urges him to find something “sexier.” Simultaneously, Abu Amjad tells his son about a shepherd from their village, Abu Jalal, who can get his sheep to give his ID card to soldiers when they ask for it. In his despair, Amjad tells Amnon about this story, who is immediately excited about the idea and orders Amjad to get him an exclusive interview with Abu Jalal.

Amjad ends up going with Meir and his Jewish animal activist girlfriend (whom he dates prior to meeting Amal) to interview Abu Jalal. Following Abu Jalal’s instructions, the three say to

¹¹ A wall built by Israel during the Al-Aqsa Intifada around Palestinian towns, villages across the West Bank, as well as neighborhoods in Jerusalem. While Israel argues that the wall helps protect Israelis from Palestinian terror, it also has a devastating effect on the lives of Palestinians (see Ben-Eliezer & Feinstein, 2007).

the sheep in Arabic “Jeeb el-Hawiyah”¹², but it does not do anything; Abu Jalal then urges them to be “tougher about it” and demand the ID like soldiers if they want the sheep to do it. Amjad eventually writes the article while his father manages to get Abu Jalal to appear in the newspaper; Abu Amjad also sells Meir an overpriced sheep, although it is not magical in any shape or form.

This absurd episode provides an ironic critique of how Jews see the Palestinians who cling to the fantastic; Palestinians, in this sense, represent an Orient that is “fatal to the gods of light by the charm of its dreams” (Said, 1978, p. 73). Amnon wants to avoid serious political issues that truly matter to people's lives and prefers entertaining, absurd topics like a talking sheep. While Amjad is upset for not being taken seriously as a journalist, Abu Amjad and his friend Abu Jalal take advantage of this situation and push it to the limit by arguing that the sheep is particularly prone to respond to a typical order yelled at Palestinians by soldiers. Abu Amjad uses the same approach throughout the show — when his son wants to get a car that will impress the Jews, Abu Amjad reaches out to a local mechanic who arranges a makeshift car from stolen parts (S1E1); Abu Amjad organizes a fake holiday ceremony for his son's new Jewish friends as he tries to imitate the Jewish Passover seder (S1E5); he sells Meir a dog for a thousand shekels after he got it for free from a shelter because Amjad was led to believe that dogs do not like of Arabs and can smell their fear (S2E3).

Abu Amjad's way of life fits into the complicated political situation of Palestinians born before the establishment of the state of Israel (S3E8). Immediately after the 1948 War, Israel put Palestinians under Martial Law which was only lifted in 1966. During that time, the Israeli state constantly collected information about its Palestinian citizens by using a network of inside informants (Cohen, 2010). Growing up in this panoptic environment, Abu Amjad is accustomed

¹² “Give me your ID” in Arabic. While there are few Israeli Jews who know Arabic, this sentence is infamously familiar to every Israeli soldier because it is commonly used in roadblocks.

to Israeli control over his life; he does not try to revolutionize the system. Although Abu Amjad is a respectable member of his community who is encouraged to get involved in politics, for him these aspirations can only exist at the local level inside his village, where traditional clans still play an important role (S4E8, see also Sa'ar and Yahia-Younis, 2008). He is not as bold as Amal and Maya, who wish to challenge Israeli values. Instead, his life experience has taught him how to use simple tricks to fool the state (Certeau, 1984).

In sum, Maya, Amal, and Abu Amjad exemplify an evolution of three generations of Palestinians trying to find creative ways to express their Palestinian identity. Maya is at the early stage of exploring and forming this identity. She often does not realize the power embedded in simple symbolic actions she can take. Yet her actions become revolutionary when she participates in an international competition for Israel and raises the Palestinian flag or when she sings a song written to commemorate soldiers while thinking about the Palestinian loss. Amal already has a clear sense of who she is and what she wants, yet people around her, both Palestinians and Jews, are deterred by her bold politics. She makes a difference by exposing her partner Meir to the hardships of Palestinians and transforming him into an important ally who uses his privileges as a Jew to help his Palestinian friends. Finally, Abu Amjad, born before Israel was founded, represents the micropolitics of a man who accepted Israeli control over his life. For him, activism is not about making significant changes in society but finding a way to survive and even profit from others' prejudice against him.

All three characters are different from the main protagonist of the show, Amjad, because they do not agree to yield their Palestinian identity. This difference is gendered. Amjad's failed masculinity is the result of his docility that makes him incapable of performing the hegemonic role of the Palestinian patriarch. His daughter defies his authority repeatedly, and his friend Amal,

whom he mocks for being a feminist, can achieve much more for Palestinians without trying to please the Jews. Thus, young Palestinian women who hold an unapologetic feminist agenda, become true agents of change in the show. Amjad cannot deliver this change and Abu Amjad is not interested in it.

Unlike the Palestinians in *Arab Labor* whose actions are driven by their precarious position in society, Doron is a part of an Israeli elite of retired soldiers. As discussed earlier, he enjoys a serene life at the beginning of the first season of *Fauda*. Yet he also has an unyielding drive to return to his special unit, a decision that leads to an endless cycle of violence that stretches across the show's three seasons. The likely explanation for this urge seems to be Doron's commitment to keeping Israelis safe, which is why he accepts Moreno's proposal to return. However, as I argued earlier, Doron does not carry out his missions because he is a patriot; on the contrary, he is driven by a very personal connection to the Palestinian he pursues, which makes him part of a "post-national community" (Gertz & Yosef, 2017, p. 4); as Doron and his unit leave the Israeli space and enter Palestinian territories, they discover that "Palestinian culture in all its manifestations is found within themselves" (p. 7).

I wish to extend Gertz and Yosef's argument by showing that Doron (and his entire unit) do not just stumble upon Palestinian culture when they embark on missions in Palestinian territories. The urge to be close to Palestinian culture is embedded in them because of who they are — people who live in the Middle East and Mizrahi Jews. According to Shohat (2017b), the identity category of the Mizrahi (literally, "eastern") was invented by the Zionist movement, which is Eastern European in its essence, as a way of labeling Jews who immigrated to Israel from countries in the Middle East and North Africa. The purpose of this category, which is Orientalist by its very name, was to erase any trace of their Arabness as a part of a greater vision of

constructing Israel as a European state. For Shohat, these immigrants are still, more than anything else, Jewish Arabs.

Doron and his unit are part and parcel of Zionism, yet their Arabness was not entirely subdued; it emerges in various instances throughout the show. Primarily, the unit's ability to "behave like Arabs" is used as a weapon; after Boaz, Doron's brother-in-law, is kidnapped by Abu Ahmad's guards (S1E5), Doron feels it is his responsibility to bring him back. With the help of some of his comrades, they go off the grid and kidnap Shieh Awadalla, Abu Ahmad's mentor, without getting any permission to do so; they torture the Shieh, and then they call Walid, Abu Ahmad's righthand, to discuss the terms of a swap. Doron threatens that he will kill Walid and his entire extended family personally if Boaz does not come back safe (S1E7). By becoming vigilantes and kidnapping an innocent older man, Doron and his unit want to prove to Walid and Abu Ahmad they too can be just like Hamas – oblivious to the law and targeting civilians.

This type of juxtaposition between lawlessness and Hamas supports the main narrative of *Fauda* and its Zionist underpinning (Kijewska, 2018) that the Israeli army operates within the law while Hamas' guerilla warfare is a form of terrorism (Hajjar, 2006). According to this logic, only if members of the unit go underground can their actions be compared to Palestinian actions. However, I am less interested in these deliberate and questionable attempts to resemble Palestinians as a way to reaffirm the category of the terrorist. Instead, the following analysis will look into subplots of *Fauda* that reveal Doron's inner world, demonstrating his deep connection to his Arabness.

The seemingly trivial yet important place to start this analysis is by looking at how Doron and his comrades greet each other. When Doron returns to his unit for the first time, the first thing he says is "good morning" in Arabic. His old friends, Nurit and Eli, who have not seen him for a

long time, get up to welcome Doron while also greeting him in Arabic; when Doron approaches Eli, they kiss each other on the cheeks three times, as customary in Arab culture (S1E1).

Fauda also features many gearing up scenes, which resemble scenes that appear in many classical action films like *Rambo*. However, gearing up in the context of *Fauda* has a special importance; it marks the moment in which Doron and the unit members transition from being Jews to being Palestinians. Therefore, gearing up does not only include loading guns with bullets or putting a knife in a scabbard; equally important are the use of makeup to paint a dark beard or wearing clothes that are popular among Palestinians. Indeed, these transition moments can be scary for an outsider – when Ido, Doron’s son, catches his father wearing a kufiyah and covering his face with it, he is immediately alarmed (S1EP1, see also Gertz & Yosef, 2017, p. 7). Yet the use of Palestinian garments is not only a disguise; when Moreno sees Doron putting on “Palestinian” clothes as he is getting ready for action, he immediately makes sarcastic homoerotic comments: “you’re looking fine! I love the shirt, it was highly popular in Jenin in the 80s, wasn’t it?” (S1E4). Doron then smiles and responds with similar comments of his own. This interaction reveals that beyond the humor used in this situation to relieve stress, Doron does not only wear these clothes because he must; he does it because he feels comfortable in them, and they help him bond with other men in the unit.

Alongside these mundane interactions, specific examples demonstrate Doron’s deep connection to Arab culture. After breaking up with his wife Gali in the second season, Doron moves in with his father, Amos, who lives in Azuz, a remote village in the desert. Amos has a farm where he raises horses and sheep. Similar to his interactions with his comrades, Doron speaks with his father in a mixture of Hebrew and Arabic. As they ride on Amos’s truck through the desert, Doron asks his father if they are going to drink coffee; Amos replies that they will make it on their

way, suggesting that they will brew it in the field using a portable burner. They eventually get to a Bedouin village where he buys hay for his animals (S2E1). Amos also takes Doron to a pond in the desert where he bathes before Shabbat; Amos uses this opportunity to tell Doron that when he was a child, he was in prison in Jordan while telling his family, whom he left alone during a holiday, that he was in Greece. This story shows that Amos was also a member of an elite unit, probably serving in the Mossad (S2E3).¹³

Doron's family background is revealed when he brings Shirin to his father's house. Shirin is a Palestinian doctor, an agent, and Doron's lover; I discuss her importance below. Doron invites her to stay with him and his father – and while Doron is away, she has a conversation with Amos in the kitchen. He offers her Ejuh¹⁴, and she then asks him how he knows Arabic. Amos tells her that he was born in Baghdad. Later, when they eat, Amos speaks about his life in there:

Amos: “it was a wonderful city, Arabs and Jews lived there together. It was the most wonderful place in the world”

Shirin: “is this why you [Amos and Doron] are like this? Half Arab, half Jews?”

Amos: “true my dear. I am a *Jewish Arab*” (S2EP7).

This is the only place in the entire show where peace is discussed openly, as a distant memory from a faraway land where the conflict did not exist. Yet Amos's self-definition insinuates where the path towards peace lies; he completely rejects the Zionist category of the Mizrahi (Shohat, 2017b) and tells Shirin that just like her – he is also an Arab. Shirin's question is asked in the plural, indicating that Doron, just like his father, is also a Jewish Arab and not a Mizrahi. The entire scene in which Amos and Shirin sit around a table in a house surrounded by a serene

¹³ The Mossad's operates exclusively outside the borders of Israel.

¹⁴ Herb based omelet, typical to Lebanese and Syrian cuisines.

desert, sharing a dish they both love and having a conversation in Arabic indicates that there are more commonalities than differences between them.

Amos's way of life also suggests that he has a lot in common with the mythical image of the Bedouins, with whom he established a close relationship based on mutual respect – they are both constructed as noble savages (Graulund, 2009): they live close to the land and enjoy the outdoors; their livelihood is the animals they raise; they take care of their families; they are distinguished warriors; and above all, they are Arabs. Doron continues his father's legacy; this is manifested in how Amos describes him, and also in Doron's decision to live with his father and the fact that he joins his daily routine of caring for the animals and trading with the local Bedouin tribe with ease. This bond with the tribe is maintained when its Shieh, Abu Alaa, helps Doron find out who are the people targeting his family (S2E1). After Nidal executes Amos, Abu Alaa comes with other dignitaries of his tribe to condole Doron, who welcomes him warmly (S2E9).

Yet *Fauda* ambiguates Doron's Arabness in the context of his relationship with his father. Amos is not only a Jewish Arab; he is also a former Mossad spy. This means that Doron's drive to be in the unit can be interpreted as following his father's footsteps rather than as a form of identification with his cultural heritage. However, Amos represents a generation in which the two were indistinguishable. Many Jewish immigrants from Arab countries, particularly those from Iraq like Amos, established a close relationship with the Israeli intelligence community and were recruited to its ranks as native Arabic speakers (Chetrit, 2010, pp. 161–162). In this process, the nature of their connection to their Arabness changes; in their conversation, after Amos tells Shirin that he was born in Baghdad, she remarks that “you do not speak the Iraqi dialect” and then moves to ask if he used to be “like Doron” (S2EP7); indeed, Amos uses the local Palestinian dialect when he speaks Arabic.

While Doron represents a different generation born in Israel, I argue that his connection to his Arabness is as deep and meaningful as his father's. Unlike Amos, who used his skills to operate worldwide on behalf of the Israeli intelligence, Doron uses his service in the special unit to explore and reconnect with his Arabness. This connection is most clearly manifested in the relationship he develops with Shirin. As mentioned earlier, Shirin is a Palestinian physician who works at a hospital in Hebron. Like Doron, she has a dual identity; her father is French, and her mother is Palestinian. She trained and lived in France but decided to move to Hebron to be close to her mother after her husband passed away (S1E3; S1E4). The unit is interested in her because she is the cousin of Walid el-Abed — Abu Ahmad's righthand in the first season and the leader of the military wing of Hamas in the West Bank in the second season. Following his injury in the chase I described earlier in this chapter, Abu Ahmad is admitted to Shirin's hospital. Walid pressures her to help him extricate Abu Ahmad from there before the Israelis locate and kill him (S1E3); Walid later forces Shirin to operate on Boaz and plant an explosive device in his stomach (S1E7).

Therefore, Doron's initial interest in Shirin stems from purely operational reasons; she becomes an obvious target for observation and later — recruitment. Doron introduces himself to Shirin as Amir Mahagne. Their first encounter occurs at the hospital, where she examines him; he is immediately attracted to her and finds it hard to follow her instructions as she examines him. Later, Doron and Nurit, also a member of the unit, go to a swimming pool to put a tracking device on her phone; after Nurit fails to do it in the locker room, "Amir" asks Shirin for her phone number and uses the opportunity to hack it (S1E3). Doron is given orders to meet with her to get to Abu Ahmad, so they go on a date where they continue flirting (S1E4). Doron leaves Shirin's life as required of him throughout the first season; nevertheless, he becomes emotionally attached to her,

telling her intimate details about his relationship with Boaz while changing the exact details of the story to avoid exposure (S1E5).

While we can interpret Doron's actions as purely professional during the first season, the intensity of his emotions towards Shirin is fully expressed during the second season. Doron develops a short yet passionate relationship with her, the most powerful romantic relationship he has throughout the show. As discussed earlier, his relationship with his wife Gali falls apart; in the third season, Doron has a superficial affair with one of his colleagues. At the beginning of the second season, Shirin is in an unhappy marriage with Walid and helps him with his operations. When Shirin is arrested and interrogated, Doron steps in; she then discovers his real identity as an Israeli Jew when he tells her his real name for the first time. Doron turns off the cameras in the interrogation room and promises to help her escape the West Bank, swearing that while his identity was fake, his emotions towards her were always real (S2E1). Doron is later sent to plant a camera in Shirin's apartment, where she often meets with Walid. Doron completes his mission successfully without being spotted but then returns to the apartment when Shirin is there and offers her a way to contact him (S2E3). By making this move, Doron completely disobeys orders and risks the success of the mission to help Shirin.

At this point, it becomes clear that Doron has stopped following protocol, a common trope in action thrillers; he was willing to make significant sacrifices for Shirin. After Shirin agrees to collaborate, she helps the unit arrest Walid (S2E6). Doron then vows to protect her and takes her under his wing, breaking all the rules a case officer needs to follow. While an officer should develop rapport with the agent to build trust (Althoff, 2016), getting too close puts the officer at risk. Nevertheless, Doron brings Shirin to his father's house, where the two connect, as discussed earlier (S2E7). Doron opens up to Shirin and explains why he divorced Gali (S2E6). She is the

only person with whom he feels comfortable discussing the core question of this chapter — why he constantly moves between Arab and Jewish identities. As they sit outside Amos’s house in the cold desert night with a boiling tea kettle, they have the following conversation:

Shirin: Tell me, don’t you get confused when one time you’re Amir Mahagne [Doron’s Palestinian identity] and the other time you’re Doron Kabilio? I would definitely go crazy if I were you

Doron: It’s hard to explain

Shirin: [pours him a cup of tea] Try

Doron: [drinks the tea] When I’m there, at your place [the Palestinian territories] *I feel lighter*. I feel no pressure. I am just Amir

Shirin: But it is a lie

Doron: It is not a complete lie. It is truly easier for me over there. Over there, *I feel real*

Shirin: What reality are you talking about? Everything you told me was a lie

Doron: My feelings towards you weren’t a lie

Shirin: You said that you are from the Preventive Security¹⁵, but in reality, you are doing something completely different. You said that you were single when in fact you were married with two kids. I called you Amir. I slept with Amir. How did you plan to get yourself out of this lie?

Doron: Listen, I planned to tell you everything

Shirin: When? After I got killed by Hamas? or after I became pregnant? How could you live with yourself? How can you live with yourself when you look at me now [as she became a fugitive after betraying Walid]?

¹⁵ A part of the security forces of the Palestinian Authority. This was a part of Doron’s cover story.

Doron: I swear in my kids' life that nobody knows about our relationship. *Nobody gave me an order to love you.* It was a secret and it's still a secret

Shirin: Do you even understand what you did?

Doron: I didn't want all this. It's not a coincidence that I'm here with you, and you are here, with me, in my house (S2E7)

In this dialogue, Shirin finally gets a chance to confront Doron about his lies, yet she reveals a profound truth about him in this process. Doron's entire relationship with Shirin is symbolic; it represents his relationship with his Arabness. Doron's tragic love for Shirin shows him the profound emotions he can experience if he is brave enough to disobey the rules dictated by Zionism and let himself be with an Arab woman. Soon after this conversation, as Doron takes Shirin to the border so she can escape to France, he finds out that his father was killed; their relationship goes downhill from there; Shirin is brought back to Israel, put in protective house arrest, and ultimately commits suicide (S2E9). By the same token, Doron has a secret yet intense relationship with his Arabness, which he does not know how to express fully; all he has is an affect, a pre-conscious attachment to the Palestinian territories, their people, and their culture where he feels at home, where he feels at ease (Papacharissi, 2014).

This conversation profoundly destabilizes the question of Doron's identity. The explicit message of *Fauda* that aligns with Zionism is that Amir Mahagne in the first and second seasons, or Abu Fadi in the third season, are like clothes that Doron can wear or remove as he pleases. They help him protect himself in dangerous situations and are valuable tools for successfully carrying out his missions. Yet the relationships that Doron develops with Shirin and with Bashar, the Palestinian boxer he mentors in the third season, suggest that Doron is the fake identity. Thus,

Doron's authentic self is revealed only when he is deep inside enemy territory, at the lion's den, where he can finally let his guards down and discuss painful issues like his divorce from his ex-wife or his difficulty connecting with his brother-in-law. Consequently, roles are switched, turning Zionist ideology on its head — Israel, the ostensible home, becomes the frontline; his commanders, who push him to destroy Palestinian life but do not allow him to love, become the enemy.

The final case study I will analyze illustrates Doron's spiritual connection to the West Bank. In the first season, after his plan to rescue Boaz fails miserably, Doron finds himself in deep emotional distress. He defies his commanders and becomes a vigilante; his plan gets Boaz killed in a gruesome death. As discussed earlier, an old religious leader, Shieh Awadallah, experiences a similar death in a failed swap, and Abeer, Abu Ahmad's little daughter, whom the unit also kidnapped as a bargaining chip, is severely injured. The Israeli Defense Minister, Gideon Avital, is infuriated by what Doron did and plans to put him in jail. More importantly, Doron knows he cannot look Gali in the eye after he promised her to return her brother alive.

Like many similar cases throughout the show, Doron isolates himself after tragedies and falls into depression. Immediately after the failed operation, Doron, injured and exhausted, wanders alone through the West Bank. Clearly, this is a dangerous situation; if anyone finds out who he is and what he did — that would be the end of him. While the unit is frantically looking for him, Doron hitchhikes with an unknown Palestinian who drops him off at an undisclosed location. As he starts walking, Doron sees a missed call from home; he turns off his phone and then separates the battery and sim card from the device to avoid getting tracked. On the cusp of collapse, an Imam from a local mosque invites him in. Doron goes to the water fountain outside the mosque to wash and purify himself; he follows the Islamic purification ritual before prayer under the supervision of the Imam. He then sits inside the mosque, where the Imam gives him a

blanket to rest. While watching other people pray, Doron falls asleep. When he wakes up with renewed powers, he leaves some money at the mosque for charity and goes back into action by turning his phone back on (S1E8).

Thus, in his most desperate moment, Doron does not seek solace in Israel with his comrades or family. As he passes through Palestinian lands, he is no longer Doron, or either of the fabricated Palestinian identities made for him. He is a Muslim Palestinian man with no name — a pure version of himself. Allegedly, he follows a protocol designed to protect him. However, by deactivating his phone, Doron evades the Israelis, not the Palestinians. When he purifies himself in the mosque's yard, his meticulous attention to the ritual details protect him from blowing his cover as a Palestinian as the Imam watches his every movement. Yet the fact of the matter is that Doron needs this ritual; the clear water he splashes on his face revives him, and resting in the mosque gives him strength.

According to Agamben (1998), Doron's journey can be interpreted as a reduction to "bare life" — a life detached from the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that solely exists in the realm of experience, where there is no language, and by effect, no political expression. This life is also bare in the materialistic sense — Doron carries no weapons when he enters the mosque; his comrades do not accompany him. The drone's point of view, establishing many scenes in *Fauda*, usually imposes a panoptic standpoint of the Israeli empire on Palestinians (Boyle, 2020; Grewal, 2017). However, in the first shot establishing Doron's journey across the West Bank, the drone cannot determine Doron's exact location; time and space remain unknown. Doron is no one in this journey, and therefore he can be anyone; he can be any Jewish Arab seeking comfort. As Gertz and Yosef (2017) rightfully contend, Doron's bare life is the product of his lawlessness; it is an expression of disengagement from his national community (p. 9). However, I argue that this is

only a part of the picture; there is a reason why Doron disregards the law — since only then, in some unknown mosque in the West Bank, where he has no name, can Doron truly come to terms with his authentic Arabness without having to worry about the state dispossessing him to be someone else.

2.4 Thinking about Peace between Passing and Authenticity

In her introspective reflection, Anzaldúa (1987) discusses the meaning of the borderland; her writing combines English and Spanish, prose and poetry, as she explores her Chicana identity in southern Texas as trapped in between the United States and Mexico as geographical and cultural spaces. For Anzaldúa, the borderland is hybrid; it is a precarious space because the person who occupies it is neither here nor there. However, it is also a creative space since its hybridity allows individuals to traverse rigid identities and question oppressive cultural norms (p. 21).

Passing on *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* oscillates between creativity and confinement; it is in constant tension with authenticity. Doron's passing as a Palestinian forces him to weaponize his Arab identity to realize Zionism. It is only when passing turns into becoming that Doron can find peace. Peace happens in the moments when he lets his guards down while wandering around the West Bank or falling in love with a Palestinian woman. Becoming rather than passing allows him to be his authentic Arab self. Amjad's passing holds him back; his performance of Jewish identity is better than many Jews around him, but it reaches the point of hyperbole, leading to an inevitable yet funny collapse. The Israeli society ultimately puts him in his "proper" place; he receives constant reminders that he can never be fully equal as a hybrid, colonized subject (Bhabha, 2004). Liberation on *Arab Labor* has to come from other characters who insist on their authentic Palestinian identity, finding creative ways to perform their Israeliness without forgoing their roots.

Both shows deal with the gender roles of their protagonists extensively. Doron and Amjad exhibit failed masculinities, occupying the opposite ends of the masculine spectrum in Israel – the Sabra vs. the schlemiel. Failure is inherent to the figure of the Schlemiel; Amjad cannot attain the equality he desires nor perform his duties as a Palestinian patriarch. Sayed Kashua, the Palestinian creator of *Arab Labor*, uses an archetype of Jewish folklore to discuss Palestinian life in Israel. As I will show in chapter 3, Amjad’s character clearly draws from Kashua’s personal life. Kashua attests that while he makes fun of everybody on his show, he laughs about himself more than anyone else. Kashua makes self-deprecation, another trope of Jewish humor, central to the comic mechanism of *Arab Labor*. While putting himself down, Kashua empowers young women on his show. Unlike Amjad or Abu Amjad, who do not offer an alternative to Israeli Palestinians' docile and destructive way of life, Maya and Amal show that internal peace is found in insisting on one’s identity rather than running away from it. This insistence stems from their double marginality as Palestinians in a Jewish state and as women in a patriarchal Palestinian community, which they turn into a site of resistance (hooks, 1990). Maya and Amal are unwilling to accept their predetermined positionality; they defy the Israeli state by raising the Palestinian flag at an official sporting event or connecting Palestinian villages to essential infrastructure. They dismiss snarky remarks about being feminists and evade men trying to supervise them. Nevertheless, they do not resign from the Israeli society or demand that the state of Israel will be abolished. Instead, their quest for justice happens internally as Israeli citizens.

Doron seemingly has the upper hand; he embodies the Sabra, realizing the Zionist dream. However, being a Sabra, a distinctly Ashkenazi invention, uproots him as a Jewish Arab. His success as a warrior yields destruction in his personal life, turning war into an endless cycle from which there is no escape. However, in moments of great distress, when performing his Zionist role

becomes too hard to bear, something new emerges. It happens after his attempt to save his brother-in-law ends in a catastrophe, or when he is trying to help his Palestinian lover escape certain death. The Sabra ceases to exist in these moments, and an Arab man is born. An outlaw who defies Israel and Zionism, he connects with an unspeakable affect and finds internal peace. Just like *Arab Labor*, *Fauda* is based on the experiences of its creators in similar undercover units. As I will show in the next chapter, these units became a refuge for them. After growing up in an Ashkenazi environment that condescended to them for their Mizrahi roots, being a Mistaarev, the Jew licensed to be an Arab, made them feel finally at home.

Peace is not the centerpiece of either of these shows, as both devote most of their attention to the hardships of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, they can discuss topics that are cultural taboos in Israel, like moving across identity lines, developing romantic relationships between Jews and Palestinians or expressing Palestinian pride. They represent failed Jewish and Palestinian masculinities, although the successful performance of manhood is the backbone of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian values. Still, these topics are on the table precisely because they are a part of fictional, complex TV (Mittell, 2015). Unlike the news, which reports on “facts” and whose representations are “real” or “objective” (Schudson, 1978), the radical ideas of *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* are popular among Israeli audiences because they are considered “fiction.” However, as I will argue in the next chapter, the everyday peace explored in these shows is a very real part of Jewish and Palestinian everyday lives.

Chapter 3 Peace as a Media Practice on *Arab Labor and Fauda*

3.1 Billboards at Dawn

In the last week of December 2017, many Israelis woke up and noticed giant billboards on the side of major roads hung there in the dead of night. Their design was oddly minimalistic; two or three words, written in white font over a black background – the language was recognizably Arabic, yet in absence of any additional information in Hebrew or English, very few Israeli Jews understood what these words meant.



Figure 3-1 One of the billboards, positioned next to a major highway in central Israel

Soon enough, many of them began protesting on social media, contacting their municipalities, and even writing letters to the Minister of Public Security, who oversees the police, demanding that the billboards will be removed. They argued that they “make people nervous.” In two peripheral towns, Nesher and Kiryat Gat, local officials complied with these demands, even after the mystery was solved – the billboards were a part of a campaign for the second season of the popular television show *Fauda*, which aired on December 31. Three different types of signs were hung, whose meanings were “brace yourselves,” “on our way,” and “soon the action will begin” (Editorial Board, 2017; Uqbi, 2017). Local officials defended their decision, saying that “the billboards reminded people of ISIS.”

Fauda (2015-) and *Arab Labor* (2007-2012) are two highly successful Israeli television shows that bring to the small screen the stories of Jews and Palestinians who are constantly clashing with each other. As discussed in previous chapter, *Arab Labor* explores the everyday struggles of Amjad, a Palestinian journalist who believes he needs to assimilate as a Jew to gain social capital and achieve professional success. *Fauda* focuses on Doron’s life, a special forces soldier who disguises himself as a Palestinian to arrest and often kill Palestinians. However, as I have argued, the encounters that take place in these shows between Jews and Palestinians do not always result in bumping into an impenetrable wall; they sometimes become a door for characters on both shows. By moving back and forth through this door, characters on *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* discover their identities’ hybridity. The insistence on discussing everyday life on both shows demonstrates that national ideologies like Zionism are not always applicable at the level of mundane experiences because they try to fit people into neat boxes, turning them into idealized forms of the nation’s subject. Everyday peace becomes the alternative. On *Fauda*, Doron is both a Jew and an Arab when he speaks Arabic with his father or engages in a romantic relationship

with a Palestinian woman. On *Arab Labor*, Maya, Amjad's daughter, and Amal, Amjad's friend, find ways to be proud of their Palestinian heritage while still seeing themselves as Israelis. They forge close relationships with Jewish friends and lovers, and they often want to make Israel a better place.

I contend that this exploration of hybridity embodies a new, radical way of thinking about peace as a form of cultural negotiation. Negotiation, as an ongoing, continuous process becomes possible because television affords continuity (Newcomb, 1974); unlike novels or films, which seek to create closed narratives with a clear beginning and an end, serial television is habitual because it lets narratives evolve gradually through the course of many episodes, ultimately making viewers a part of the show's imaginary world (Sconce, 2004). This makes television a space more suitable for working through social struggles than resolving them; television frequently evokes struggles through talk while underscoring the uncertainty of their resolution, particularly in the news (Ellis, 1999). On reality shows, struggles are essential for participants and viewers; shows like *Big Brother* or *Pop Idol* are appealing because they demand viewers to pick sides in the competition among contestants that unfolds throughout the show, a competition that is often fueled by a deep social struggle (Briggs, 2009; Holmes, 2004). On television dramas, working through social struggles affords nuance; for example, the show *Rescue Me* (2004-2011) accommodates both progressive and regressive ideas when discussing the acceptance and visibility of gay men. It offers an insight into the emotional development of its male characters, as they work through their homophobia, demonstrating that progress is a messy process, laden with internal contradictions (Draper & Lotz, 2012).

So far, the idea of working through social struggles on television has been discussed primarily within the confines of the televised text. In this chapter, I expand this inquiry. I argue

that writing, producing, directing, distributing and promoting a television show afford new, radical conceptualizations of peace. Creative workers constantly need to navigate a set of overlapping tensions when working on a show to turn it into artistic and commercial success. On *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, working through as an industry practice means that creative workers had to handle budgetary, regulatory, and technical opportunities and constraints. They needed to fit their ideas into the structure of a recognizable genre with a long cinematic tradition while remaining true to the stories they try to tell. They had to power through difficult reactions to their creations, which are often controversial due to the sensitive topics they discuss. Exploring these processes reveals that the navigation of creative and bureaucratic tensions turns Israeli media industries into a space where crucial conversations about the relationship between Jews and Palestinians take place. The need to process traumatic memories into a television show also means that making television allows introspection and can help facilitate a healing process. Taken together, the main argument of this chapter is that working through difficulty as a media industry practice becomes a way of practicing everyday peace. In other words, the creation of television fiction on *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* is a form of peacemaking.

While *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* are heavily based on the life stories of their creators — they are not documentaries. Documentaries, either Israeli or Palestinian, touch the conflict's wounds too directly and do not leave any room for identification with the other side (Morag, 2008). As pointed out in the introduction, this type of ethnocentric discourse creates fatigue, especially for Israeli-Jews, for whom the discussion turns into an argument over who is more of a victim (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004, p. 299; Siman Tov-Nachlieli et al., 2015). While Palestinians rightfully demand that their suffering from the Israeli occupation will be acknowledged and narrated (Said,

1984), fatigue and dissent are counterproductive when one wishes to create a popular television show, particularly within an Israeli industry.

Consequently, both *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* go through a fictionalization process of the original experience that does not explicitly entitle either side with the victim's role. Ultimately, the text must serve either the show's comedy (on *Arab Labor*) or drama (on *Fauda*) rather than trying to be verisimilar or advance a political agenda. However, the gap between fictional and real events is filled with emotional realism; the use of exaggerations, jokes, special effects, or heated dialogues give the text an intensity that is true to the feeling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not only for the audience watching the show (Ang, 1985) but also for its creators.

This chapter analyzes the values that undergird the production of *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*. By focusing on above-the-line professionals working on these shows, I wish to understand their production culture (Herbert, Lotz, & Punathambekar, 2020). According to Caldwell (2008), television productions form distinct communities where questions of identity, order, and power are negotiated continuously. Investigating the dynamic relationships among creators, producers, writers, broadcasters, distributors, and directors, I seek to understand what was valuable for creative workers while thinking, discussing, writing, planning, designing, shooting, editing, broadcasting, selling, and promoting each show. Specifically, I ask: what was the vision that led the creators of each show? How was the show conceived? How did it come to fruition? What were the struggles creative workers faced along the way? How did they work through them by negotiating with other professionals? Given both shows' commercial success, how did they manage to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's sensitivities without becoming polemical?

