ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Existing and Creatively Resisting in Al-Khalil: A Journalistic Study of Art, Humanity, and Resistance from Palestine to Kashmir

Elizabeth Tower, Bachelor of Arts, 2023

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It seems easy to divide up resistance art by artform, by issue, or by geopolitical context. It is, perhaps, more manageable and less overwhelming to do so. However, my attempt to study Palestinian film, literature, music, and visual art as separate topics ultimately failed. As I explored and uncovered a network of connections within Palestinian resistance art, sorting resistance art into neat little boxes became increasingly difficult. I found, at the crux of each connection I uncovered, inherently human experiences, memories, and identities that bled between binary artforms and political contexts. After I spent two months in the Palestinian city of Al-Khalil getting to know artists Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal, I began to ask the question: How do the lived experiences, memories, and identities of Palestinians appear in the interrelated works of Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal, regardless of their medium, to engage their community within the social and political context of resistance in Al-Khalil? This thesis adopts the theoretical approach of intermediality and interarts studies, as developed by Erica Fischer-Lichte and Claus Clüver. This theory explores interrelations between artforms and, in the context of this thesis, helps investigate how artforms like painting, stone carving, videography, and digital art connect and interact underneath the umbrella of Palestinian resistance art. This thesis also asks how such an approach might uncover connections between Palestinian resistance art and the resistance art of other geopolitical contexts. Therefore, I use Kashmir as a point of reference throughout this thesis and uncover connections between the resistance art of Al-Khalil and Kashmir. Through my artistic analysis of Khalili and Kashmiri resistance art and interviews that I conducted with Khalili artists Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal and Kashmiri artist Mir Suhail, I surmise that, in Palestine and Kashmir, resistance art is characterized by human experiences, memories, and identities that are closely tied to the social and political context in which artists, and other members of their collective, are engaging in resistance. When we strip away the divisions between different art forms, mediums, and geopolitical contexts, we can identify threads of commonality that tie together resistance art movements globally.

Existing and Creatively Resisting in Al-Khalil:
A Journalistic Study of Art, Humanity, and Resistance from Palestine to Kashmir

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Ala, your ability to tell stories with your art and your words inspired me to do justice to this story. Thank you for the passion and thoughtful intention behind what you create and what you say—I will always strive to embody it.

Rani, thank you for welcoming me into your art studio, for drawing me into the world of Palestinian art, and for your friendship. You reminded me of the beauty in this world and the unique opportunity that we have to add to it. I wrote this for you.

في مدينة الخليل ما يستحق الحياة.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis was inspired by a human rights internship in the Palestinian city of Al-Khalil, or Hebron, that took an unexpected turn and revealed a rich network of artists in the city. This experience presented an opportunity to explore the relationship between Palestinian art and the human rights situation of Palestine, as affected by the Israeli occupation since 1948. I met artists who responded to Palestine's distinctive humanitarian and human rights situation through their work as painters, stone carvers, animators, photographers, and graffiti artists. Despite the differences in their chosen mediums, these artists constituted a unified artistic community. My immersion in Al-Khalil's artistic community incited questions about how artists who worked with such different mediums were able to support one another and work together.

Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal are two of the artists I met in Al-Khalil. They both create artwork against the backdrop of the city's unique social, political, and humanitarian environment. Sharabati is a 24-year-old painter, photographer, graffiti artist, and high school art teacher. Haikal, originally an architect, has recently adopted the title of "artist" and works in stone carving, animation, and videography. The two artists work on art individually, but they also work on many collaborative projects. In speaking to these artists about their lives and their work, I realized that the two were inextricably linked. Their work reflected their lives, experiences, memories, and identities as Palestinians. As I got to know them, I continued to ask questions about how all of these artistic mediums, the lives of the artists, and Palestinian resistance were all connected and manifesting in Khalili resistance art.

Months later, after my internship had ended and these questions were left open ended, I watched a documentary about art in Kashmir. In this documentary, *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies,* I connected Kashmiri artists and their work to the artists and artwork of Al-Khalil. The histories

and modern resistance movements of Palestine and Kashmir have been compared by scholars, but I began to wonder if anything besides similar colonial pasts and modern resistance ties Palestine and Kashmir together. Above all, I asked the question: are the connections between different art forms, artists' lives and experiences, and resistance isolated to the context of Palestine, or can they be uncovered in Kashmir too? With these questions in mind, this thesis will explore how resistance art is characterized by human experiences, memories, and identities related to the social and political contexts that the artists live in. I will also subvert the binary categories that we use to study conflict, art, and resistance by bringing together artforms and geopolitical contexts in one unified conversation about resistance art.

Literature Review and Research Problem

Problem One: Obscuring Creative Production in Al-Khalil

The first problem that motivates this research is the lack of scholarship on creative production in Al-Khalil. This problem stems from the international community's rigid categorization of Al-Khalil as a site of political tension, humanitarian crises, and human rights abuses. Organizations like the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) fixate on Al-Khalil as a dramatic example of modern-day apartheid and release reports that deal with issues such as access restrictions, Israeli military operations, violence by Israeli settlers, disparities in educational opportunities, and food insecurity (*The Humanitarian Situation).*

Instagram accounts like "Eye on Palestine" and "Human Rights Defenders" disseminate information about the situation in Al-Khalil and feature videos of Israeli soldiers infiltrating the Bab Al-Zawiya area in the southern part of Palestinian controlled H1, home invasions and arrests in Israeli controlled H2, and home demolitions in the city's rural outskirts which are located in

the Israeli controlled Area C of the larger West Bank.[1] Before I traveled to Al-Khalil for two months in the summer of 2022, many of my peers warned me about road closures, checkpoints, segregated areas, and the presence of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) in the old city. Even as I traveled around the West Bank, locals and foreigners alike balked when I told them that I had opted to spend my summer in Al-Khalil instead of in Jerusalem or Ramallah. In my experience, the things that I heard about Al-Khalil were true; the city is a museum of modern-day apartheid and human rights abuses. However, the city is also home to a budding artistic community and rich cultural and artistic heritage.

Scholars who have studied Al-Khalil's cultural heritage approach the topic through the lens of social sciences such as anthropology, political science, international relations, and especially archeological preservation. Scholars emphasize the idea that dividing Al-Khalil into two parts creates legal, administrative, and practical obstacles to preserving the old city (Alshweiky and Ünal, 711). This idea translates to the issue of preserving the Ibrahimi Mosque which, Alshweiky and Ünal argue, cannot be preserved unless it is treated as an architectural whole (ibid). Scholars also emphasize the involvement of the international community in preservation efforts. Due to the adoption of the Ibrahimi Mosque as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the World Heritage fund can provide financial support to preservation efforts (Bleibleh and Awad, 197).

Scholars who study cultural production in Al-Khalil focus on the city's glass and pottery industries. For instance, the article "Cultural Transmission and Perception of Vessel Shapes among Hebron Potters" focuses on "individual and cultural object traits" in Al-Khalil's pottery

[1] After the Oslo Accords, which divided the West Bank into areas A, B, and C, The Hebron Protocol divided the city of Hebron into two parts: H1 which is controlled by the Palestinian Authority and H2 which is controlled by the Israeli military. Hebron's Ibrahimi Mosque was also split into a mosque for Muslim Palestinians residents and a synagogue for illegal Israeli-Jewish settlers (Alshweiky and Ünal, 710).

industry (Gandon et al., 1). Scholarship's emphasis of traditional crafts over modern cultural production was one of the first comparisons that I drew between Palestine and Kashmir. According to Kashmiri artist Showkat Kathjoo, "craft is a major backbone of the [Kashmiri] economy. But for contemporary art, nothing is done" (Godechot). Kathjoo attributes this to the fact that artists can express their disagreement with the state through their work; artwork that expresses political discontent is not lauded in the same way as crafts that contribute to economic growth. (ibid). Therefore, as scholars focus on archeological preservation efforts and craft economies, modern cultural production and resistance art takes a back burner to these other forms of cultural heritage.

To combat this pattern, I will introduce two modern Khalili artists into scholarly conversations about the city of Al-Khalil and provide an overview of their artwork and involvement in the city. Despite their success as artists, Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal are unknown in academia. Their presence in Al-Khalil challenges previous perceptions of the city as void of modern artistic production and will push scholars to accommodate a more comprehensive conception of the city in future scholarship. Furthermore, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, the work of Sharabati and Haikal complements the issues covered in past scholarly work on Al-Khalil as their work addresses many common human rights abuses and emphasizes the value of the old city of Al-Khalil.

Problem Two: Dividing Artforms

Just as the international community categorizes Al-Khalil based on its political atmosphere, it is also quick to categorize artwork and contribute to the development of strict binaries within the study of art. Western approaches to studying art have divided artistic expression into inflexible categories based on medium, the context of production, and the institution through which art is viewed by an audience. The frivolity of these divisions is

exemplified by Erica Fischer-Lichte and Claudia Georgi's debate over the categorization of theater. In her chapter, "Drama, Theatre and (Inter-)Mediality," Georgi addresses Fischer-Lichte's claim that theater should not be considered an individual medium because it combines so many artforms (Georgi, 45). Georgi opposes this claim, arguing that negating theater's status as its own artform would negate the status of all other "plurimedial forms" such as film and opera (ibid, 46). This debate attempts to categorize and define a topic which is distinguished by its fluidity and transformability and demonstrates how inconsequential issues arise from dividing artwork into categories.