Much information about the creation of these shows is available online. However, more materials are available about *Fauda* than *Arab Labor*, mostly because the show was produced more

recently and has become an international megahit after being sold to Netflix. The variety of online materials available about *Fauda* includes many video-recorded interviews held with the show's co-creators, Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, during international film festivals, season launches, and invited talks. I also found numerous conversations held with the creators and some leading actors organized by Jewish-American institutions. Lastly, various promotional materials like commercials, teasers, and even sketches discuss *Fauda* in illuminating ways. Although these texts do not explore the making of *Fauda* in the narrow sense, they help me portray the media ecology (Fuller, 2005) within which the show is created. Following Caldwell (2006), these intertexts help consolidate the people who make it into a creative community. Taken together, I watched more than 13 hours of video recorded materials about the show in Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

There are fewer materials available about *Arab Labor*. Therefore, I conducted a broader search that included audio and video recordings and written interviews with actors, the second director of the show, Shay Capon, and, most prominently, with Sayed Kashua, the head writer and creator of the show. *Arab Labor* was considered a breakthrough moment in representing Palestinians on Israeli television, as I discuss below; therefore, government officials and researchers believed it had an educational potential. One particularly informative text I found is a panel held at the Israel Democracy Institute. Kashua, Capon, and Ran Telem, the broadcasting company's program manager, discuss the show with leading journalists, a famous sociologist, a media regulator, and a representative from the Ministry of Education. Overall, I analyzed 38 articles about the show and 12 recorded interviews in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. I also analyzed the book *Native* (2015), a collection of weekly columns written by Kashua for Haaretz newspaper between 2006-2014, reflecting on some of the experiences that inspired his writing for the show.

Besides the materials available online, I also conducted interviews with above-the-line professionals. I talked to directors, producers, program managers, screenwriters, and distributors (see Appendix for more detailed information about the interviews). Since my interviewees are industry professionals who often discuss the issues brought up in our conversations openly in other venues (some of them, for instance, teach classes about their profession using examples from the shows), I identify them by their real names. I choose to do that because considerable thought and effort were put into the creative process, and I want my interviewees to be recognized for what they have achieved. However, there were some interviews in which sensitive information was disclosed; the interviewee's identity is deliberately obscured in such instances.

The following section provides a brief history of the Israeli television industry. I interweave this general history with the inception of *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, as both shows are landmark moments in Israeli television history. Specifically, they both point to significant developments in representing the encounter between Jews and Palestinians, fueled by regulatory and technological developments.

3.2 The Making of *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* — A Historical Perspective

Israeli television was founded in 1968 as a political project operated and controlled by the government. Its declared purpose was to educate the people and promote Zionist ideology. Accordingly, it tried to maintain a distance from the “primitive” culture of surrounding Arab nations by marginalizing any expressions of Arabness, whether Jewish (among Mizrahi Jews) or not (among its Palestinian citizens, see Oren, 2004).

Changes in the representation of Palestinians first happened in literature, particularly among some Israeli-Palestinian authors who, since the 1970s and 1980s, wrote their stories and

poems in Hebrew about their Israeli experience (Mendelson-Maoz, 2015). Since the 1980s, Israeli and Palestinian cinema began to bring to the foreground the experience of living under military occupation (Shohat, 2017a). These films also attempted to blur identity lines between Jews and Palestinians through various cinematic tools, like casting Palestinians to play Jewish characters (Bardenstein, 2005; Gertz, 2002). Israeli television, still based on a government-funded, single-channel model at the time, began representing Palestinians more frequently through sitcoms like *The Big Restaurant* (1985-1988) and on guest appearances in popular shows like *Zehu Ze*. However, many of these shows continued to portray them stereotypically, as uneducated, coarse people, who are driven by plots and conspiracies and feel alienated from their “cultural backwardness” as they seek to resemble the West (Eshed, 2006; Shifman, 2008).

The establishment of a second commercial television channel in 1993, Channel 2, marked a shift away from a public broadcast model towards a more individualistic approach to television, which put more emphasis on entertainment and opened the Israeli television industry to competition (Liebes, 1999). The channel was run by three franchisees, *Reshet*, *Keshet*, and *Telad*, each receiving two or three broadcasting days each week and rotating them periodically. This competition intensified with the launching of *Channel 10*, a second commercial broadcast channel, in 2002 (Schejter & Yemini, 2015). In 2004, four companies participated in *Channel 2*'s new tender, which reduced the number of licensed franchisees to two. The Second Authority for Television and Radio, the government agency overseeing *Channel 2* and *Channel 10*, required the winning franchisees to incorporate more multicultural programming (Geoni, 2005). This requirement was backed by a study showing that many minorities in Israel were dramatically underrepresented and misrepresented on the channel (Laor et al., 2004).

Udi Leon, a media entrepreneur, sought to improve marginalized communities' representation by producing *Jerusalem Mix* (2004-2010) for *Channel 10*, a show focused on a Mizrahi family living in Jerusalem. He partnered with Dani Paran, who was mostly involved in producing Israeli telenovelas at the time. They both strongly believed in bringing young, talented writers to prime-time television. Paran contacted Sayed Kashua, then a journalist, columnist, and novelist who had already published his first book, *Dancing Arabs* (2002). It was not an easy task; television at the time was still considered an inferior form of art, and Kashua was hesitant to write a show; moreover, he had to learn how to write for television – something he had never done before. When interviewed about the creation of the first season, Paran said that he was happy that he could find “a courageous Arab-Israeli writer who is willing to write for prime-time the way he feels about both sides (Jews and Palestinians).” Kashua, in a typically cynical and modest response, said that he did it “just because I got paid” (Rosenberg, 2008).

Leon was eventually hired by *Keshet*, the franchisee that bought *Arab Labor* and became the head of its multicultural programming division. Leon’s advocacy inside *Keshet*, coupled with Paran and Roni Ninio, the first season’s director, led to several ideas. The initial idea was to create a show based on sketches, and only later, after a few pilots, the show was reconfigured as a sitcom. The show’s first working title was *Wajae Ras*, “headache” in Arabic, and later changed to *Avodah Aravit*, “*Arab Labor*” in Hebrew. The new name was conceived by Kashua and has several meanings. It denotes the labor of Palestinians trying to fit into the Jewish society, like Amjad, the protagonist of the show; it also points to the labor of Arabs, specifically Kashua, and the predominantly Palestinian cast, who created the show together. Connotatively, the name is ironic; “*Arab Labor*” is a pejorative in Hebrew, referencing cheap, unprofessional labor. Kashua reclaims this insult by associating it with his groundbreaking show, airing on prime-time by *Keshet*, the

leading Israeli broadcasting company at the time. However, the name also reflects Kashua's own anxieties about the show's success prospects.

Despite *Keshet's* decision to support the project, there was a constant negotiation between Kashua, Paran, and Ninio on the one hand, and *Keshet's* CEO, Avi Nir, on the other, regarding some fundamental decisions. Nir was hesitant to air a show on prime-time whose characters speak predominantly in Arabic; that is why, in the first season, Palestinian characters often speak to each other in Hebrew, which is quite odd. Kashua had to come up with creative solutions in the plot that would justify this behavior. Nir was driven by rating considerations and believed that Amjad had to be played by a well-known actor. However, since there were very few roles available for Palestinians in the industry at the time, leading to a limited pool of actors, the famous actor Nir had in mind was utterly unsuited for the job. Ninio insisted on casting Norman Issa, who was hardly known to the broad Israeli-Jewish audience. Ninio convinced Nir to hire Issa by casting Mariano Idelman as Meir, Amjad's Jewish coworker and best friend. Idelman was a famous comedian and a major star on *Keshet's* flagship satirical show, *Eretz Nehedered* (literally, in Hebrew, "a wonderful country," an Israeli version of Saturday Night Live, see Shifman, 2012).

Raising the money needed to get the show off the ground was not an easy task either. *Keshet* agreed to invest only a partial amount that was far from what was necessary to produce the show. Leon attested that he needed to personally recruit money through different funds, tripling the budget available to make the pilot. I told him many stars had to align to make *Arab Labor* possible — finding an original writer like Kashua or preparing for the new tender that pushed *Keshet* to support the show. He disagreed with my interpretation:

This was not serendipity. It was a manipulation. I mean, it was power used deliberately [to make it happen] — power used by the Second Authority on the networks [meaning the

franchisees, he is referring to the tender], that's a form of manipulation. There was the power I applied through *Keshet*. Danny Paran used his power as one of the most experienced and trustworthy producers [in Israel]. Many things could not be possible without these manipulations. If you ask me, in today's reality [in the Israeli television industry], *something like Arab Labor can no longer happen.*"

While *Arab Labor* was created in an industry still dominated by traditional broadcasting channels, technological and regulatory changes that happened in the early 2000s and have come to fruition a decade later transformed Israel's television landscape once again. Local, often pirate cable companies began operating in Israel as early as the 1980s, and through a slow regulatory process, consolidated into a single operator called *Hot*, established in 2003. Its main competitor was *Yes*, a satellite company that began operating in 2000. These television services launched the multi-channel era in Israel, offering hundreds of channels and enormous video-on-demand libraries (Schejter, 2009). The liberalization of the Israeli television industry led to an evolution in its content; marginalized communities like Ultra-Orthodox and Mizrahi Jews have become the central topic of many successful Israeli television dramas (Harlap, 2017).

These developments profoundly impacted on how television is created in Israel. As noted earlier, *Arab Labor* was initiated by its producers who had a vision to bring Palestinians to Israeli prime time television. While this model still exists, today there are many shows where creators make the crucial first steps. This trend is an outcome of participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) and the age of sharing (John, 2017) — social media give ordinary people a platform where they can easily share their stories and publish them with little institutional barriers. Shakargy (2020), exploring the revolution in the means of production of poetry in the digital era, argues that the internet allows novice poets to undermine traditional hierarchies in the industry because they no

longer have to find a publisher to publish their poems. Similarly, platforms like *YouTube* afford the production and distribution of audiovisual materials while requiring very few material resources (Burgess & Green, 2013). However, there is still a significant difference between a homemade *YouTube* video and a television show's professional production.

Therefore, many people with little experience writing for television, often galvanized by positive feedback on social media, decide to pursue their dream to write a show. In Israel, social media play an additional role in this process; given the informal nature of social interactions in Israeli culture (Katriel, 1986), writers feel comfortable looking up top executives in the industry, reaching out to them to pitch their ideas. As attested by Dganit Atias-Gigi, Yes' head of drama:

Since we are in the era of [social] networks, creative work is accessible like never before. Everything is open; I can shoot, edit, and upload [video] materials, write a blog, or feel like I have written an amazing post after getting 500 likes. So perhaps I know how to write, but this is not the type of writing appropriate [for television] [...] *it's deceiving, there is this feeling that anybody can do it*. And our accessibility is another issue – it's very easy to find me on Facebook and say: "I have an amazing story." *What am I going to do? Not give them my email?* [...] so many people send me suggestions – actors, agents, and just ordinary people.

Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, the co-creators of *Fauda*, were no different. Both had no experience writing for television — Raz was a relatively anonymous actor and owned an advertising company; Issacharoff was more well-known as a journalist who covered the Palestinian territories. They both grew up in Jerusalem and hung out in shared social circles; in 2010, they met expectedly at a graduation ceremony of undercover soldiers who finished their training. As they watched the soldiers talking to each other in Arabic, they found out that they

shared the same dream – writing something about being a soldier in these units and the price one has to pay for serving there – a story based on their military experience. They started working on the show with Moshe Zonder, an experienced screenwriter, who helped them craft it as an action-thriller (Aharish, 2015).

The process of selling the show to Israeli broadcasting companies was not easy – Raz and Issacharoff met with *Keshet*, *Reshet*¹⁶, and *Channel 10*, and all of them turned down their offer, arguing that nobody is interested in watching another show about the conflict. Eventually, after considerable efforts, they persuaded Yona Wiesenthal, Yes’ program director, that it was worth investing in the show. However, more difficulties emerged; Raz wanted to be cast as Doron, the protagonist. Dana Stern, the head of Yes Studios, which is in charge of distributing Yes’ shows, told me that many creators demand to be cast as the lead, which often becomes a dealbreaker during early negotiation stages. Raz eventually auditioned for the part and got it. Wiesenthal also faced considerable internal opposition within the drama department, where many people believed that the show was poorly written and too machoistic (Siegel, 2019). The dominance of women in the production of the show, including Dana, Dganit and Liat, the lead producer, and Michal, one of the lead writers, whose work I discuss below, contributed to the softening of the classic machoistic army story. It led a more complex discussion on Israeli masculinity, as pointed out in the previous chapter.

For example, the working title of the show *Mistaarvim*, which means in Hebrew “those who disguise themselves as Arabs,” demonstrated this problem. Atias-Gigi confessed that this name reflected an initial emphasis on the experience of Israeli men fighting in undercover units. She felt uncomfortable with the direction the show was taking because it was too similar to what

¹⁶ The second Channel 2 franchisee.

people saw on the news. At a relatively late stage in the writing process, Lior requested to change the name to *Fauda*, a word in Arabic meaning “chaos.” Similar to *Arab Labor*, this name has multiple meanings. In the context of the Israeli undercover units, it is used as a code word, signaling to commend that the unit has been exposed and faces imminent risk. More broadly, it conveys the general sense of watching and producing the show, as discussed below — the sense of chaos looming over the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leading to an endless cycle of violence. Choosing an Arabic name for an Israeli show was also a statement; it reflected a more profound transformation in the creative process, revealing a deep commitment by the creators to tell the Palestinian side of the story to the best of their ability.

While both *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* were off to a rough start, they achieved substantial commercial and symbolic success by becoming landmarks in Israeli television history, winning multiple awards, and inspiring other Israeli television shows. In the following section, I discuss the meaning of their success, which is ought to be examined on an entirely different scale, revealing the benefits and stakes of becoming a hit show.

3.3 The Meaning of Success

Arab Labor ran for four seasons between 2007-2013. Ninio was frustrated from working with Kashua and especially Paran, claiming that the latter did not invest enough money to produce a high-quality show, and decided to leave (Crystal, 2008). Paran replaced Ninio with a director with whom he collaborated on Israeli telenovelas — Shay Capon. Despite early hesitations, Capon and Kashua immediately clicked, which helped stabilize the creative process. The new team gained more trust from *Keshet* — the requirement to minimize the use of Arabic was relaxed; Kashua and Capon, who started writing together, were allowed to be bolder on the show.

The most obvious example is the Memorial Day episode (Season 2, Episode 8) that I briefly analyzed in the previous chapter and received considerable scholarly attention (Goren, 2014; Kosman, 2015). Capon told me that Kashua was worried that they were going too far by mixing Memorial Day, which commemorates fallen Israeli soldiers, with the Palestinian Nakba's memory on this episode. However, Capon insisted that they use the Reut Song to represent both memories¹⁷, which was never done before on Israeli television. For Capon, it was the entire show's pinnacle and everything that followed merely “resonated episode 8” (See also Meidan, 2014).

Arab Labor won five Israeli television academy awards in 2013 and stayed on prime time or sub-prime time throughout its entire running¹⁸. Leon explained this is a tremendous achievement for any show, given the small size of the Israeli television market. A show cannot drop below 25% ratings for more than one or two episodes to be renewed for another season. Keshet became fully invested in *Arab Labor*'s success — Ran Telem, Keshet's program manager from the second season, pointed out that he often organized the programming schedule to support *Arab Labor*'s ratings. He would put the highly popular reality show Big Brother right after the news, followed by *Arab Labor*, hoping that some of the people who watched the former would stay for the latter.

Arab Labor was an innovative, subversive text. It was the first Israeli show written by a Palestinian and the first show that talked about Palestinians — not as absolute enemies (“Bad Arabs”) or as purely submissive subjects (“Good Arabs”, see Cohen, 2010), but as human beings who have to face relatable everyday problems. Amjad's fights with his wife and kids, or efforts to

¹⁷ As discussed in the previous chapter, the most powerful scene on this episode is when Maya, Amjad's daughter, participates in her school's Memorial Day ceremony and sings the Reut Song, a canonical war song that lauds the brotherhood of Israeli men in battle; through cross-cutting editing, the viewer sees Maya thinking about old photos of Palestine before Zionism that her grandmother showed her while singing this song. By doing so, Maya imbues the song with an entirely new meaning, encouraging the Jewish viewer to consider the Palestinian catastrophe of the Nakba as a legitimate memory.

¹⁸ Prime time on traditional broadcasting in Israel is the slot immediately following the evening news, between 9-10pm approximately. The following slot, 10-11pm is a bit less lucrative but still expected to draw a lot of viewers.

become successful at his job — made it easy for Jewish-Israeli viewers to identify with the show. It even sparked interest among government officials who wanted to incorporate it into school curriculums to promote tolerance (Carmon, 2013). Therefore, the show's mere existence was seen as an achievement for the people who made it. Leon and Yoni Paran, Dani Paran's son and the show's co-executive producer, both told me that *Arab Labor* was the apex of their career. There were plans to produce a fifth season, which were ultimately canceled because, as explained by Yoni Paran:

At some point, Sayed could no longer stand Amjad. Amjad is a clown, and it was just too much for him [...] he (Sayed) wanted to demonstrate his skill, to move to the next level creatively. He demonstrated it magnificently on *The Screenwriter*, which was a masterpiece.

The Screenwriter (2015) was *Arab Labor*'s meta-show discussing the process of making the latter from a very somber perspective; its protagonist, Kateb ("writer" in Arabic), struggles to write the fourth season of *Arab Labor* and feels uncomfortable living among his Jewish neighbors. He eventually decides to leave Israel due to its impossible politics, which Kashua himself did around the same time *The Screenwriter* aired (Kuban, 2015). *Arab Labor* paved the way for other shows focusing on the lives of marginalized communities in Israel: *Mona* (2019), which was created by Mira Awad, who played Amal on *Arab Labor*, tells the story of Mona, a Palestinian photographer who moves from her village in the Galilee to Tel Aviv, where she has to face the hardships of war and prejudice. Another example is *Nebisu* (2017-ongoing), an Emmy Award winning sitcom that tells the story of Gili, an Ethiopian Jew who works as a copywriter in Tel Aviv and has to navigate his Ashkenazi, white surroundings. *Nebisu* uses many of the tropes already explored on *Arab Labor* to discuss the racism against Ethiopian Jews (Tobin, 2017).

Arab Labor presented at various festivals in the United States, yet despite several attempts to sell it to foreign television companies, the negotiations did not lead to the desired result. Both Capon and Telem believe that the reason for this failure is that *Arab Labor* is too blunt and upfront in how it deals with racism and prejudice to be palatable to non-Israeli audiences. Specifically, they argued that the way Amjad internalizes his oppression and expresses overt racism towards his own family would be seen as utterly inappropriate on American television. Additionally, Telem told me the show addresses issues closely tied to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, bringing together questions of religion, land, and identity – a unique array of overlapping problems that are hardly comparable to other national contexts.

Fauda had a modest beginning similar to how *Arab Labor* started. Raz and Issacharoff repeatedly claim in interviews that after they finished shooting the first season, they thought nobody would watch the show beyond their immediate families (Bachor, 2017). *Yes* was heavily invested in the show's success from the very beginning and released many promotional materials for the first season, which are markedly different in tone from materials released in subsequent seasons. The self-confidence stemming from the show's international success is not there yet, as the satellite company tried to appeal to viewers by releasing a behind-the-scenes video where they can see the hard work put into the show (Yes, 2015a). *Yes* even produced a special edition of the first episode, free to watch on YouTube. It is accompanied by a voice-over recorded by Raz and Issacharoff, where they discuss the meaning of every scene, how it was shot, and what inspired them to write it (Yes, 2015b).

However, the show became a major success soon after the first season aired. *Fauda* won 11 Israeli academy awards in 2018 (Brebner, 2018). Actors from the cast, even those who do not play lead roles, said in interviews that fans are exuberant when they see them on the street (Jew

Tube, 2017; Yediot Ahronot, 2019). Some Jewish-Israeli fans even told Raz that they wanted to learn Arabic after watching the show (Amedi, 2020). Domestically, Raz became a celebrity. His character, Doron, appeared on the aforementioned satirical show *Eretz Nehedered*, which in Israel symbolizes Raz's achievement of stardom (Holer, 2004). In the skit, Doron is sent on a new mission — instead of going after Palestinians, he targets irresponsible Israeli Jews who returned from a trip abroad and got infected with the coronavirus (Segev, 2020). In this sense, as Doron, Lior has become the protector of Israel from both visible and invisible existential threats (Sonnevend, 2020).

Lior also appears in many commercials, always as a manifestation of Israeli machismo, an exemplar of the Sabra Jew. He gets a new car after his old one was wrecked in a chase (Albar, 2020) or calls the special forces to help him clean up the house before the upcoming holiday (Shufersal, 2019). These commercials are humoristic, using hyperboles to interject military logic into mundane situations to sell a product — a common advertising strategy (Callister & Stern, 2007). However, this ostensibly harmless use of humor also creates a slippery slope, because some commercials reflect toxic masculinity justified as being “just a joke” (Smirnova, 2018). In Israel, where the border between civilians and soldiers is permeable (Adelman, 2003), the routine use of violence as a socialization tool in the military is legitimized by Lior, under the pretense of “this is what men do” (cf. “boys will be boys,” see Murnen et al., 2002). In a commercial for Goldstar beer, Lior is seen reaching his hands to a man's groins in an elevator, completely unprovoked, making him curl up instinctively. Other men then follow his lead, making offensive remarks to friends and colleagues, sexually harassing women, or just hitting other people (Goldstar, 2018).

While Lior as Doron has become a part of Israeli popular culture, what transformed *Fauda* from a successful Israeli show to an international megahit was its sale to Netflix in 2016 (Times

of Israel, 2016). Its international commercial success, compared to *Arab Labor*'s inadaptability for other markets results from a difference in genre. As discussed below, *Yes* hired *Fauda*'s writers and directors because they understand the rules of action thrillers and enjoy making them. Unlike humor, which is difficult to translate and risks becoming offensive especially when dealing with sensitive topics, much of the entertainment in a show like *Fauda* derives from high-paced action scenes. These scenes became more complex and expensive as seasons progressed. Thus, even if the audience does not understand the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict discussed on *Fauda*, it will still be entertained. Contrarily, if a joke on a show like *Arab Labor* is misunderstood or worse still, upsets audiences, its chances of succeeding in the long run are slim.

According to Dana Stern, who led the negotiations with *Netflix*, the deal was a historic moment in Israeli television not only because it was successful, but also since *Fauda* was sold as original content and not as a format, which was the case with other Israeli shows previously purchased by international companies. The simultaneous rise of *Netflix* as a leader in global television streaming services (Lobato, 2019) meant that *Fauda* became a household name worldwide, leading watching statistics in many nations, including those with which Israel did not have diplomatic relations like Lebanon or Dubai.

Beyond international fame, Raz attested that the success of the show reshaped the way people think about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

This is what people are telling me – that it was the first time they saw Israelis in a real way and not on the news, you can understand how they feel, why they are doing the things that they are doing them, and also the Palestinian side — because we are humanizing the other side, it makes people think about the conflict in a different way (Jew Tube, 2017).

As trust in the news declines (Tandoc et al., 2018; Wagner & Boczkowski, 2019), the fictional portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is seen as more trustworthy because of its truth to feeling (Ang, 1985) and its deliberate attempts to humanize Palestinians rather than depicting them as a caricatured enemy (Kampf & Liebes, 2013). However, the perceived realism of the show generates a problem for its creators. When they meet with fans, they often have to explain that the show is not real, that a soldier like Doron does not exist, and that many of the situations depicted on the show did not happen (Guy Pines, 2018; see also Liebes & Katz, 1990).

Given this international success, the show's production needs to ensure that Netflix does not subsume it. Many of my interviewees, including Stern, Rotem Shamir, the director of the second and third seasons, and Liat Benasuli, the show's executive producer, echoed the same message — there is no such thing as “an international show.” They argued that the only way *Fauda* can remain successful is if it continues to be committed to telling an Israeli story to an Israeli audience. What helps maintain the show's locally-anchored nature is that it is sold as a finished product, which means that the streaming giant cannot intervene at any stage of the creative process. One of the top executives underscored the importance of this minimal interaction with *Netflix*. Based on their rich experience with international productions, they told me that American broadcasters tend to intervene in the production of television shows. American productions are as cumbersome as they are impressive; while they have the resources to build grandiose sets that an Israeli production could never afford, the rigidity of the process, in which everything has to follow a predetermined protocol, makes it long and expensive, leaving very little room to explore creative solutions when things do not go according to plan. Shamir told me that “*Fauda*'s biggest strength is its insufficient budget,” providing multiple examples when unexpected problems or a lack of money pushed him to rethink scenes in a way that eventually made them better.

International success does solve the show's problem of underfunding; the sale to *Netflix* did not significantly impact *Fauda*'s budget. However, this success does help the show in a roundabout way. *Fauda* has become a source of Israeli national pride, an Israeli brand that helps improve the image of the state and its armed forces, essentially making it a form of public diplomacy (Aronczyk, 2013; Nye, 2008). For example, Yaakov Daniel, who plays Eli on the show, served in an undercover unit during his military service. He struggled financially after his release and barely made ends meet as an acting student. Daniel received a scholarship from an American-Jewish organization called Friends of the IDF (FIDF) that supports Israeli veterans and helped him graduate. In a video produced by the organization, Daniel talks about this support, and his testimonial is supplemented with scenes from *Fauda*. The video is a part of FIDF's fundraiser, attempting to persuade American Jews to support Israeli soldiers (FIDF, 2018).

In other words, the Israeli army benefits from the show, as proclaimed by Ehud Barak, a former Israeli chief of staff and prime minister who attended the second season's premiere (Yes, 2017). This fact directly impacts the resources available to the show's producers, who need the military's cooperation to obtain equipment or secure locations necessary to make the show look authentic. Benasuli told me that during the production of the first season, when the army still did not know what the show was about, it was reluctant to provide military vehicles needed for the shootings. The relationship improved on the second season, and on the third season, the army was entirely on board, giving the production access to unique resources. It lent *Fauda* a helicopter free of charge; since most of the third season takes place in Gaza, the army permitted the production to use a special training facility to simulate Gaza's dense urban areas. *Fauda*'s art department added windows and graffiti to the buildings to make them look realistic, and when the shooting was done,

the army asked it to leave them in place because they made the facility look more appealing (Ariel School of Communication, 2020).

While collaborating with the army benefited the show in many ways, *Fauda*'s creative workers also acknowledges that it is a double-edged sword, especially if the intention is to create a text that is often critical of Israel's armed forces. Michal Aviram, a screenwriter who participated in the creation of all three seasons, lamented how the show galvanizes young Israelis to volunteer to undercover units like the one depicted on the show:

it's unfortunate that [*Fauda*] created this thing, that it's cool to serve in *Duvdevan* [one of the elite undercover units] and partake in fighting. The last thing I want is that someone will see this and want to become a fighter [...] but you can't create a show with cool guys and guns and say that it's bad to be a fighter.

In other words, there are limitations on what messages can be conveyed by the show, dictated by the predetermined conventions of its genre, public and institutional expectations. Indeed, a key to understanding the success of both *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* lies in the constant need to balance between the genre – a sitcom or an action-thriller – and both shows' attempts to tell a compelling, authentic story. I explore these dimensions of television making in the following subsection.

3.4 Genre vs. Authenticity

In my conversations with the people who made *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, the importance of being authentic came up repeatedly. The same tension between anonymity and authenticity on the internet, discussed in the introduction, and between passing and authenticity discussed in the

previous chapter, also emerges in the process of television production. Here it comes up in tandem with the conventions of the television genres.

After reading Kashua's book, *Native* (2015), listening to interviews he gave about the show, and talking to the people who worked with him, it became clear that *Arab Labor*, and Amjad in particular, are an exaggerated version of Kashua's life. *Native* is a collection of columns Kashua wrote between 2006-2014 and published in Haaretz, Israel's leading liberal newspaper. Many stories first appeared as a column and were later incorporated into the show: Amjad/Kashua's desire to see his daughter learn Western classical music so she could resemble her Ashkenazi friends (p. 100; S2E7); or the fact that Amjad's decision to move to a Jewish neighborhood in Western Jerusalem was motivated by the superior water pressure available in Jewish showers (p. 107, S2E1). Broader strokes from *Arab Labor* also appear in the book; the idea of the hypocritical Jewish liberal, who does not understand why Palestinians are not grateful for the benevolence of Israeli Jews, is explored in the show through Timna's character. On *Native*, the same idea is brought up through a researcher on a radio show who invites Kashua to participate in a panel devoted to Arab novelists. When Kashua refuses, saying that he does not want to be labeled as an "Arab novelist," she becomes infuriated, saying that "because of this kind of ungratefulness, there will never be peace" (p. 148).

Kashua uses the show to reflect on microaggressions (Sue, 2010) that feel innocent to his Jewish interlocutors but are, in fact, highly offensive. Kashua recounted his arrival to his new apartment building, where he was invited to meet his Jewish neighbors on his very first tenants meeting. He was excited about the occasion and even dressed up, only to be asked by the others to find someone who could tend to the building's garden, assuming that as a Palestinian, he must know someone who could do the job. Kashua, a novelist and a columnist, was disappointed to find

himself, as always, associated with the stereotypical Palestinian who can only do cheap manual labor — *Arab Labor*, if you will (Carmon, 2013). The exact same situation is explored on the show (S2E5).

At times, these experiences of prejudice and racism were not only offensive — they were traumatic. When Kashua moved with his family to Jerusalem, he tried to enroll his three-year-old daughter into a Jewish kindergarten, and his application was rejected under various pretenses. This experience led Kashua to hate himself more than the Jewish environment that spurned him for his naivety of even trying to fit in (Ninio, 2010; also S1E3). The most formative traumatic experience that Kashua brings up in multiple interviews is his first trip back from Jerusalem to Tira, his home village, after enrolling in a boarding school in the city as a teenager. Midway through his trip, when the bus stopped next to the Ben Gurion International Airport, a soldier boarded the bus, immediately recognized Kashua as “the Arab,” and forced him off to run a search through his bags. Kashua reached his destination, where his father waited to pick him up, only to find his son bursting into tears when he told him about what had happened. His father, a political activist, scolded Kashua for crying, saying that he should have been proud of his identity when facing the soldier (Elboim, 2013; Kuban, 2015). In a rare, non-humoristic episode on *Arab Labor*, discussed in the previous chapter, Amjad, who is caught with his neighbors in the building’s bomb shelter, tells a very similar story about being sent by his father to a pharmacy in Jerusalem and being stopped by a policeman (S3E10).

Kashua was not the only one working on *Arab Labor* who used the show as a tool to deal with trauma. Dov Navon, who played Natan, Amjad’s Jewish neighbor, also talked about the shelter episode in an interview. He recalled a monologue his character had about being afraid of Palestinians and the legitimacy of that fear. Navon said that this monologue brought him to tears:

When we had the suicide attacks [refers to the Second Intifada, 2000-2005], which was an insane time, my daughter was in kindergarten; she was five years old. That is an age when you really love riding buses [the Intifada is primarily remembered, on the Israeli side, for suicide bombers exploding on buses] [...] I told her that buses get broken along the way [...] finally we settled for a minibus; I had this idea that a terrorist will not attack a minibus. So when he (Kashua) wrote this monologue for me, *I told him that this is what Dov never told any Arab* [but always wanted to, Hershkovitz, 2013].

Salim Dau, who plays Abu Amjad, Amjad's father, confessed in a conversation with other Palestinian cast members that he used to be filled with hatred towards the Israeli state and how it treats Palestinians. He told a story common among many Palestinians who experience racial profiling at the airport and have to go through a search and humiliating questioning (Hasisi & Weisburd, 2011). Dau recalled an instance when his daughter, who studied abroad, flew back to Israel. Dau and the rest of the family went to the airport to pick her up. They waited for a long time at the reception hall because she was detained; when she finally came out, Dau made a scene:

Cursing all the Jews and the state of Israel. I held on to my daughter, pointed at her and said in front of everybody — “this girl is a threat to the state of Israel”. I was confident I was going to get arrested afterward.

Dau explained that he realized that the hatred towards Israel was hurting him more than anyone else; while he did not believe that a show like *Arab Labor* could change Israel's political reality, he found great joy in making it (Median, 2015). Dau, like Kashua, and unlike some Jewish creative workers like Shay Capon, does not believe in the power of television to change a political reality in a place like Israel-Palestine. However, creating or acting on the show becomes a way to

face, discuss, and even mitigate the devastating effects the same political reality has on Kashua and Dau's *personal* lives.

For Capon, personal transformation emerged from the work on *Arab Labor* because it told the stories of Palestinians and allowed him to create meaningful, authentic relationships with Palestinian peers and learn about their lives firsthand. As testified by Yoni Paran, Kashua and Capon became close friends and spent much time going out to bars in Jerusalem. Capon himself used to be a Tel Aviv icon; when he was young, he played the lead role in a popular youth drama called *Inyan Shel Zman* ("a matter of time," 1992-1996). The show told the story of high school students from northern Tel Aviv, geographically associated with the Ashkenazi elite, coping with various problems; as an educational show, each episode was resulted in a hegemonic "proper conduct" (Gozansky, 2018). Seeing Tel Aviv as the epicenter of Israeli liberalism, Capon's first encountered Jerusalem's nightlife when he hung out with Kashua. It was a revelation:

Through Sayed, I got to know an entire population that I didn't know existed. The Arab youth, the intellectuals, who live in Jerusalem. Great fellas, smart, creative people [...] I realized that *Jerusalem was far more liberal than Tel Aviv*. We would go out for a beer in Jerusalem, and you could see Arabs and Jews drinking together. You would never see anything like that in Tel Aviv.