The adherence to binary categories and divisions have prevented scholars of Palestinian culture and art from studying the interactions between different artforms. Therefore, the second problem that my research addresses is that, by viewing artforms as binary, isolated categories, scholars fail to identify the many interconnections and relationships between artforms in resistance art movements. Sunaina Maira, for instance, identifies the role of both rap and graffiti art within the Palestinian youth movement in her book, *Jil Oslo*. However, Maira does not explore interactions between these mediums and discusses them in their own respective chapters as separate parts of Palestine's "hip-hop subculture" (Maira).

Other scholarship on Palestinian resistance tends to focus on different artforms as single, autonomous entities. In *Artistic Resistance in the Holy Land: '48 Palestinian Fiction and Hip-Hop,* Miriam Bourgeois discusses both Palestinian literature and hip-hop music but focuses on them as separate artforms, putting them in contrast to one another instead of investigating how they might interact (Bourgeois). In her 2010 article, "Representations of Conflict: Images of War, Resistance, and Identity in Palestinian Art," Luisa Gandolfo acknowledges the expansion of modern Palestinian art into "new realms of expression" like painting, sculptures, and movements

that incorporate the land into art (Gandolfo, 54). She conceptualizes this expansion as a movement outwards instead of as an interplay between traditional and new realms of expression. Gandolfo also recognizes the disintegration of "concepts regarding the boundaries of artworks," but she does not explore how different art forms interact with each other in the Palestinian context (ibid).

Erica Fischer-Lichte, a renowned performance studies scholar, identifies two paramount developments within the study of the arts: the breaking down of binary art forms and mediums such as music, theater, and visual arts and the influence of art on elements of life that are typically viewed as "non-art," such as politics or social norms (Fischer-Lichte, 12). In "Interarts Studies: An Introduction," Claus Clüver's twofold definition of the objects of interarts studies closely mirrors Fischer-Lichte's observed developments and creates a framework for studying the interaction between art forms.

Based on the work of Fischer-Lichte and Clüver, I refer to this theoretical framework as intermediality. Though he often uses the term "interarts," Clüver argues that intermediality is the most appropriate name for this theory because of its range and the "flexibility of 'medium' as a concept" (Clüver, 523). Fischer-Lichte does not view intermediality as interchangeable with interarts, but as one of the three concepts, along with hybridity and performativity, that facilitated the development of interarts studies (Fischer-Lichte, 14). Regardless of whether intermediality is equivalent to or merely an element of interarts studies, it is the most relevant term to this thesis and will be further explored and defined in this and subsequent sections.

According to Clüver, a scholar of comparative literature, the first "objects" of interarts studies are "the kinds of interrelations (and 'metarelations') between individual 'texts' in different arts" which includes "combination[s] in multimedia, mixed-media or intermedia forms,

transposition and adaptation, quotation and imitation" (Clüver, 497). Clüver's use of the word "texts" is derived from the movement towards approaching works of art as "complex structures of signs" (503). Essentially, an individual "text" is any structure of signs meant to be viewed as a single work, whether it be a film, song, poem, painting, sermon, political speech, or flag (ibid). The individual texts that become objects in interarts studies, however, are those that are read as a work of art (ibid). Clüver's next object of interarts studies is "relations among the arts and media, including the institutions where they are produced and received" (497). This object reflects Fischer-Lichte's observation of the aestheticization of everyday life and brings into question the division of art and non-art, a concept that I will address in its own section.

Problem Three: Dividing Resistance Movements

Similar to the second problem I identified, the third problem that my research aims to address is that viewing art within binary categories prevents scholars from exploring interconnections across resistance art movements as well as between artforms. For the sake of managing the scope of this thesis, I will specifically analyze the interconnections between art produced in Palestine and art produced in Kashmir.

The similarities between Palestine and Kashmir's respective political histories and modern struggles have been studied, and their shared colonial pasts and modern resistance tactics certainly contribute to the art produced in both contexts. For instance, Goldie Osuri discusses the military alliance between Israel and India, similar issues of settler colonialism, and the majority Muslim populations of Israel-Palestine and Kashmir which incite Islamophobic, anti-terrorism rhetoric (Osuri). Ather Zia discusses the shared elements of Palestinian and Kashmiri resistance such as stone throwing, the term "intifada," and a rise of creative resistance through art (Zia). The similarities between the colonial histories, political situations, western perceptions, and

resistance movements of Palestine and Kashmir inspired the comparison of the two in this thesis and are relevant to the art produced in both contexts.

I intend to use Kashmir as a point of reference in my discussion of Palestinian resistance art to demonstrate how the patterns and themes identified in Palestinian resistance art are transferrable between geopolitical contexts. I will demonstrate how the experiences, memories, and identities that are central to Palestinian resistance art are mirrored in the Kashmiri context. I will refer to interviews with Palestinian and Kashmiri artists to identify the experiences shared between them and I will analyze artwork in which these experiences manifest. I will also identify patterns between how Khalili and Kashmiri artists use digital art and social media as a part of their artistic resistance movements.

Research Question

The problems that this research is attempting to address are the lack of scholarship on art in Al-Khalil and the binaries which prevent scholars from identifying and analyzing interactions between art forms within Palestine and between the Palestinian context and other cultures of resistance. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following questions: What interconnections within and between resistance art movements are uncovered when the boundaries that separate artforms and geopolitical contexts are blurred? In Al-Khalil, how are the works of Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal interrelated, despite differences in medium, to engage their community within the social and political context of resistance in Al-Khalil? And how does approaching this case study with an interarts lens highlight the connections and patterns that link resistance art in Al-Khalil to resistance art in Kashmir?

Approach and Methods

Intermediality

Intermediality is a useful tool for this research because it breaks down boundaries between art forms and provides a framework for identifying interactions between them. I intend to use it as my theoretical approach to studying the work of Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and other Palestinian and Kashmiri artists. I will analyze the works of art as they stand alone, and I will also analyze the intermedial relationships between them. As explained in the literature review section, objects of intermediality, as defined by Claus Clüver, refer to interactions between individual artistic texts: multimedia, mixed-media or intermedia forms, transposition and adaptation, and quotation and imitation. Objects of intermediality also refer to interactions between art and media, such as the institutions in which they are created and then presented to an audience.

For the purpose of my artistic analysis, I categorize multimedia, mixed-media, and intermedia forms, Clüver's first object of intermediality, as any individual text that combines two or more art forms, traditionally viewed as autonomous, into one artistic whole. An example of this in Ala Haikal's work is his several projects that include a physical QR code, hand carved into stone, that leads to a YouTube video filmed and edited by Haikal. Another example might include collaborative projects between Haikal and Rani Sharabati in which both artists contribute work from their own mediums of choice.

Clüver's second object of intermediality is transposition and adaptation. Best exemplified by film adaptations which transfer literature into cinematic works, the object of transposition and adaptation refers to the transferring of artwork from one context, or art form, into another. In Al-Khalil, Ala Haikal films high quality videos of his stone carving process which become works of art of their own. Many of Rani Sharabati's works are images transposed from his photographs

into paint on canvas. Other examples of this, while outside of the scope of my case study, might include the Palestinian rapper Tamer Nafar releasing a song and later transposing it from an auditory art form into a visual one, such as a music video.

Quotation and imitation, the third object relating to interrelations between individual texts, is the most straightforward. It refers to works of art that reference, imitate, or replicate other individual texts. For example, in the summer of 2022, Rani Sharabati took fourth place in a young artist's competition for a painting that featured Banksy's bellhop ape statue, located outside of Banksy's Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem in which the competition took place (see figure 1). Sharabati painted the ape that Banksy's statue depicts standing atop the Israeli apartheid wall (see figure 2). Another example is one of Ala Haikal's stone carvings that reads "يستحق الحياة" (*yastahiqu al-hayaa)*, meaning "worthy of life." This is a quotation from Mahmoud Darwish's poem "On This Land" and Haikal's carving will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

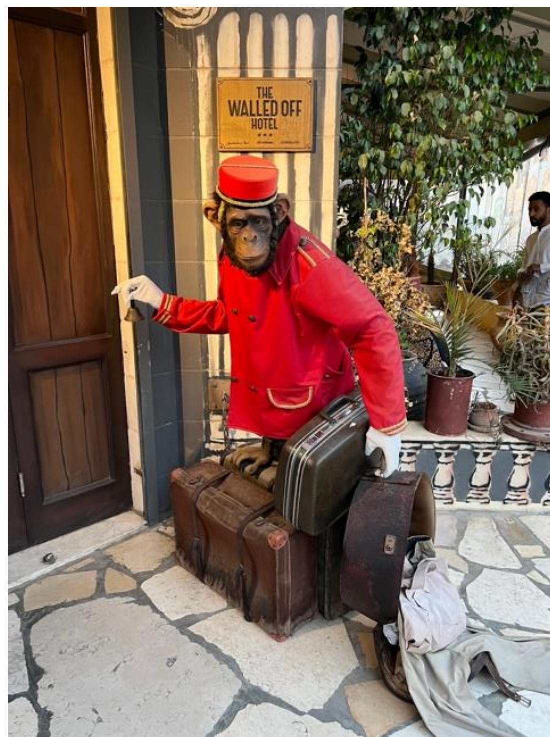

Figure 1. Banksy's Bellhop Statue

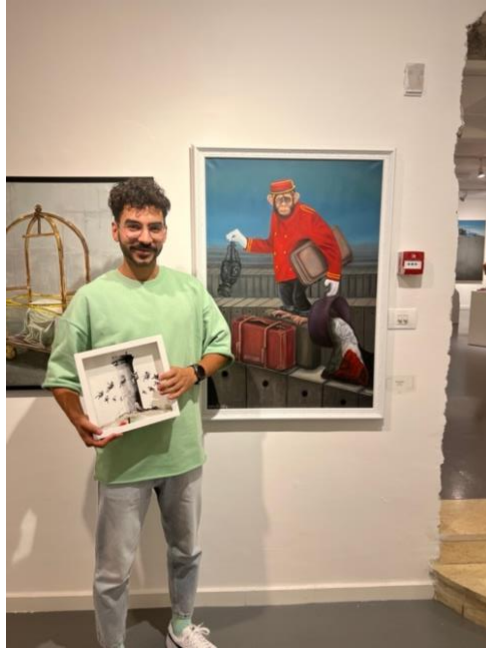

Figure 2. Rani Sharabati with his painting, *Monkey on the Wall*

Clüver's final object of intermediality is interrelations between the arts and media, including the institutions in which they are produced and received. My understanding of the term "institution" will be defined in the following section, along with the distinction between art and "non-art." In my case study, these interrelations look like Rani Sharabati setting up an exhibition in one of the ancient buildings of Al-Khalil's old city and both Sharabati and Haikal's use of Instagram to share their work. This object may also include the relationship between Sharabati and Haikal and the artistic community that they belong to.