The construction of authenticity on the show, drawn from personal experiences and building friendships across national identity lines, had to be balanced with the conventions of the sitcom — in the course of thirty minutes, a story that violates the status quo is explored and leads to a resolution that reinstates social order (Mills, 2009; Staiger, 2000). The repetitive formation of the sitcom helps a satire like *Arab Labor*; the viewer gets to know the characters, especially Amjad,

and identifies with their human, universal problems, even when these problems are often used to criticize the Jewish-Israeli society (Gintzburg, 2012).

What is more challenging is finding a way to translate painful, traumatic experiences into a funny text. When I asked Ninio about this delicate transformation, he told me that he did not help Kashua in this process:

Sayed is not a person who shares [his painful experiences] — the story was already ‘baked’ as a comedy when he brought it [to the table], but I knew, *in some places, that these were things he had to go through*

While the people who worked with Kashua pointed out that he is a hilarious person and that the atmosphere on the set was always fun and frivolous, creating comedy can be an earnest endeavor because it deals with such difficult experiences. During the conversation at the Israel Democracy Institute, the representative from the Ministry of Education talked about the importance of comedy on the show. A religious Jewish man, he quoted the Jewish sages who compared humor to the handles of a boiling pot, for they allow one to deal with painful issues that are impossible to tackle through more “serious” genres. Ran Telem, who also participated in this discussion, rejected this metaphor, saying that “*comedy is a very serious thing*”—for him, laughing at these painful issues is not holding on to the handles of the boiling pot; it is touching the pot itself. It gives the traumatized individual the power to gain mastery over their painful experiences, and precarious lived reality (Henman, 2001; Ostrower, 2015).

Kashua, on the same panel, offered a different perspective on exploring the role of humor in the show. While agreeing with other panelists that he is writing a satire designed to ridicule stereotypes against Palestinians, he also noted that writing an episode about dogs that bark only at Palestinians is funny for a Jewish audience because it is presented in a non-threatening way

through self-deprecating humor (Hay, 2001). Amjad is led to believe that it is indeed true that dogs despise Palestinians and wears a yarmulke to stop their barking (S2E3). For Kashua, this episode, among many others, is used as a softening mechanism that precedes “heavy” episodes like “Memorial Day” (S2E8) or “Shelter” (S3E10) discussed earlier (Carmon, 2013). Yoni Ninio told me that sequencing and balance were crucial for this show; there can be only one or two episodes on every season that tackle the precarity of Palestinian life in Israel in a serious, direct manner, and they had to appear late in the season. Otherwise, Israeli-Jewish audiences would not watch it.

While the emphasis on authenticity in *Arab Labor* is mostly implicit, the co-creators of *Fauda* talk about authenticity explicitly in interviews, underscoring the efforts put into making *Fauda* feel real. Since Raz and Issacharoff served in undercover units, they know what it means to be there. The stuntmen hired by the production are friends from Raz’s old unit, and he performs all the action scenes himself (Yes, 2015a). Liat Benasuli explained that many Jewish actors cast to play soldiers were veterans of these undercover units and were chosen even if they had little experience acting. When providing the voice-over analysis of the first season's first episode, Raz and Issacharoff point to specific details in the artwork of the show that demonstrate their inside knowledge about these units. For example, when Doron decides to return to the unit after its commander, Moreno, pleads him to do so, he reaches for a bag in an upper shelf where he stores old garments and weapons – his kufiyah, and a gun. Raz and Issacharoff then comment that “every soldier who served on one of these units has this bag of memorabilia” (Yes, 2015b).

Similar to *Arab Labor*, *Fauda* is also heavily based on the personal experiences of the creators and in-depth knowledge of politics and the everyday life of the Palestinians. In the first season, Raz and Issacharoff incorporated traumatic events that happened to them. One of the subplots on this season focuses on Boaz, Doron’s brother-in-law and a member of Doron’s unit.

Boaz is in a relationship with Daria, who is killed by a suicide bomber exploding at the bar where she works (S1E3). That episode is dedicated to Iris Azulay, Raz's girlfriend from when he was nineteen, killed by a Palestinian who stabbed her to death. Raz explains that the way Boaz deals with Daria's death is similar to how he dealt with the loss of Iris, and the dialogues between the two characters on the show are quite similar to conversations Raz had with his girlfriend before she died. Raz added:

You know, *it was kind of a healing process*, writing the show. Not just because of Iris, but because of many things that happened to us, I had many blackouts. I didn't remember so many operations I was in, the names of villages. But when I met Avi, who has a phenomenal memory [...] he reminded me of things that I had forgotten about my experience in the army (Senor, 2020).

Thus, the work on *Fauda* helped Raz and others resurface repressed memories. The writing process gives the helpless teenage Raz a voice after witnessing the death of his sweetheart; *Fauda* becomes an outlet to speak about what had happened to him, turning television making into therapy. It is a way to assume control over the trauma or a painful event; Issacharoff said that one of the Palestinian militants appearing on the first season shot and injured him in real life when he was a soldier.

However, there is a difference between writing and acting on *Fauda*; while the former affords a reflective distance, the latter can sometimes feel uncannily real. It reflects the difference between seeing media as representing trauma, where a text like *Fauda* is seen as separate from the traumatized individual's memories. Contrarily, acting on *Fauda* in a narrative that unfolds gradually (Newcomb, 1974) means that media partakes in the construction of trauma itself. It reveals that trauma is a dynamic, malleable structure that is based on memory but continues to live

and change throughout the show without reaching a clear conclusion (Harlap, 2013; Pinchevski, 2019). Rotem Shamir, the director of the second and third seasons, told me about a specific scene where the unit is waiting outside a mosque in the middle of a Palestinian town, and Idan Amedi (who plays Sagi — a soldier in the unit) is exposed. This exposure means the soldiers must leave the place as quickly as possible (S2E7). The extras who played the Palestinians on the street were *Shabachim* – Palestinians from the West Bank who live and work in Israel illegally. Shamir described the shooting:

I told them [the Palestinian extras] on the megaphone “there is a team of soldiers here, they are going to board a car – don’t let them leave.” That’s it; I didn’t add any specific directions. So they didn’t let them leave. They picked up chairs and started throwing them at the car and really began hitting each other [the Palestinians extras and the Jewish actors]. *Now Lior, who is post-traumatic, when something like this happens to him, enters a state of trance; I told him afterward “why did you go to (Idan) Amedi? You were supposed to get in the car.” He responded: “Idan was alone, I could not leave Idan alone.” You see? He ran to save his buddy.*

Thus, when shooting *Fauda*, the director and the rest of the staff must be careful; the realistic reenactment of intense violent confrontations create such vivid simulations to the point where the post-traumatic actor can no longer distinguish truth from fiction.

An additional danger in providing too many details about people's experiences is that they could make the show seem too didactic. Noah Stollman, the head writer of the third season, told me that one of the core principles he teaches his students of screenwriting is that “there is no place for ideas on television,” meaning that television must not push ideologies manifestly. This point echoes the distinction between everyday peace and diplomatic peace. While the latter is based on

reaching a compromise between two competing ideologies or national narratives, the former ignores these ideas and by doing so subverts them; everyday peace shows that there can a shared life between people beyond and before ideologies are conceived and contested.

In more practical terms, in a show like *Fauda* that deals with a highly contentious topic like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ideology can potentially color the entire show as either “leftwing” or “rightwing,” something that its creators do their best to avoid, or at the very least, hide. Shamir told me about a scene from the third season that was written and shot but did not make the final cut. In it, Jihad, one of the main antagonists of the season, tells his son how he became involved in fighting against Israel. When he was fourteen, Israeli soldiers broke into his house, undressed his father, and humiliated him in front of his eyes — Jihad could never forget his father’s look at that moment. Shamir said that the scene was acted wonderfully and was very moving but had to be cut out; within the narrative arc of the season, it could have been interpreted as exonerating Jihad, who helped kidnap two innocent Israeli teenagers.

Looking into the last two examples, Doron’s trauma versus Jihad’s trauma, it is clear that the creators of *Fauda* are more careful to include scenes that could be seen as receptive to the Palestinian narrative of the conflict. Indeed, *Fauda* is an asymmetric show. Raz was asked in an interview to respond to critiques arguing that the show should be more sympathetic towards the Palestinians; he replied that *Fauda* tells an Israeli story and that both him and Issacharoff define themselves as Zionists. He was angry with critics contending that *Fauda* should hire Palestinian writers explaining that “if Palestinians want to write a show, they should write a show” (Siegal, 2019).

The way *Fauda* tries to achieve authenticity when telling Palestinian stories is through casting, locations, and meticulous attention to details. One of the critical decisions made by Raz

and Issacharoff is that only Palestinians will be cast to Palestinian roles — a controversial move that I discuss at length in the next subsection. Similarly, since the show is based entirely on location rather than studio shootings, much of it occurs in Palestinian cities and villages inside Israel proper. One of them is Kfar Kassem, a Palestinian city located 20 kilometers east of Tel Aviv. It has become a favorite site for *Fauda* and other shows to the extent that it was no longer possible to use it for future seasons. During the shooting of the first season, working in Kfar Kassem was difficult for a different reason — it was the summer of 2014, and a major war was fought in Gaza. The production decided to cancel the first shooting day and was immediately contacted by the mayor, who told them that their presence in the city is vital during such strenuous times precisely because it can prove that coexistence between Jews and Palestinians is possible (Yes, 2015a). Liat Benasuli described this situation as “surreal,” adding that “Arab, Israeli, Jewish actors – everybody was afraid of the rockets (fired from Gaza) in Kfar Kaseem. It was so absurd that when the siren went off everybody would enter the bomb shelter together”.

While shooting actual scenes inside Gaza and the West Bank was not possible, the production tried to create the illusion that scenes were taking place there. Therefore, many sequences are prompted by establishing shots of Palestinian cities filmed from a bird’s eye view using drones. In the first season, these shots were superimposed with military sights, creating an eerie semblance between the show and the actual military drones used to surveil and kill Palestinians (Chamayou, 2015; Grewal, 2017). From the second season onwards, Shamir decided to take the sights off. On the third season, which mostly takes place in Gaza, the production found a Palestinian photographer inside the blockaded Gaza Strip who operated a drone to take these shots. This work was done under considerable constraints, and substantial personal risk to the

photographer who could face dire consequences had the Hamas authorities found out that he was working for an Israeli television production.

The final tool used to construct authenticity in depicting the Palestinian side was meticulous attention to detail. Avi Issacharoff, who has spent many years covering Palestine as a journalist, is always pushing other creative workers to be accurate with details even if using them does not align with the logic of television making. For example, Issacharoff insists that meetings between two Palestinians must start with ritual blessings and kissing: “this drives them [the screenwriters] crazy. It’s screen time, it’s a dialogue, they want to move on. And I fight with them all the time”. Michal Aviram confirmed that this is the work dynamic she has with Issacharoff; having to look up “Hamas” on Wikipedia before starting to work on the show, Aviram admitted that she does not have political savvy at all. When Issacharoff found out, “he almost threw up at me for my ignorance.” Aviram constantly consults Issacharoff about names of places in Palestinian cities or when seeking examples for songs that Palestinians like to hear as a way to bring a high level of specificity to the text necessary for constructing authenticity.

Specificity is also a useful tool for avoiding a stereotypical portrayal of Palestinians. In the first season, Aviram needed to figure out what Abu Ahmad, the antagonist, would eat while hiding in Ramallah. As an Israeli Jew, the easy solution was to have him eat pita bread with labneh, two traditional Palestinian foods. However, Issacharoff told her that there is a KFC branch in Ramallah:

Using this specificity, you can manipulate the viewer, say — “*this [Palestinian life] is not what you think*” [...] and this is not like McDonald’s, [KFC] *is not available in Israel*. So here [the viewer] starts thinking — what is this? *Does he [Abu Ahmad] live abroad?*

While the dedication to writing an authentic, credible story is seen as a staple for good television in *Fauda*’s co-creators’ eyes, there is a deeper motivation for them to spend considerable

time bringing Palestinian life to the screen. Raz repeatedly discloses in interviews that his father is from Iraq and his mother is from Algeria, and when he grew up, and friends would come over to his house, he was embarrassed when his father spoke to him in Arabic. Similarly, Issacharoff told me that as a teenager he joined a talent show where he performed a song by a famous Mizrahi singer, Zohar Argov. After the show ended, a teacher told him that choosing that song was a brave decision. Issacharoff reflected on this experience:

you suddenly realize *that you've been hiding your Arab identity*. It's not a Mizrahi identity, "Mizrahi" is a *euphemism*. What do we mean by that [by using the Mizrahi category]? We [Jews originating from countries in the MENA region] are not Arabs; therefore, we are Mizrahi. And then gradually you shed off the shame [...] and you know what? The funny thing is that the army helped me a lot. Because after six years in Leyada¹⁹, where I was in Histaarvut²⁰, *in disguise*, when I joined the unit, *I suddenly felt at home*. Because most of the people there looked like me, and if *you were culturally Arab and knew Arabic* — that was a huge advantage.

Joining the undercover unit was an act of redemption for Issacharoff, Raz, and many others. For them, the unit is a site where they can connect with other Arab Jews and where having an Arab identity is an asset rather than a burden. Issacharoff realized that being labeled as a Mizrahi was a way to distance him from his Arab identity. Shohat (2017b) argued that the Mizrahi category is a useful Zionist tool that drives a wedge between Jewish and non-Jewish Arabs. However, serving in the unit did not drive Issacharoff away from Zionism. Quite the contrary, the unit is a rare case

¹⁹ A prestigious high school in Jerusalem whose students are predominantly Ashkenazi Jews.

²⁰ The same word used to describe members of the undercover unit, as pointed out earlier in the chapter. In other words, Issacharoff argues that the real undercover experience for him was being shameful of his Arab identity in an Ashkenazi-dominated environment.

where the explicit expression of Arabness by Jews serves Zionism rather than undermining it because it is seen as a disguise. As discussed in the previous chapter, soldiers are expected to be Arabs when sent out on a mission and then return to being Mizrahim once they come back. However, Issacharoff's need to connect with his Arabness persisted even after he finished his military service. He told me that he continues to feel much more comfortable going into Palestinian territories as a journalist, while being in Tel Aviv often feels like wearing a mask.

Similar to *Arab Labor*, genre is one of the main obstacles that can disrupt *Fauda*'s ability to tell authentic stories about the traumatic life of Palestinians and Jews. While action cinema is profoundly about trauma and post-traumatic stress because its heroes are taking action to restore lost confidence (O'Brien, 2012, p. 1), action scenes can often obfuscate the text's ideological meaning. The increased velocity of contemporary films can lead to "chaos cinema" in the action genre. The rapid editing and shaky camera movement can overwhelm the viewer to the point where the scene is hardly intelligible (Purse, 2016). Rotem Shamir told me how he found a solution to this problem – by sticking to the hero's point of view on action scenes, they enhance the dramatic narrative of the show rather than undermining it:

Here [on *Fauda*] you [the viewer] see [the action scene] only like this [illustrates a narrow point of view with his hands] – if someone is shooting [at the hero] from above, under no circumstances will I cut and give you a shot from above [thus moving to a different point of view], I [stick] only to him [to the hero, as a way to show the viewer] how far it is [the distance between the hero and the shooter], how dangerous, how hidden.

Despite these risks, the use of action on *Fauda*, just like the use of humor on *Arab Labor*, is essential because it makes the show entertaining. Stollman and Shamir both told me that they were hired because they are experts in working within the action thriller confinements. Stollman

shared with me his pleasure of adhering to the restrictions imposed by this genre, which he sees as a way to honor a great cinematic tradition and spark his creativity. As already noted, because the action thriller and its conventions are easily recognizable by the audience, it manages to compensate for the lack of familiarity with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict's specificities, especially among international viewers. It can also help hide a subversive storyline, just like the humor on *Arab Labor* can help soften the audience before striking it with direct criticism on the Israeli-Jewish society.

The need to tell authentic Palestinian and Israeli stories within a specific genre is critical for understanding the production culture of *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* and the popularity of these shows. While Israeli stories are naturally commonplace on Israeli television and are crucial for their commercial success, Palestinian stories told by Palestinian actors are much less common. Nevertheless, without these stories, neither show could exist nor become so popular. In the final subsection, I will delve into the meaning of being a Palestinian on an Israeli television show, taking into account the different, often contradicting pressures put on Palestinian creative workers who decide to work for an Israeli television production.

3.5 Being a Palestinian on an Israeli Television Show

Amal Jamal and Noa Lavie (2020b, 2020a) were able to attain unique access to the process of creating *Fauda*. They conducted a participant-observation on the show's set throughout the second season, paying close attention to how Palestinian creative workers navigate this Israeli-Jewish environment. They conclude that Palestinians exercise subaltern agency using two strategies; they embrace the position of the total Other and try to use it for self-empowerment, like demonstrating their superior knowledge of Arabic over many Jewish actors whose parts require them to speak it

yet do not know the language. The second strategy is to reject attempts to stereotype them, often by reclaiming and ridiculing the stereotype. Jamal and Lavie describe one situation in which a Palestinian actor could not find a place to sit during a lunch break. After looking around for an available seat to no avail, he started to imitate the Palestinian waiter's stereotypical image in front of everybody present at the buffet before ultimately sitting with the research team rather than with his colleagues. According to Jamal and Lavie, these small actions cannot change the structural power dynamic between Israelis and Palestinians, but they allow Palestinian creative workers to exercise agency in precarious situations.

As noted earlier, in the early 2000s, Palestinians were significantly unrepresented on Israeli television shows, and as an extension, there were also very few Palestinian working in the industry. While navigating an Israeli set is difficult for Palestinian actors, it is important to acknowledge that both *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* have given opportunities to Palestinian creative workers that were not available beforehand. Most of the cast on *Arab Labor* and half of it on *Fauda* is Palestinian. Ninio, the director of *Arab Labor*'s first season, told me that when he was looking for actors there were not many options available; most of the Palestinian cast was fairly anonymous and had very little experience acting on television shows — most of them came from film and mostly theatre.

Similarly, *Fauda* gives Palestinian creative workers opportunities to work in the industry (Jamal & Lavie, 2020b, p. 2407). Many below-the-line workers in the show are Palestinians — including location managers, language experts, and assistant directors whose knowledge in Arabic and familiarity with Palestinian culture are vital on the set. Their ability to establish rapport with locals in Palestinian locations helps the production in critical moments when unexpected things happen. Shamir recalled one extraordinary situation:

There was one scene on the second season where el-Makdasi [the antagonist of the second season] was supposed to fire an RPG into a coffee shop. It was a very complicated shooting day [...] every minute counts. And there was a window from which el-Makdasi had to fire the RPG. The lady [who owns the place where the scene was shot] was supposed to come and meet with Jamal, the third assistant director, and location manager on the Palestinian side. He suddenly came up to me and said, “she’s not here.” I responded: “what are you even talking about? [i.e., there is no way this is happening right now], *so he climbed a ladder, broke the window, and told me “no worries, you can come in”* [...] later [when the lady finally showed up] he screamed at her [probably in Arabic]: “where were you?” and paid for the broken window, so there was no problem with that.

This example shows that the Palestinian staff is an integral part of the joint effort to make *Fauda* a success, going above and beyond to come up with creative solutions for difficult problems while demonstrating an impressive ability to improvise. Shamir, as well as other above-the-line Jewish executives with whom I spoke, are highly appreciative of the contribution of the Palestinian workers to the show. As noted earlier, Raz and Issacharoff insist that only Palestinians will be cast for Palestinian roles, seeing it as an essential way to guarantee the show’s authenticity. Michal Aviram, one of the show’s writers, told me she found this decision odd, even racist at first – she believed an actor should be able to play anyone regardless of their real-life national identity. Shadi Mar’i, who plays Walid in the first and second seasons, expressed similar concerns about being cast as the stereotypical Palestinian terrorist, while he plays much more diverse, universal roles in theatre (Herman, 2016; see also Jamal & Lavie, 2020b, p. 2411).

However, there is also a case to be made about casting Palestinians to these roles – an actor who feels close to their character will protect it in the creative process and make sure that *Fauda*

is doing its best to tell a rich, human story about its Palestinian characters. Casting Israeli-Jews to play Palestinians run risks becoming an Israeli version of blackface.

While Palestinian actors cannot change the show's entire narrative, they can make their characters more accurate and trustworthy. Issacharoff, functioning as the expert on Palestine among the Israeli-Jewish creative workers, would often mediate these situations. For example, Firas Nassar, who played el-Makdasi on the second season, worked with Issacharoff on rewriting his character because he believed his character needed to be more religious as an ISIS fighter, which did not come through in the original script. Samar Quity, who played Haifa on the third season, said she always has doubts and questions that come up while working on the show, yet felt comfortable sharing them with Issacharoff and Raz and engage in dialogue with them. She especially commended conversations she had in Arabic with Issacharoff about her role; speaking her native language with the show's creator made her feel very comfortable. Ala Dakka, who plays Bashar in the third season, shared how excited he was when he learned that he got the part, saying that *Fauda* is currently the biggest show produced in Israel (Shore, 2020; Senor, 2020). Working on *Fauda* becomes an important springboard for many Palestinian actors, helping them push their careers forward.

While Palestinians play active roles in making *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* authentic and entertaining, achieving stardom allows them to push the envelope even further by expressing their political opinions or challenging stereotypical perceptions of Palestinians in Israel. Ninio explained that once *Arab Labor* became popular, Norman Issa, who played Amjad, began to openly express his political opinions, like declaring that he will not perform in the occupied territories. Mira Awad, who played Amal, gave multiple interviews about the show that quickly moved into discussing her politics — she talked about the overt racism her father faced as a

Palestinian physician treating Jewish patients; Awad also proclaimed that as a member of the young Palestinian generation, she does not fear expressing her opinions and taking actions to create a more just, equitable society (Glazer, 2012; Nuriel, 2007).

On *Fauda*, the show's Palestinian cast has become highly popular in Israel, turning numerous Palestinian actors into local celebrities. Consequently, these actors are neutralized as ordinary people when they appear on soft, entertainment sections of Israeli newspapers rather than on the sections where Palestinians usually “belong” — hard news, mostly in the context of terror or crime (Avraham et al., 2000). Profoundly, the incorporation of Palestinians into the heart of cultural hegemony — the gossip columns — means that they have transmuted from being detestable to being desirable. Interviewees often described Firas Nassar as someone who has become a sex symbol following his performance as el-Makdasi (Siegel, 2019). Constructing Palestinian men as having an uninhibited desire is a common orientalist strategy (Said, 1978); however, that is not the case with Nassar. His public persona is the opposite of the barbaric and licentious Eastern man. In one interview held during the premiere of the second season of *Fauda*, Nassar, who speaks flawless Hebrew, shyly averted blatant flirts from an attractive Jewish Israeli actress who teased him on camera (Yes, 2018). Thus, Nassar’s media appearance undermines and complicates his image as el-Makdasi, the ruthless ISIS terrorist.

As a minority, Palestinian creative workers are often perceived as a synecdoche of their entire community (Cohen & Garcia, 2005). It creates a pincer movement of opposite powers operating simultaneously on Palestinians in the industry. From the Israeli-Jewish side, there is always the risk of being stereotyped and expected to act “like a Palestinian.” From the Palestinian side, creative workers are often seen as representatives of their community and are critiqued if their work does not reflect the community’s values or brings it shame. One example is explored

by Jamal and Lavie (2020a, pp. 6–9) when discussing a young Palestinian actress. They describe her revealing clothes and the physical contact she made with male colleagues. This behavior stood in sharp contrast to her role in *Fauda* as a religious, married woman and to the location where the shooting took place — Kfar Kassem, a religious Palestinian city. Jamal and Lavie discuss one argument she had with an assistant director about whether her character should wear a headscarf when she opens the door to her house. Jamal and Lavie argue that she was acting in defiance, directed mostly towards her Jewish colleagues, who struggle to accept the idea that a Palestinian woman could be secular and liberal like them.

However, Jamal and Lavie do not indicate who was the assistant director arguing with the actress; as noted earlier, some assistant directors on the show are Palestinians, which was likely the case here since the argument was about how a religious Muslim woman should behave. Therefore, the actress’s defiance could have been directed towards her own community and the religious environment where the scene was shot — Kfar Kassem, a city where most women wear head covering.

Other examples clearly indicate that this type of internal Palestinian critique exists. Many in the Israeli Palestinian cultural elite did not appreciate the first season of *Arab Labor*; they did not like the way Palestinians are portrayed on the show. In many cases, the butt of the joke is Amjad and his failed attempts to please the Jews. The character of his father, Abu Amjad, is not very flattering either as he is a cunning cheat who profits from manipulating others, including his son. In one very personal attack against Kashua, Muhammad Bakri (2008), a famous Palestinian actor and filmmaker, published two articles at a local Palestinian newspaper criticizing the show. He argued that Kashua is a traitor who knows very little about Palestinian life because he lived among Jews for too long and therefore created superficial characters with no nuance or depth. As

indicated by Kashua, the show sparked a heated debate within the Israeli Palestinian community, where on the one hand, some people were so enraged that Friday sermons in Mosques targeted Kashua. In contrast, some Palestinian intellectuals stood up for him and defended the show (Kopeper, 2008). Thus, Kashu'a writing is not only critical against the Israeli Jewish society, but it also defies against the cultural norms within the Palestinian minority in Israel. These critiques eventually subsided, and many Palestinians grew fond of the show; according to Norman Issa, after the second season aired, Palestinian viewers approached him and said that they deeply identified with Amjad because they behave similarly among Jews (Median, 2015).

Participating in *Fauda* is even more complicated for Palestinian actors because it is an entirely Jewish-Israeli production. In some cases, the co-creators and the director had to reassure actors that Palestinians are not depicted as psychopathic murderers on the show. In some cases, deciding to act on the show has severe repercussions — actors are labeled as traitors, and funds given to their theatres are taken away. Hisham Suliman, who plays Abu Ahmad, the antagonist in the first season, had an open conversation about being a part of the Israeli entertainment industry with Ronny Dahdal from Musawa, a Palestinian satellite television channel. Dahdal pointed out that many Palestinian actors decide to boycott the industry; Suliman responded that it helped him achieve professional success and that Israeli acting schools are tantamount to Europe's best schools. He felt satisfied with the opportunities given to him, so it seemed unfair to him to boycott the industry that nurtured him. Again, being a Palestinian star on an Israeli television show meant that he was attacked twice; Suliman told Dahdal that he once gave an interview to an Israeli newspaper where the reporter twisted his words to portray him as a supporter of terror against Israel. On the other hand, Suliman was also clearly uncomfortable with Dahdal's attempts to goad him to apologize for his success (Dahdal, 2015).

3.6 Working Through Issues as a Media Industry Practice and the Path to Peace

Arab Labor and *Fauda* are far from being the perfect tools for facilitating everyday peace between Palestinians and Jews. As a satire, *Arab Labor* suffers from one of the common problems of the genre — it remains unclear who gets the joke and who reads the text at face level, concluding that Palestinians are indeed docile subjects of the Israeli state (Boxman-Shabtai & Shifman, 2014; Perks, 2012). This satire is particularly sensitive because it discusses one of the most marginalized communities in Israel, Israeli Palestinians, who are naturally suspicious of the Israeli media that has always depicted them as terrorists or criminals. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that there were furious reactions to this show by some members of the community, who got used to stereotypical depictions on Israeli media but did not expect them to be written by one of their own. Many Israeli Palestinians fear that a show like *Arab Labor* reifies rather than undermines these harmful stereotypes (N. Katz & Nossek, 2020).

Fauda is even more problematic in this regard. It is a show that tells the story of the *Mistaarvim*, undercover soldiers who infiltrates Palestinian towns and villages, arresting and often killing people. According to Tanya Reinhart (1993), these units enjoy unprecedented glorification in Israeli culture, when they are, in fact, death squads that kill people without trial. She criticizes her “postmodern colleagues” who are “infatuated by the representation of the self-disguising as the Other” while real Palestinians are getting killed. In many ways, Reinhart is right; *Fauda* is tied to the Israeli military in profound ways that go beyond the text itself. The show’s creators and many of its actors are veterans of *Mistaarvim* units; following my discussion on failed masculinities from the previous chapter, this chapter illustrates how toxic masculine norms have become a part of Lior Raz’s public figure when he appears on commercials. The production has

built a strong commercial relationship with the Israeli army and helps it promote its image globally; finally, the show galvanizes young Israeli-Jews to join these units.

Therefore, it is easy to dismiss both shows as detrimental rather than conducive to peace. Their creators openly admit that their shows are not designed or are unable to affect the Israeli-Palestinian public in a way that would make it believe or desire peace. For Kashua and other Palestinian cast members on *Arab Labor*, the Israeli Jewish public is too close-minded for a single television show, as popular and as well-written as it may be, to be able change their minds about Palestinians. For Raz and Issacharoff, *Fauda* tells an Israeli-Zionist story; they have no intention to accommodate a Palestinian narrative in their show.

However, this is not a reception study. I believe that trying to assess the potential effect of one or two popular texts on a profound social process like peace is not possible. My argument is based on the critique of everyday peace scholars who urge their colleagues to look for peace at locally embedded practices rather than parsimonious, abstract models of nation-state interactions (Bräuchler, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2014). Similarly, evaluating all the variables underlying people's decision to support peace, especially in the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, is an impossible endeavor.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter was to investigate peace as an industry practice, embedded in the creative process of making *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*. It is a peace based on everyday life because both shows describe their creators' personal experiences. Making these shows has always been about working through these experiences by reformulating them as television shows. Ellis (1999) borrowed his idea of television as working through from psychoanalysis where the mental material is not meant to be molded into a finished resolution, but continually worried over until exhausted (p. 55). Since the raw mental materials used by the creators of both shows are often

traumatic, the metaphoric use of “working through” by Ellis becomes real in these case studies; for Kashua, Raz and Issacharoff, as well as actors who performed what they wrote, the making of *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* was a form of therapy. Their traumas are worked over in the process of making these shows, and the shows never bring them to a complete resolution. Taken together, the stories of Doron and Amjad touch the open wounds of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, working through them, as an industry practice, is a form of peacemaking.

Making these shows is not easy. The creative workers navigate a series of overlapping tensions that pose opportunities and constraints to the creative process. One such tension is the *political economy* of the Israeli television industry at a given historical moment. *Arab Labor* was created when broadcast television was still dominant in Israel, although it had already moved away from the single-channel, public-broadcast model. The broadcasting schedule was still important, as well as primetime and ratings. This television market, operating in the 1990s-2000s, was somewhat similar to the U.S. network era (Lotz, 2014b). Regulators and producers dominated it; *Arab Labor* became possible due to the concurrence of the 2004 *Channel 2* tender and the show’s producers’ initiative to create the first show written by a Palestinian about Palestinian life in Israel.

Fauda, produced ten years later, operated under an entirely new logic of post network or post television era (Harlap, 2017; Lotz, 2014b). Broadcasting is replaced with streaming; ratings are replaced with subscriptions, and primetime can be anytime. The Israeli television industry has also become much more globalized. Currently, the highest ambition of each production is to be sold to a major U.S. television company (Talmon & Levy, 2020), which is what *Fauda* managed to achieve. It is also an era driven by an influx of writers; unlike *Arab Labor*, it is a market economy in which creators and writers are more likely to initiate the creative process.

As success stories, *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* demonstrate that either economic model could support the creation of controversial texts designed to make their audiences uncomfortable. However, since it was clear that both texts were going to be contestable very early in the creative process, their creators had to overcome significant obstacles – on *Arab Labor*, they had to raise external funds to support the show; on *Fauda*, they had to endure multiple rejections before being bought by *Yes*.

A second tension explored throughout this chapter has to do with *external pressures*. The productions of *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* had to respond to pressures put on them by individuals and organizations that are not directly involved in the creative process. Kashua, Ninio, and Paran had to limit the use of Arabic on *Arab Labor* and cast famous Jewish actors that already worked in another show aired by *Keshet* to get Avi Nir, the CEO, on their side. Dana Stern, who sold *Fauda* to Netflix, had to make sure that the contract prevents the American giant from intervening in the show's creative process. External pressures also come in the form of responses to the shows. Creative workers have to make sure that right-wing and left-wing Israelis, Jews and Palestinians, will not hate their shows. Being labeled “political” in an internally divided country like Israel-Palestine is a death sentence to any television show. Avoiding this trap is quite tricky; the initial responses to *Arab Labor* among some Israeli Palestinians, or the false perceptions among fans that *Fauda* is a precise representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict require creators to be imperturbable and patient.

What ultimately helped these shows endure harsh critiques and gain considerable popularity is their perceived authenticity. Both try to be as descriptive as possible; they tell the stories of Doron and Amjad without providing an interpretation of what they mean more broadly, at the societal-political level. I will explore the power of descriptive stories further in the next two

chapters. The attempts to reach authenticity forces creative workers to forge friendly relationships across national identity lines by rewriting a character together or going out for a beer to work on a script. Listening to other people and being interested in their stories is key for writing reliable, interesting television as it is key for making peace (Y. Katz, 2020).

Since these stories are often based on traumas, picking wounds creates *internal pressures*, perhaps the most challenging tension creative workers need to tackle. Telling these stories, speaking about what was previously unspoken (Pinchevski, 2019) can be therapeutic; it can also trigger the post-traumatic individual by reactivating and reliving the traumatic experience. Therefore, trauma needs to be coated with the genre's mechanism to be tolerable - laughing about prejudice distracts from the sadness emanating from it; generating action distracts from painful moments frozen in time. The creative process of making these shows is a dance; it is figuring out a way to talk about these experiences without turning up the dial to the point where it becomes intolerable. It is about continuously coming up with new ways to talk about traumas because complex television is an inconclusive medium (Mittell, 2015).