Along with Clüver's objects of intermediality, there are a few additional objects that I find relevant to the use of intermediality in the study of resistance art. In the context of artists in Al-Khalil, I am interested in collaborations between artists who work in different mediums. Though Sharabati and Haikal's work differs both visually and tangibly from each other, the two artists still work out of the same art studio and collaborate with one another on various projects. Furthermore, I am interested in each artist individually as they both create work which spans

multiple art forms. Sharabati creates acrylic paintings on canvas, street art like graffiti and murals, and digital photographs. Haikal creates stone carvings and films videos. Though the works that they create in different mediums aren't always interacting with one another, I argue that intermedia collaborations and intermedia portfolios are related to Clüver's objects of intermediality and ought to be explored, especially in this case study.

Art, Non-Art, and the Institution

The distinction between art and non-art is a difficult one to make. Erica Fischer-Lichte defines non-art as fields such as "politics, the economy, new media, sports, religion and everyday practices" (Fischer-Lichte, 12). Claus Clüver, on the other hand, does not give non-art a definition. Rather, he defines art as "a text in any sign system or medium that our interpretive communities authorize or oblige us to read as a 'work of art'" (Clüver, 503). He also posits that, in some applications of intermediality, a distinction between art and non-art is unnecessary, whereas a clear distinction might be made in other cases (ibid, 504).

In my thesis, I define art in the same way as Claus Clüver. I interpret art as any individual text that is put forward by its creator as a work of art or perceived by a group of people and interpreted as a work of art. Therefore, I view the art/non-art dichotomy as a process, not a rigid distinction and adhere to the idea that as artists attempt to embrace something outside of the artistic sphere, they actually bring it into the artistic sphere and broaden the definition of what art can be (Fraser, 104). The categorization of something as non-art is circumstantial and subject to change, and the distinction between art and non-art will only be made in this thesis when necessary.

For the sake of this research, I view the "institution" of art as any site in which art is being created and produced, as well as any site in which art is being viewed and interpreted by an audience. While the institution of art is typically viewed as art galleries, exhibitions, and

museums, my thesis broadens that definition to include private studios, social media, community events, and any space, public or private, where artwork is being shown, viewed, and interpreted. Furthermore, my understanding of the institution also encompasses the social and political contexts and the physical spaces in which art is being produced. In my case study, the institution includes the land on which Rani Sharabati built his own studio, the studio in which Sharabati and Haikal work together, the political and social context of Al-Khalil in which their work is produced, and the artists' social media platforms.

Unstructured Interviews

This research is first and foremost a case study of two Palestinian artists in Al-Khalil with a comparison made to artists from Kashmir. Therefore, the unstructured interviews that I conducted are a key element of my research methods. I chose unstructured interviews over structured interviews with predetermined questions to preserve the integrity of the artists' thought processes and to leave room for our conversations to progress, weave, and shift naturally. I refrained from asking any leading questions, cutting off any trains of thought, or generally polluting the authenticity of each conversation. However, there are varying topics that I was sure to cover with each artist based on what I already knew about them and their work.

Rani Sharabati

Rani Sharabati is a 24-year-old painter, graffiti artist, photographer, and art teacher who I met during my two months in Al-Khalil. Oil painting is his preferred medium, though his portfolio of work is diverse. Therefore, in my unstructured interview with Rani Sharabati, I was interested in the diversity of mediums in which he creates art. As a painter, graffiti artist, and photographer, I wanted to hear him speak on each of those mediums and ascertain whether or not he draws any distinctions between them. We also spoke about the concept of resistance art and explored whether that is a label that he would apply to his own work or not. Based on my

established working relationship with Sharabati, I knew that he is often commissioned by stores, cafes, and schools in Al-Khalil to paint murals and other decorative art. I was interested in learning if and how he views that work differently from his other artistic exploits.

Furthermore, along with his collaborations with Ala Haikal and a few other local Khalili artists, I knew that Sharabati has collaborated with a number of European artists from outside of Palestine on various projects. I spoke with him about those experiences to learn where he finds inspiration outside of Palestine and where he finds common ground with artists from other cultures. We also discussed his role in the artist community of Al-Khalil and, more broadly, of Palestine.

Chapter three of this thesis is especially interested in how the themes of land, space, and place influence and manifest with Sharabati's work. Though he studied art and began his career at Al-Quds University in Jerusalem, Sharabati built his art studio on his family's land on the far north edge of Al-Khalil. He has shown his work internationally, but continues to host exhibitions in the ancient buildings of Al-Khalil's old city and hopes to build a gallery in a cave on the same plot of land where he built his studio (Sharabati, *Interview)*. In our unstructured interview, I aimed to discern why Sharabati chooses to remain in Al-Khalil when he could easily move to a more artistic and culturally literate city like Ramallah. Finally, I spoke with Sharabati about how he engages with members of his local community, many of whom lack appreciation for his art. We discussed his job as an art teacher, the courses that he teaches out of his studio, and community focused projects that he has worked on in the past.

Ala Haikal

Ala Haikal was the second artist who I met in during my time in Al-Khalil. After years of working in architecture, Haikal works primarily in stone carving and videography, but he is also an illustrator and animator. My unstructured interview with Ala Haikal explored similar topics

and themes as my interview with Sharabati, especially about art forms, collaborations, and the significance of land, space, and place. In regards to his use of different art forms, I spoke with him about his habit of filming his stone carving process, editing the footage, and posting it online. We also explored why he adopted this practice and why he finds it important to his work and discussed the significance of land in his work as he fashions his carvings with stones that he has taken from various sites around Palestine. This practice of using the physical land in his work is especially relevant to the questions that I address in this thesis.

While Sharabati has always been an artist by trade, Haikal only recently adopted the title after working as an architect for his entire career. We discussed how he views this transition from architect to artist, how he sees the two fields as inherently different or linked, and what inspired the transition. Many of Haikal's stone carvings depict iconic architectural sites in Palestine like the Ibrahimi Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Golden Gate and we also talked about the thought process behind these pieces. As I will discuss in the chapter 3, this conversation led to interesting revelations about the relationship between art, land, and memory.

Mir Suhail

Mir Suhail is a Kashmiri political cartoonist who I discovered in the documentary *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies*. After being exposed to Suhail and his work, I was able to connect with him via Instagram. While Suhail was based in Kashmir when the documentary was filmed, he has since moved to New York City. When I visited New York in February of 2023, we were able to meet in person for an interview. This interview aimed to explore Suhail's work as a political cartoonist and experience as a Kashmiri artist. We discussed the advent of his career and the jobs that he held in Kashmir before he began to draw cartoons for a living. Our interview lent significant focus to the mediums of Suhail's work and he spoke about the rise of social media and digital art and how these things have impacted his career. Other topics of conversation

ranged from censorship by the Indian government, his move to New York city, and his understanding of creative resistance. We also spoke about the cartoons that Suhail has drawn about Palestine and his understanding of the connections between the Palestinian and Kashmiri struggles.

Artistic Analysis

Artistic analysis is an important part of my research methods, especially when drawing comparisons between Palestine and Kashmir. I will be analyzing the work of Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and Mir Suhail, along with the work of Kashmiri artists Syed Mujtaba Rizvi and Showkat Kathjoo. I will also draw connections between statements made by Palestinian rapper Tamer Nafar and Kashmiri rapper MC Kash. For my artistic analysis, I intentionally chose pieces of artwork that varied across art forms to emphasize the diversity of resistance art being produced in Al-Khalil and Kashmir. Furthermore, because Rani Sharabati is 24 years old and has only been producing work since his teenage years, I will not analyze any works produced prior to 2010. This chronological boundary is also necessary because social media is an important aspect of the modern institution of art and the role of social media will be obsolete if I analyze works from too long ago.

Since I will conduct my artistic analysis through a lens of intermediality, I will focus on the objects of intermediality found among my selected artworks. I will be analyzing interrelations between individual texts within Palestine, within Kashmir, and between the two. In this analysis, I will use Clüver's definition of the objects of intermediality to identify patterns that arise between both cultures of resistance. I will also analyze relationships between works of art and the institution, such as a video that has been posted to YouTube or an image of a painting uploaded to Instagram. I intend to analyze collaborations between artists who work in different mediums as well.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that my academic background and personal experiences are more centered on Palestine than on Kashmir. In the summer of 2022, I spent two months in Al-Khalil as a human rights intern. During through those two months, I spent time in Rani Sharabati's art studio and in Pal Motion, the studio in which Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal work collaboratively with other artists in Al-Khalil. We spent time talking in cafés, traveling to art galleries in other cities, and creating art together. Furthermore, my undergraduate degree was focused on Middle Eastern comparative culture and identity with a specialization on Palestine. Therefore, my comparison between the contexts of Palestine and Kashmir will lend more time and attention to Palestine, with Kashmir serving as a point of reference for examining my hypothesis about the translatability of patterns in resistance art movements.