One way to think about this inconclusiveness is through *productive polysemy*. The idea that mediated texts have multiple meanings is one of the pivotal conundrums explored in communication and media studies. Two notable examples from cultural studies that pertain directly to television and its popularity were discussed by Stuart Hall (1980) and John Fiske (1987). Hall and his students at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (e.g., Brunson, 2000; Morley, 1980) argued that viewers' interpretation of televised texts is not necessarily identical to the intention behind it, since ordinary people have the agency to make texts their own. On the other hand, Fiske contended that multiplicity already exists in the televised text; for Fiske, polysemy, or

the multiplicity of meanings, is what makes television shows popular. Since they encompass many meanings, they can appeal to various audiences.

Recently, Boxman-Shabtai (2020) conducted an extensive review of the fragmented literature on meaning multiplicity that reflects this emphasis on either the text or the audience. She points to several studies that apply a speaker-centered approach (pp. 404-405); mostly stemming from rhetorical studies, they analyze the strategic use of meaning multiplicity that affords different forms of manipulation like deniability or dog-whistling. For example, an analysis of former President Trump's speeches reveals that he uses well-known canards, like the idea that some well-known Jewish individuals control world finances, as a way to appeal to white supremacists, or "dog-whistle" them, without using explicit antisemitic slurs (Moshin, 2018).

Taken together, studies about polysemy assume that if the mediated text or its reception are inherently unstable and afford different meanings, the text's production manages to remain stable. If a speaker or an organization intentionally creates an ambiguous text, it is probably done for strategic, often nefarious reasons.

By using the concept productive polysemy, I want to reject this premise. When the creators of *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* try to find ways to speak about their traumas through a television show, there is no perfect way to do it. Some scenes are too close to the original experience; some are too far and may come across as unauthentic. Ridiculous situations and jokes can spotlight the absurdity and hypocrisy of prejudice, while sometimes the show's main character suddenly feels like a clown to the person who wrote it — turning him into a person whose concerns and pains can never be taken seriously. This type of polysemy, this inconclusiveness of the meaning of the televised text that is quintessential to writing, producing, directing, editing, distributing, and advertising a show, is a productive element in media industry practice. Productive not only in the sense of being a part

of the production process but also as an essential engine that pushes the creative process forward and galvanizes creative workers to explore new terrains.

This type of endless worrying over or working through the meaning of a show compels creative workers to discuss profound questions; in the case of *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, these questions are at the core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are hardly discussed among politicians or diplomats (Gavriely-Nuri, 2015; Said, 2000). Therefore, working through *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* does not mean that they could potentially promote peace among their fans; it means that peace is already underway.

Chapter 4 Peace as Nonreciprocal Storylistening on *Border Gone*

4.1 Gaza: Unseen, Unheard

When Benny Gantz began his election campaign in January 2019, his pronounced goal was to replace Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister. While leading the center-leftist block, historically associated with supporting a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, Gantz wanted to prove that he does not hesitate to use brute force to protect Israel, just like his rightwing opponent. A video released by his campaign, titled "6,231 targets destroyed - parts of Gaza go back to the stone age", returns to the 2014 war in Gaza when Gantz was chief of staff. Accompanied by dramatic electronic music, the video presents the destruction in Gaza in black and white at the end of the war (figure 4-1), followed by titles announcing that "6,231 targets were destroyed" and "1,364 terrorists were killed", leading to "3.5 years of tranquility" (Haaretz.com, 2019).



Figure 4-1 Destruction in Gaza from Gantz's election campaign video

It was Gantz's job as commander-in-chief of the Israeli army to protect Israel during the war. However, the overt pride expressed in this video in destroying a city and killing its people suggest that the ostensible ideological divide over the desirable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not exist anymore (Aruch, 2020; Levy, 2015) or never existed in the first place among Zionist parties (Kimmerling, 1993; Wright, 2018). What is equally striking about Gantz's video is what it conceals – the death of uninvolved civilians counted at 761 people according to the most conservative tally (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). The images of destruction are shot by a drone, forming an aesthetic of alienation in which wounding and killing are not seen, and the screams of bombarded people are not heard (Chamayou, 2015). The extreme long shot only presents ruins, ruptured structures, and rubble – a city of stones, sent back to the "stone age," void of people. The music blocks the voices of those who survived this devastation and the piercing noise of explosions that set the war zone's ambiance (Daughtry, 2015).

Seven years after the 2014 war, Israel, led by Gantz and Netanyahu, launched another devastating military campaign in Gaza in May 2021, killing more than 230 people (Yee & Abuheweila, 2021). The Israeli mainstream media played an instrumental role in galvanizing it, portraying the repeated wars in Gaza as an inevitable reality (Friedman, 2021), and often pushed aggressively for the use of uncontrolled violence during the campaign (Noy, 2021).

The people of Gaza are shut off from the world, the result of a 15-year blockade imposed by Israel. They are usually known through numbers. These numbers can represent war casualties, population density, reliance on external humanitarian aid or poverty levels, constructing Gaza as always on the verge of collapse. While statistics are informative, they sideline people's experiences, which is crucial for humanizing Gaza (Tawil-Souri & Matar, 2016). The website "*We*

Are Not Numbers" (n.d., WANN henceforth) tries to tackle this problem by providing a space for young Palestinians to tell their stories in English to the world (Miranda, 2019).

A second, complementary digital project called "*Border Gone*" (n.d., BG henceforth), is the focus of chapters 4 and 5. It is the product of a collaboration between Yaron (all names are pseudonyms), Israeli-Jewish journalist and social activist, and Ibrahim, a Palestinian from Gaza who is currently based in London. Ibrahim is also the former project manager of WANN. They decided to create a platform devoted to translating stories written by Palestinians in Gaza from English to Hebrew. A website and a Facebook page began operating in December 2019, where stories were made available to Israeli readers. In February 2021, BG moved to the second stage in its evolution when it became an independent news outlet devoted to reporting about Gaza in Hebrew. This chapter investigates BG as a platform that creates the conditions for listening to the voices of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza, enabling everyday peace — a type of peace that highlights the experiences of ordinary people and the need to facilitate a human connection between Palestinians and Jews. In the next chapter, I will look more closely into comments made on BG's Facebook page throughout the first year and a half of its operation, paying close attention to the May 2021 war in Gaza when its operation peaked.

Chapter 2 focused on the *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, two Israeli television shows where the discussion about Palestinian and Jewish identities demonstrates that everyday peace, manifested in the televisual, can destabilize national and ethnic identities. Chapter 3 expanded this argument, showing that the collaboration between Palestinians and Jews working together on these shows while working through some of the perennial problems undergirding the Israel-Palestinian conflict is also a form of everyday peace. Creating these shows exemplifies the power of media industries to facilitate deep human connections rarely seen elsewhere. This chapter moves from the visual to

the auditory, examining forms of listening. It inspects a different media space, digital platforms, points out how *Border Gone*, an independent initiative started by young Jewish and Palestinian activists, gives Palestinian voices the presence necessary for everyday peace.

My goal is not to assess whether BG gets Israelis to support peace. Instead, I want to understand how a digital project can help facilitate a care structure for Gaza, and how it affords empathy towards an ostensible enemy in the way the project is built and understood by the people who made it (Katz, 2020). I will argue that *Border Gone* makes *nonreciprocal storylistening* possible; a type of listening that does not pose a demand to the subaltern to listen to the colonizer. Instead, the path to everyday peace goes through a deep act of solidarity, in which Israelis sit and listen while Palestinians tell their stories. I will explore the following questions: what motivated managers, translators, and editors to join this project? What does it mean for Israeli Jews to spend considerable time learning about the lives of Palestinians and translating Palestinian voices to Hebrew? How do different digital platforms that host this project (i.e., its website and Facebook page) support its goals? And finally, why did BG transition into a news outlet, and why did its managers decide that simply translating stories was not enough? I will look into the meaning of listening to the stories of others as a sonic experience, reflect on the idea that being able to tell a story means that one has a voice — a fundamental right in a democracy, and show how translation affords nonreciprocal listening.

4.2 Mediating Peace: Listening to Others through Translation

4.2.1 Listening to Stories, Deliberating through Voice

This chapter focuses on stories as an effective way to talk about conflict. Personal stories of ordinary people are powerful because they are embedded in the lives of their characters, unlike political deliberation that poses ideologies for debate and contestation (Dewey, 1927; Habermas, 1989). They are appealing and easy to understand because they follow a familiar structure (Propp, 1968) and evoke affect, letting the audience identify with the motivations that drive the story forward (Miall, 1988). For example, Bar-On (2006) describes a story told by a Palestinian participant at an intergroup meeting focused on his great-grandmother, who took care of her family after her husband left for Egypt. Although the story included descriptions of Jewish violence, depicting how the great-grandmother had to hide in a cave when Israeli forces attacked her village, some Jewish participants found ways to identify with it. One said that he envied how the memory of her heroism was passed down through the family; another said she liked it because her grandmother was also an influential figure in her family (pp. 129-130).

We can describe the difference between confronting the other side and listening to its stories in sonic, communicative terms. We deliberate using our voice, but we listen to stories. According to Couldry (2010), voice is an extension of the self and should be seen as a democratic value beyond the sound humans can produce with their vocal cords. People who have a voice can give account to their lives, which they can only do with the support of society, giving them permission and the means to speak. Therefore, the distinction between the vocal and the voiceless, those who get to speak and those who do not, is instrumental in examining the boundaries of a public sphere (Fraser, 1990). Voice is necessary for effective political activism because activism is often focused on claiming one's voice; accordingly, power is often exercised by ignoring or

silencing dissenting voices (Jenkins, 2016, p. 21). Unsurprisingly, many democracies underscore freedom of speech as a core value; however, it remains unclear whether the right to speak includes an obligation to listen.

Jacob's (1998) legal commentary inspects whether an obligation to listen can be derived from the First Amendment to the U.S. constitution, concluding that if no one listens to a person's speech, their freedom of speech becomes pointless. Therefore, individuals have the right to voice their opinions in public even if others see these opinions as deplorable; in other words, "the question whether there is an obligation to listen is, of course, really a question about the scope of the right to free speech" (p. 524).

This articulation of listening deems it to be a container of voice. Sound studies offer a different way to think about listening as attentiveness to others (Lacey, 2013). Barthes (1985) discusses three modes of listening – first, alert, which is about directing one's attention to a sound and its direction, like noticing a siren wailing in the distance. Second, deciphering, a semantic process in which one tries to make sense of human sounds; this mode of listening underpins Jacob's discussion on free speech — listening exists to make sense of voice. However, the third mode of listening underscores its intersubjectivity, as an exchange between human beings in which the listener recognizes the other side's humanity.

Lacey (2013) distinguishes between two types of mediated listening – *listening in* versus *listening out*. While the former focuses on appreciating sound at the individual, intimate level, listening out constructs the act of listening as a political action that bears responsibilities. It is a risky endeavor, as the listener eavesdrops on another person's inner world, feeling both curious and anxious about it (Nancy, 2007). The speaker's voice resonates with both sets of ears — the sound leaves its mark on the speaker and the interlocutor, engaging them in internal listening

(Derrida, 2012). Therefore, listening out entails certain ethics of communication – it empowers the speaker who listens to their voice, helping develop a new consciousness through the exchange (Derrida, 2012), and compels the interlocutor to recognize the humanity of the other person while listening (Honneth, 1995). Listening out is an intense experience due to the constant anticipation for resolution; in music, tension builds up gradually, eventually leading to a release (Nancy, 2007); in stories, there is a complication in the plot — something goes wrong, or someone goes missing, the status quo is broken — and the listener awaits in suspense for a resolution (Propp, 1968).

In conclusion, listening out is foundational for everyday peace because it expresses a willingness to step outside one’s subject position and become open to a different, often troubling world. An intention to listening out is necessary especially when the listener enjoys privilege or power; without it, peace talk might fall back to a deliberative, reciprocal model that immediately reinstates the power dynamics that existed before the encounter.

4.2.2 Storylistening and Translation

Storytelling cannot work without listening. I argue that the act of listening is as crucial as the stories themselves in promoting everyday peace. Beyond sharing the experience of suffering in violent conflicts, telling stories to those responsible for this suffering, who sit *in silence* and listen, confronts them with the consequences of their actions. While intergroup dialogues, which I discussed in the introduction, have the power to create some intimacy among members who participate in multiple meetings, they are limited because they reach few people who need to be together in the same physical space. Therefore, a key question is whether media can elicit a sense of responsibility toward other people. Media witnessing harnesses the power of media to reach a wide audience and hold it responsible for the suffering of others. However, as I have shown in the

introduction, distant suffering often becomes a form of entertainment in the media without generating a genuine commitment to delivering social change. This problem stems from the ethnocentrism of media, wherein an audience cares little about the lives of those who live far away and whose life seemingly have little relevance.

However, it is unlikely that traumas inflicted by an ongoing conflict will be forgotten or will not resonate with the people personally affected by its violence. The challenge here is different and high-stake; it is about getting witnesses to listen to the stories of survivors, knowing that they are, in fact, the perpetrators. Accomplishing this goal without evoking immediate resistance requires a form of media witnessing that is invested in *storylistening*. I assert that storylistening is a helpful framework for thinking about peace through listening. Benjamin (1986a) describes two archetypes of a storyteller – the seaman who travels to faraway lands and the tiller who works the land, each accommodating different types of human fascination – journeys to the unknown and the lore of the past (p. 85). In either case, the experience of the teller encompasses wisdom bestowed upon the listener. Storytelling, in this sense, is didactic, focusing on the teller who possesses the sacred treasure of life experience.

Storylistening does not negate the teller (i.e., the survivor); it complements them by examining the listener's experience while highlighting what needs to happen to get the listener invested in the story. A good story brings listeners into an altered state of consciousness called “storylistening trance,” which happens while they are immersed in the narrative, creating the illusion that they are a living part of the story. Devoting oneself wholeheartedly to this experience can only happen if the listener pays undivided attention to the story, trusts the teller to lead the way in and out of it, and be willing to embrace the internal change generated by it (Sturm, 2000). One of the most immersive ways to listen to a story is to translate it.

Translation is primarily concerned with building connections between different human beings across linguistic barriers. Translation theory often goes back to the ancient story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), the archetypal symbol of human vanity that makes translation a fall from grace. The people of Babel tried to attain divine power by building a tower that reaches heaven and by giving themselves a name (verse 3), an exercise reserved for God who created the world by words (Genesis 1). The punishment was dismantling the power of unified language by deconstructing it into multiple languages; translation is seemingly the way to overcome these differences. Consequently, one of the core questions of translation is whether this unity can be restored. For Derrida (2007), the answer is no; translation is always deemed incomplete because no matter how hard the translator tries, the translated text will never capture all the meanings encapsulated in the first unified language of Babel before the deconstruction.

However, even the simple attempt to accurately transform a text from a source to a target language can be inadequate. According to Benjamin (1986b), that is the work of bad translators; instead, the true purpose of translation is to reveal the target language's latent qualities. In other words, translation is a form of listening in which the “listener”, the target language, is enriched by the engagement with a foreign text because it allows it to expand its forms of expression (Goedde, 2019). Therefore, translators are creative workers who do not simply transfer a text from one language to the other but expand how their language can articulate the world. In the case of *Border Gone*, the translation of Palestinian stories to Hebrew gives Israelis new linguistic tools to think about the lives of people they barely know and whose suffering largely results from the Israeli military occupation of their territories.

4.3 Attentive, Informed Dialogues

The chapter is primarily based on 16 interviews I conducted with the people behind *Border Gone*. They can be divided into two groups: the managing team, which includes the individuals who conceptualized, constructed, developed, and maintained the project and its different digital platforms. Interviews in this group are exhaustive – I talked to almost the entire team, except for one or two members (n=7). They include Yaron and Ibrahim, the Israeli and Palestinian young adults who started the project together.

The second group of interviewees consists of volunteers for the project. This community includes individuals whose work was to choose stories from *We Are Not Numbers* and either translate them from English to Hebrew or edit them in collaboration with the managers. The volunteers' internal Facebook group currently has 190 members, so I had to select my interviewees carefully. These interviews (n=9) include individuals who could provide unique perspectives on BG, based on several criteria: first, I chose to talk to professional translators and editors who do this work for a living, making them more aware of the challenges and opportunities embedded in the project. Second, I looked for particularly active members — after sifting through the project's website, I found a handful of people who made multiple contributions, suggesting they were highly invested in BG and could provide deep reflections on their work there. Third, I looked for members whose contribution or positionality differed from others to obtain a variety of perspectives. The vast majority of translators and editors on BG are Israeli Jews; therefore, I wanted to talk to the few Israeli Palestinians who volunteered to learn what it meant for them as Palestinians to translate stories written by other Palestinians for a Jewish, Hebrew speaking audience. I also interviewed Vicky, who contributed not by translating or editing stories but by designing the project's website.

Interviews lasted between 38 to 87 minutes and were all fully transcribed. I conducted the interviews between February-April 2021, a turning point for BG. The project began transitioning from strictly translating readymade materials from WANN to creating original stories through affiliated journalists based in Gaza. This shift transformed BG into an independent news outlet, and many of my conversations with the managing team focused on this transition, why it happened and how they imagined the project's future.

I did not try to present myself in these conversations as either neutral or indifferent to the political goals of the project, which could backfire when studying a sensitive topic (Dexter, 1956). I was open about my support for BG's mission and shared with my interviewees that I translated some texts and was interested in deepening my contribution. Without my explicit and implicit expression of sympathy (for example, in how I asked questions), interviewees could have felt uncomfortable, withheld information, or refused to speak to me entirely (Sollund, 2008). Some Jewish interviewees were surprised by my interest in this project and suspicious that I had nefarious intentions to reproach them once I learn more about their involvement. Some Palestinian interviewees were worried about their safety; my conversation with Ibrahim, the Palestinian co-founder of BG, began with him interviewing me about my politics and what I see as the desirable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He agreed to continue the conversation only after I gave him satisfactory answers. By questioning my motivations and intentions, interviewees challenged the power dynamics embedded in the interview situation, where the researcher sets the agenda, turning the interview into a dialogue (Plesner, 2011).

While interviews were my primary data source, I did not ignore texts that are the epicenter of the projects and inform the project's operation (D'Acci, 2004). I read many of the stories available on the platform's website (*Border Gone*, n.d.) to get a sense of the variety of narratives

told by Palestinians in Gaza; I will put much more focus on texts in the next chapter. Most interviews with translators and editors included a reconstructive component often employed in journalism studies (Hoxha & Hanitzsch, 2018; Reich, 2006). I presented to the interviewee a story they either translated or edited and asked them to tell me about their process and their decisions while working on these texts. Similarly, I looked at posts from the translators' internal Facebook page that illuminates their work process. Finally, when I talked to Vicky, the website's designer, we went over some of its pages so that I could understand the guiding principles behind building the website. Therefore, this conversation became a version of the walkthrough method, where researchers examine the affordances of digital platforms to reflect on the experience they create for the user (Light et al., 2018). However, instead of discussing my experience of using the platform, Vicky shared her inside knowledge on designing it.

My findings are organized sequentially; I first talk about the establishment of *We Are Not Numbers* with the goal of giving voice to Palestinian youth in Gaza. Second, I discuss the creation of *Border Gone* as a complementary project. Third, I focus on the meaning of BG for its translators and editors, reflecting on how translations may open new political horizons in Israel/Palestine. I also discuss how the project's website and Facebook page are harnessed to advance this vision. Finally, I consider the transition into the second stage of BG, arguing that it was used to push the project's political vision forward more forcefully than the first stage.

4.4 Beyond the wall: Israelis Learning about Palestinian Life

4.4.1 *We Are Not Numbers: Hope and Despair from Gaza*

The story of *Border Gone* begins with *We Are Not Numbers*. In the aftermath of the 2014 war in Gaza, Ibrahim, whose brother and a group of close friends were killed by an Israeli airstrike, felt very depressed. He spent hours at the graveyard and had little hope for the future. Ibrahim knew Pam Bailey, an American human rights activist and journalist, who reached out to him and encouraged him to write about his experience in English. He was reluctant at first, believing that nobody cared about Palestinians' lives in Gaza; that the dominant Israeli narrative is the only one going to be heard. He eventually conceded, and Pam helped him perfect his writing. The story got published in several international news outlets, receiving considerable attention. Ibrahim attested that this was a turning point for him; he founded WANN with Pam, which meant choosing life over death.

WANN replicates Ibrahim's experience with Pam – it gives Palestinian youth in Gaza an opportunity to talk about their experiences and narrate their stories (Said, 1984) in English — with the help of native English speakers who mentor them throughout the process. WANN benefits its participants in multiple ways; creative writing is therapeutic, just like the writing of television shows discussed in the previous chapter. It allows writers to express traumatic experiences and process their emotions, rediscovering their agency to control their lives through stories (McKinney, 1976; Polkinghorne, 2013). In addition, WANN provides professional training to participants; by improving their English skills, they have better chances of finding quality employment in the Strip, where unemployment rates are incredibly high (*Gaza's Workforce Continues to Shrink, 43% Unemployment in the Last Quarter of 2020*, 2021). Finally, being a part

of WANN gives participants a sense of belonging; Ibrahim described members of this project as a “family”:

Many of them [the Palestinian writers] said that *We Are Not Numbers* is a sanctuary, it's a resort [...] t's a place where they can express themselves and reach out to the world. These are one of the most deprived people in the world, and they just needed the chance to express themselves.

WANN is unique in the way it reports news about Gaza because it focuses on people's ordinary lives, unlike Western news organizations that usually report on war and conflict (Amer, 2017; Chouliaraki, 2009; Tenenboim, 2017). By producing texts in English, writers at WANN challenge this dominant narrative. Some stories are unequivocally political; they speak about political movements and events, like the Return Marches (2018-2019), where Palestinians marched to the Israeli border every week (Al-Naji, 2018); express the longing of Palestinian refugees who live in exile to return to their homeland (Dawood, 2016); or name the casualties of the most recent war (Zaneen, 2021). Stories discussing loaded subjects highlight the suffering of Palestinians. Unlike the Hamas government, whose media strategy propagates armed resistance (Abdelal, 2016), WANN's writers draw their inspiration from leaders who called for non-violent resistance, like Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi (e.g., Abu Said, 2016).

However, many stories primarily discuss the common interests and concerns of Palestinians in Gaza. One talks about a young man who decided to grow out his hair to the dismay of his father (Shakshak, 2020); a young woman who struggles with overweight and the insensitivity of people who make her feel uncomfortable in her body (Ghassan, 2019); or the anxiety of waiting for the results of the university's finals and worrying about the future (Abu Fanunah, 2016). However, just like the political is inseparable from the personal, the personal is

inseparable from the political situation in Gaza; the consequences of the occupation can be found in the private lives of Palestinians, and as such, it also becomes a fertile ground for imagining social change (Hanisch, 1972; MacKinnon, 1982; Yu, 2011). For example, when a woman in Gaza dreams about opening a community center where families can get together, she eventually gets disillusioned when facing reality. She is reminded that the dire situation in Gaza occupies her with a daily struggle for survival and shuts down any dream before it can be realized (Jamal, 2019).

Translators and editors at BG were aware of this variety; Heli, one of the professional translators I interviewed, suggested a “traffic light” system to typify the spectrum between personal and political stories. Usually, what differentiated the two is whether the story could have been written elsewhere, thus making it more universal than specific to life in Gaza. For example, Heli and I discussed a story of a man who talked about developing depression after following his Facebook feed because friends were trying to predict when the next war in Gaza would happen. He also reflected on the difficulty of staying connected because of the energy scarcity in the Strip (Al-Ostath, 2016):

I think we can imagine a traffic light when thinking about these stories. This story about Facebook is “yellow”; it is somewhere in between, it is not entirely everyday in the sense that it could have been written elsewhere, it is not about how he feels after his entire family was killed — it is somewhere in the middle, talking about everyday life, *but everyday life also means that there is no electricity for hours because the Israelis bombed something*

Ibrahim was not fond of the idea of publishing universal stories that do not discuss the specific circumstances of life in Gaza, insisting that the purpose of WANN is to strive for social justice through non-violent means. As I will argue in my concluding remarks, this definition of WANN’s goal is central to everyday peace. However, as a manager, he could not dictate to writers

what they can or cannot write. What many writers did have in common are unhindered expressions of optimism and hope that often appear at the end of their stories. Lital, a professional editor, suggested that this attribute of the texts could be a directive from foreign mentors, who ask them to finish their stories on a positive note. Ibrahim rejected this idea, explaining that hope is a life-giving tool that helps people in Gaza survive (Muñoz, 2009):

We don't have a choice [...] we can't be but hopeful. Like hopeful is the only thing that makes us see the light [...] we're living a very terrible life, but we are hopeful or try to be hopeful [...] in our writing.

Ibrahim himself is no different and his enthusiasm to work with Israeli partners led to the creation of a second project of translations in Hebrew, resonating with the hope that delivering social justice was possible. Vicky, the graphic designer of the project, told me that Ibrahim inspired many volunteers in the project; while they, the Israeli Jews, had lost all hope that anything could change, Ibrahim still believed in this vision. Ironically, Israeli managers of the project, Jewish and Palestinian alike, sometimes needed to tell Ibrahim not to build his expectations too high, based on their bitter experience with Israeli politics. Yaron, the Israeli-Jewish initiator of the project, said the following about him:

I think he really wanted to reach the Israeli society, he said, "let's translate these texts; I would be happy if Israelis read them too." He still sees this project as his life's mission; he truly believes in it, some will even say he does it in a naïve way. There were moments I had to tell him that he is getting carried away, I mean, with (the project's) potential to facilitate change. I wanted to curb his enthusiasm a little bit. I think this also has to do with the fact that Palestinians in Gaza who are the same age as Ibrahim and me have never met Israelis in their lives

As noted in the introduction, Israeli control over Gaza is remote; it uses military technology like drones and airstrikes to surveil and target Palestinians (Abu Saif, 2015; Hajjar, 2017). Palestinians in Gaza do not meet the Israeli military forces like their brothers and sisters in the West Bank or even inside Israel, who need to endure roadblocks (Shulman, 2008), settler violence (Byman & Sachs, 2012; Shulman, 2018), and banal expressions of racism (Shoshana, 2016). Counterintuitively, the Palestinian community facing the most extreme Israeli violence can reimagine something different from the abyss of its despair because it has nothing to lose and because Israelis are amorphous to them in absence of real-life encounters. When I talked to Aisha, a Palestinian Israeli manager at BG, she expressed her frustration with Ibrahim's attempts to reimagine the Israeli audience of the platform to facilitate change:

I don't need to imagine; *I know the Israeli audience*. Ibrahim is coming from a different place, so maybe he is lucky or has no luck, but he didn't have this interaction with Israelis (like she did). His way of thinking is more naïve. *Generally speaking, the discourse about the Palestinian issue is not resolved between Ibrahim and Yaron.*

While the unfamiliarity with Israelis helps Ibrahim become more ambitious in dreaming about the future, he cannot do that without a positive encounter with an Israeli Jew who challenged his heuristic that all Israelis want to destroy Gaza. The friendship he developed with Yaron made this mental shift possible and gave rise to *Border Gone*. Aisha's statement that their relationship cannot resolve the problems Palestinians face rightfully expresses skepticism towards the political power of the interpersonal to change state policies. However, this is the essence of everyday peace; the notion that destructive ideas that lead to war can be challenged in the everyday lives by ordinary people who promote justice. As I will argue in the next section, without any knowledge about

Palestinian life in Gaza, exposure to the quotidian is an essential first step in promoting political change.

4.4.2 Border Gone: The Power of Solidarity through Friendship

Yaron, a 25-year-old journalist and social activist met Ibrahim when he conducted a series of interviews with Palestinian youth about the elections in Israel. He was familiar with the work of WANN and reached out to some of its writers via Facebook, introducing himself and interviewing them. Yaron emphasized their suspicion when something like that happens, explaining what it takes to establish trust among Palestinian interlocutors necessary for this type of communication:

Often, when I tell Israeli [Jews] this story, they think, “wow, it is so simple.” Many of them responded to this video [the interviews with Palestinians from Gaza], saying: “why people don’t do it more often, at the human level?”. They completely disregard the way Palestinians perceive a random message from Israelis – they immediately think it’s the Shabak [the Israeli intelligence agency responsible for surveilling Palestinians] or the [military] intelligence [...] when I get in touch with them, I immediately say that I oppose the colonialism between the [Jordan] river and the [Mediterranean] sea, that I am a Jew who tries to change that from the inside. *My political stance is very critical in opening the door with politically conscious Palestinians.*

Yaron flips the dynamic of an interaction between an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian from Gaza from a hermeneutic of suspicion to a hermeneutic of trust (Scannell, 2014). It is not an easy task. Palestinians are used to being surveilled and exploited by the Israeli intelligence officers, who often try to recruit them as informants (Berda, 2018; Cohen, 2010), making talking to Israelis dangerous. During their long conversation, held in Arabic, Ibrahim told Yaron about his life, and

when the interview ended, the roles switched, and Ibrahim wanted to learn more about Yaron, his interest in Gaza, and his knowledge of Arabic. Yaron, unlike most Israelis, made an effort to educate himself about Gaza, whether through acquiring the appropriate language skills or learning about Palestinian life. He laid the necessary foundations for establishing trust, and ultimately friendship with Ibrahim.

Derrida (1997) bases his theory on the politics of friendship on Aristotle's argument that friendship is founded upon unconditional, nonreciprocal love. Not expecting reciprocation is vital for the success of BG. As noted by volunteers Lital and Rotem, when Israelis hear about the project, many instinctively ask in defiance if there are similar peace activists in Gaza who are interested in hearing the stories of Israelis. Such statements pose reciprocity as demand and create a false symmetry between the Israeli and the Palestinians conditions, ignoring the stark power differential between the two sides and the continuous silencing of Palestinian stories that BG seeks to unveil (Barhoum, 2014; Said, 1986). Therefore, the type of storylistening practiced at BG is *nonreciprocal*; it is an unconditional commitment to solidarity with Gaza that does not pose demands to Palestinians in exchange for giving them permission to tell their stories (Said, 1984).

Derrida (1997) adds that for Aristotle, friendship is specific to the unique encounter between two people and cannot be replicated. As noted earlier, Aisha was painfully aware of the irreproducibility of Ibrahim and Yaron's unique friendship that she believes cannot become a method for political change. However, managers at BG indicated that this friendship is the foundation of the project, which resonated with others and gave it meaning. Moran, one of the Jewish managers, explained that the connection between Yaron and Ibrahim justifies the entire project, which is why she felt it was the right decision to have the two of them represent the project to the world while others worked behind the scenes. Staff meetings of the managing team involved group discussions

and internal interrogation of how and when one's heart opened to Palestinian suffering. Elisheva said that her friendships with Palestinians, both in Gaza and the West Bank, made their suffering much more personal. She told me about one particular friend of hers who lives in one of the refugee camps in East Jerusalem:

If I become aware of a curfew being imposed on neighborhoods beyond the [separation] wall [in the West Bank], it is no longer something that I inspect as a matter of principle because I support human rights, *it is because I have a friend in camp Shuafat*, and I know that beyond not being able to see her, it limits her life. It becomes personal.

Finally, Aristotelian friendship requires that both parties be of equal footing and see each other as having equal moral standing (Bülow & Felix, 2016; Cooper, 1999). According to Mirit, an editor on BG and a veteran educator for human rights, the managing team of BG is much more progressive in comparison to other human rights organizations from older generations because they genuinely see Palestinians as equals:

There are [other] initiatives founded on very good ideas but they do not consider the needs of the Palestinian side — the need to be sensitive and keep them safe [...] so in this sense, this group [the managing team of BG], from this [young] generation does an incredible job, I think. In political terms, *it is solidarity in its deepest sense*.

Compare Mirit's reflection on BG with the words of Aharon, a translator and a veteran human rights activist who participates in other human rights initiatives. Specifically, he took pride in an organization called *Road to Recovery*, where Israelis volunteer to give rides to Palestinians who need to get from Gaza or the West Bank to Israel to receive medical care. Aharon reminisced one of these rides:

One time I had to bring [a Palestinian family] back to Tarqumiyah [one of the crossing points between the West Bank and Israel]. We have a coordinator who tells us, “go there, pick up this person.” So she asked me if it was okay that I’ll take the child to the sea [...] I got to Ichilov [a hospital in Tel Aviv], a ten-year-old girl from Hebron, she was there with her parents. I asked for the mother’s permission to take her daughter to the sea — the mother’s face lit up, and the girl was elated — a ten-year-old girl who can only see the sea from afar.

While Aharon’s volunteer work at *Road to Recovery* is noble, it is a reminder of the power differential between Jews and Palestinians; Jews give, and Palestinians are always on the receiving end. Like any other humanitarian work, it does not seek to promote political change. In their critique, Couliaraki (2013) and Ivanovic (2017) point out that humanitarianism often becomes a branding technique showcasing Western benevolence at the expense of acting for justice and acknowledging the humanitarian’s responsibility for suffering. As Rotem pointed out in her interview, Israelis often categorize Palestinians as either terrorists or victims; the latter position can be as destructive as the former — if a terrorist is unwilling to change his life circumstances, a victim cannot do so, and will always depend on Jewish help.

Political solidarity established through friendship, which is what BG is trying to do, is strikingly different. According to Scholz (2008), solidarity is a form of community building based on the interdependence between its members. The individual feels committed to others because solidarity carries moral obligations with it. Sociologists usually think about solidarity as the force that coheres a society together, assuming its members share traditions, values, and history. Unlike mundane social solidarity, political solidarity arises as a response to injustice or oppression. It is based on a shared commitment to a cause rather than the identarian similarity between members

(p. 34), although, as noted in the two previous chapters, political solidarity between Jews and Palestinians is often founded on a silenced social solidarity; an acknowledgment that Jews and Palestinians share many things in common and a resolution to express this similarity unashamedly.