Argument

In Palestine and in Kashmir, resistance art is characterized by human experiences, memories, and identities that are closely tied to the social and political context in which artists and other members of their collective are engaging in resistance. When we strip away the divisions between different art forms, mediums, and geopolitical contexts, we can identify the shared individual experiences that inspire resistance art and tie together resistance art movements like those of Palestine and Kashmir. The use of intermediality helps to blur divisions between binary categories. It also creates room for the use of sources that highlight different elements of the artists experience alongside their work, further bringing to light the patterns and themes that tie resistance artwork and resistance art movements together.

Significance

This thesis expands upon past political comparisons drawn between Palestine and Kashmir by comparing art produced in both contexts. This establishes an unstudied connection between Palestine and Kashmir and opens an opportunity to compare them through a humanities

lens instead of a social science one. This cross-cultural comparison is important to our understanding of collective identity, resistance, and decolonization. The comparison of Palestinian and Kashmiri art can also extend to other contexts of resistance. For instance, as I mention in a footnote in Chapter 4, one Kashmiri artist's artistic resistance mirrors a practice of artistic resistance in Egypt.

This thesis also introduces scholars of Palestinian art to Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and their respective bodies of work. In doing so, it will present Al-Khalil as a site of artistic expression and creative production. As Al-Khalil is typically studied through social science lenses for its tenuous political and human rights situation, this thesis presents a new point of view that establishes a more comprehensive picture of the city of Al-Khalil.

Finally, the use of intermediality in the study of resistance art is also a new approach. Intermediality allows us to analyze the ways that political and human rights issues, social identities, and human experiences manifest in art, regardless of medium, and how the artists' experiences and the context of production, content, and elicited response of a piece of art resonates with people in a way that transcends its characterization as a certain form of art. Essentially, the use of intermediality in this thesis establishes a new lens through which we can discuss art and overcome the binaries that so often dictate the study of art.

Conclusion

This chapters of this thesis are broken down by theme. Chapter two will answer the question "what is resistance art?" by breaking it down into two elements: the communal and the personal. Chapter two will first discuss resistance art as representative of a collective narrative and used as a collective tool. Social media, which serves the same function, will be discussed in tandem with communal resistance art. Next, chapter two will turn to more personal understandings of resistance art and will draw on the insights gained from my unstructured

interviews. Overall, chapter two aims to demonstrate that the communal and personal elements of resistance art are equal in importance.

Chapter three will focus on the themes of land, space, and place as they appear in Khalili resistance art. The chapter will focus on the role that land plays in Palestinian collective identity and experience and how this appears in the art of Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal. This will be accomplished by analyzing Palestinian art that engages land, space, and place as either a subject or a medium. Chapter three will also focus on the experiences of these Palestinian artists that relate to the land of Palestine. Finally, the chapter will use Kashmiri art that deals with land, space, and place as a useful point of comparison to further analyze the patterns identified in the Khalili art.

Finally, chapter four focuses on human rights violations and legal and political issues in resistance art. The chapter will first discuss rap and graffiti as widely accepted mediums of resistance art due to their illegality and position in opposition to the status quo. Next, this chapter will discuss the legal challenges faced by Khalili and Kashmiri artists and their experiences with political subjugation and human rights violations which have inspired their art. This chapter will also offer a discussion on common human rights and legal issues faced by Palestinians and Kashmiris and put forth works of art that address and resist each issue.

This thesis aims to address the problems caused by binaries imposed on the study of resistance art and art in general. It will also answer the question of what patterns and interconnections might be uncovered when binary categories and divisions between artforms and resistance art movements are blurred. Ultimately, this thesis argues that uniquely human experiences, memories, and identities tie together resistance art across artforms and geographies

and can be best identified when we adopt an intermedial and cross-cultural approach to studying resistance art.

Chapter 2: What is Resistance Art?

لكي أكتب شعراً ليس سياسيّاً يجب

أن أصغي إلى العصافير،

ولكي أسمع العصافير يجب

أن تَخرس الطّائرة (Makhoul, 20) .

To write poetry that isn't political

I must listen to the birds,

And to hear the birds

The planes must be silent.

Introduction

According to Mafalda Young, "Palestinians have found in art one of their most important and empowering tools of nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation" (Young, 19). Young writes that art "challenge[s] the hegemony of the Zionist narrative," "contribute[s] to the construction of the Palestinians sense of togetherness and national identity," and "has been one of the driving forces…of Palestinian resistance by mobilizing Palestinians to act" (ibid). Young conceptualizes art as a tool of collective expression, as inherently communal; art becomes resistance when it is wielded by an oppressed collective against their oppressor. In my academic study of Palestinian art, I have found these things to be true.

The writings of Mahmoud Darwish have represented the Palestinian people's collective struggle and have been reincorporated into their collective identity. Darwish's portrait and writings can be found in places all over Palestine, like at the Palestine Polytechnic University in Al-Khalil (see figure 3). Naji Al-Ali's cartoon boy named Handala, a personification of the Palestinian refugee collective, is as "ubiquitous on the walls of Dheisheh as he is throughout

Palestine and on the bumper stickers and Facebook pages of the Palestinian diaspora abroad" (Olin, 181-2). Together, the works of Darwish and Al-Ali, along with others like painter Sliman Mansour or writer Ghassan Kanafani, comprise the communal and representative form of resistance art that scholarship focuses on. However, in my conversations with Palestinian artists, I found that thinking of resistance art as a tool, wielded by the Palestinian collective to chip away at the Zionist entity's colonial power, does not paint the whole picture.

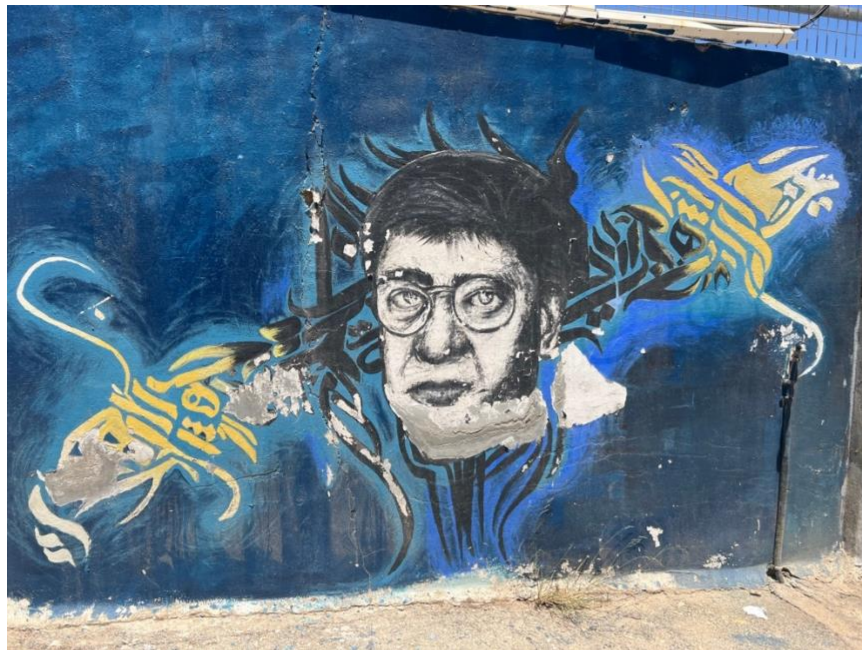

Figure 3. Mahmoud Darwish Mural at the Palestine Polytechnic University

In painting resistance art with such a wide brush, scholars and academics obscure the uniquely human experiences of individual artists and creatives who contribute to the network of resistance art that we can see from the outside. In my unstructured interviews with Rani Sharabati, Ala, Haikal, and Mir Suhail, I brought up the concept of resistance art. Each artist spoke about the relationship between their artwork and resistance, but the things that they spoke about did not match my big-picture conception of resistance art. As I studied their work in tandem with the work of other Palestinian and Kashmiri artists, I was able to see how the work

of each individual artist fit into the larger narrative of resistance art. However, what these artists had to say was much more intimate, personal, and individual than I had expected. They don't necessarily see themselves as a part of a larger resistance art movement from their position inside of it. Of course, some artists gain undeniable notoriety, but in the words of Mir Suhail who grew up feeling as if he should try to change something, "there is no Superman, [not] even in New York City" (Suhail, *Interview*). Essentially, most artists like Suhail don't think of themselves as catalysts for change or bringers of justice.

During my interview with each artist, in the moments where I expected them to bring up the Kashmiri or Palestinian people's fights for justice or the collective struggles that they belong to, they spoke instead about coping with their own trauma, navigating their own depression, and recording their own thoughts. These things countered my understanding of resistance art as being inherently communal. As I weighed my own understanding of resistance art with the anecdotes and personal philosophies garnered from the three interviews I conducted, I began to ask if there may be a better way to conceptualize resistance art. How can we talk about resistance art as a tool while taking the unique outlooks of individual artists into account? Ultimately, I argue that collective resistance is derived from the experiences and trauma of individuals. These individuals are not components of collective resistance by accident, but because they have undergone similar experiences of trauma and oppression that unite them under one collective. To truly understand resistance art or even resistance movements as a whole, we must pay attention to the individuals that the collective is comprised of, along with their experiences and modes of self-expression.

This chapter is going discuss this duality of resistance art in which the communal can only be fully understood if one understands the personal. First, I will discuss resistance art in Palestine as Mafalda Young sees it: as a communal tool of collective expression. This side of

resistance art is big-picture oriented. It consists of final artistic products and the messages that they carry. It is also communal as artists build off one another's work, interact with each other, and spread their artwork and political messages to broader audiences. Over the past two decades, social media has played an increasingly important role in making resistance art communal. Therefore, the first half of this chapter will discuss the relationship between art and social media in Palestine and will focus on how the blending of physical and digital mediums makes resistance art easier to be shared.

However, when art is used as a communal tool of resistance, the individual narratives that make up the Palestinian collective narrative are obscured and the collective narrative is depersonalized. For instance, when we look at Naji Al-Ali's Handala cartoon, as a representation of the Palestinian refugee collective, we are removed from the everyday struggles of individual Palestinian refugees. After a while, we begin to think of Palestinian refugees as a monolith that can be adequately represented by a single cartoon boy. By focusing on communal resistance art that aims to represent an entire collective without narrowing in on individual experiences, scholars risk depersonalizing resistance art. Therefore, the second half of this chapter will be devoted to the other side of the coin: the intimately personal side of resistance art and the personal value that it holds for individual artists.

In the second half of this chapter, I will discuss how specific artists in Al-Khalil and Kashmir think about art and resistance by using information gleaned from their interviews. By giving focus to the personal side of resistance art and the philosophies of the artists who make it, I lay a necessary foundation for the rest of this thesis which stands upon the claim that resistance art movements are best understood by reincorporating individual narratives, experiences, memories, and identities into analytical conversations about art and resistance as a communal

practice. The personal philosophies and experiences of Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and Mir Suhail will be essential elements of the artistic analysis that I conduct later in this thesis.

From the outside in, resistance art looks like a tool of collective expression, mobilization, and unification. From the inside out, however, artists don't always view themselves as being part of a larger movement of artistic resistance. Instead, through exploring the attitudes that artists hold towards their art in a context of resistance, we uncover a personal element of resistance art that goes hand in hand with its communal element.

Communal Artistic Resistance Through Social Media

In their article, "From Wall 1.0 to Wall 2.0: Graffiti, Social Media, and Ideological Acts of Resistance and Recognition Among Palestinian Refugees," Eric Ping Hung Li and Ajnesh Prasad write about the rearticulation of physical expressions of resistance, like graffiti originally inscribed on the Israeli apartheid wall, in the digital forum of social media (Li and Prasad, 493). The article characterizes discusses the "dynamics of Wall 1.0 by focusing on how graffiti in the occupied Palestinian territory of the West Bank is employed as an ideological act by which to convey personal realities and political messages" (ibid, 495). On one hand, Wall 1.0 is the physical apartheid wall between Israel and the West Bank as a site of resistance. Their discussion of Wall 2.0, on the other hand, pertains to the use of social media as a different tool for achieving the same goals (ibid).

Li and Prasad posit that Wall 1.0 and Wall 2.0 work together to as one dimension of "transmedia storytelling," a term coined by Henry Jenkins in 2010, which refers to the division of integral elements of a narrative across multiple artistic mediums as pieces of a single unified storytelling endeavor (ibid, 494). As they delineate the movement of resistance art into the digital realm of social media, Li and Prasad write, "narratives are transformed, reconstructed, and recirculated in the networked space, while new content is joined, integrated, and rearticulated

from past narratives" (ibid, 507). This idea, and its application in the context of Palestine, is closely related to my study of different artforms present in the Palestinian resistance art movement.

In a resistance art movement, the transition of resistance into the digital world allows for the sharing of "hashtags, photos, videos, and stories created in an effort to elucidate the experiences of Palestinians" (Li and Prasad 502). Social media as a tool of resistance is relevant to this study of resistance art for several reasons. First and foremost, social media allows artists to share their work whenever they want to. It allows them to use art as an immediate response to current events, rather than having to take the time to start and finish a new piece of art as time-sensitive events unfold around them. For instance, Rani Sharabati has used his Instagram account to post artwork in response to unfolding violence in Gaza.

On August 5, 2022, Israel launched a so-called "pre-emptive" military strike in Gaza which lasted three days (Israel/OPT). According to the United Nations, this strike killed 49 Palestinians, including 31 civilians (ibid). On August 5, Israel bombed a Gaza City apartment building, killing an Islamic Jihad commander, as well as a five-year-old child and eight other civilians ("Israel's Assault on Gaza). In response to these attacks, Rani Sharabati posted one of his paintings on Instagram (see fig. 4). This painting, called *Gaza Under Attack,* features two birds looming over a cityscape below. The two birds are positioned beak to beak, as if they were fighting, and a black cloud fills the space between them (Sharabati, "Gaza Under Attack"). Though he painted this piece in 2021, he chose to share it on Instagram in coincidence with the Israeli attack on Gaza in the summer of 2022. Instagram allows art to transition between physical and digital mediums which encourages its spread and viewership to grow. It also allows artists

like Rani Sharabati, who's medium of choice is time consuming, to respond to political events with art that they've already created.

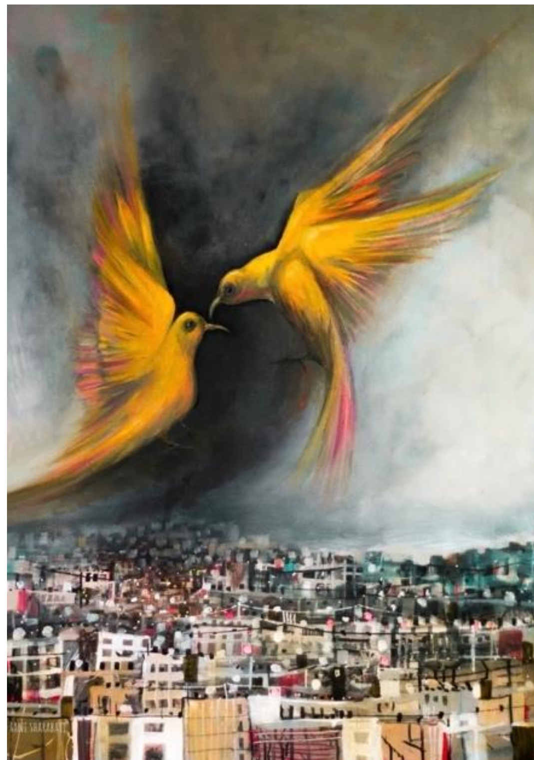

Figure 4. *Gaza Under Attack,* Rani Sharabati

Furthermore, "the semipublic nature of social media invites 'readers' to join in the conversation and, in so doing, to become instrumental actors in the shaping of the discourse" (ibid, 499). This characteristic of social media allows an artist's followers to engage with their work as well as with the issue that they are addressing. Because of its interactive elements, social media also functions as a bridge between artists who may not otherwise work together, as their artwork ranges a variety of mediums. For instance, though Kashmiri rapper MC Kash has a private Instagram account with only around 7,000 followers, political cartoonist Mir Suhail follows his account (Suhail, *Interview).* I have also witnessed online interactions between the Khalili artists Rani Sharabati and Izz Al-Jabari and Palestinian actor Adam Bakri who follow each other on Instagram and repost each other's work.

Finally, Li and Prasad's article supports my claim that scholars tend to talk about resistance art and resistance in general as a communal act. Li and Prasad see the blending of individual narratives into a collective narrative as one of social media's strengths. They write, "[coproducers] share and forward others' postings in the networked world; therein, ensuring that the audience will be exposed to a collection of narratives instead of an individual or an isolated story" (Li and Prasad, 506). I do not argue that presenting a collective of narratives to an audience is in any way misleading or harmful. I do, however, argue that there is benefit in paying attention to one story at a time. Mir Suhail echoed this sentiment in our interview when he said, "I am not a historian, [who] gives the key points or [who] talks about numbers. My important rule is to talk about one number…if a person died today, we should know who died. Not that that person was a number we can count in [the] future" (Suhail, *Interview*).

Pop Culture Icons in Communal Resistance Art

The use of pop culture icons in resistance art is another key element of our understanding of resistance art as a communal tool. By incorporating recognizable figures or symbols in resistance art, the artist caters to a larger audiences' interests and provides a cultural touchstone that allows more people to feel "invested" in resistance art. For instance, during my two months spent in Palestine, I received countless recommendations for the television show *La Casa de Papel,* or *Money Heist*, a Spanish heist crime television drama. The show is popular among Palestinians and I watched a few episodes with my host family during my stay. In the series, the characters wear "Dali masks," modeled after Salvador Dali, and Sharabati translates this symbol into one of his paintings (see fig. 5). Sharabati's painting features a figure with a Palestinian keffiyeh wrapped around their face and one of the Dali masks in their hand.

The show and it's Dali mask-wearing characters carry anti-fascist connotations. The Italian anti-fascist anthem "Bella Ciao," which was sung in defiance of the Nazi's and Mussolini regime during World War Two, is the main song sung by various characters throughout the series (Bahl). By using a recognizable image from such a popular cultural phenomenon with connotations of resistance, Sharabati opens up an avenue for members of his community to engage with his work and creative resistance. To this end, Sharabati borrows images and symbols that are circulated in widely viewed digital media, like television and film, and translates them into his chosen medium of oil paint as resistance art.