Thus, the pursuit of justice through solidarity often unearths hybrid identities between seemingly discrete groups, or rather, it exposes how colonialist ideology siloes people from each other as a power move and seeks to abolish this division (Márquez, 2016). Unlike the humanitarian paradigm, in which Palestinians need Israelis to survive, political solidarity helps Israelis reshape their identities through their friendship with Palestinians. Yaron told me how learning Arabic and befriending Palestinians changed his life and forces him to confront his Israeli identity and what is expected of him as an Israeli:

My life in Jerusalem today is completely bilingual. I am always on the move between speaking Hebrew, seeing my cousin who serves in the army, you know, all kinds of Israeli situations, and being in Hebron, sitting down with Palestinians, or in Jerusalem. You know, I pass, both my Arabic and my looks, I'm a bit unusual in this sense, I pass as a Palestinian [...] if I board a taxi in Ramallah, they don't ask questions, *for them, I'm a part of this space* [...] there is a big element of liberation [in this new mode of existence].

Friendship in BG was not only a steppingstone for developing solidarity with Palestinians. It also had practical utility — the managing team of the project is composed of a group of friends, many of whom are leftwing activists based in Jerusalem. They told me how the project was put together, following Yaron's establishing Facebook post, which I discuss in the next section. The team's spontaneity and the division of labor happened while working on the project and constantly shifted. The tasks they had to complete illustrate that BG is primarily a media project — they sought out stories appropriate for translation on WANN, uploaded them to a table shared on

Google Docs with the translators, updated and maintained the project's website, and posted translated stories on its Facebook page. Taken together, BG exemplifies a grassroots, uninstitutionalized form of digital participatory politics used to express civic concerns and advance social change (Jenkins, 2016). The following section focuses on BG's volunteers, how and why they joined the project, their relationship with the managing team, and what translating stories from Gaza meant to them. It also discusses the particular ways in which the affordances of BG's digital platforms help support the project's mission.

4.4.3 Translation as Mediated Listening: BG as a Platform for Justice

In September 2019, Yaron uploaded a post to his personal Facebook page where he told friends about WANN and Ibrahim. He said that he was looking for people who could help him translate stories from English to Hebrew. In two hours, BG had 120 volunteers, forming the backbone of the project. I was among those who read Yaron's post and decided to join in. Communication between translators and the managing team was conducted primarily electronically — the team sifted through hundreds of stories available on WANN's website and shared them with the translators, who would sign up to work on a text. After completing their work, the managing team used the help of professional language editors who made sure the translated texts were legible on the one hand but also maintained the colloquial, everyday language used by writers at WANN. Translators also had a private Facebook group to share issues that came up in the translation process and think about solutions together.

Unlike the managing team, composed of young political activists from Jerusalem, the volunteers came from various backgrounds. One of the apparent differences among translators was their level of professionalism. Heli, for example, is an experienced translator who primarily works

on young adult fiction. She attested that translation is her essence; that she often finds herself mediating between people who disagree with each other, arguing that building discursive bridges is what translations should do. For her, like other professional translators and editors I interviewed, volunteering for BG allowed them to put a unique skill into use and make a significant contribution that is not possible in other forms of activism, like participating in demonstrations. Hassan, a Palestinian translator, told me that his involvement with BG helped him connect with his people even if this connection did not happen through direct conversation, demonstrating the power of media to engage people in intense listening:

Border Gone allowed me [...] it's true that I didn't speak to anyone from there [Gaza] but I felt that by translating their stories I find a connection to their experience, I strengthen these connections by reading their stories, translating them, I do something good for my people.

Many professional translators took their job very seriously and shared some of the hesitations they had when translating the texts. Heli was particularly active on the translator's private Facebook group – in one post, she asked her peers for advice on the correct transliteration of an author's name; she also had questions about the name of the clothes that author was wearing referenced in her story. Heli uploaded the Palestinian author's picture to get the others' advice (see figure 4-2).



Figure 4-2 Seeking out advice on translation issues

Aharon, on the other hand, was the opposite of Heli. A retired banker, he volunteered for many human rights organizations, and BG was just one of them. Admitting he had a lot time on his hands, Aharon was one of the most prolific translators on BG, and his work method suggested why he was so productive — he used Google Translate. Aharon did not adhere to the workflow set by the managing team; he did not settle for picking stories from a table and independently found new materials for translation on WANN’s website. Aharon was particularly interested in Rashid, a young Palestinian from Gaza, and translated everything Rashid wrote. Aharon explained to me that for him, this was an opportunity to connect with Rashid — he tracked him down on Facebook, told him that he was translating his texts to Hebrew, and asked for his advice on some

translation issues. Aharon asked the managing team not to assign Rashid's texts to anyone else — feeling that without them, Rashid will lose interest in speaking to him.

Taken together, BG reflects profound motivations for digital activism. Current literature links motivations to participate with the immediate affordances of the digital platform, like spreading accurate information to many people (Suwana, 2020) or gaining recognition from peers on social media (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Such motivations are easily categorized as 'slacktivism' because they require very little labor (Christensen, 2011). BG demonstrates deep emotional investment in a digital project and its goals, especially when studied beyond the limited scope of sharing, liking, or commenting. Translations require time and attention; even in the case of a translator like Aharon, who spent relatively little time working on his texts, translation became a tool for connecting with a Palestinian from Gaza.

When I talked to Afifa, an Israeli Palestinian, I learned that BG became no less than a life-saving platform. Afifa is a senior health administrator specializing in oncology who works for the largest healthcare provider in Israel. She knew very little about life in Gaza when she first heard about BG, although she herself is a Palestinian. Afifa translated a couple of stories and even met with one of the writers virtually, yet her main involvement in the project was helping make the necessary arrangements so that Ibrahim's mother could receive life-saving treatment for terminal breast cancer in Israel. Since there is a severe lack of access to oncological treatments amply available in Israel, many Palestinians in Gaza are sentenced to death by denying them these therapeutics (e.g., *B'Tselem*, 2021). Afifa eventually managed to get the permits allowing Ibrahim's mother to enter Israel, yet by that point, her breast cancer was too advanced, and she eventually passed away. When other Palestinians learned about Afifa's efforts through a post on BG, they began reaching out to her, asking for similar help. Previous research has shown how

online communities like the Harry Potter Alliance use digital platforms to coordinate humanitarian aid (Jenkins, 2012; Kligler-Vilenchik, 2018; McEvoy-Levy, 2018). However, BG is different because it is a solidarity platform that facilitates a direct connection between Palestinians and Israelis and does not remain a closed club for internal communication among Israelis. Indeed, Afifa, a Palestinian, was able to offer help through BG's digital platform.

Most translators at BG did not go as far as reaching out to Palestinians or helping save lives. For them, the meaningful encounter with Palestinians was happening through stories that touched them in unexpected ways. Several translators told me they liked being given a choice to pick stories from a table; this way, they could work on what felt relevant to them. Lital, a professional editor, discussed one story she translated and shook her profoundly:

I was born and raised in Kibbutz Nahal Oz [located near the Gaza border] [...] the story I translated is called "Honey from Yad Mordechai" [another Kibbutz located close to Gaza] which was truly a punch to the gut for me [...] I don't know what was there in Nahal Oz before 1948, they [the elders of the Kibbutz] used to tell us that Palestinian didn't live there [before the Kibbutz was founded] but these were probably farming lands that belonged to the people of Gaza [...] and she [the Palestinian author] says that her father, after the 1967 [war, when Israel occupied Gaza], *was sent to work in the groves of Yad Mordechai* [in the lands that once belonged to his family], and that is why she doesn't buy honey from Yad Mordechai [which is a popular brand] when she sees it in the supermarket.

Taking the time to read and translate this story, Lital learned something new about her personal history's dark, unspoken side, which undermines the narrative on which she was brought up. The original owners of the lands where she spent her childhood suddenly emerged from their obscurity, and by translating their story Lital gave them the voice that her ancestors tried to silence.

BG became a tool of digital listening to the story of the other side (Lacey, 2013). By making such stories available in Hebrew to Israeli readers, the powerful human message is not limited to Lital's intimate connection to it, as would often happen in intergroup dialogues (Ron & Maoz, 2013). She helped it reach many other Israelis through the disseminating power of digital media.

Border Gone put considerable thought into the public digital platforms of to help promote this type of listening. One of the things that intrigued me about the project was its website. Since Facebook is the primary platform used by BG to publish translated stories, I did not understand why a website was also necessary, especially since building it requires time and labor. Most managing team members gave me the same answer — they saw the website mainly as an archive, where stories are easily accessible. They recognized the ephemerality of the Facebook feed that constantly changes (Kaun & Stiernstedt, 2014; Keightley, 2012), thus making it hard to find specific stories or learn more about its authors, especially if some time has passed since they were posted, requiring visitors to scroll down a long feed.

However, speaking to Vicky, the web designer, revealed careful consideration of the communicative affordances that serve the overall purpose of BG to create a care structure for the lives of Palestinians (Bucher & Helmond, 2018; Katz, 2020). Vicky said that she is most proud of the writers' page that presents a list of the Palestinian contributors from WANN whose stories were translated by BG. The page presents their names and pictures, and when hovering over an image, the beginning of a biography is revealed (see figure 4-3). Clicking on it directs visitors to the writer's full biography; from there, one can access the complete list of their translated stories. Vicky explained: "you see the person, you see the people. I think that the whole idea behind this website is to show that they are regular people, just like us". She added that on the first few days, there were thousands of entries to the website and others in the managing team echoed this

observation — they believed the initial success of BG could be attributed to Israelis’ fascination with the ordinary life of people in Gaza, disassociated from war or terrorism. Israeli contributors — managers, translators, and editors alike — are moved to the background on the website, a deliberate goal of BG. As explained by Moran from the managing team:

Ibrahim is at center stage [...] when someone from the management writes, we keep it vague [...] this entire structure reflects the idea that *we [the Israeli Jews] remain quiet, and now we are translating the voice of those whose voices are unheard.*

Accordingly, the page “join us” invites Israelis to join the translation efforts and contains a simple, alphabetical list of translators and editors without additional information (see figure 4-4).

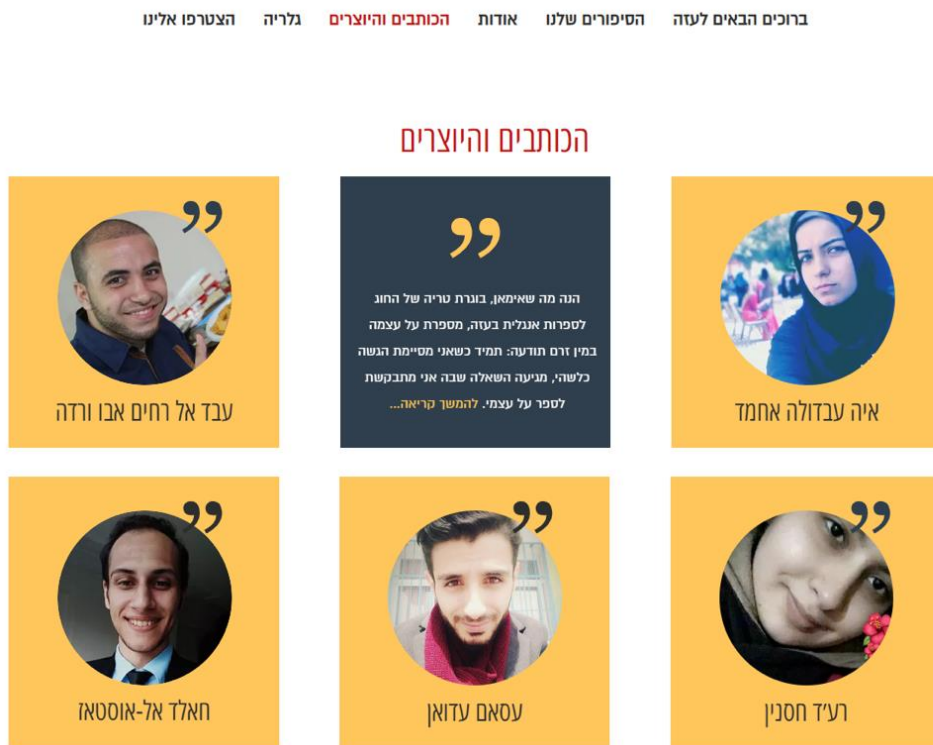


Figure 4-3 Writers’ page on BG’s website



מורגמים ועורכים, לפי סדר אל"ב		מרכיבים
שמואל דוד	ח'אלד אבו ע'אלי	יביל אברם
אבי דולר	יח'רא אבו ע'אליה	אורלי איליסקי
בני-שמעון רז	ג'דה אבו-ע'אמי	רחמי דר
הילה רבנוב	ג'וזף אבו-ע'אמי	מלי מרק
רזי רזניב	אינה אבו-ע'אמי	אלון שרר
ענת הלפר	די אולד	
אורי ריי	ג'ילה אסיף	
יצב זור	ג'ורדן אלמנד	
תמי זיכרוב	ליאור אלמנד	
גיל זכריה	נור אגול	
מכל זכריה	מתן אג	
מירב זק	אור ארן	
סילי זכבני	ג'נה אריאן	
אמל חסן	רחיט בבר שחר	
סיון טל	רזי בוקרנד	
אילה טוריה	ס'וד ג' ד'וי	
חמטל ז'ר	רעות ג' אקב	
יעל יצחק-יעיר	אירי ג' קיר	
	עירי ג' יצקב	
	יעם ג' ס'ול	
	מירית ג'ויאשי	
	ע'בד ג'	
	ח'ת' ו'מל	
		תודות
		רזי
		רמנה שרעבי
		אורי קין
		עיצוב האתר
		רוד ביתן

Figure 4-4 “Join us” page with the list of Israeli translators and editors at the bottom

BG’s Facebook page complements the website. It helps the project reach many people since Facebook is the most popular social media in Israel (Samuel-Azran et al., 2018). It is also more suitable than other social media platforms to engage with long texts like personal stories and develop a conversation about them (Bossetta, 2018; Neuberger et al., 2019). As I will show in chapter 5, comments on the stories were often adversarial if not toxic, urging Palestinians to topple Hamas to improve their lives and vindicating Israel from any fault to the dire situation in Gaza. Such comments left me wondering whether Facebook was an appropriate platform for BG, especially since they divert the attention away from stories, shut down listening, and lead the conversation back to dead-end verbal attacks. Rivka, one of the project’s managers, disagreed with my observation:

All comments, even the most vicious ones, like “go to Hamas! Why don’t you talk to them?” also mean “hey! You are people! But why do you let Hamas destroy you?” — I believe this also reflects altered consciousness [...] what moved me the most in these Facebook conversations *is that they were all directed towards the people in Gaza*, saying “why do you do this?” or “why don’t you do that?”. Sometimes comments were directed at us [the managing team] [...] *but mostly people [Israelis] were speaking to Gazans, which I believe is something, even if it is the cruelest comment [...] because it creates communication.*

Ambiguity is a crucial feature of BG’s Facebook page in the first stage of the project. Since the platform is designed to centralize Palestinian writers, posts create a sense of direct conversation with Israelis, who are surprised to read Palestinian stories in eloquent Hebrew. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, this high-level Hebrew led some Israeli commenters to question the authenticity of the stories, and argue that Hamas operated BG as a psychological warfare tool against Israel. Like the BG’s website, translators and editors are moved to the background, their names only mentioned at the end of each post. As pointed out by Rivka, direct conversation is powerful because it establishes communication, highlighting the phatic function of these posts as a first yet essential step in every communicative act (Jakobson, 1960). I disagree with Miller (2017), who argues that phatic communication on social media, seeking merely to establish an open line of communication, is “idle talk” that cannot lead to social change. In cases like the violent conflict in Israel/Palestine, the existence of that communication is revolutionary in and of itself, even it is far from being built on trust or friendship. The managers of BG worked to sustain this sense of live, ongoing conversation when Ibrahim was invited to write posts where he responded

to allegations raised by Jewish commentators during the May 2021, representing the Palestinian side. I will delve into these conversations in the next chapter.

While the relatively soft introduction of Israelis to life in Gaza helped humanize the people who live there, the managing team of BG realized it needed to produce a different type of content, expanding its operation to become an independent news outlet that publishes original stories written by journalists from Gaza. I use the last section to reflect on the transition to the second stage of the project, discussing the motivations to make this move and the implications on BG in its entirety.

4.4.4 Moving to the Second Stage: Sharpening the Political Edge of BG

On 17 February 2021, a new post was pinned to the public Facebook page of BG, announcing the transition to a new stage. It was strikingly different from the post uploaded in late 2019 when BG began operating. The earlier post creates the impression that the project was run by young Palestinians who wanted to speak to Israelis directly and inform them about life in Gaza. As noted earlier, this direct speech obfuscated the work of Israelis who translated and edited stories. On the other hand, the more recent post is much more transparent about the project's operation and political agenda. It clarifies that BG includes both Israelis and Palestinians working together and lays out a clear political vision — reimagining Israel/Palestine as a single space that guarantees equality and justice to all its inhabitants, Jews and Palestinians alike. In other words, it spells out the guiding principles of the one-state solution (O'Malley, 2016; Tilley, 2010), abandoning the two-state solution that is still seen, at least declaratively, as the desirable solution to the conflict by the international community and Israel (B. Miller, 2016; Security Council, 2016; Ziv, 2019). Practically, the second stage marks a shift towards the production of original content by BG,

ceasing its absolute reliance on texts already produced by WANN. It makes BG the first Israeli news outlet exclusively devoted to reporting news from Gaza.

While BG pledged to be more political in its second stage, it remained committed to focusing on ordinary people. The result was stories explaining how the Israeli occupation of the Strip affects the everyday lives of Palestinians, supplementing them with appropriate interpretation and analysis highlighting its political implications. For example, one story, published in March 2021, revolved around Mother's Day; it focuses on Nasreen, a Palestinian woman from Gaza, married to a man from the West Bank. She has not met four of her five children in three years because they live with their father. Had the story been written by Nasreen on WANN, it would have probably ended there, with Nasreen's personal pain. However, BG sought to broaden the discussion to turn the story into a well-rounded news article based on multiple sources; it was also constructed as a case study, used to illustrate a social phenomenon, teaching readers something about their worlds (Cotter, 2010; Frost, 2010; Gerbner et al., 1978). Therefore, the piece also includes an interview with Nasreen's son, sharing his perspective on living apart from his mother. It explains that Nasreen's story is not unique; it is the result of the deliberate separation of Gaza from the West Bank imposed by Israel's military control that tears families apart.

I discussed the meaning of the evolution of BG with the managing team extensively, primarily because interviews were held when these changes were taking place. At the practical level, BG began receiving financial support from Physicians for Human Rights — a major, well-established Israeli human rights organization. Consequently, BG, which was run and managed on a purely voluntarily basis up to that point, was able to hire and pay a handful of the managing team — Ibrahim, Yaron, Elisheva, and Aisha, who was not a part of the first stage, becoming the first Israeli Palestinian helping manage the project. BG also recruited Hisham, a Palestinian journalist

based in Gaza who provides the project with most of its raw materials. BG makes tremendous efforts to conceal Hisham's real identity, knowing that he will be in great danger if Hamas finds out he works with Israelis.

Moran explained the need for this transformation with the gradual ebbing of the initial excitement around the project, among managers and visitors:

At some point, the stories [from WANN] began to feel a bit boring and repetitive. We suddenly felt we are not challenging the current discourse strongly enough, and all the stories began to sound the same [...] we saw that [BG] was beginning to lose its power; fewer shares, fewer likes [on Facebook] — it was reflected on the traffic [data]. *After a post or two [Israelis] got the point — there are people in Gaza.* Perhaps it's not about "getting the point," but the medium [BG] was not surprising anymore.

Moran reflects on the common problems of newsworthiness — and the need to dramatize stories to make them more appealing (Caple, 2018; Wolfsfeld, 2004). However, as Moran pointed out, the goal of the second stage is not only to make the content more exciting but to pose a clear, unapologetic demand to change the status quo — a change that cannot be achieved without being explicitly political. Elisheva underscored this point:

We want to bring a story that comes with a demand and a political vision *to take responsibility* and observe reality differently. I envision it happening in stages; the more advanced stage, of higher solidarity — you [the Palestinian from Gaza] are a human being, above anything else, a humanistic perspective [promoted by the first stage], *but you are also a person with national aspirations who has been oppressed by a government, a regime and an army that represent me* [the Israeli Jew].

This tension between the first and the second stage of BG goes back to the tension between the different models for intergroup dialogues; the coexistence model, concentrating on finding common ground between Israelis and Palestinian and the confrontational model, insisting on speaking openly about the political situation in Israel/Palestine and addressing its injustices (Maoz, 2011). When transitioning between the two, what is at stake is quite similar to the dilemmas of BG since confrontational stories, demanding that Israelis acknowledge their responsibility for Palestinian suffering, can alienate Israeli readers. However, if such demands are integrated into personal stories, it is harder to refute or reject them as mere propaganda because they are embedded in everyday life. In the next chapter, I will examine the political power of descriptive stories more closely. Such stories demonstrate the power of storylistening as ethics, exposing listeners to unyieldingly political narratives while remaining human and relatable.

4.5 The Ethics of Nonreciprocal Storylistening as a Road for Peace

We Are Not Numbers was not designed for an Israeli audience; its managers did not imagine Israelis finding interest in it, especially since it articulates direct criticism against Israeli policies. Written in English, stories on WANN plead the world to listen and recognize Palestinian suffering, perhaps in the hope that it could lead to international pressure, convincing Israel to change its policies. When the Israeli managers of *Border Gone* were looking for volunteers in late 2019, they were not entirely sure either if the project was viable. They were proven wrong by the unbelievable response to Yaron's first post, alongside the past-paced development of the project, turning in only one year from a small initiative run by a group of friends from Jerusalem and a London-based Palestinian to an independent news outlet funded by a prominent human rights organization.

It proves that there is hunger on the Israeli side to hear different stories, ones that go beyond the narratives of war and destruction offered by both politicians like Benny Gantz, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and the mainstream news media in Israel. Stories that focus on the everyday lives of Palestinians and promote everyday peace. Palestinians get an opportunity to speak for themselves instead of having others speak on their behalf. This innovative episteme for Gaza, so simple yet so rare, became possible by the mutual curiosity Yaron and Ibrahim expressed towards each other and the friendship they have built, happening at a personal, intimate level. A friendship independent of reciprocity because it acknowledges the stark power differential between them. The burden of listening lies on the powerful or the privileged, especially if that power or privilege leads to the weak side's oppression. Only then can listening become a steppingstone for peace; the beginning of healing that recognizes injustice and seeks to rectify it.

Therefore, nonreciprocal storylistening is an ethical position in the context of violent conflict. It happens intersubjectively and not only for the sake of meaning-making; it reconstitutes the speaker, whose voice is finally heard, humanizes them, and validates their experience — making it a lived reality whose consequences must be addressed. Simultaneously, this type of listening reconstitutes the listener; beyond the immediate blame and shame, which are often essential for taking responsibility, it reveals a profound truth obfuscated by state ideology that seeks to maintain “us” separate from “them.” In the process of learning to speak Arabic and investigating Palestinian life and culture, Yaron found peace, a sense of internal liberation once he became naturalized in Ramallah, being able to take a taxi ride without drawing any special attention. In this sense, Yaron found the solution Doron from *Fauda* is looking for — he feels welcome and naturalized in the West Bank, using his skills to connect people rather than separate them.

Consequently, BG is a project of solidarity rather than humanitarianism; the Israelis managing, translating, or editing stories on BG do not do Palestinians a favor by letting them speak; instead, they seek to learn something new about them and about themselves. By taking the time to dive deeply into stories, they expand their knowledge and expand the ability to articulate what it means to be a Palestinian from Gaza in Hebrew, the signature of good translation. Translation is the epitome of listening; translators and editors who volunteered for BG spent considerable time reading the original texts, struggling to understand what the author meant to say in English — although the experience happened in Arabic — and figure out how to make it legible to an Israeli audience. Translators could pick their work from a table; while choosing allowed them to avoid challenging texts, some chose to translate a text because it was challenging. This reflexive process, often described as a “punch to the gut,” means that they had to work through these texts, just like the television industry professionals interviewed in chapter 3.

However, translations were not designed as a self-contemplation exercise for the BG volunteers’ community. BG departs from the formula set by intergroup dialogues that are based on physical, interpersonal encounters. It established two complementary digital platforms where stories are disseminated to the world — a website that affords searchability and allows visitors to get to know the Palestinian writers better; and a Facebook page that affords discussion and can reach wide readership by operating within the most popular social media platform in Israel. Both platforms highlight Palestinian writers and their experience, deliberately minimizing Israeli contribution to the project and expecting no reciprocation. Thus, BG sets a standard for digital storylistening as a tool for everyday peace invested in carving out space where the story of someone other than yourself, someone your people have fought for decades, can be heard.

Therefore, it pushes back on the idea that reciprocity is essential to both digital culture (e.g., Lewis, 2015; Pelaprat & Brown, 2012) and peace dialogues (Bar-On, 2006; Maoz, 2011).

The transition into the second stage crystallized BG as an activist project with a clear vision for a radical change of the political status quo. By making this move, it ran the risk of alienating its Israeli readers, the vast majority of whom reject the idea of one state between the river and the sea (*The Palestine/Israel Pulse, a Joint Poll*, 2020). Nevertheless, the managers of BG believed that insisting on their vision was a virtue; that even if most Israelis will not be persuaded by the heartbreaking stories told on this platform, at least they have done their best to make these stories heard.

Chapter 5 Peace as Solidarity and the Power of Description on *Border Gone*

5.1 Visiting Family, Experiencing War

We landed in Israel in early May 2021 for the first time in three years. My son was born in the U.S. in early 2020, and this trip was his first opportunity to meet the extended family after visits were repeatedly postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. We had to quarantine right after we landed; I had plans to meet with loved ones while conducting essential fieldwork. After interviewing members of the *Border Gone* community during the winter over Zoom, I wanted to use this opportunity to meet with them in person and learn more about the platform. I was excited to study the transition to the second stage of the project, discussed in the previous chapter, in which BG began publishing original stories from Gaza. I wanted to participate in the reimagining of BG as an independent, politically-conscious news platform that works towards social change.

When we finished quarantining, I met with Elisheva, one of the project's managers, in Jerusalem on May 9. The atmosphere in Israel was tense; Jerusalem Day, which celebrates the Israeli occupation of the eastern city in 1967, was scheduled for the following day. Elisheva organized a demonstration in front of city hall, urging officials to cancel one of the ugliest traditions of this day — Jewish youth marching through the old city, singing and chanting hateful slogans at Palestinians, forcing merchants to close shops in fear of violence. Simultaneously, Israel's ongoing political crisis had reached a boiling point. Benjamin Netanyahu, who had been prime minister for 12 years, failed to secure a stable coalition after four general elections, taking place over only two years. Simultaneously, Netanyahu faced trial for corruption charges.

May 2021 was also the holy month of Ramadan, leading to multiple violent clashes between the Israeli police and Palestinian worshippers, coming to pray in the Temple Mount every evening after the daily fast was broken. In a different part of the eastern city, the Palestinian neighborhood Sheikh Jarrah, residents were facing the threat of eviction by Jewish settlers who claimed the houses where they had lived for decades for themselves. Palestinians from across Israel joined protests in the neighborhood; Netanyahu's extreme rightwing political ally, Itamar Ben-Gvir, decided to move his office to Sheikh Jarrah, making tensions even higher.

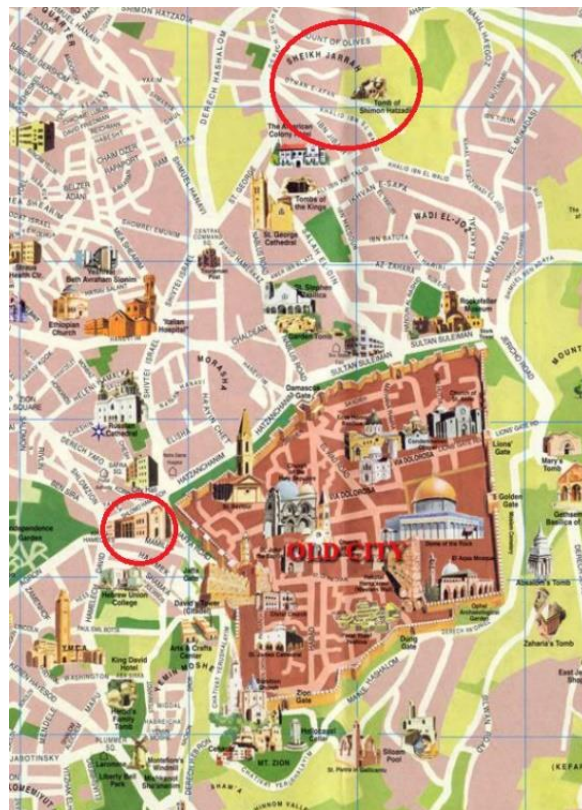


Figure 5-1 A map of eastern Jerusalem. The city hall (west of the old city) and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood (north of the old city) are in red

Elisheva was late, so I decided to stroll around the old city, expecting to see remnants of confrontations from previous nights, yet the city was surprisingly calm. I walked the narrow,

cobblestoned lanes; looked at the tiny shops with their owners sitting close together, out on the street, observing passersby and chatting about going to the mosque to pray; I watched the people surrounding me — tourists, monks, religious Jews, and Palestinian shopkeepers. The serenity of this scene, the mundaneness of coexistence, reminded me that peace is part and parcel of everyday life while war is a performance, a spectacle, an event (Bakogianni, 2015; Sontag, 2003).

When I left the old city, I noticed a group of police officers attending a briefing while overlooking the city's walls from a hill nearby; they were getting ready for the evening hours when violence was expected. I turned away and went back to the city hall, waiting for Elisheva; I heard the sound checks conducted on a stage erected on the central court adjacent to the building, preparing for the upcoming celebrations of Jerusalem Day. A group of security guards was checking the perimeter, and their boss demanded professionalism from everybody, warning that “nobody comes in without a ticket, and you can't let your friends in if they don't have one. if you don't follow protocol — you're fired”. The war started the following day, after Israel ignored an ultimatum issued by Hamas to retreat its forces from Jerusalem. On May 10, Hamas fired rockets to Jerusalem and later Tel Aviv. Israel retaliated with massive bombings in Gaza.

My family and I were lucky. Staying with my in-laws in a town 25 kilometers east of Tel Aviv, we were far enough from the metropolitan area, which was heavily targeted. We also knew that we would have ample time, a minute and a half once we hear the siren, to go to the “secure room” in the house — built of fortified concrete and double glass windows, it provides good protection in the case of a direct hit. Sirens did go off a few times, mainly in the evening. It was scary, especially since we had to wake up our son, who was adjusting to his new bed routine. We had to take him to the secure room, half asleep, making as little noise as possible and keeping the lights down so he would stay calm. While the experience was far from what we envisioned in the

months leading up to our trip, I did not feel we were in real danger. The integrated system of sirens, the secure room, and Iron Dome — a cutting-edge rocket interception system — meant that we were as safe as possible under these difficult circumstances.

The situation in Gaza, however, was very different. While civilians on both sides suffered tremendously during the war, Gazans were facing one of the strongest and most technologically-advanced armies in the world. Gaza was already devastated by previous wars leaving large swaths of the Strip in ruins; ordinary people on the other side had nowhere to hide, no system intercepting the Israeli army's powerful bombs, and a constant feeling of inevitable death haunting them. On May 11, I was texting with Elisheva, who quickly assembled a group of volunteers to help the core managers of *Border Gone* report on the experiences of Palestinians in Gaza. I joined immediately. It was a surreal experience; since I was sharing a living space with my relatives, it was impossible to leave the house and find a quiet place to work. Instead, I was sitting in the living room with my laptop and phone, texting with BG members over the “Gaza Emergency Room” group we opened on Whatsapp. My job was to search Palestinian news sites to find information about what was happening on the other side or sift through social media profiles to illuminate lost Palestinian lives in the collaborative attempt to show Israelis that there were people behind the numbers presented dryly on mainstream news. After collecting information and editing it, BG uploaded posts to its Facebook page. Israelis could read what was happening in Gaza in Hebrew and engage in a conversation on the posts' comments sections.

BG was unique in the Israeli news media landscape. When a war breaks in Israel, news reporting immediately shifts into an old ritual of disaster marathons — television and radio channels provide nonstop live broadcasting of horrendous images, suspending all entertainment shows. The news focused on pain of Israeli families, interviews with eye-witnesses crying on

camera, and overviews of the destruction caused by rockets fired from Gaza. These reports were interweaved with conversations with high-ranked military officers giving citizens advice on protecting themselves, alongside studio panels of ex-military men in suits echoing each other, urging the government to use brute, merciless force against Gaza, amounting to war crimes (Noy, 2021). The informative value of a disaster marathon decreases the longer it extends, as reports become increasingly repetitive; there is no room for a critical examination of the complex political context that makes violence possible, even predictable (Liebes, 1998). Citizens and journalists tend to rally around the flag during war, especially when journalists become dependent on the army for information (Brandenburg, 2007; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). I found myself arguing with family, trying to explain why it is crucial to learn about the experience of Palestinians given the informational homogeneity of television news, running cyclically in the background like a constant hum as I was trying to concentrate on work. I had to explain how I could empathize with the pain of Palestinians, the enemy, while they were firing rockets at our family.

In this chapter, I investigate the operation of *Border Gone* throughout the ten days of the war in Gaza, taking place between May 11-20, 2021, and in the months leading up to it. I argue that peace is possible even during the darkest of times when Israelis and Palestinians work together to make shocking stories from Gaza public, stories rarely told by the mainstream Israeli news media. In the previous chapter, I focused on the establishment of *Border Gone*; I contended it is a project of nonreciprocal listening based on a deep commitment to Jewish-Palestinian solidarity. In this chapter, I explore the encounter of Jewish readers with the texts posted by BG on Facebook before and during the May 2021 war. I also look at the collaboration between Jewish and Palestinian managers of the project during the war. I point out how the solidarity within the managing team gave solace to its members, particularly to the Palestinian ones, for whom the

stories of destruction from Gaza were unbearable. These stories managed to reach some Jewish commenters and galvanize them to reconsider their perception of Gaza despite impossible political circumstances. These Jewish readers were able to perform close, trusting reading of Palestinian stories, based on their powerful descriptive nature. In the following section, I explain the difference between close and deep reading and why the descriptive writing is often more effective than prescriptive writing or critical reading.