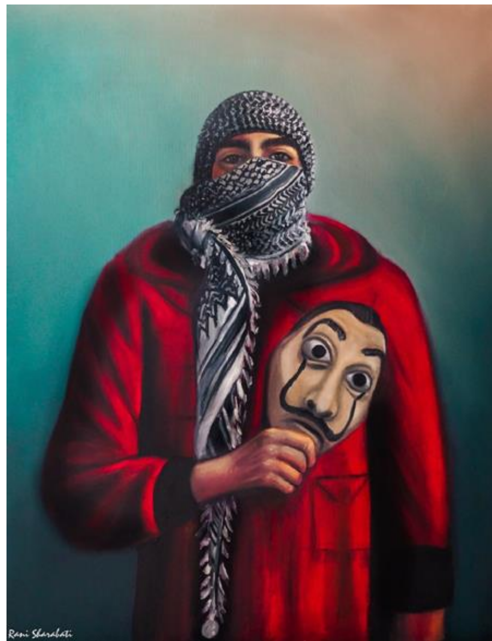

Figure 5. مقاومة *(Resistance)*, Rani Sharabati

Sharabati utilizes another cultural icon of resistance in a different painting that features the Joker, the Batman villain, dancing on top of the apartheid wall (see fig. 6). In this painting, Sharabati puts the Israeli occupation front and center by invoking the symbol of the apartheid wall, but also interjects a cultural icon who will make the piece relevant to a larger audience and serves as an international symbol of resistance. The Joker has appeared as a symbol in protests in Lebanon, Iraq, Chile, and Hong Kong (Kaur). Having descended into madness due to a life in

Gotham City characterized by wealth inequality, crime, and cuts to social services, The Joker has been adopted by the "downtrodden" of the world as their mascot (ibid). In his painting, Sharabati subverts the power imbalance between Israelis and Palestinians by depicting The Joker, a representative of the oppressed, dancing atop the apartheid wall. The Joker, just like the symbolic mask from *La Casa de Papel,* builds a bridge between Sharabati's audience and the pro-Palestinian political message present in his work. Because the Palestinian struggle is not always relatable to an international audience, Sharabati increases the relatability of his work by using cultural icons to connect with those who view his work.

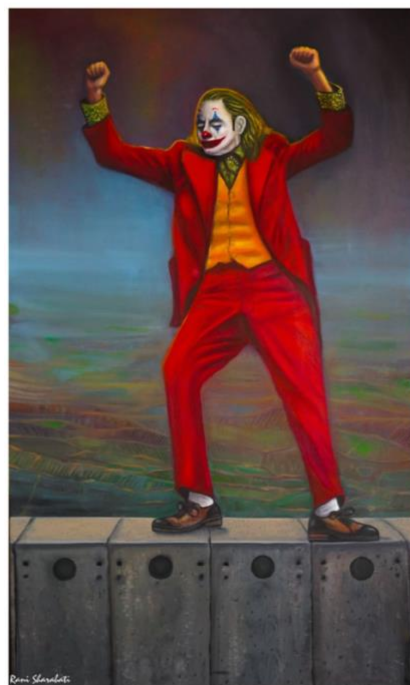

Figure 6. *The Joker*, Rani Sharabati

While studying art as a method of collective expression and resistance is important, it only paints part of the picture. This approach allows us to identify the messages and motives of resistance art that reflect the experience of the collective, but it obscures individual narratives, traumas, and experiences. To obscure individual narratives is to depersonalize and even dehumanize resistance art movements, placing focus on the movement as an entity instead of on

the individual human beings who contribute to it. For instance, if we study any of Sharabati's paintings without discussing his personal experiences and understanding of resistance, we are removing ourselves from the human element of resistance art. We can better understand resistance art and empathize with its creators if we study the personal alongside the communal.

Personally, I Think Resistance Art Is…

While scholars who study resistance art view it as a tool or a mode of collective expression working hand in hand with social media, each artist who I spoke to sees resistance art in a different light. When scholars refer to art as a tool, they imply some level of intentionality held by its wielder. They imply that artists who contribute to collective resistance art movements wake up each morning with the intention to do so. However, levels of intentionality and political conviction vary from artist to artist. According to Rani Sharabati, it's impossible to be an artist from Palestine and only paint landscapes, flowers, and blue skies because the political situation affects all people (Sharabati, *Interview).* In his words, "all of painting, all of drawing, all of art [in Palestine] is resistance art" (ibid*).* Therefore, Sharabati sees himself as contributing to resistance art by default. This isn't to say that Sharabati doesn't mean to imbue his art with political commentary. Rather, Sharabati makes no conscious choice to make resistance art because, as he understands the nature of art in Palestine, he can't consciously choose not to. Can resistance art be solely described as a tool if Sharabati makes no intentional choice to wield it? Can a tool be wielded accidentally?

Ala Haikal has an understanding of resistance art that is unique to his craft as a stone carver. In our interview, he spoke about the intifadas, or Palestinian uprisings, in which mostly unarmed Palestinian protesters threw stones as a means of protesting the Israeli occupation (Haikal, *Interview).* According to Haikal, the stone became an icon of saying "no" in the Palestinian resistance movement (ibid). Haikal, as a stone carver, has taken this iconic symbol of

rebellion and resistance and repurposed it in a peaceful and artful way. Tourists visiting Al-Khalil can purchase Haikal's work and carry it back to their respective countries with them. According to Haikal, he is still throwing stones, but they are going even farther than they went before to tell the story of Palestine (ibid).

The most prominent trend that I noticed between the artists that I interviewed was that they understood their art as carrying personal value for them, as well as representing their communities. Even though Haikal uses his stone carving as a way to "tell the story of Palestine," he adopted the craft of stone carving because it has been passed down through his family for generations (Haikal, *Interview*). I will discuss this more in the next chapter, but Haikal makes it clear that he adopted the craft of stone carving because it was a part of his family's heritage, not because he was seeking a mode of resistance. Mir Suhail also exemplifies the duality of resistance art as communal and personal through his work and his personal experiences.

Mir Suhail

Due to his particularly rich insights, the rest of this chapter will lend special focus to Mir Suhail. Mir Suhail is a Kashmiri political cartoonist who is now based in New York City. I had the opportunity to meet and interview him in February of 2023 and gleaned insight into his artistic philosophy and personal understanding of what art as resistance really means. Suhail is a prime example of an artist who has a deep personal connection to his work while also contributing to the larger, communal narrative of resistance art. The following section includes the ideas discussed during my interview with Suhail, followed by my analysis.

To Mir Suhail, drawing is everything. Suhail has dyslexia and struggled with reading and writing as a child, so he turned to drawing instead. He drew on his homework, much to his teacher's chagrin. His mother supported his artistic tendencies because Suhail's grandfather had been a musician, and therefore, his mother understood the value of music and art. Art gave

Suhail an avenue to express himself and, as he said to me, “I believe my work, my art, is my language…it’s hard to speak and it’s easy to draw” (Suhail, *Interview*).

Aside from his mother, most people tried to convince Suhail to abandon his artistic pursuits because there was no money to be made in that field and art supplies were costly. He worked for a while selling medicines until a friend suggested that he work for a newspaper, but the paper’s head designer told him that he could not be a cartoonist because he didn’t have a well-developed political awareness. In response to that, Suhail argued that he knew enough about Kashmir, that one of his friends had been killed and while he didn’t have academic knowledge of Kashmir, he was emotionally connected to it (ibid).

When I asked Suhail whether he considered his work resistance art, he said, “I’m not resisting, I’m just asking questions.” Along the same train of thought, he said, “art is literally a cure, even for my own depression. When you ask yourself questions like, ‘why am I living in this situation?’ ‘why don’t they respect us?’ ‘why don’t they feel that we are human?’ it hurts you. You don’t have answers.” For Suhail, art is a way to ask these difficult questions and to reconcile the injustices that he lived through in Kashmir. In his words, “art can help you to get an answer” (ibid).

Another theme in my conversation with Suhail was the idea of art as a coping mechanism and a tool to mitigate and process trauma. He views art as a means to release trauma, saying, “if you see a person who’s getting killed, imagine their trauma. When you try to draw that, you will get some relief from that trauma.” Suhail also attributes art with the power to transform trauma. He said, “when you see blood all the time, you try to change it into a different thing. You call it red...and then you use it as a color in your drawing. Art also tries to minimize that psychological pressure and that harshness” (ibid).

Furthermore, Suhail demonstrated an acute understanding of resistance art as being both inherently communal and inherently personal. Reflecting Sharabati's sentiment about all art in Palestine being resistance art, Suhail said, "imagine if you're not from a conflict zone but you're an artist…[This] artist is doing something else…creating some beautiful furniture for someone, even creating a gun for someone. As an artist from a conflict zone, I try to portray a narrative…about my people, people who don't have rights" (ibid). As Suhail acknowledges his goal of illustrating a collective narrative of the Kashmiri people, he also understands the importance of the individuals who make up that narrative. Suhail told me that he sees himself as an impressionist and said, "every second is important, every second someone feels something, so let's draw like that…if I don't document every day…then it will not be there, the charm of the story" (ibid). As Suhail works to tell the collective story of his people, he is inspired by the feelings and emotions that individuals are experiencing at any given moment.

Finally, when Suhail and I continued in our conversation about resistance, he said that resistance can be anything, "when you are in a cage, you want to come out. You try to find ways [to come out]." He gave the example of trying to get out of bed in the morning and resisting the urge to close your eyes and sleep for just a few more minutes. According to Suhail, any mental, emotional, or physical push-back against the metaphorical cages that constrain you is the essence of resistance. He said, "you don't have to go and always do action; you can also create that feeling inside you and you are resisting" (ibid). Therefore, Suhail does not view his completed artworks as resistance. Rather, he views the emotion, the frustration, and the discontent that he channels through his artwork as his resistance to injustice and inhumanity.

After interviewing Suhail, I understood that his understanding of resistance, art, and his own work does not ascribe to any one scholar's definition or understanding of resistance art. His

understanding is complex due to his personal background and experiences working as an artist and living in Kashmir. Furthermore, when we understand that Suhail views his work as a way to cope with his trauma, manage his depression, and ask questions about his situations, we are better equipped to analyze and interpret his artwork. If I only analyzed Suhail's work within a collective narrative of resistance art and did not seek to understand the individual experiences attached to it, my understanding would be incomplete.

Concluding Remarks

In order to understand resistance art as a whole, we must view it on a collective and individual level. Scholars like Mafalda Young view art as a tool used by a collective to express their discontent and resist oppression and injustice, but it is also a tool used by individuals to process and cope with their pain and emotions. While the work of Sharabati, Haikal, and Suhail contributes to resistance art as a collective narrative, their unique individual experiences and outlooks are just as important to our understanding of their work. Focusing on individual experiences helps audiences of resistance art to better understand and empathize with people resisting oppression and struggling for liberation.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis, focusing on the themes of land, space, and place and human rights issues respectively, aim to consider the two halves of resistance art: the communal and the personal. Both chapters will discuss works of art by Khalili and Kashmiri artists, the collective narratives that they represent, and the systemic injustices that they oppose. At the same time, both chapters will turn to the individual experiences of the artists whose work I analyze. The emphasis on the duality of resistance art serves to advance my argument that experiences, memories, and identities are at the root of the connections between resistance art mediums and geopolitical contexts.

Chapter 3: Land, Space, and Place in Collective Memory and Identity

Introduction

In this chapter, I will focus on the themes of land, space, and place, which are relevant to the resistance movement of Palestine. A simple google search of "Palestinian land" will yield a wide selection of multi-part maps that illustrate Palestine's loss of land since 1948. While Palestinian resistance partially responds to this loss of land, the themes of land, space, and place are not best represented by a map. These themes include elements ranging from rocks to cities to monuments to homes, and they are important to the work of Palestinian artists. Land, space, and place manifest in several ways as these artists convey political or social messages connected to the land on which they live and create art. These themes can be the subject of artwork. They can also be an artistic medium or tool. Finally, land, space, and place can also be a source of inspiration or a building block in an artist's philosophy about their work.

In Al-Khalil, Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and their colleagues make art that represents, repurposes, and reclaims Palestinian land, places, and spaces. These places are important to their individual and collective memories, experiences, and Palestinian identities. A continent away in Kashmir, the work of artists like Showkat Kathjoo and Syed Mujtaba Rizvi is connected to Kashmiri land in a relationship similar to the one found in Al-Khalil.

Regardless of differences in medium and geography, the works discussed in this chapter remain centered around the themes of land, space, and place. Furthermore, these works are derived from the subjective experiences, memories, and identities of the artists who created them. This artwork contributes to the conversation surrounding Palestinian and Kashmiri resistance by emphasizing the intersection of land and humanity, rather than focusing on broader land issues like building permits, agriculture and environmentalism, and the placement of geopolitical borders.

Conversations about the land of Palestine vary from discipline to discipline, but most of these disciplines are characterized by standardized research methods and an objective analysis of gathered data. For instance, Rabab Alshweiky and Zeynep Gül Ünal write about land and space in the context of the archeological preservation of the old city of Al-Khalil and specifically of the Ibrahimi Mosque (Alshweiky and Ünal). Other scholars approach the topic of Palestinian land from the perspective of environmentalism. The *International Journal of Environmental Studies* published a special edition on Palestine in 2011 which included an article on cropping patterns by Samer Kalbouneh and an article on groundwater pollution in Gaza by Basem Shomar, among others (Al-Sa'ed, 410). Leila Farsakh's review essay, on the other hand, brings together two pieces of scholarship that adopt the disciplinary lenses of history and political science. Her essay, amidst its discussion of Mehran Kamrava and Gershon Shafir's work, is primarily concerned with which powers had control over which pieces of land during certain time periods.

Each aforementioned piece of scholarship offers a valuable perspective on the issue of Palestinian land. However, this chapter aims to challenge the idea that talking about land in Palestine is like talking about a map; a conversation where scholars, politicians, and other outsiders put pins on important sites, debate about where borders ought to be drawn, and ultimately remove themselves from the land's human inhabitants. This thesis makes two simultaneous corrections to this approach. First, when our conceptualization of land transitions from land as an amorphous shape on a map to the soil on which individual human beings build their homes, grow their food, and live their lives, we gain a more comprehensive and humanistic view of Palestinian experience and the resistance that is derived from it. Second, as the intersection of land and subjective human experiences becomes the issue at hand, other localities facing similar issues can be brought in as a point of reference.

For instance, Alshweiky and Ünal's work on archeological preservation in Al-Khalil and Shomar's writing about groundwater pollution in Gaza are not easily transferred to other contexts. Human experiences, memories, and identities, on the other hand, can be reapplied from context to context. In other words, when scholars stop viewing the issue of Palestinian land as being constrained by and tied to the borders of either the British mandate, 1948, 1967, or the Oslo Accords, they can put the issue of land in Palestine into conversation with the land of Kashmir or any other disputed territory. Studying art, which often broaches the topic of land as an element of human experience and identity, helps us accomplish this.

Collectively, this chapter aims to answer the question: how do the themes of land, space, and place intersect with experience, memory, and identity in the interrelated works of Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal, regardless of their medium? And how does putting the work of these artists in conversation with the work of Kashmiri artists uncover connections and patterns that link resistance art in Al-Khalil to resistance art in Kashmir?

This chapter will analyze works of art produced in Al-Khalil and in Kashmir that incorporate the themes of land, space, and place whether through content, materials used, or both. I will specifically analyze works by Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, Showkat Kathjoo, and Syed Mujtaba Rizvi. In this artistic analysis, I will also identify connections that exist between the work of the former Khalili artists and the latter Kashmiri artists. Next, this chapter will discuss how the themes of land, space, and place in the context of Palestinian and Kashmiri resistance are present in the lives and experiences of Palestinian and Kashmiri artists: in their artistic processes, their philosophies about their own work, and their understanding of the physical spaces that they occupy.

Despite the variety within their work and despite the fact that the artists of Al-Khalil may never meet the artists of Kashmir, the artwork and artists discussed in this chapter all contribute to the same conversation about interrelations between land, space, place, identity, and human experience.

Rani Sharabati's Paintings

Rani Sharabati is an oil painter, graffiti artist, photographer, and art teacher native to Al-Khalil. A painter since childhood, he studied fine art at Al-Quds University (Sharabati, *Interview)*. During the years that he spent studying art in Jerusalem, he traveled an hour both to and from school each day and remained based in Al-Khalil throughout the course of his studies (ibid). Therefore, the land and spaces of Al-Khalil, and of greater Palestine, are a subject in many of Sharabati's paintings. Though Sharabati doesn't live in a refugee camp himself, Al-Khalil is neighbored by both the Al-Fawwar and Al-Arroub refugee camps, and refugee camps are one such subject of Sharabati's paintings. Sharabati's "campscapes" utilize varied color palettes, incorporate fine details, and represent the many refugee camps spread across the West Bank. Beyond merely depicting these spaces and places, Sharabati's portrayal of refugee camps offers commentary on the fracturing of land and suffocation of Palestinian communities by the Israeli occupation.

Displacement has long been incorporated into the collective memory and narrative of Palestinians and refugee camps have long been incorporated into the Palestinian landscape. Rashid Hussein, a Palestinian poet who lived through the *Nakba,* the catastrophe that displaced 700,000 Palestinians, and died just a decade after the 1967 war wrote:

"The stars in the night shine like refugee camps

Like some dismal humanitarian organization, the miserable moon heaves off

A load of cheddar cheese, or flour.

This is what the moon has donated to my sad people" (Hussein).

As most refugee camps within Palestine have existed since Israel declared independence in concurrence with the 1948 *Nakba*, they have grown in population, height, and permanence over the past 75 years. In other words, Palestinian refugee camps do not match the accepted and expected images of clustered, canvas tents and United Nations vehicles. Over time, canvas tents have been replaced with brick, multi-story structures as refugee populations have grown and the camps have stretched vertically. The United Nations logo remains, not plastered on the side of trucks and vans, but on the gates of concrete school buildings. Rani Sharabati's paintings reflect the growth of Palestinian refugee camps and their cementation into Palestinian identity. They also reflect the over-crowdedness, the military presence, and the liminality of the people who live in refugee camps.

One of Sharabati's campscapes features tall buildings crammed together and spread far into the distance, growing smaller and fuzzier (see fig. 7). If it weren't for the sliver of sky above the horizon in the painting's top right corner, the viewer might think that the expanse of the refugee camp went on forever. As many Palestinians born since 1948 have lived their entire lives as refugees, the seemingly eternal nature of Palestinian refugee camps, and the Palestinian refugee crisis, is no exaggeration. This painting also toys with the interruption of space, another recurring theme in Sharabati's campscapes. Many of the buildings in the painting are painted with warm shades of orange, pink, or red, and the continuity of the expansive background is interrupted by the Israeli guard tower and its surrounding wall and fence, foregrounded in the right side of the painting. The tower and wall, unlike the rest of the painting, are painted with dark grey and cool blue colors and stand out in sharp contrast to the rest of the image (see fig. 7).