5.2 Mixing the Cement: The Power of Description

In September 1987, Ehud Banai, a famous Israeli singer-songwriter, released his debut album. The album included many protest songs; one of them criticized the racist treatment Ethiopian Jews received when they immigrated to Israel in the early 1980s. Another memorable hit was “mix the cement Ahmed.” Appearing only a couple of months prior to the Intifada, the first Palestinian popular uprising against Israel, the song tells the story of a Palestinian construction worker from Gaza and his daily routine of going to work in Tel Aviv, building houses for the Jews²¹:

5 am, it's still freezing cold in Gaza / I'm tired
I enter Nabil's car / and fall asleep on his shoulder
On our way, in the roadblock / they say: “stop! documents!”
We will get to Tel Aviv in an hour / just another workday
Mix the cement Ahmed

²¹ The album was released many years prior to the Israeli siege on Gaza; many Palestinians from Gaza worked in Israel as cheap manual labor at the time.

In an interview Banai gave celebrating thirty years for the album's release, he remembered the negative responses the song received for its controversial message. He underscored the undeniability of the situation described in "mix the cement":

"I don't think anyone can come and argue with me about this song, even if they have a different political opinion — I'm on the left and they're on the right. What are they going to tell me? *that Ahmed doesn't mix cement* [in real life]? [...] the message in the lyrics is implicit. I don't talk openly about the rights of the Palestinian people; I just try to present Ahmed as a human being, not as an enemy, as someone who has the right to wake up in the morning and live like a human being. I felt like no one could argue with that" (quoted in Friedman, 2017).

Banai knows that had he written a didactic manifest calling for the liberation of Palestine —nobody would listen. However, focusing on the daily routine of a Palestinian bricklayer crystallizes the political in everyday life; Ahmed needs to wake up before dawn every morning and go through the humiliating experience of the roadblock just to get in time to Tel Aviv to build houses for those who oppress him. This point underlines that everyday peace is a critical, deeply political approach. Its insistence on everyday life does not mean that it ignores power dynamics. It is exactly because of this focus on the everyday that this approach can reveal how people are experiencing power. By thinking critically on these mundane practices, a creative understanding of peace can emerge.

Banai's storytelling made Ahmed real; he was no longer the faceless terrorist from the news but a real person, whom Israelis see on a scaffold or a crane in a construction site in their neighborhoods. His insistence on description, making an invisible person present in the text is often lost in critical inquiry. Deep reading is a longstanding methodology in many critical traditions. Dating back to Marx (1906), the distinction between base and superstructure means that

all fields of social knowledge, like law or politics, are superimposed on a material base that puts social processes in motion. The way to expose power structures is by conducting deep readings of texts that operate at the superstructural, discursive level, naturalizing and neutralizing the unequal distribution of material resources. Deep reading as a method was adopted by multiple critical traditions like feminism (Friedan, 1963), postcolonialism (Said, 1978), critical studies of sexuality (Foucault, 1978), and race (Harris, 1993). These studies revealed how texts written by those in power have helped keep it in their hands. However, what happens if a text is not written about a disempowered community but by or in solidarity with it? What is lost when scholars explain a text by exposing its supposedly deep, true meaning?

Deep reading is the primary method used by the New Criticism movement in literary studies, which gained prominence in the 20th century. Moving away from earlier approaches that paid considerable attention to the authors' biographies, New Criticism argued for deep readings that focus solely on analyzing the text and its multilayered meanings; they saw the text as a gateway to the richness of life, making it worthy of careful attention. In response, distant reading was developed as an alternative to close reading — in this paradigm, literary texts are datapoints, and studies are based on the aggregation of many texts to look for patterns and correlations, similar to data analysis in social sciences. Love (2010) critiques both distant and deep readings — she does not want to lose the nuance of the single text but does not want to add a layer of “deep” meaning either, a meaning that conveniently only the researcher can reveal. Instead, she argues for “a close but not deep” reading that values the power of description:

Good descriptions are in a sense rich, but not because they truck with imponderables like human experience or human nature. They are close, but they are not deep; rather than

adding anything “extra” to the description, they account for the real *variety that is already there* (p. 377, see also Best & Marcus, 2009).

Love (2010) demonstrates this method in her analysis of Toni Morrison’s canonical *Beloved* (1987), bringing to the fore a scene in the book ignored by most scholars because of the ruthlessness of the description. However, the scene, in which slave catchers observe Sethe killing her children, demonstrates the real, tangible effects slavery had on African Americans — an affect preceding “deep” ideology like abolition (p. 386; see also Papacharissi, 2014).

Latour (2005) expands this intervention, moving it from the methodological to the epistemological. He challenges the assumption that it is possible to disentangle society from other domains like law or politics, arguing, for example, that new legislation is the result of shifting power dynamics in society or vice versa. For him, any attempt to establish causality — in which society (or culture) are either dependent or independent variables is futile because society is constantly in flux, forming new associations in every iteration. Every time we utter words like “France,” “Capitalism,” or “University,” they take on new meanings. Thus, the way to understand new phenomena is to follow actors and their “crazy innovations” (p. 12); in other words, Latour suggests foregoing explanations or prescriptions. As discussed in the introduction, most peace studies try to do the latter; they try to analyze a given political situation, usually at the level of the international system, and predict under which circumstances peace can be made possible. Everyday peace, invested in description, assumes that truth is already there and does not need to be “revealed”. Similarly, peace is already there, present in texts and people’s everyday practices — we just need to look closely to notice it.

What happens when Israelis encounter powerful descriptions of Palestinian suffering? Can they move beyond their ideological footing, Zionism, and find a way to identify with Palestinian

stories? How do two different social media platforms, Facebook and Whatsapp, function as mediators for these encounters, and do they promote peace? I address these questions in the rest of this chapter.

5.3 Integrated Analysis: Texts, Comments, and Production

I triangulated three corpora in this study. First, I analyzed the stories uploaded by *Border Gone*, beginning with the establishment of the platform (December 19, 2019) and ending with the last stories about the May 2021 war (May 22, 2021). Note that while the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas went into effect at 2am on May 21, BG continued to post stories discussing its immediate aftermath the following day. Overall, the corpus includes 116 posts.

Second, I analyzed the comments to these posts, written primarily by Israeli Jews. Overall, these posts contain 20,356 comments. I did not analyze all of them; Facebook's algorithm uses a filtering tool that prioritizes certain comments over others while hiding those deemed as spam. I tried to overcome algorithmic filtering by clicking "all comments" instead of "most relevant" in some posts before starting to read. However, I observed that Facebook's filtering algorithm is mostly successful — interesting comments usually appear first — probably because they attract many reactions. Comments at the bottom of the thread were often less articulate, laden with misspellings, adding little new information, or trying to sabotage the post through trolling, which I discuss below. Each post and its subsequent comment section were screenshotted, allowing me to pay close attention to the conversational nature of the thread, in which commenters talk to each other and often go on tangents hardly related to the original story (Farina, 2020). I read comments until I reached a point of saturation where they became repetitive, adding no new information to

my analysis (Hennink & Kaiser, 2019). I began reading posts from the oldest to the newest, giving me a complete picture of the evolution of reactions to the project leading into the May 2021 war.

As I will demonstrate in the next section, the May 2021 war was the peak of BG's activity, resulting in an exponential increase in reactions. The project's success during the war resulted from a concentrated effort of six members of the managing team with the help of five volunteers, me included. While some work was done offline during the war, group members collaborated virtually, using a designated Whatsapp group called Gaza Emergency Room (غرفة طوارئ غزة, in Arabic) to communicate. We were in good company; Whatsapp has become a popular tool for communication among professionals, including surgeons (Koparal et al., 2019), journalists (Dodds, 2019), and teachers (Cansoy, 2017), as well as a pedagogical tool (e.g., Escobar-Mamani & Gómez-Arteta, 2020; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018).

Whatsapp's popularity can be explained through the platform's affordances; linked directly to the user's phone number, it is different from other social media that revolve around a newsfeed like Twitter or Facebook. As an instant messaging app, Whatsapp often replaces texting because it allows users to form groups with regular members, creating, in our case, a virtual newsroom. Users join groups through a direct invitation from admins or by clicking a circulating link. In both cases, admins have the power to boot whomever they please, resulting in a conversational space that is both open for free exchange among members and also highly regulated by administrators. Whatsapp is considered safe for its end-to-end encryption technology, encouraging activists wary of surveillance to use it (Pang & Woo, 2020). Communication over Whatsapp often takes a multimedia form — while most communication on the Emergency Room group happened via texts, we also incorporated voice messages, images, videos, and links to Google Docs, where the

group worked on ideas and drafts for posts collaboratively. Overall, I analyzed 891 text messages and 128 multimedia artifacts.

There were four dominant participants in the Emergency Room conversations – I interviewed all four before the war for the previous chapter and use the same pseudonyms here for consistency. Elisheva, an Israeli Jew, was responsible of operation logistics — she recruited volunteers, coordinated video conferences, and met with members offline. Yaron and Ibrahim, the co-founders of *Border Gone*, were very dominant on the Whatsapp group. As a Gazan based in London, Ibrahim wrote many posts published during the war, presenting his perspective on the situation in Gaza and providing helpful information about places destroyed in bombings. Yaron, an Israeli Jew, conducted interviews in Arabic with people in Gaza that were translated and posted on the page. Aisha, a Palestinian Israeli, also conducted interviews with people in Gaza and sent the group links to information published on Palestinian news channels and social media accounts. Yaron, Ibrahim, and Aisha were constantly engaged in conversation about what should be published, when, what message we were trying to convey, and what impact we were trying to achieve through our work. Another noteworthy member of the team was Hisham. Hisham is a Palestinian journalist based in Gaza and employed by BG; while he did not participate in the conversation on the Emergency Room, Hisham wrote a diary published daily on BG’s Facebook page throughout the war. Unlike Ibrahim, who was able to publish under his real name because he lives in exile, Hisham’s had to use a pseudonym to protect himself. Meetings with Hisham were sensitive, and I was not allowed to attend them.

Given the participants' various cultural and linguistic backgrounds, most conversations were held in Arabic — a language everybody understood. Ibrahim does not speak Hebrew, so conversations in Hebrew were seldom held between Yaron, Elisheva, Aisha, and myself; there

were also a few conversations in English. In the following sections, I will indicate which language was used in every quoted interaction taken from the Gaza Emergency Room.

I was an active participant in the Emergency Room conversations and enjoyed brainstorming with other members. As I already mentioned multiple times throughout this manuscript — I am not indifferent to the project’s goals — I identify with BG’s vision and try to contribute from my knowledge and experience to make it a success. However, my duties as a member were limited to collecting raw materials in Arabic, translating them to Hebrew, and adding them to a Google Doc — I did not conduct interviews, nor did I write any opinion pieces. Ultimately, none of my materials was published, helping me maintain a fair balance between being a participant and an observer, distant and close (Goffman, 1989; Stoller, 2014). I informed participants in the Emergency Room of my intention to study the group; I also received consent from the project managers to collect and save the record of the Emergency Room transcripts.

I will begin my discussion on the reactions to BG prior to the war, moving from the first stage of the project, exclusively devoted to translations of texts written by Palestinians in Gaza, leading into the second stage when BG transformed into an independent news outlet, generating original content. I will then devote most of my attention to BG’s operation during the May 2021 war, presenting an integrative approach that brings together texts, comments, and production.

5.4 Foundations: Overview and Reactions to *Border Gone* before the War

5.4.1 A Bird’s-Eye View of Border Gone’s Operation: The First Two Years

At the time of writing, *Border Gone* has been operating for two years, its first post uploaded on December 19, 2019. As illustrated in figure 5-2, the platform had ebbs and flows, supporting findings from the previous chapter. The project's first stage ended in September 2020; during this

period, BG was entirely devoted to its partnership with the Gazan project *We Are Not Numbers*, discussed extensively in chapter 4. Supported by hundreds of Jewish Israeli volunteers, stories written in English by members of WANN were translated to Hebrew and uploaded to BG’s Facebook page and website. On average, 6.7 stories were posted every month, drawing an average of 243 reactions per post, including comments, shares, and likes (see figure 5-3). The standard deviation for this stage is 447 reactions, meaning that there was considerable fluctuation in the number of reactions a post received — some got as little as six while the most successful post, published on September 3, 2020, received 3,232 reactions. This post, reporting that three children in Gaza were burnt to death in their beds, marked a turning point in the project’s operation, which I discuss below.

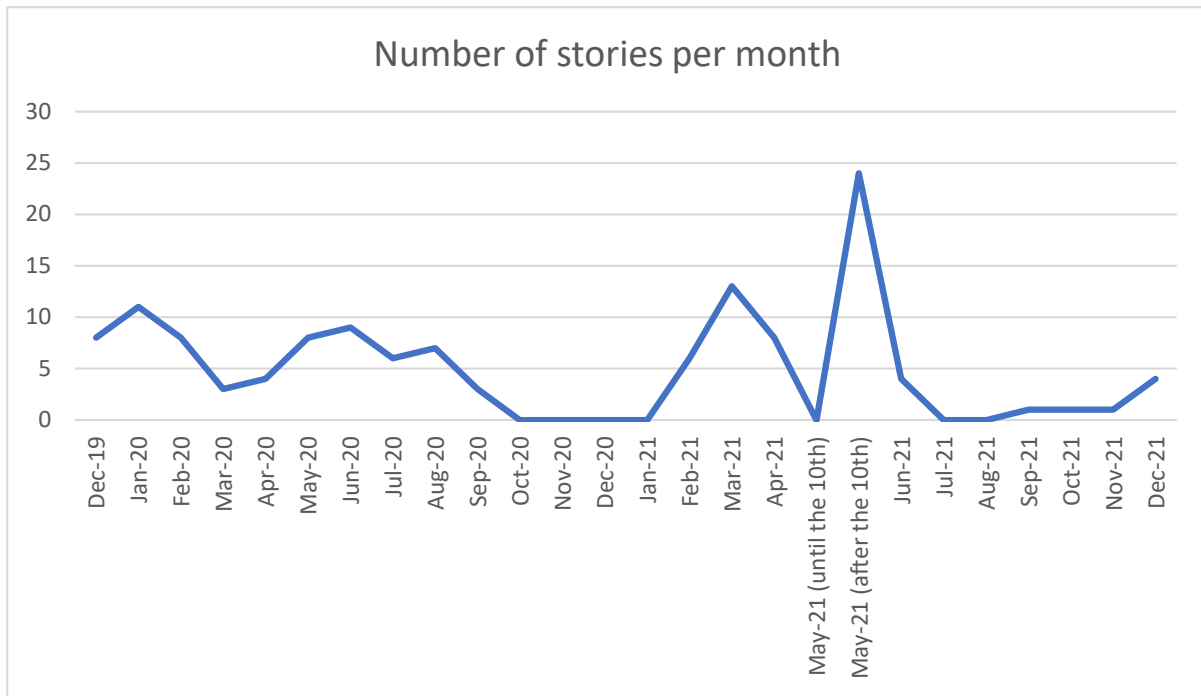


Figure 5-2 Distribution of posts per month

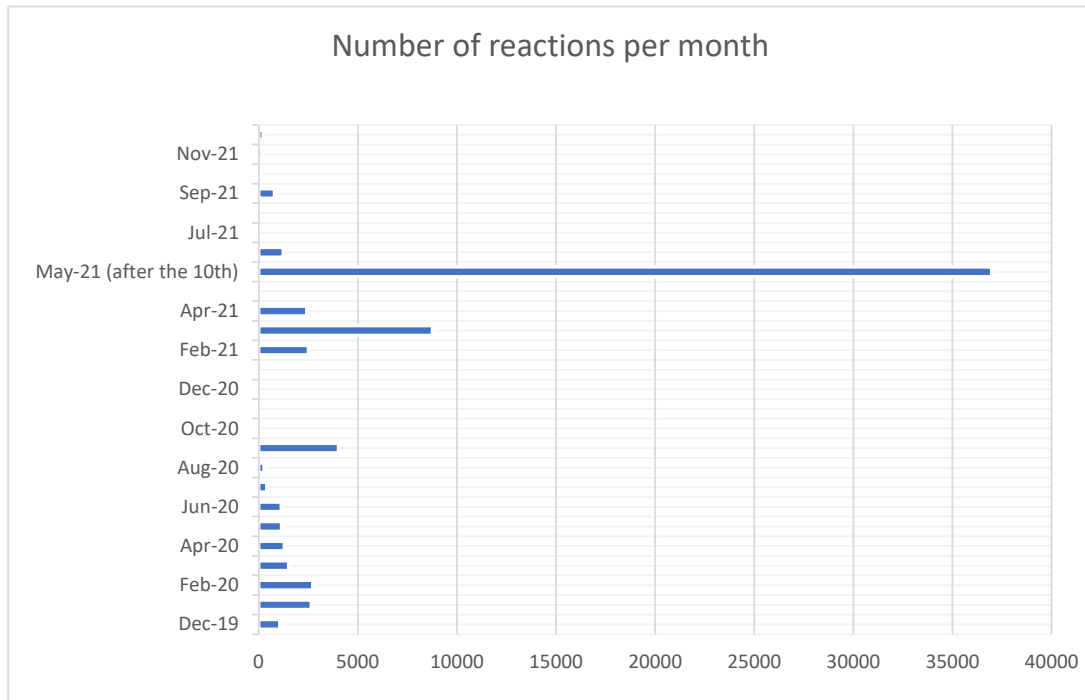


Figure 5-3 Distribution of reactions to posts per month

Border Gone stopped uploading posts for four months (October 2020-January 2021), resuming operation in February 2021 by announcing its transition into the second stage on February 17, 2021. This announcement is still pinned to the top of the page today; as discussed on chapter 4, the second stage marked a new commitment to creating original content and not only translating existing texts; the new *Border Gone* openly expresses its investment in a profound political change in Israel/Palestine. The second stage, beginning in February 2021 and ending in April 2021, also led to more content generated by the project, with an average of 9 uploads per month. Reactions doubled (508 on average), yet coupled with a double standard deviation of 810 reactions, the page continued to struggle with inconsistencies in its popularity.

The breakthrough moment for *Border Gone* was the May 2021 war. After not uploading anything at the beginning of the month, the project exploded with 24 posts published between May 11-22, with as many as three posts per day during the most intense days of the war. The number

of reactions was at a completely different level; half of the posts received a thousand reactions or more, with the most popular post receiving a staggering 7,338 reactions – the largest number in BG’s history. Overall, posts received 36,978 reactions during the second half of May 2021, constituting 53% of all the reactions *Border Gone* has ever received. After the war, the project dwindled again, hardly generating new content between June-December 2021.

5.4.2 The First stage: December 2019-October 2020

One of *Border Gone*’s first publications was its initial mission statement. The statement obfuscated the work of Jewish mediators in translating and editing the texts, as if Gazans were speaking directly to Israeli readers, expressing their desire to connect. It led to confusion among Jewish readers, who were perplexed to see stories from Palestinians in Gaza written in perfect Hebrew. It stated: “We are young people from Gaza who want you to hear our stories with no filters [...] we want to raise awareness to life in Gaza and change the policy that drives us apart”. Israelis responded with both curiosity and suspicion. Reacting to Ran, who blamed Hamas for suffering in Gaza, Tom pleaded him to use this platform to educate himself:” [...] Please read the stories written by the people themselves instead of determining for them how they live and who controls their lives”. Ziv provided political context to this conversation, reminding Ran of the realities of the Israeli occupation and the siege on Gaza: “There is no pride in being the prison guards of 2 million people. This is the longest collective punishment in history. There is no reason for us to manage their finances nor their power supply”.

Suspicion towards the platform was expressed by Albert, who said that the purpose of the post was to make Israel weaker, contending that the “New Israel Fund must be involved”. The NIF is civil society organization that has become a popular scapegoat in Israel in an ongoing

delegitimization campaign against human rights organizations (H. Katz & Gidron, 2021). Some commenters tried to poke holes in stories, looking for inconsistencies that they believed proved they were fake. For example, Amira, whose story was posted on December 26, 2019, wrote about her hatred of Gaza. She said she finds it hard to sleep because her mind is constantly bothered by her poor living conditions or the warplanes circling above her head in the middle of the night. She talked about her jealousy towards people who can travel; thus, as much she would have liked to love Gaza, she cannot. Dafna wrote a comment picking on a single detail —Amira being a student while being twenty-two — arguing that the entire story must be a lie since this does not make sense. A close reading of the text clarifies that Amira discussed her college and not high school experience.

Among commenters slamming *Border Gone*, Dorin was one of the most persistent, constantly dismissing stories and mounting accusations against Palestinians. For example, she responded to a story posted on February 6, 2020. It was written by Rania, a young woman forced to look after her young siblings after her mother died from an illness because Israel did not give her permission to get lifesaving medical treatment outside Gaza. Dorin complained that Gazans never care about Israelis, so Israelis have no reason to show Rania any sympathy. She contended that BG's posts were psychological warfare against Israel while directing much of her anger towards leftist commenters expressing sorrow or sadness. Dorin condemned them for identifying with the enemy. In other posts, she argued that Israel should be merciless towards Gaza, often quoting her mother, who used to say that "if you don't let your enemy die, it won't let you live." Her base comments notwithstanding, something is intriguing about Dorin; if she found the posts and some of the comments so repelling, why did she keep coming back for more? In a discussion that followed a post from May 8, Esther asked her this question directly, suggesting that Prime

Minister Netanyahu funded her to post hate speech against leftists. Dorin replied: “I wish. What am I doing here? They [BG] send me sponsored posts, so I comment”. Dorin’s answer is unconvincing; technically, she could have easily blocked BG’s posts from landing in her newsfeed but instead decided to be an active participant on the page.

Border Gone anticipated disbelief and detachment, structuring early posts to appeal to Israeli readers by focusing on nonpolitical issues or by looking for a point of connection that will make stories relatable. For example, a post uploaded on January 5 was written by Salma, a journalist from Gaza. It discusses the difficulties Palestinians face during the heavy rains of winter by creating a symmetry between floods in Tel Aviv and those happening in Gaza. This false symmetry appearing at the beginning of the post was designed to lure in Israeli readers and did not appear in Salma’s original text. However, the reader can easily recognize the stark difference between the two cities when learning the details of how the rain damages ramshackle houses in Gaza. Salma interviewed Dima, a 12 years old girl, who told her how she gets sick every winter because her room gets flooded with sewage. Eliran was not impressed and commented sarcastically, diverting the discussion to the political, pinning the blame to Palestinian violence: “Are you cold? Wet? Your house is sinking? The state of Israel has a solution — lay down your arms and you will get everything you desire”. Kineret was less snide in her tone, expressing hesitant dismay towards the situation in Gaza. However, she did not accept any Israeli responsibility to this situation, particularly one that implicates Israeli citizens. Instead, she resorted to giving advice to Gazans, a type of advice uttered in spite that does not seek to remedy the injustice but sustains it (Hughley, 2018). Kineret believed that if Palestinians accepted her suggestion and organize a revolution, Israeli benevolence will be within their reach:

I would have loved to lift the siege, but I am a private person. The Egyptian people proved that a revolution was possible [in the Arab Spring]. I am certain that if you make the step, Israelis will not only lift the siege — they will help you develop advanced industry like they did with Jordan. Don't say a day will come — bring that day.

The last sentence references the canonical “song for peace”; written in 1969, it became associated with the Israeli peace movement, especially after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. Rabin led the movement in its heydays; he was murdered after a large peace rally where he sang this song, and a blood-stained paper with its lyrics was found in his pocket after the shooting. The song calls Israelis to act for peace; however, in Kineret's comment, it is incumbent upon Palestinians to do something because Kineret and other Israelis, although uneasy with the situation in Gaza, feel disempowered to make political change. They feel powerless, although they have a right to vote, while Palestinians in Gaza remain disenfranchised, unable to affect the decisions Israel makes about their lives. Internal elections are not common either because Hamas has prevented free elections in the Strip since 2006.

In a story posted on January 21, Aliya demonstrates the long-lasting impact Israeli policies have on life in Gaza by talking about the effects of war. At only twenty-two years of age, Aliya has experienced three devastating wars. Quite remarkably, she finds a silver lining in Gazan life; unlike people who live a life of privilege, she learned to appreciate the most trivial things, like having access to power. She talks fondly about the family time afforded by frequent blackouts — instead of staring at screens in solitude, the family comes together when power is out — talking, laughing, and playing with the kids. Writing with tongue in cheek, Aliya ends her story by thanking Israel for giving her the skills that help her persevere. Given the unexpected perspective of this post, insisting on finding empowerment in a very miserable situation, Israelis were drawn to

respond. Some tried to draw a symmetry between the two sides, arguing that many Israelis were suffering. Alma pointed out to these commenters that Aliya was probably only ten when she survived her first war, and Tanya reminded them that while suffering happens on both sides, the Israeli side is much stronger than Hamas, and its weapons are more lethal. Gil told her that while that is true, the Israeli side is interested in peace while the Palestinian leadership declares its desire to destroy Israel, using indiscriminate fire against civilians.

Gil wanted to talk about intentions instead of outcomes. While the vitriolic rhetoric of Hamas against Israel deserves and received condemnation by the managers of *Border Gone*, as discussed below, such arguments ignore the fact that Hamas' threats are probably inefficacious because it has no tools to defeat Israel militarily. While the suffering of Israelis caused by rockets fired from Gaza is undeniable, it has never posed an existential threat to Israel. On the other hand, Israel can and does control everyday lives in Gaza through immense violence perpetrated by its powerful army or tight bureaucratic control over the Strip. Unlike Gil, Danit reflected on how little she knows and how much she can learn from reading such stories about Gaza while acknowledging her own privilege:

As much as I think I understand and empathize with the pain “over there” [in Gaza], this sort of text comes along, showing how unimaginable it is to live there. Having to think about survival, at the most basic level, is something we [Israelis] never encounter, certainly not as a continuous situation that keeps repeating itself. Regardless of whose fault it is and who benefits from it, suffering beyond the wall is just terrible. *We can just acknowledge that without running straight into “but..”*

Danit is not trying to shift the conversation thematically or temporally; she does not discuss hypotheticals; she does not go back to history to justify Israel's actions, as many critics on the

comments sections did, nor does she fantasize about what can happen in the future if only Gazans stop supporting Hamas. Instead, she focuses on the consequences of war happening right now and described in the story. Her emphasis on unconditional acknowledgment, or nonreciprocal listening, requires staying in the moment and seeing reality for what it is without looking for justifications or explanations elsewhere.

As pointed out earlier, it was hard for Israeli Jews from all political camps to make a compelling case against the factuality of posts. Instead, many arguments in the comments sections revolved around finger-pointing, as each side was trying to convince the other that either Israel or Hamas were responsible for the dire situation in Gaza. However, personal stories written by young adults from Gaza complicate Palestinian suffering because they make it three-dimensional, adding depth through personal experiences rarely found on the news (Chouliaraki, 2006; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017). They also encouraged some commentators to understand Palestinian life better because something in the story was surprising or did not make sense.

For example, in a story posted on January 25, Isra recounts her return to Gaza when she was fifteen after living in the UAE as a child with her family. Using dark, witty humor, she talks about being on the plane back home as if she was being kidnapped to a foreign country; she describes the excruciating journey to her new house taking hours on end; she speaks about taking a shower with water full of sand; seeing her mother light candles when power is out and thinking she was practicing séance; and talking to a spider she found in her new bedroom, telling it that it must also hate living in Gaza. Most comments discussed whose fault it is that Isra and others have to endure such conditions; some commenters, infatuated by Isra's writing style and personality, said that they could easily see themselves befriending her. However, Rivka and Rinat were troubled by one detail — why did Isra's family decide to return to Gaza after enjoying a

comfortable life in the UAE? Although this information was missing from the story, Elinor explained to Rivka and Rinat that they were probably migrant workers whose visas were not renewed, leaving them with no other option. Elinor also attached a link for further reading.

While finding more information about Gaza through external sources was an option, some commenters yearned for direct communication with the Gazan writers to learn firsthand about their lives. Sausan wrote a story published on June 19, 2020 about Gaza being old-fashioned and conservative, arguing it is the outcome of years of isolation from the world. Shirly asked: “I wonder if the original writer can comment here, or is this only a unidirectional discourse?”. Shifra was less interested in a conversation with Sausan and more in lecturing her, writing a post about how the people of Gaza prospered when they cooperated with Israel before Hamas came to power, expressing her wish that what she wrote in Hebrew would be translated to Arabic. These responses reflect varying levels of understanding of how the platform works, echoing the ambiguous mission statement discussed earlier — while Shirly believed that the young Palestinians were writing to Israelis directly, Shifra understood the mediation of Israeli translators, asking that her message will be translated back.

Israeli commenters did get the opportunity to communicate with a Palestinian from Gaza when *Border Gone* invited its followers to ask questions answered by Ibrahim, the Palestinian co-founder of the platform. While some commenters made statements or asked rhetorical questions, others showed genuine interest in Palestinian life: Shalom wanted to know how many Gazans know Hebrew and English; Ne’ama asked about popular music and television shows; Miriam wanted to know how the coronavirus affected Gaza. Beyond questions about everyday life, Niva asked Ibrahim how many people he knew supported terror. Nihal, a Palestinian commenter,

challenged this question, asking Niva how many people she knew supported the Israeli occupation, and Niva gave the following answer:

“It is clear to me that most of them [the people I know, support the Israeli occupation], but I don’t. I want to get an honest answer to my question exactly because this is *the only thing I have heard in the media since I was born.*”

Niva’s explanation reflects a beginning of critical thinking that challenges the hegemonic notion that all Palestinians are terrorists. She understands that maybe not all the information she has received about Palestinians from the Israeli mainstream news media was true; therefore, she wants direct communication with Ibrahim to learn more and possibly reconsider her perception of the conflict. While still using “terrorists” as a descriptor, BG offers Niva and others to think about Gaza differently.

Nevertheless, such sporadic critical thinking was not enough for *Border Gone*. As discussed in the previous chapter, the project managers concluded that they wanted more than just telling relatable stories about everyday life in Gaza. BG had a great achievement in its first eleven months of operation — it showed Israelis that there are human beings on the other side of the border. Nevertheless, once Israelis got this message, they gradually began to lose interest, and so did the managers of the project, who wanted to push their political vision more forcefully. They were eager to produce original content without relying on stories from *We Are Not Numbers* and elevate the everyday experiences of Palestinians by putting them in the proper political context. The transition to the second stage was a combination of a decision made by the managers and one pivotal event, discussed in the next section.

5.4.3 *The Second Stage: February-April 2021*

As shown in figure 5-2, the second stage of *Border Gone* is neatly delimited between January and April 2021, preceded by four months of silence (October 2020-January 2021) and followed by a peak in activity in mid-May 2021. However, the trigger for the transition can be found in one of the last posts uploaded during the project's first stage on September 3, 2020. It broke a reactions record—the most popular post up until that point received 1,317 reactions, while this post received 3,232. It tells a heinous story about three young children burnt alive in their bedroom. The context for this tragedy is the coronavirus pandemic; the post explains that the authorities in Gaza could no longer contain the spread of the virus and declared a general lockdown. The Gazan economy, already in shambles, was devastated, leading to hunger and a shortage of basic supplies. The health system was also unequipped to deal with a pandemic, with very few available respirators. Israel made things worse by limiting the power supply to Gaza to only two hours a day. Osama, the father of the three children, could not turn on the light in their bedroom before they went to bed and could not afford batteries for a flashlight. Instead, he lit candles and then went to the kitchen to pour milk for his son. When he returned, the room had already caught fire.

Beyond this detailed description of the horror that did not appear in previous posts, the post marks a significant shift in the tone of storytelling. The managers of *Border Gone* are appealing directly to their Israeli readers, pleading with them to pay close attention to the story. They underline the connection between the Israeli occupation and this tragedy — although Israel did not kill the children directly by bombing the house — its control over Gaza, as argued in the post, creates the desperate conditions that made this tragedy possible, almost inevitable. This tone was adopted four months later during the project's second stage, dominating all posts.

As already mentioned, comments were abundant. Shalva said the following things: “It is very sad that there is no power or water, but they have plenty of balloons they can send to Israel²² — I hope that they will always live in the darkness, amen.” Responding to this comment, some Israelis supported Shalva, claiming that the balloons and other weapons used by Hamas create terrible damage in Israel. However, Nira, as well as many other commenters, were shocked by the inhumanity of Shalva’s response:

How pitiless can you be towards the pain of losing innocent children? Have we [Israelis] become beasts? This is yet another proof of how much the occupation corrupts — I am ashamed to be a part of this people

Predictably, comments to the post contained more finger-pointing. Many commenters blamed Hamas for investing in terror rather than infrastructure, while others responded that Israel constantly tries to find excuses to renounce its responsibility. Aviram took this effort further, arguing that the entire story was false. He quoted a report by a news source called *Abu Ali Express*, painting a completely different picture — ostensibly relying on findings from the internal investigation of the case in Gaza, the report claimed that significant inconsistencies were found in the father’s version of the incident, raising the possibility that he killed his children intentionally.

This is not the only time that reports by *Abu Ali Express* were linked in comments by Israelis trying to refute BG’s stories. Yaniv Kubovich (2021) from Haaretz investigated this news platform and found out that the person heading it was a Middle East expert working as an external advisor for the army, specializing in psychological warfare on social media. Operating on Telegram, *Abu Ali Express* provides exclusive reports on Palestinian issues, arguably based on inside information. During the May 2021 war in Gaza, it became highly popular, reaching 6.7

²² She is referring to a low-tech incendiary balloon used by Hamas against Israel.

million views. Alongside news reports, this platform is used to criticize Israeli reporters who do not align with the official message dictated by the army, raising suspicion that it provides a service to the army that wishes to silence any criticism against it. In other words, if Dorin and many other commenters were concerned that BG was a tool for psychological warfare against Israel, it seems like the opposite is true — the army is supporting a dubious news source intended to feed Israelis with questionable information and scrutinize journalists critical against it.

The second stage of BG was designed to unveil the Israeli political apparatus that makes Palestinian life in Gaza miserable and often remains hidden from the Israeli public's eye. BG's mission statement, published on February 17, 2021, and still pinned to the top of the Facebook page, became much more daring and transparent. It declares that *Border Gone* consists of a team of "Palestinians and Israelis [...] young journalists, translators and activists" who "demand national and civil equality between the two peoples who live on this land [...] an end to the Israeli siege on Gaza, the military control over the West Bank and an end to the violent colonialist policy". The statement makes it clear that BG sees Gaza as an inseparable part of the conflict between Jews and Palestinians, working against the attempt to marginalize and close it off from the world. Commenters were divided between those who said that supporting the enemy is a disgrace and those who argued that loving Gaza and loving Israel do not have to be mutually exclusive. Some were ambivalent; Uri maintained that the work being done at BG was crucial because he wanted to hear opinions from the other side for a long time. However, he also added that

Everything you do could have driven significant change had you condemned Hamas [...] a genuine attempt to understand our side, our anger, and strong resistance to aggressions from your side is an [essential] first step.

This comment reflects the consequence of presenting a clear political agenda on the platform. While BG's first mission statement positioned connections between Jews and Palestinians as a top priority, the second statement, although much longer, does not mention this point at all; instead, it focuses on the urgency of telling stories from Gaza. On the one hand, it frees the platform to discuss the serious political problems in Israel/Palestine honestly and without trying to sugarcoat or ignore them. On the other hand, it alienates Israeli moderates who are curious to learn more about Gaza but do not want to be accused of its suffering — a situation very similar to what is observed in intergroup dialogues. This problem became more pronounced during the war, as I discuss below.

Subsequent stories posted during the second stage debunk prevalent myths about the relationships between Israel and Gaza. One of these myths, commonly used by commentators who defend Israel, contends that Israel no longer controls Gaza. Israel disengaged Gaza unilaterally in September 2005 by evacuating its military forces and 8,600 settlers from the Strip. The decision was highly controversial in Israeli politics, and the complex operation was experienced as collective trauma (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2008). However, the fact that Israelis no longer live in Gaza or that military forces are no longer present on the ground does not mean that Israel has stopped occupying the Strip. A story published on February 24 illustrates this point by focusing on the everyday lives of Palestinians. Specifically, the story tackles the problem of resident registration, pointing out that every person in Gaza must be registered twice — by the Palestinian Authority and by the Israeli army. It gives Israel immense power over Palestinians — if a person is not registered, they cannot get an identity card or a passport, preventing them from receiving medical treatment or traveling abroad. Most commenters were surprised to learn about this bureaucratic control responding with despair and disbelief; Rami tried to challenge the post by

arguing that Palestinians in Gaza are Egyptians by nationality; Dikla responded to Rami with a link to the website of the Israeli resident register clearly stating that Israeli is involved in this procedure. BG published other stories on similar topics — reporting that agricultural lands in Gaza are flooded because Israel diverts winterbourne streams to the Strip, or how fishers cannot make a living because Israel imposes a strict naval siege around Gaza’s coast.

The story receiving the highest number of reactions during the project's second stage was published on March 30. It focuses on Ali, a professional cyclist from Rafah, a city at the southern edge of the Gaza Strip. Ali talks about his passion for cycling and how he became a professional athlete, dreaming of attending international competitions. Nevertheless, his dream was shattered after he participated in one of the Return Marches next to the Israeli border²³; Ali was curious to see the protests with his own eyes and represent his family expelled from Jaffa. He was shot in the leg, which had to be amputated at the hospital. Ali finishes the story by discussing his rehabilitation efforts and becoming an organizer of a parasports cycling team in Rafah. Had the story been translated during the first stage of BG, it would have probably ended here, with Ali’s personal reflection. However, at the new phase, the story continues, providing additional political context. Ali testifies that he stood 300 meters away from the border during the march, posing no threat to Israeli soldiers, and was still “shot like an animal.” BG cites interviews held with snipers by Haaretz that support Ali’s story; snipers were competing over who will “get more knees,” and senior officers admitted that targeting protesters’ legs this way was a mistake because it led to too many casualties.

²³ A series of mass demonstrations that began in March 2018, protesting the Israeli siege on Gaza Strip and demanding that Israel allows refugees to return to their homes. Hundreds of Palestinians were killed during the marches and tens of thousands were injured, many of them by sniper fire.

The post led to a heated discussion over the necessity of using sniper fire against protesters during demonstrations. Some commenters pointed out that many protesters were violent and tried to cross over to Israel and attack soldiers; others insisted that many Palestinians were unarmed and did not pose any threat, standing far away from the border. Gili, who tried to defend the soldiers, used information from Wikipedia in Hebrew to support his claims and was pushed back by commentators who said that Wikipedia is not a reliable, objective source on this topic, especially if it is written in Hebrew. Gili responded cynically to one of them, saying: “You’re right. This was a peaceful protest of pacifists murdered in cold blood and without prior provocation by bloodthirsty soldiers.” Gili was pushing his argument ad absurdum intentionally, and other commenters reacted appropriately, suggesting a more nuanced analysis; they said that just like the soldiers are not bloodthirsty, so were protesters, many of whom attended the marches to express a legitimate demand for political change. However, the description provided by Ali, supported by interviews with the snipers, suggests that some Israeli soldiers in this situation were bloodthirsty, or at the very least found little value in Palestinian life by turning “knee counts” into a game. However, for Gili and most Israeli commentators, thinking about soldiers as killers is unfathomable. Nevertheless, BG’s post showed them that this murderous state of mind was possible. Such conversations about Israel’s military violence intensified during the peak of BG’s operation – the May 2021 war.

5.5 The War in Gaza: May 11-21, 2021

On May 11, around 10am, the conversation among organizers and volunteers at *Border Gone* began. Our first task was to figure out how we could use the existing platform on Facebook and other social media to report on the war. We considered using multiple modalities — expanding to

visual media like Tiktok or Instagram to tell compelling stories. Ruth, one of the founding members of BG and a professional photographer, was supposed to oversee the creation of these videos. Another goal the team had in mind early on was to find a way to humanize Palestinian casualties because they are usually presented as statistics on Israeli news. The idea was to post vignettes with intimate information about the deceased, their family, and their everyday life. This was my main task —looking up information on social media about Palestinians killed during the war. There was a debate over the wording of the introduction to these vignettes, resonating the tension that has always loomed *Border Gone* — pushing the project’s political agenda aggressively or being more subtle to avoid alienating Israelis. Eventually, we came up with the following introduction:

The post you have just read tells the story of X. We share the stories of the deceased so that we will not forget that there was a person *behind every number*. Dead Palestinians have a face, a family, friends, and a life story. Some of them are kids whose life has yet to begin. They have stories that need to be heard [Hebrew].

The idea that every killed person has a name is powerful in Israeli culture because this metaphor is often used to symbolize Holocaust memorialization (*Central DB of Shoah Victims’ Names*, n.d.). It is also the name of BG’s Palestinian partner project —*We Are Not Numbers* — whose declared goal is to resist turning Palestinians into statistics. We also talked about using explicit materials in this context; for example, group members shared a heartbreaking video of a little boy saying goodbye to his father during the latter’s funeral. Again, this brings up the tension between shocking the Israeli public and alienating it. There was a consensus that such materials could be posted, but eventually, we never used any graphic images in our posts.

The fast-paced development of events soon made us realize that there was little time for deep reflection on the life stories of individuals — it became clear that the most urgent task was to stop the Israeli attacks in Gaza. What made this war different from previous violent clashes between Israel and Hamas was the widespread targeting of civilian buildings, most notably residential towers. Around 8pm, Ibrahim joined the conversation, informing the others that the Hanadi tower was bombed. In a voice recording, he explained Israel's tactic:

Israel first bombards residential towers with a small missile. Launched from a drone, it is called a “warning missile,” and then they tell the family that they have ten minutes before destroying the tower. They [the families] have to leave [immediately] and can't take anything with them [Arabic].

This tactic is called “roof knocking” and was extensively used during the 2014 war in Gaza. Israel usually argues that warnings prove that its use of powerful weapons in heavily populated civilian areas is ethically sound. However, this tactic was criticized for its ineffectiveness in saving civilians' lives; in effect, “roof knocking” makes Palestinians responsible for their own deaths (Joronen, 2016). Later in the war, we received reports that Israel stopped using these minimal measures to protect civilians' lives, turning to indiscriminate fire for demoralization. Ibrahim emphasized that targeting residential towers was a dangerous development that would undoubtedly lead to rockets fired at Tel Aviv. That is exactly what happened later that day.

The only post uploaded on the first day of war was a diary written by Hisham, BG's correspondent in Gaza. His diary was published consistently every day and always incorporated a personal tone, helping Israeli readers relate to the text and making them feel like an ordinary Palestinian was speaking directly to them. When Ibrahim provided his commentary on the war, he used the same tone. In his first dairy post, Hisham gave a firsthand account of the fear and

confusion haunting Palestinians who were already suffering from the results of previous wars and the economic devastation created by the coronavirus pandemic. He reported that some business owners decided to keep their stores open even after the Israeli attacks began; he provided one example where a person went pick up his children from a shop, arguing with the owner because he was “risking kids by keeping his shop open.” Unsurprisingly, the conversation among Israeli commentators revolved around finger-pointing, only this time accusations had to do with who started the war. There was also a disagreement around the starting point of the war — whether it began when Hamas fired rockets at Jerusalem or was the result of political tension in Jerusalem that preceded this attack, which I discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

Ibrahim was enthusiastic to respond to some Israelis in the comments sections — he was using Facebook’s automatic translation function to read the comments in English. On May 12, Yaron and Ibrahim discussed a possible response:

Yaron: we need to talk about the political aspect of the Gaza problem and how we could resolve it. I mean, the possible solution, the alternative, is crucial at times of war.

Ibrahim: yes, we need to write something that will give [the Israeli readers] a broader perspective. And at the same time, we need to remind [the Israeli readers] that we don’t support the targeting of civilians in Israel and that we don’t support the resistance [Hamas] [Arabic].

This exchange led to a follow-up conversation between Ibrahim and Aisha, because Aisha was not fond of the idea of responding to comments:

Aisha: guys, I must bring up this point on how we keep emphasizing that we are against violence and against the resistance. That’s fine, and we are deeply invested in this [non-violence], right? But Israelis constantly pose this demand to Palestinians —

that they [the Palestinians] declare they are against violence and against the resistance. They, the people who comment, will never talk about their state [critically]. We don't need to get ourselves into this [pointless] discussion. I disagree with the points you brought up. I understand that comments are a form of mutual understanding, but we can't let [commenters] dictate our strategy. We need to take the initiative, and we shouldn't write the things they expect us to write. We write and discuss the ideas that are important to us.

Ibrahim: Aisha, when we respond to comments, this doesn't mean that we are following their dictations. These comments help us see what people over there [on the Israeli side] are thinking, we are using these comments to develop new ideas for new articles [Arabic].

This internal Palestinian deliberation resonates the tensions between Ibrahim and Aisha discussed in chapter 4. Ibrahim is a Palestinian from Gaza, while Aisha is from Israel. Their positionality creates dramatically different perspectives on Israelis. Ironically, while Ibrahim represents the Palestinian community targeted in the war, he has stronger faith in the possibility of connecting with Israelis by responding to their comments. His approach, often seen as naive by his friends at BG, is based on his unique friendship with Yaron and other Jewish members in the project. These relationships came as a complete surprise to Ibrahim because he had never met Israelis before. On the other hand, Aisha has a very intimate and painful familiarity with Israeli culture as a state citizen. She is sensitive when a demand to condemn violence comes up, not because she supports it but because she realizes that this is a rhetorical trap; a condition Israelis always put forward in political conversations with Palestinians while never criticizing the Israeli state violence. Ibrahim understands her point but believes that responding to Israeli commenters

is essential not to please them but as a creative form of engagement that can beget new ideas for BG.

Ibrahim followed up on his plan in a post he wrote and was uploaded on May 12. In this post, he recounts childhood memories from another tower in Gaza destroyed by Israel — the Shuruk Tower. He muses over the times he used to frequent one restaurant in the tower with a friend, where they would smoke hookah, drink tea and talk about life. The post ends with a clear message — the destruction of residential towers by Israel does not reap any military benefits — it just creates more hatred among Palestinians.

Many Israelis commented on this story — Ibrahim responded to one of them, Hadar, who had a direct question to Ibrahim: she asked him to comment on what was said in Israel about these attacks; that the towers were legitimate targets because Hamas had arsenals and headquarters in these buildings. Ibrahim argued that these were lies propagated by the Israeli government and urged Hadar to use her logic — even if Hamas used a flat or two, Israel has accurate weapons that could destroy them and not the entire tower “where hundreds of families used to live.” Their conversation continued, and Hadar asked Ibrahim why he holds Israel to higher standards if Hamas targets civilians too; Ibrahim explained that “Israel promotes itself as the only democracy in the Middle East” and therefore holds itself to such standards. Hadar kept drawing symmetry between Israel and Hamas, while Ibrahim tried to show her that people in Gaza, living under military occupation, cannot control their faith like Israelis. He did, however, say that he is very critical of Hamas — going against Aisha’s suggestions in the internal BG conversation.

Beyond the crucial points Ibrahim brought up in his debate with Hadar, the mere existence of this conversation was groundbreaking. When I interviewed Ibrahim for chapter 4, he told me he was tired of talking to Zionist Israelis because he felt these conversations were going nowhere.

Hadar was no different; while being polite, she repeated the Israeli claims Ibrahim relentlessly tries to deconstruct. Nevertheless, this discussion conducted publicly on BG's Facebook page, showed witnessing Israelis that the Palestinians working at *Border Gone* were real, voicing genuine concerns. Ibrahim's comments also received likes from people following the conversation.

Despite Ibrahim's presence, the idea that BG was a psychological warfare platform continued to resonate among commenters, more powerfully than in earlier stages — Eliran said that BG was probably a Hamas propaganda platform in Hebrew. Responding to Hisham's diary from May 12, Geva said that there was no way that any "Hisham" wrote the post because "there is not a single Arab who can speak Hebrew at this level." Avi resonated these thoughts, saying, "I think this is a fake diary. (His) Hebrew here is at the level of someone who graduated with a degree in linguistics or literary studies. There are many levels, layers, and nuances of the Hebrew language [in this post] – hard for me to believe this is real". Hezi went a step further, making a sexist comment by sarcastically thanking "Lihi and Tzlil who invented the character and wrote this text." Lihi and Tzlil are presumably typical leftwing Jewish women who make up Palestinian war stories.

I suspect that Geva, Avi, and Hezi did not honestly believe that BG was fake. If anything, BG represents the diametrical opposition of Hamas' attempts to create propaganda in Hebrew. A famous example is a song released by Hamas in 2014 titled "carry out terror attacks." Sung in broken Hebrew, the song talks about Hamas militants attacking Israel, burning down military bases, and shaking Israel's sense of security. The song, designed to scare Israelis, achieved the opposite outcome — it became a meme due to its catchy tune; many Israeli versions of the meme ridiculed the original song (Avni, 2014; Levy, 2014). Here, on the other hand, commenters knew that Israeli Jews were involved with *Border Gone* — Jews who made sure that posts were written in perfect Hebrew. For rightwing Israelis, this was particularly concerning; indeed, many critical

comments on the page were directed against leftwing commenters who were empathetic towards the suffering of Palestinians described in posts.

Throughout the war, Yaron and Aisha interviewed Palestinians from Gaza to bring their voices to the fore, reflecting *Border Gone*'s longstanding commitment to centralize Palestinian stories. These interviews were based on established personal relationships both Yaron and Aisha already had in Gaza; Yaron told the group how hard it was to talk to Palestinians during a war because many were afraid to speak. Nevertheless, Yaron realized it was unrealistic to expect Palestinians to write their stories and then translate them to Hebrew; their lives were at such disarray that they did not have the mind space for deep reflections; therefore, only interviews could tease out their stories.

One of Yaron's interviews was held with Dr. Jamil Suliman, the hospital manager at Beit Hanoun, a city located at the northern edge of the Gaza Strip. Although Yaron interviewed him on the first day of the war, the story was only published on the seventh day, May 17. In this interview, Dr. Suliman provides a horrifying testimony on families being rushed into his ICU — including the Al-Masri family, whom we discussed at *Border Gone* in the early days of the war because we considered writing a profile about them. Dr. Suliman recounted the ghastly details — the father was injured but still alive when he got to the hospital, yet his children were already dead, their bodies burnt from an airstrike; Dr. Suliman did not know how to break the news to the father. Their mother had to bury the bodies only an hour later, and as they were carried out of the hospital, other wounded Palestinians were rushed in. It was Ramadan and Dr. Suliman, working late at night, continued to fast, completely forgetting that the fast was over because of the chaos at the hospital. Dr. Suliman underscored that most of his admitted patients were civilians and not militants.

It was challenging for Israelis to accept the portrayal of suffering in this post. Some refused to believe it was true, others accused Dr. Suliman of supporting terror against Israelis, and some trolled the post. Trolling comments were pervasive throughout the war; most of them were designed to flood posts with irrelevant content, hoping this type of sabotage would “ruin the post.” The opposite was true; Facebook’s algorithm filtered these comments efficiently, and I could only find them after deactivating it.

A more harmful type of trolling was spreading disinformation. A prominent example was a message that circulated in comments and was written by Prof. Aryeh Eldad, a plastic surgeon from the Hadasa hospital in Jerusalem. Eldad told a story about a Palestinian woman from Gaza set on fire by her family, a common practice in Gaza, according to Elad, when it is suspected that a woman is having an affair. Israeli doctors treated her burns and saved her life, but when she was invited to a follow-up visit in Israel, she carried an explosive belt with her with which she was planning to kill the doctors who treated her. Eldad explained that she was promised clemency in Gaza in exchange for carrying out this attack. This story fails to mention that Eldad is not only a plastic surgeon but also a former Israeli politician affiliated with several extreme rightwing parties. Moreover, some of the details in the story are not true; an exploded gas canister burned the woman, and Eldad did not treat her (Cohen, 2014). While some parts of the story are accurate, it first circulated years before the war and was utterly irrelevant to BG’s post. In other words, it is a canard based on a faulty generalization designed to defame all Palestinians and portray them as ungrateful, murderous terrorists.

Some rightwing critics of *Border Gone* believed it was essential to undermine its operation because the information the platform was publishing could be dangerous if it reached many people. BG’s damaging potential to Israel’s reputation was revealed in a post uploaded on May 13 was

later reposted by one of Israel's most popular Facebook pages — *Tweeting Statuses*, which currently has 861,544 followers (compared to 14,443 people following BG). Yaron reported this to the group; Ibrahim and Aisha did not believe him at first. Ibrahim wanted to ensure that *Statuses* gave BG credit and Yaron confirmed: “they tagged us.” Ibrahim was then eager to read comments to the post, but Yaron had to warn him first that a mainstream Facebook page like this draws an audience much less sympathetic to BG’s mission:

Ibrahim this page is the hardcore mainstream, everybody did like on it. There is 2,000 comments after a few minutes most of them bad [English].

The *Tweeting Statuses* post was uploaded at 4:23pm; by 5:11pm Elisheva reported it was gone. Yaron responded: “I wouldn’t be surprised if the army asked them to take it down,” further supporting the notion that the content BG created was seen as dangerous, not only by ordinary Israelis but also by high-ranking officials in the army who did not want the Israeli public to hear stories from Gaza about the war. We did not receive any threats or demands to stop our operation, probably because of our limited outreach, yet once one of our stories was published on one of the most popular Facebook pages in Israel — it was taken down within half an hour.

The story itself was the most popular in BG’s history — receiving more than 7,338 reactions. Its popularity was probably driven by the reposting on *Tweeting Statuses*. It is an interview Yaron conducted with Nudra, another Palestinian doctor based in el-Rimal, one of the richest neighborhoods in Gaza. In this post, Nudra talks about the destruction of the residential tower where she lived and how it felt to have to leave everything she knew behind in a matter of minutes. The old guard at the tower’s lobby received a phone call from the army telling him that the tower was about to be targeted; he then frantically knocked on every door, telling people they must escape immediately. Nudra recalled shaking her son and daughter out of sleep around

midnight and describes how they ran across the street with nothing in their hands. Nudra finishes her story by saying that targeting civilians fuels armed resistance against Israel because people act out of despair. Like other posts, many comments focused on telling Nudra she was responsible for this situation. Gershon, for example, said that Nudra was “blaming Israel for its tactics, but we didn’t see any complaints directed at Hamas, which probably stored a few hundred missiles in the building.” Comments like these show that many Israelis believe that if a building was targeted, then the army must have had a good reason to do it, even if the “collateral damage” is the destruction of many Palestinian lives. Daria responded to this comment, pointing out the patronizing tone Gershon and other Israelis use when they talk to Palestinians:

What? Is she supposed to write exactly what you want her to write? This woman lost her entire world yesterday, and you are looking down on her, complaining that she criticizes Israel after it bombed her house? How out of touch can one be? What is wrong with all of you? [talking to the many other commenters who said similar things]. Saying that a woman who lost her home in an attack deserves no mercy says some really bad things about you [Gershon]. I truly pity you. Goodbye.

Another post that resonated outside the confines of BG was uploaded on May 18, the eighth day of the war. It focused on killed children, stating their names and ages in a big poster with black background (see figure 5-4). The post itself is a political manifesto, saying very little about the children themselves. Instead, it focuses on the circumstances that make the war possible, specifically Israel’s separation policy. It explains how this policy aims to keep Gaza separate from the West Bank and Jerusalem to prevent any Palestinian sovereignty in the land. This post continues BG’s commitment during its second stage to politicize its stories; it is also a part of the attempt to refute some of the myths regarding Gaza. If the post from February 24, which I

discussed earlier, rebutted the perception that Gaza was no longer occupied, here the goal was to respond to Israelis arguing that Gaza is a part of Egypt, because Egypt controlled the Strip between 1948-1967. The post proves this wrong by showing that the people of Gaza have families in Jerusalem and the West Bank and not in Egypt; that they have longstanding social, economic, religious, and cultural ties to this land. The idea that Gaza should be seen as a part of Egypt was brought up frequently during the war as Israeli commentators argued that Hamas, based in Gaza, had no business intervening in the tensions in Jerusalem, which resulted in the war.



Figure 5-4 The title reads in Hebrew “they had names” followed by “61 children were killed in Gaza this week by army fire”. The list includes the names of 41 children and their ages. At the bottom, next to the hashtag, the name “Border Gone” is written in both Hebrew and Arabic.

The following day, an Israeli human rights organization used this image and added the names of two children killed during the war in Israel, posting the list under the title “children in Gaza and Israel are paying the price.” Elisheva told the group about this post, and Aisha got angry

because the organization did not give BG proper credit. More importantly, on May 27, a week after the war was over, Haaretz translated and published an article originally published by the New York Times that tells the story of the children killed in the war (El-Naggar et al., 2021). While Haaretz is considered the liberal newspaper in Israel, it still speaks to the Israeli mainstream; therefore, this article was a revolutionary text because it focused on the life stories of killed Palestinian children, something that rarely happens on Israeli news but is the bread and butter of *Border Gone*'s reporting.

Responses to this post reflected the inability of Israelis to accept the magnitude of the catastrophe perpetrated by the army; most comments blamed Hamas and demanded that *Border Gone* discuss the suffering of Israeli children. Avivit expressed her overall disappointment from the project:

Listen, I subscribed to this page around the day it was created, more than a year ago — when its sole purpose was to bring stories from the other side because I really wanted to read and learn. I also think that I am a part of the demographic you are trying to reach — those who have the opposite political opinions. This post, beyond being full of nonsense and distortions, is mainly pushing away those who do not identify with your political agenda, and that is a shame [...] I understand that the purpose of this page has changed, but in my opinion, the former format that focused only on personal stories brought much more people closer. You have begun pushing your agenda, and therefore I am unfollowing you.

Avivit's post proves that *Border Gone* had founded concerns about the shift to the second stage. Reading political rather than folkloristic texts, which were the type of texts the project published during the first stage, is difficult for many Jewish Israelis. They prefer to pretend that

injustices in Gaza do not exist, and if they do, that they are the Palestinians' fault. Such reactions can lead to despair, especially when they appear on a post about the death of innocent children.

Feelings of despair from Israeli reactions to posts were common in conversations among the managing team. May 15 was the most intense day of the war; Aisha and Ibrahim had an emotional conversation in the middle of the night while massive attacks took place in Gaza. They shared gruesome images — for example, a video of the dead body of a young boy pulled out of the ruins of a destroyed building and put on a stretcher. After talking about the need to tell stories about how Israel targets children and publish them, Aisha finally broke down at 3:14am:

I will not post on the page [right now], Ibrahim. I feel helpless and defeated. And I don't want to give anyone [on the Israeli side] the opportunity to boast and gloat, to see this as their victory. I am tired of this [Israeli] people [Arabic].

Aisha's pain does not only pertain to Israel's military actions, but also reacts to responses made by Israeli commenters who express pride and delight when hearing stories from Gaza. She continued:

They are writing comments right now, in these moments, on the other posts. They want more [destruction] than what we described in previous posts — one of the comments says right now “we will eradicate the people in Gaza and the Arabs in Israel” [...] zero humanity and consciousness [...] there is only so much one can bear [Arabic].

The following morning, Elisheva informed the rest of the group that she was working with Moran, another manager at BG, on erasing offensive and abusive comments like the ones Aisha described.

Hateful comments were common. However, one post was a noteworthy exception. It was published on May 19, when fighting was almost over, and it was the post that most resembled the

vision we laid out early in the war. Unlike interviews conducted by Yaron and Aisha or reflections provided by Ibrahim and Hisham, this post was written differently. It was a collection of personal stories, focusing on a single family, Abu Al-Auf, whose house was bombed and all family members – fifteen people – were killed. The post lingers on the life of several family members, discussing their hobbies, hopes and dreams — all destroyed in a single moment. The post captivates the reader because it is built on cumulative sorrow, similar to the book of Job; after the reader learns about the life of one person led and how much they meant to their community, another story is quick to follow, evoking a feeling that the horror will never end. The post is the outcome of meticulous investigative journalism conducted at *Border Gone*, as members collected information from multiple sources — the family’s personal Facebook pages, videos circulating online, as well as Israeli and Palestinian mainstream news media — to draw the complete picture of this tragedy.

Unlike other posts, most comments expressed deep sorrow and shame when hearing this story. Raheema, a Palestinian commenter, wondered why the army did not issue a warning before the strike; Gitit said she was ashamed, clarifying that the attack “was not done in her name”; Sivan said that no one can be happy seeing such images and that we need to remember there are human beings on the other side who just want to live; Ella said she was “sorry for her part in this atrocity”; and Tali warned the critics of this post:

All of those trying to be critical here, saying that this is Hamas’ fault, or trying to justify this act — please stop. An entire family was erased, they are victims just like the victims on our side. We share this big sorrow; we need compassion rather than preaching here

The managers at *Border Gone* were surprised to see these reactions. Aisha responded with disbelief:

I can't believe it, but most of the comments on the last post express sadness. It seems like there are no polemic comments, is that right, or am I just tired and imagining this? [Arabic]. This post shows it was possible to touch the hearts of Israeli commenters even if this was a difficult task.

5.6 Bringing Down Ideological Walls through Close Listening

Scholarship on cross-cutting encounters in digital media argues that members of oppositional groups often avoid communicating with each other, as they enjoy the comfort of the filter bubble. Respectful deliberation between people with opposing opinions only happens under exceptional circumstances when they have prior familiarity with each other and overcome their differences by relying on existing ties. Contrary to the great promise of the World Wide Web to connect people's minds, social media fall short of delivering this promise when it comes to strangers, not to mention adversaries (see also John, 2019). Surprisingly, although it is a unidirectional medium that does not allow dialogue, television seems to be the new avant-garde, at least in the Israeli-Palestinian context. In recent years, groundbreaking shows produced on Israeli television and discussed in chapters 2 and 3 invite viewers to experiment with complex, liminal identities, which are difficult to adopt on contemporary social media.

Should we completely abandon social media as a place where peace can be forged? My findings on the establishment and operation of *Border Gone* suggest that the possibilities afforded by digital media galvanize managers and translators of this community to work towards just peace in Israel/Palestine. Yet what about the wider Israeli-Jewish public? Is it possible to get it to care about peace (Y. Katz, 2020), see its necessity? Unfortunately, existing scholarship on cross-cutting exposure rarely provides a deep dive into the complex dynamics of social media interactions. The

purpose of this study is to conduct a holistic investigation of interactions revolving around a highly controversial issue — the Israeli occupation of Gaza — before and during the heightened tensions of war. I paid close attention to the entire communicative cycle — texts from and about Gaza, conversations in comments sections, and the real-time dilemmas of a managing team producing these texts and reacting to comments.

Expectedly, the responses to stories posted by *Border Gone* were diverse. Some Jewish commenters refused to believe they were true and questioned the authenticity of the entire project. They exonerated Israel from any responsibility to Palestinian suffering, pointing fingers at Hamas and Egypt. They demanded that Palestinians acknowledge Jewish suffering, undermining the goal of BG to be a space for nonreciprocal listening, as discussed in the previous chapter. Many advised Palestinians to come to terms with Israeli control over their lives, depicting Israel as a benevolent ruler. Some even rejoiced when learning about the destruction in Gaza.

Still, there were many Israeli Jews who were genuinely curious to learn about everyday life in Gaza and work towards everyday peace. They suddenly saw Gazans outside the framework of terror. When BG transitioned into its second stage, they were utterly surprised by the depth and breadth of Israeli control over Gaza, countering the official Israeli narrative that its occupation ended with the 2005 unilateral disengagement. They acknowledged Palestinian humanity and felt the pain of losing one's house or not being able to receive life-saving medical treatment. They were enchanted by the people behind the stories and could imagine befriending them, if there were no physical and ideological barriers separating them. *Border Gone* became a portal to Gaza, a place Israelis cannot enter. Many of them sought direct communication with Palestinian writers, misconstruing how the platform functions.

Border Gone received much attention throughout the May 2021 war as it became the only Israeli news outlets committed to telling authentic stories from Gaza. As such, it posed a risk to the army, which needed to act more aggressively to stop its content from disseminating. When rightwing commenters say terrible things but keep coming back for BG's content, it is reasonable to assume they are dedicated readers of stories from Gaza. While the war stories reflect a terrible situation, Palestinian authors often find a silver lining, a way to hang on to hope and see beauty in the hardship of their lives, inspiring Israeli readers.

Israeli Jews were willing to open their minds to Palestinian experiences because of the power of description. Even during the second stage, when ideology and politics were brought to the forefront to push harder for change, *Border Gone* remained committed to focusing on ordinary Palestinians and based posts on descriptions of their lives. Just like Ehud Banai, who said that nobody could argue with the fact that Ahmed is mixing the cement, neither can anyone argue that one can hardly live a normal, peaceful life when they have only four hours of power a day; when they need to shower with water full of sand; or worst of all, when they witness their family dying and their houses destroyed. The ability to listen out to Palestinian stories to form a connection (Lacey, 2013) and without voicing critiques is similar to the descriptive turn in literary studies — read stories closely but not deeply; give them the benefit of the doubt, use hermeneutics of trust rather than suspicion; do not seek out a hidden meaning but have faith in what the text says (Ricoeur, 1970; Scannell, 2014). Complementing peace as nonreciprocal listening discussed in chapter 4, I argue that peace *was close, trusting listening* for Israeli Jews commenting on BG's posts.

Even if most commenters did not leave *Border Gone* believing in peace, the platform had a crucial role in empowering Palestinians and making them visible, especially during the war. The

collaborative work of the managing team, communicating through Whatsapp, reflects an unhindered commitment to elevating Palestinian voices and creating a safe space where Ibrahim and Aisha could express their pain and anger, and then harness this energy with the help of others to make Israel/Palestine a better place. Whatsapp became a space for deep solidarity between Jews and Palestinians operating the platform. Similar to my conclusions from chapter 3, *Border Gone* demonstrates how the process of making media is a form of peacemaking in and of itself.

Cross-cutting interactions happen on social media when brave Jews and Palestinians take risks, resist the directives of national ideologies, and linger on other people's life stories. Hateful, toxic interactions between groups often obfuscate moments of beauty when connections are made against all odds. Peace exists, we just need to look close enough to notice it; just like my walk through the old city in Jerusalem reminded me that peace is found in mundane, fleeting moments, it is our responsibility as media scholars to elevate such moments on social media to show that peace is possible.

Chapter 6 Minding the Gap: The Contours of Mediatized Everyday Peace

6.1 Jewish and Palestinian Drawings and the Semantic Crisis of Peace

When I began my journey to understand peace in Israel/Palestine, I first wanted to speak to Jews and Palestinians who experience the conflict and the occupation daily. Throughout June-July 2017, I met with 13 politically active undergraduate students from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem Mount Scopus campus. They were in their mid-twenties, six Palestinians and seven Jews. I wanted to hear various voices; therefore, the Jewish interviewees represented the entire Zionist political spectrum, from Meretz, a party that openly criticized the occupation, to the Jewish Home party that advocated for expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank. All of my Palestinian interviewees except one were Israeli citizens. Some of them were affiliated with *Hadash*, a communist, anti-Zionist party; others were unaffiliated, reflecting the inherent ambivalence of Israeli Palestinian towards participation in the Israeli political system that marginalizes them while also realizing that such involvement is crucial for advancing their community's interests (Ali, 2022; Ghanem & Mustafa, 2007).

One part of the interviews was devoted to an exercise where I asked the interviewees to draw peace and explain what they had drawn. Their creations were diverse and often contradictory. Yehuda (M, Jewish), representing the centrist *Yesh Atid* party, drew two tanks driving, separated by watchtowers and what seemed like a fence (figure 6-1).

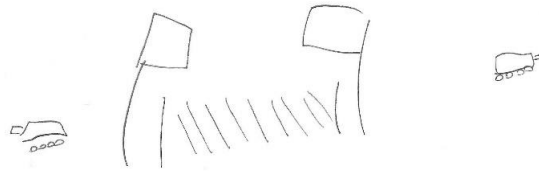


Figure 6-1 Yehuda's drawing of peace

He then said: “for me, peace is simply the absence of war. If you have a fixed border, demilitarized, and the two sides are disengaged, each is driving in the [opposite] direction”. On the other hand, Reem (F, Palestinian) focused on people. She described “a Muslim drinking Arak, a Jew smoking a joint, and a Christian eating falafel; they are all drinking, smoking together [...] the sun [is up], they sit on the lawn, they are happy” (figure 6-2).

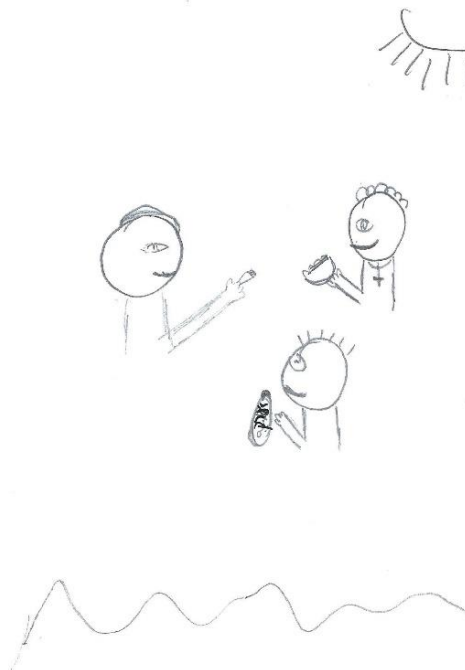


Figure 6-2 Reem's drawing of peace

Reem's idea of peace is the opposite of Yehuda's. Yehuda dehumanized the situation — there are no people in his sketch — instead, he chose to centralize weapons and barriers preventing these weapons from being used. Looking at his drawing, the tension of war is still very present; peace seems so fragile it could collapse at any moment if the two tanks change direction and storm each other. It is the peace of *realpolitik*, characteristic of early scholarship in International Relations. Peace here is no more than a lull in war, a temporary situation laden with mutual suspicions that require physical separation and is based on keeping the two sides away from each other.

On the other hand, Reem's understanding of peace insists on human relations, believing that connections between people from different backgrounds can happen. Her image has no trace of war or an inkling of violence. Instead, she depicts a friendship anchored in everyday life; ordinary people who enjoy simple things together — a cigarette, a meal, a drink. The people in her drawing do not need politicians to help them forge this connection; it happens spontaneously through self-made relationships. Reem's ideas are reminiscent of everyday peace but can also be seen as somewhat naïve and raise crucial questions: how can enemies connect? How can they ignore the injustices created by war?

Aaron (M, Palestinian), representing the *Hadash* party, added the missing piece of the puzzle. He scribbled a map of Israel/Palestine (figure 6-3), containing several elements — a remix of the Palestinian and Israeli flags, bidirectional arrows at the country's borders signifying the free movement of people, and words in Hebrew and Arabic. At the top of the map, the words “dignity” and “freedom” are written in both languages, and at the bottom, Aaron wrote “freedom of movement,” “freedom of worship,” and “sexual freedom” in Arabic. He explained his drawing:

Everybody lives in peace and serenity. And everybody's equal before the law. The law must respect both Jewish and Palestinian citizens. And each side must recognize that the other side has a right [to live here] and one [group's] rights are not superior to the other's.



Figure 6-3 Aaron's drawing of peace

Like Reem, Aaron wants people to live with each other as equals. Yet, he underscores that such equality cannot be achieved without profound structural transformation like changing Israeli legislation that discriminates against Palestinians (Nakhala, 2012). Everyday peace should combine Aaron and Reem's ideas, emphasizing grassroots activities of ordinary people that help generate new, surprising relationships while remaining mindful of the structural problems that must be addressed to make peace possible.

Finally, some interviewees were dumbfounded by the drawing exercise and my request to come up with a concrete definition for peace. Tehila (F, Jewish) drew the iconic CND peace

symbol (figure 6-4, see Rigby, 1998). She explained: “I used the image of the peace symbol, but it is flawed, imperfect. When I was little, I believed in this ideal peace where everybody will be [together], but I soon realized that’s not the case.”

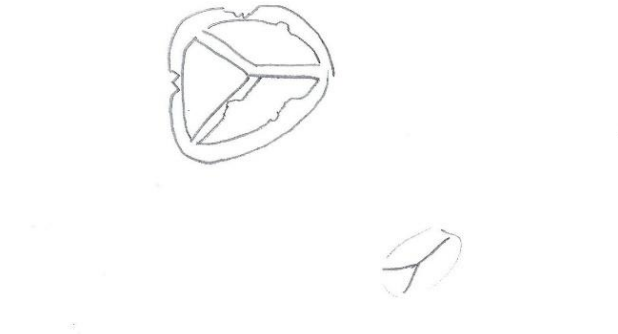


Figure 6-4 Tehila’s drawing of peace

Tehila’s sketch and explanation surprised me because she represented the *Meretz* party. A liberal-Zionist party, it used to carry the banner of the peace process with the Palestinians and the desire to achieve a two-state solution, especially during the heydays of the Israeli peace movement in the 1990s. Therefore, hearing a member of this party instinctively drawn to an abstract symbol when asked to talk about peace made it clear that the concept itself is going through a *semantic crisis*. Its meaning has become obscure, reflecting profound doubts about the possibility of peace among those who used to be its most avid advocates.

After rejecting what she saw as an obsolete idea of peace as togetherness, which Reem suggested, Tehila brought up some contemporary formulations. She mentioned “cold peace,” wherein the two conflicted sides sign an agreement that prevents warfare but does not promote reconciliation that will bring people together; the agreement Israel signed with Egypt is emblematic of such peace (Eldar, 2003). However, it is inappropriate to think about the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict in these terms because Jews and Palestinians are interlaced in multiple, complex ways; the failure of the Oslo process and the two-state solution (Faris, 2013; O'Malley, 2016) suggests that it is difficult if not impossible to keep Jews and Palestinians separate for geographic, demographic and political reasons. Tehila also suggested “economic peace”; in this formula, Israel should improve the economic situation of Palestinians by issuing more work permits or by advancing various economic initiatives in the West Bank. The underlying assumption is that if the Palestinians are better off economically, they will have more to lose by fighting Israel. However, the small benefits offered by economic peace are not the result of any political change; they do not end Palestinian subordination to Israel — they solidify it. Therefore, economic peace undermines any Palestinian attempt to build a viable, independent economy where they can trade freely with the world without Israeli mediation or oversight (Dana, 2015).

Finally, Tehila talked about peace as the absence of war, a definition closer to pessimistic theories of peace in International Relations and Yehuda's suggestion. This mixture of puzzling new meanings of peace emerging in the interviews is not coincidental; it reflects a transformational moment in the Israeli political discourse, wherein peace, which was foundational to Israeli self-perception, is no longer seen as such (Katz, 2021). Therefore, peace as an end to the conflict is replaced with other options that may still use the word “peace” but fall short of suggesting a genuine alternative that will terminate violence and offer a life of freedom and dignity to people on both sides. These options include ideas like “minimizing” (Goodman, 2018) or “managing” (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2007) the conflict. Under these dire political circumstances, a new intervention is acute to salvage peace as a theoretical construct and turn it into a viable, exciting option for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

6.2 Untangling Peace and Justice

Turning back to my conversations with Aaron and Reem, the tension between their definitions of peace evokes a puzzle that keeps resurfacing throughout this manuscript — are peace and justice congruent or mutually exclusive? This debate dates back to the 17th century and revolves around whether peace should be merely contractual, saving people from violence, or if it should also be normative, promoting specific values that deliver justice to people (Albin, 2009). Stopping violence can be agreed upon at the inter-state level, assuming the parties in question are nation-states with a monopoly over the use of force, unchallenged by militias or guerilla groups. However, justice cannot remain a cordial agreement between diplomats; it must be delivered and felt by people in their ordinary lives. It is hardly surprising that early theories of peace in International Relations dismissed the question of justice (Brown, 1997).

A peace agreement restricted to ending blatant violent acts in which people are killed and injured runs the risk of becoming elitist and detached from people's concerns. In an intractable conflict based on questions of identity, mutual hostility runs deep, and violence takes many shapes. The Israeli occupation does not only kill Palestinians but also makes their lives miserable. Palestinian refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist taps into a painful collective fear of a second Holocaust. In retrospect, the failure of the Oslo Accords to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is partly attributed to the disconnection between political elites and ordinary people (Barak, 2005). Negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian diplomats are flawed at the most basic level. Palestine is not an independent state whose representatives can sit around the negotiating table as equals to their Jewish counterparts. Israel occupies Palestinian territories and controls the Palestinian people. Although Israel's presence in the life of a man from Gaza is very different from its presence in the

life of a woman from Nazareth, being surveilled, arrested, and discriminated against by the state is the quintessential Palestinian experience.

I reject colonialist peace plans made by Jewish Israeli thinkers who wish to make peace without justice. They demand that Palestinians leave Israelis alone yet never let Palestinians live a life without fear and close supervision (Bhabha, 2004). Their conceptualization of peace is one of tranquility. I agree that Israelis have every right to demand a life without exploding buses, rocket fire, or mass shootings of civilians. However, by limiting the definition of violence to such gruesome acts, their plans maintain the political status quo while ignoring the everyday violence of the occupation. The case studies explored in this manuscript provide numerous examples of this problem: *Border Gone* posts stories on how Israel denies access to life-saving medical treatment to Palestinians in Gaza; *Arab Labor* discusses how Israeli authorities refuse to connect Palestinians in the West Bank to basic infrastructure, and *Fauda* shows the horror instilled in Palestinians, who become paranoid of undercover soldiers (Reinhart, 1993).

Therefore, reimagining peace in Israel/Palestine requires reorienting our attention to the everyday lives of ordinary people without losing sight of power dynamics and the demand for justice. In the next section, I will explain how the case studies explored in this manuscript offer an opportunity to start thinking about everyday peace through media texts and media practices.

6.3 Everyday Peace through Media in *Arab Labor*, *Fauda*, and *Border Gone*

This project does not provide recommendations on how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through everyday peace, nor does it lay out the specifics of justice in everyday life. One of my main goals is to step away from the prescriptive approach of International Relations theories of peace. Instead, I make a case for description, arguing that peace is already found in everyday

interactions between Jews and Palestinians, captured by popular texts circulating in the media, and in the process of making them. Such texts push back on the Zionist premise that coexistence between Jews and Palestinians is impossible.

Connections between these communities are examined in this manuscript through the popular television shows *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*, and in digital culture, through the activist digital storytelling project *Border Gone*. Taken together, these case studies demonstrate the sensory variety of everyday peace. Television shows provide visual representations of moments when Jews and Palestinians find ways to make peace with each other and with themselves. They illustrate how everyday peace entails internal and external journeys; Doron's relationships with Shirin and his father require a willingness to open up to others, an openness that begets opportunities to discover his repressed Arab identity. His transformation into an Arab necessitates inward-facing courage to destabilize his identity and an outward-facing conviction in his right to do so unapologetically. Doron struggles with both; he is not ready to become an Arab wholeheartedly and keeps his relationship with Shirin a secret because a love affair between a Jew and a Palestinian is taboo in Zionism. Still, such sensitive issues come up in the everyday lives of Jew and Palestinians; they are recognized and discussed by *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* rather than being ignored or scrutinized.

Utilizing the power of description, the shows do not suggest a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor do they offer closure to the problems they evoke. Instead, they provide an opportunity to work through painful issues, addressing the personal price their protagonists pay by living in an intractable, violent conflict. Amjad and Doron fail as Palestinian and Jewish men, demonstrating the intersection between national and gender identities in a conflicted life. When Amjad finally has an opportunity to tell his Jewish neighbors that he does not feel like an Israeli

despite being an Israeli citizen, he admits that the barriers blocking him from becoming a part of society cannot magically disappear by simply passing as a Jew. Nevertheless, the shows exemplify how peaceful life can be found. For Amjad, it means being proud of his Arab identity; for Doron, it means stopping to deny his Arab identity.

Interviewing the creators of the shows echoed the same principles; telling authentic stories about the lives of Jews and Palestinians was the top priority of creative workers. While belonging to different television genres, the shows had to strike a delicate balance between being entertaining and speaking about painful issues. *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* are very successful within their respective genres because they carefully follow their structural conventions —*Arab Labor* is very funny; *Fauda* constantly keeps its audiences on the edge of their seats. As products of commercial television, the entertainment value is the shows' backbone — otherwise, no production company in Israel would have agreed to make them. It helped the shows succeed domestically and internationally; people who watch *Fauda* on *Netflix* worldwide can still enjoy it even if they know very little about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because they understand how an action thriller works. Yet among the mesmerizing car chases, close combats, and special effects, Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff planted solemn scenes reflecting the price of being caught in an endless cycle of violence. Sayed Kashua wrote hilarious episodes about Amjad trying to imitate a Passover seder or transforming into a vegetarian, but he also carefully placed “heavy” episodes towards the end of each season. In these episodes, he discusses grave matters and dares to poke at sacred cows like the Israeli Memorial Day. The funny episodes are used as a “softening” mechanism, putting the audience to sleep by making it think that *Arab Labor* is harmless, frivolous comedy and then delivering a punch to the gut when they least expect it.

This project demonstrates the power of integrated analysis that looks at media texts and production together (D'Acci, 2004) to understand mediatized everyday peace. Had I restricted my analysis to texts alone, it would have been easy to dismiss my argument about everyday peace in *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* as cherry-picking. Indeed, the scenes and episodes where difficult issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are openly, seriously discussed are few and far between. However, looking at these scenes and episodes in the context of industry constraints changes the picture dramatically; it helps us see that show creators must prioritize entertainment value to be commercially successful and to be renewed by the network for additional seasons. It also means they need to be deliberately ambiguous when articulating their points. Issacharoff and Raz take pride in the fact that people struggle to label them as either rightwing or leftwing since each side finds ways to identify with the show. Kashua makes fun of everybody on *Arab Labor*, yet self-deprecation is his primary comedic tool, making Amjad, who represents Kashua, the butt of most jokes. By targeting Amjad, Kashua makes the show much less threatening to his Jewish audiences, who do not feel like they are being directly blamed for Palestinian suffering.

Yet the need to play with meaning is not only an outcome of a commercial need to lure audiences. It also derives from internal uncertainties and blocks creators experience when writing and acting in these shows. The deceptive nature of trauma, making memory unreliable (Peters, 2009), means that the creative process of making *Fauda* and *Arab Labor* became a sandbox for figuring out how to speak trauma. It pushes actors to take enormous risks because acting out a traumatic situation often triggers and resurfaces repressed painful memories. In extreme cases, the result is complete disorientation wherein the actor relives trauma, forgetting that they are only acting. Creating shows about the everyday experiences of the conflict is a form of peacemaking because it pushes Jews and Palestinians to speak the unspoken together.

Thus, there is an overlapping array of internal and external constraints for creating television shows about the everyday experiences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, creators find ways to maneuver around them elegantly while openly talking about controversial issues in Israel/Palestine. Thus, an integrated analysis proves that television fiction is a crucial site for exploring everyday peace. Paying proper attention to production adds another layer to the analysis: the historical context (D'Acci, 2004). *Arab Labor* and *Fauda* were produced during transformative moments in Israeli television — For *Arab Labor*, it was the years following the 2005 tender of Channel 2 wherein commercial television tried to diversify its content; for *Fauda*, it was the early days of streaming television in Israel, leading to increased investment in shows that tell the autobiographical stories of their creators. Understanding this industry history is crucial since developments in the media industries often lead to dramatic changes in the type of content being produced (e.g., Lotz, 2014a).

Everyday peace on television fiction succeeds where mainstream news fails, although the latter has been traditionally assigned the task of communicating peace in most theories of peace and the media. Unlike the news, television fiction can discuss taboo subjects like hybrid identities, interfaith relationships, and Palestinian pride. When Lucy Aharish, a Palestinian journalist, and Tzachi Halevi, a Jewish actor, got married, most news items about the wedding featured a discussion about assimilation. A quarter of them presented mixed marriage as a danger to Jewish identity in Israel (Lachover & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2022). Contrarily, relationships between Jews and Palestinians are central drivers of the plots on *Arab Labor* and *Fauda*.

Focusing on everyday peace in the media helps scholars “see” it, which has been a significant methodological challenge (Mac Ginty & Richmond, 2013, p. 778). Yet everyday peace is not only seen; it is also heard. The work of *Border Gone* demonstrates the power of digital

storylistening; the idea that to build trust, listening should happen without expecting reciprocation and without drawing symmetries in a clearly asymmetrical conflict. The voluntary work of members of this project, magnified during the intense days of the May 2021 war, demonstrates that everyday peace depends on acts of solidarity. The relentless pursuit of justice cannot be accomplished in solitude; it is contingent upon the existence of safe, supportive spaces where activists can think and express their emotions together, which is what happened on the project's WhatsApp group during the war. Palestinians in Gaza have been trying to tell their stories for years to no avail, leaving them feeling abandoned by the world (Nashef, 2022). The managers, translators, and editors at *Border Gone* are engaged in a deep form of listening — translation — which requires them to step outside of their familiar, comfortable world and learn about the impossible life of Palestinians in Gaza. This journey forces members of the project, most of them Jewish, to acknowledge the difficult realities of the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and its effects on the everyday lives of ordinary Palestinians.

Border Gone has become a platform for solidarity that extends beyond cyberspace. The stories create moments of reckoning for participants in the project who face harsh realizations about lies they are told by the state and the stories they heard as kids. When Lital happened to translate a story revealing the dark history of the Kibbutz where she grew up, she was forced to reckon with that history, realizing that her childhood memories happened on stolen lands. Afifa, an Israeli Palestinian, knew little about life in Gaza before volunteering for *Border Gone*. Yet when she learned about the dire situation of cancer patients in the Strip, she immediately used her connections in the Israeli health system to help Palestinians get the treatment they needed and save lives.

Border Gone started as a translation project, but after roughly a year of operation, it turned into an independent news platform while remaining committed to telling stories of ordinary Palestinians. Its crucial contribution crystalized during the May 2021 war when it became the only Israeli news source reporting on what was happening in Gaza. Thus, *Border Gone* shows what compelling peace journalism should look like; it is not enough to go to the war zone, seek out brokers of community peace, write a short piece about them and then head out. Everyday peace in Israel/Palestine requires stories that abide by Gaza (Ismail, 2005), wherein Palestinians get to be the speakers rather than being mediated, adjusted, and sterilized to satisfy the Israeli ear. The uncompromising commitment to telling Palestinian stories is the foundational ethos of *Border Gone*; the Jewish activists operating the project do not only read and write about Gaza or occasionally go to the field when they need to write a story. They forge strong, often dangerous friendships with Palestinians. Many of them go to live in the West Bank for special missions, helping locals resist the army and Jewish settlers. Israel will not allow them to enter Gaza physically, so they do everything in their power to bring Gaza to Israelis. They use the only tool available to them to keep this line of communication open — the internet and particularly social media.

While studying *Fauda* and *Arab Labor*, I could only gauge reactions to the shows anecdotally when creative workers spoke about comments they got on the street from fans. The diffusion and decentralization of internet-distributed television in a post-network era (Lotz, 2009; Lotz et al., 2018) makes it challenging to conduct a reliable reception study that would cover the full scope of reactions to television shows. However, investigating *Border Gone* did allow me to see how Israeli Jews responded to stories from Gaza, especially during a devastating war. Studying these comments was essential because it puts the power of the platform to a real test; had I settled

for interviewing the people operating and volunteering for *Border Gone*, my findings would have reflected a closed elite of people already invested in peace. These activists are similar to the Jewish moderators of intergroup dialogues who engage in deep soul-searching and become committed to advancing peace yet constitute a tiny minority among Israeli Jews (Ron & Maoz, 2013). Ultimately, the goal of *Border Gone* is not to preach to the choir but reach new audiences and educate them about what is happening in Gaza.

However, as pointed out throughout this manuscript, my goal is not to make a direct, casual argument about how Facebook posts (or television shows) convince people to believe and act for peace. Instead, my approach here is similar to the one I adopted previously when studying small digital platforms for peace (Katz, 2020) — I want to understand what type of engagement with a text creates a care structure for peace; a moment when something is slightly shifting, making an opening for more constructive dialogue with other people. *Border Gone* demonstrates the power of descriptive narration to humanize an ostracized community, proving that Palestinians have mundane passions and concerns, just like Jews. Such stories help collapse the longstanding Zionist construct of Palestinians as terrorists. The stories appearing on *Border Gone* alarm Jewish audiences about the ongoing Israeli control over the Gaza Strip through various military and bureaucratic means, many of them left hidden or unspoken in the Israeli public discourse. They expose the bitter irony of Israel’s perception of its army as “the most moral army in the world” (Khalidi, 2010) while it destroys residential towers with powerful bombs, leaving innocent civilians homeless or dead.

The harsh realities of the occupation were not readily accepted and recognized by Jewish commentators on *Border Gone*’s Facebook page. Unsurprisingly, many of them preferred to deny them (Cohen, 2001) by poking holes in individual stories or by trying to discredit *Border Gone*

altogether, arguing that it is a psychological warfare project operated by Hamas. Yet despite vicious responses and attempts to troll the page, many of the vociferous critics of the project kept coming back, reading the stories, and participating in the discussion. I follow the footsteps of Rivkah, one of the project's managers, when thinking about such comments. In her interview, she cleverly pointed out that even the most hateful comments on the page are usually directed at Palestinians. It means commentators see *Border Gone* as a direct line of communication with Palestinians in Gaza — an unrealistic endeavor through any other media. Many comments are attempts to talk to the Palestinian storyteller by asking a question, making an argument, or suggesting a solution to the situation. They often ignore or fail to see the involvement of translators and editors in mediating the stories to them; nevertheless, this direct speech reflects a deep yearning for communication — the foundation of everyday peace.

6.4 Revisiting Hybridity and Authenticity in Everyday Peace

The difficulty of connecting with others is fundamental to communication studies; since the 19th century, communication theorists have been thinking about its power to meld minds alongside its inevitable breakdown. Paradoxically, communication must fail to allow communication to exist; if people can completely understand each other, penetrate the other's minds, and grasp their inner world fully, then communicating is not needed anymore. For Peters (1999), communication theory must acknowledge this intrinsic failure and cherish insurmountable otherness as a wonder rather than a burden of human existence.

The history of the internet, and social interactions within it in particular, illustrates this problem through an ever-shifting balance between hybridity and authenticity. Hybridity marks moments of departure from one's subjectivity into the uncharted terrain of a different identity. It

galvanizes exploration; many members of the LambdaMoo community felt they had permission to experiment with identities other than theirs, although the articulation of these identities was often done in a tasteless, racist manner (Nakamura, 1995). Eventually, anonymous chat rooms, which afforded hybridity, were replaced with algorithmically-driven social networks, where authenticity became an essential value, as a part of an expectation to share one's thoughts and experiences (John, 2017) and as a technical requirement for the proper operation of algorithms (Gillespie, 2014).

Mediatized everyday peace taps into the same communicative puzzle. On the one hand, it requires a movement outside one's subject position when protagonists on television shows experiment with the other's identity or when Jewish activists commit profound acts of solidarity, distancing themselves from Zionist ideology. Ideological subversion often marks these individuals as traitors in the mainstream Israeli political discourse, yet their audacious behavior can also spark curiosity among others, who might decide to educate themselves and experiment with something new.

However, everyday peace is committed to respectful consideration of the other's everyday life. Individuals engaging in solidarity or identity swapping must be conscientious not to "go native" (O'Reilly, 2009), a methodological and ethical concern that has loomed over anthropologists for decades, a remnant of the discipline's colonial past. It is a situation where a researcher, an activist, or an ally forgets that they are a guest in the field, visitors to the place they seek to study or support. Their experiences there must never come at the expense of indigenous communities who do not have the privilege to pack their suitcase and leave the field once a study or a project is over. Jewish managers at *Border Gone* are careful not to cross this line; their declared and exercised goal is to centralize Palestinian voices from Gaza while deliberately moving

themselves to the background. Doron and Amjad, as well as Avi Issacharoff, Lior Raz, and Sayed Kashua, are not passing as others as a form of entertainment or just to do a job. Their passing is categorically different from the toxicity of some anonymous online chat rooms; it is used to excavate a buried heritage (for Doron) or perform conformity to fit in (for Amjad). In all cases, authenticity is a top priority — telling stories that reflect ordinary people's real lives and problems. The incentive to be authentic is ethical but also commercial — the people who work to promote mediatized everyday peace know their stories will not be appealing if they turn out to be fake.

Similar to Peter's (1999) conclusion about communication and its failure, the authentic and the hybrid are not antithetical — they complement each other. Making everyday peace means that one can step outside of their comfort zone while honoring the other's boundaries. Everyday peace makers try to communicate with the other and resonate the other's voice to people in power who need to hear it to deliver long-awaited justice. Yet they also know when to let go as communication inevitably breaks down, and an unbridgeable gap remains.

Appendix

This appendix maps out my interviewees as well as other key individuals mentioned throughout chapter 3 whom I did not interview. Red background indicates that the person was not interviewed. However, in many cases firsthand accounts of making the shows were available online, especially with creators like Lior Raz and Sayed Kashua, with whom I did not speak personally. The industry professionals were involved in the entire creative process unless otherwise stated.

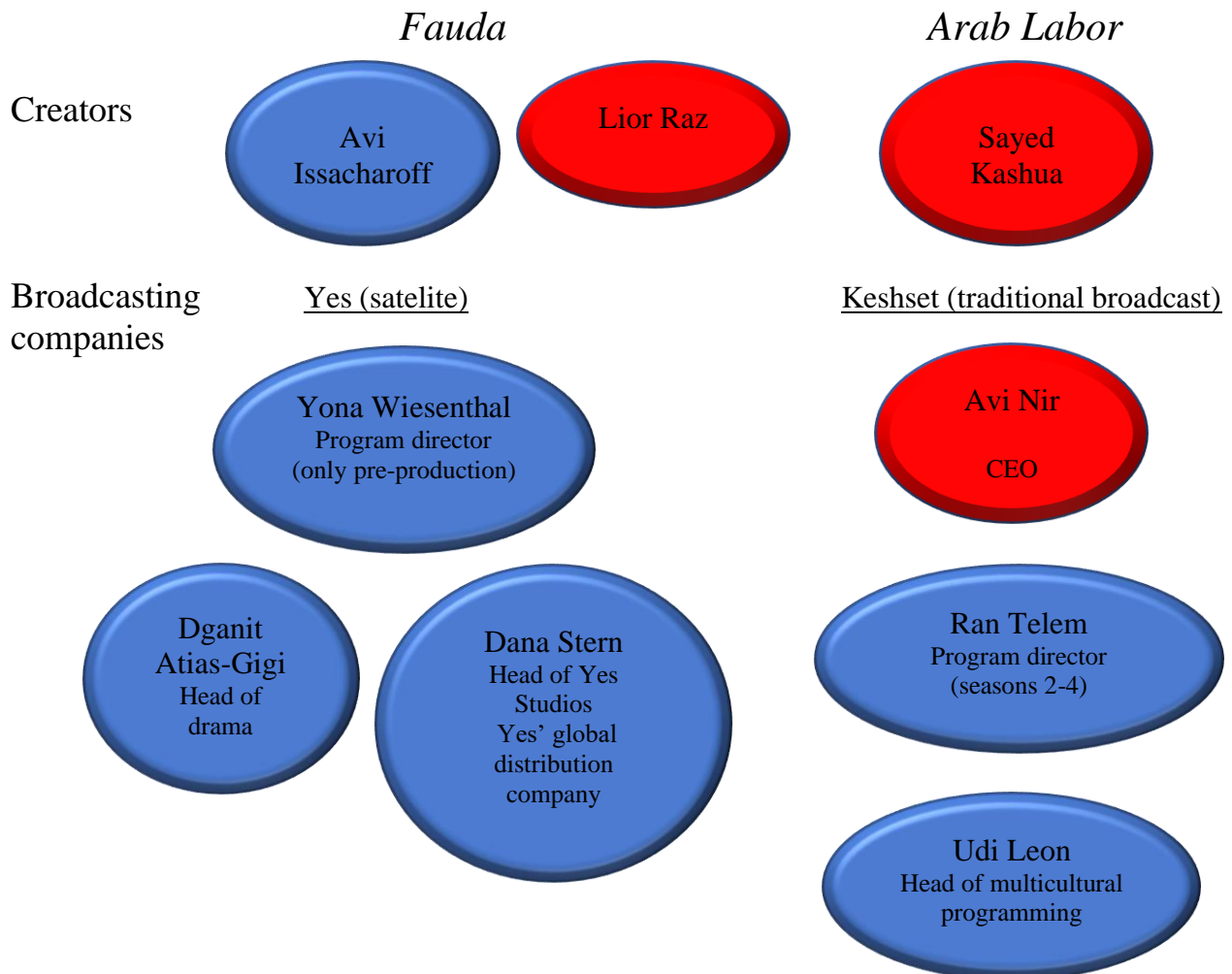
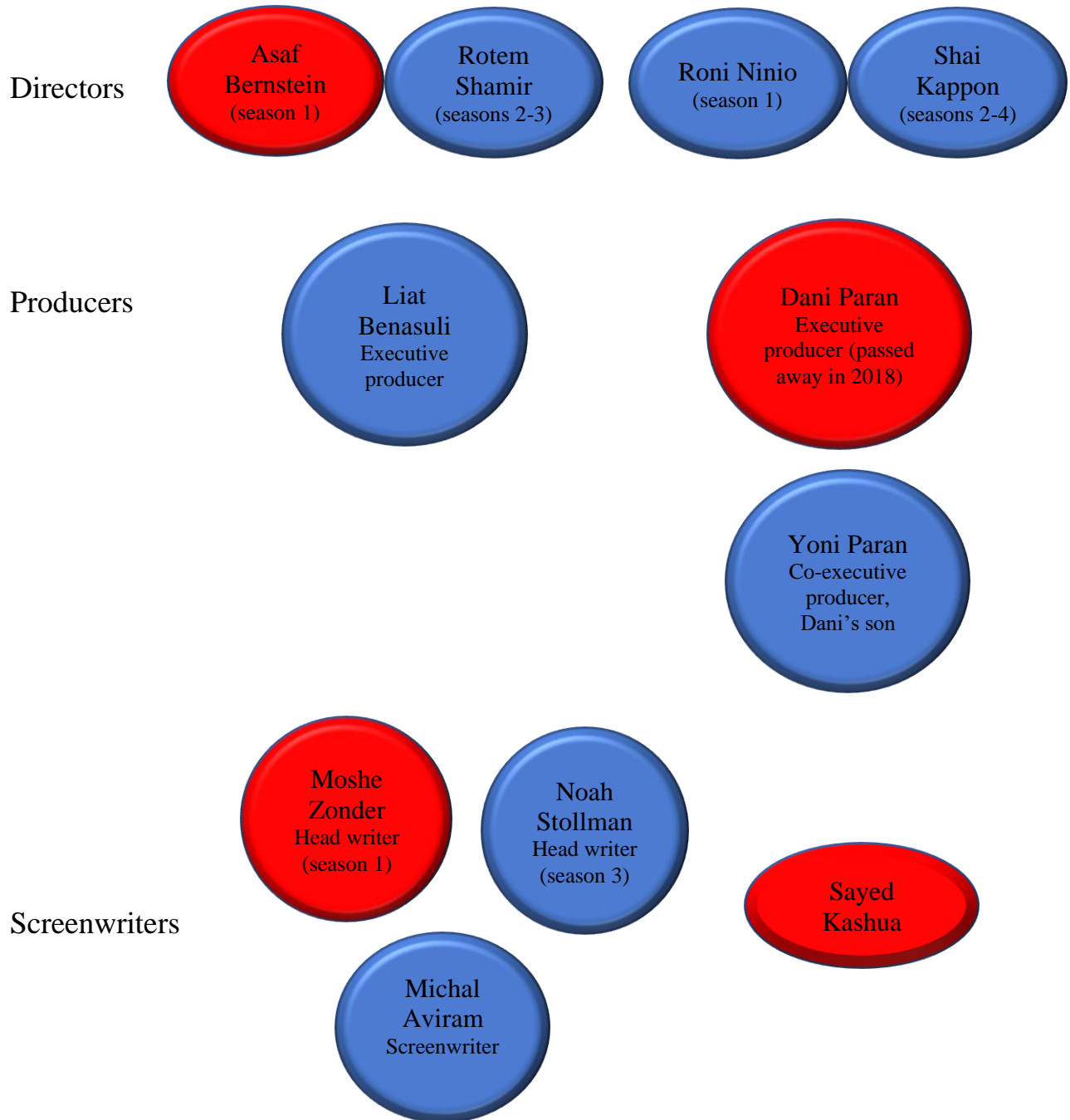


Figure 0-1 Diagram of creative workers for chapter 3

Fauda

Arab Labor



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