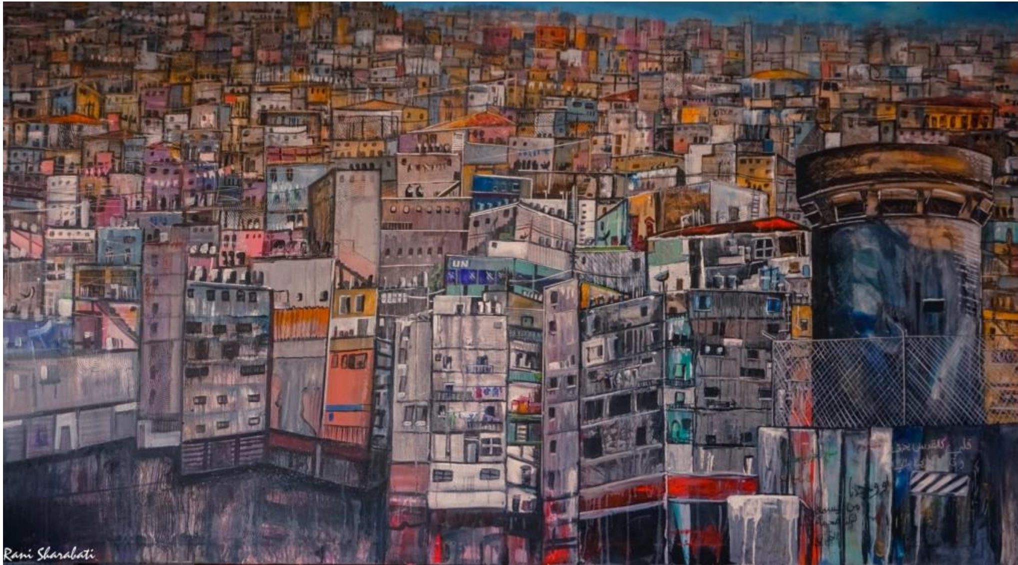

Figure 7. *مخيم (Camp),* Rani Sharabati

The interruption that the Israeli guard tower and separation wall poses to the cohesivity of Sharabati's painting is representative of the Israeli military's disruption of the Palestinian landscape. It is also representative of the Israeli military's disruption of everyday life by restricting Palestinians' freedom of movement in and out of refugee camps. For instance, in February of 2018, the Israeli military blocked off the entrance to Al-Fawwar refugee camp ("The Military"). According to B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organization focused on the occupied Palestinian territories, the Israeli military closed the entrance for five consecutive days in January of 2018 and closed it on several occasions shortly after (ibid). The closures impacted tens of thousands of Palestinians living in and around Al-Fawwar refugee camp (ibid). One Al-Fawwar camp resident told B'Tselem that his livelihood suffered during the closures because, as a taxi driver, he was unable to drive his usual routes to Al-Khalil, Bethlehem, and Ramallah and was forced to exclusively provide rides within the camp, rides which only cost 2 shekels (ibid).

Another of Sharabati's campscapes (see fig. 8) dramatizes the vertical expansion of Palestinian refugee camps with its vertically elongated canvas. This painting uses mostly shades of blue and cool gray; any warm color is muted. This painting also addressed overcrowding as it

is riddled with small, almost imperceptible, details such as clothes hanging from clothes-lines and human silhouettes in the countless windows of the foregrounded buildings. These details serve as a reminder that the uncomfortably crowded refugee camps of Palestine are indeed occupied, and they further remind the viewer of the individuals that belong to the "Palestinian refugee collective." According to B'Tselem, residents of Al-Fawwar refugee camp were suffering from overcrowding as the camp's population of 10,000 was living only in one square kilometer in 2018 ("The Military"). Furthermore, the buildings in this painting overlap with one another and the only visible sky is above the horizon which is not flat, but rather juts down between the towering buildings. The sky is not an expanse of open air above the camp, for as the buildings are built up more and more and creep up the sides of the painting, they overtake and consume the sky.

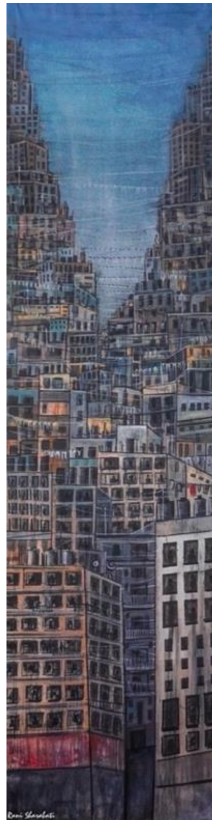

Figure 8. *The Camp,* Rani Sharabati

Just as he forefronts the guard tower in figure 7, Sharabati invokes the Israeli apartheid wall as a recurring symbol of interrupted space. In Figure 9, the charcoal gray apartheid wall consumes the bottom third of the canvas and obscures the neon-colored buildings behind it. Because the wall takes up so much vertical space, the sky in this painting is once again reduced to a sliver of purple above the sea of buildings. Again, the placement of the horizon in this painting emphasizes the restrictions and limitations of life in occupied land as even the wide-open sky is shrunk down and contained.

Figure 9. *Untitled,* Rani Sharabati

In figure 10, the wall similarly obscures the buildings behind it and commandeers the left two thirds of the canvas. The scale of the wall, demonstrated by the graffiti art that only reaches a third of the way to the top, is foreboding as it dwarfs the city behind it. In this painting, the wall and its graffiti are painted in a more realistic style than the more abstract buildings of the background. The streaky greens, grays, and yellows of the wall stand in grim contrast to the stark white of the buildings it overlaps. Across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the towering concrete apartheid wall restricts movement for Palestinians, literally disrupting the landscape and fragmenting Palestinian farms and towns. Sharabati incorporates the apartheid wall into his campscapes and cityscapes as a disrupting antagonist, the same role that it plays in the lives of every single West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinian.

Figure 10. *Untitled,* Rani Sharabati

The subject of Sharabati's work shifts sharply in figure 11, a painting of a lone olive tree atop a rocky hillside. The place featured in this painting is not disrupted or cloaked in the grim reality of life under occupation. Rather, the horizon is lowered to the bottom half of the scene and the blue sky is wide open. Compared to figures 7-10, in which the horizon barely dips below the top of the canvas, this scene reads like a breath of fresh air. The rocks and the tops of the olive branches are bathed in warm sunlight and the green land of the valley stretches far into the distance. This painting critiques the occupation not by focusing on the apartheid wall or a guard tower, but by presenting an image of what Palestinian land might look like if it were unmarred and uninterrupted by such tools of oppression.

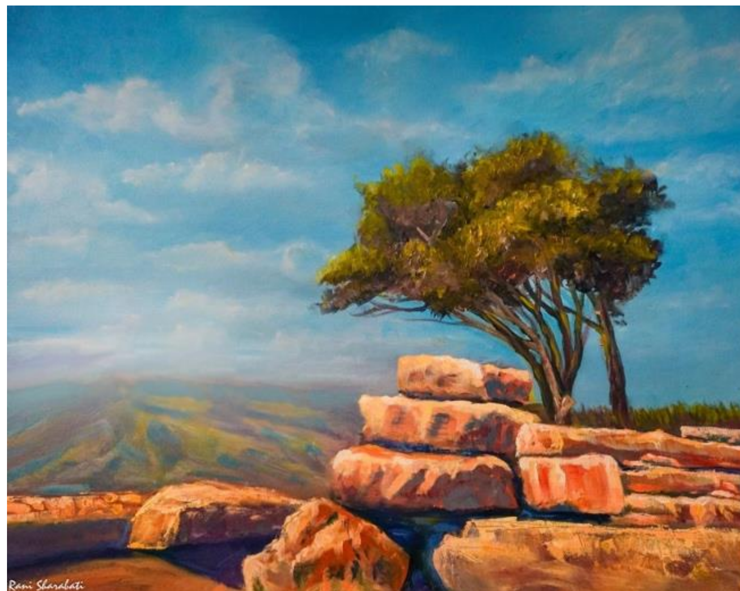

Figure 11. *Untitled,* Rani Sharabati

Ala Haikal's Carvings

Ala Haikal, a Khalili stone carver, videographer, and animator, features land, space, and place as subjects within his carvings and also uses them as one of his primary materials. According to Haikal, he has had a skill for stone carving ever since he was a child as the craft has been a part of his family's heritage for generations and his great great grandfather carved the stone columns in the old city of Al-Khalil (Haikal, *Interview*). An important part of Haikal's artistic process is collecting stones from the Palestinian sites that he depicts in his carvings (ibid). He said, "even stone has memory, so when I pick a stone from [a] place, it saves its memory. It's like a witness of what was [there]" (ibid). In my interview with Haikal, he also pointed out that stone is one of humanity's oldest methods of recording memories (ibid). Just as Haikal chooses to carve stones because of the memories they carry, he also engages in this practice because the tradition and memory of stone carving has been passed down to him by his father, grandfather, and the generations of Haikal stone carvers who came before.

Both Figures 12 and 13 feature carvings made from stone that Haikal takes from the land himself. Figure 12 is a photograph of a replica of one of his carvings which features Palestine's most well recognized architectural site: The Dome of the Rock. By carving this building into a rock taken from Palestinian land, Haikal reaffirms that the Dome of the Rock is a piece of Palestinian architecture. He reclaims it, and the old city of Jerusalem in which it resides, as a piece of Palestine and Palestinian collective identity. Furthermore, Haikal does not carve the iconic mosque in its entirety. Only a portion of the mosque is carved, protruding out of the rest of the stone which remains unrefined. According to Haikal, he chooses to leaves the natural cracks and grooves in the stone because he believes that the most beautiful things are made by nature (ibid). This approach also emphasizes that the Dome of the Rock cannot exist separately from the land on which it stands. This idea can be expanded to suggest that Palestinian identity, which

often incorporates Al-Aqsa and The Dome of the Rock, cannot be untethered from the land of Palestine either.

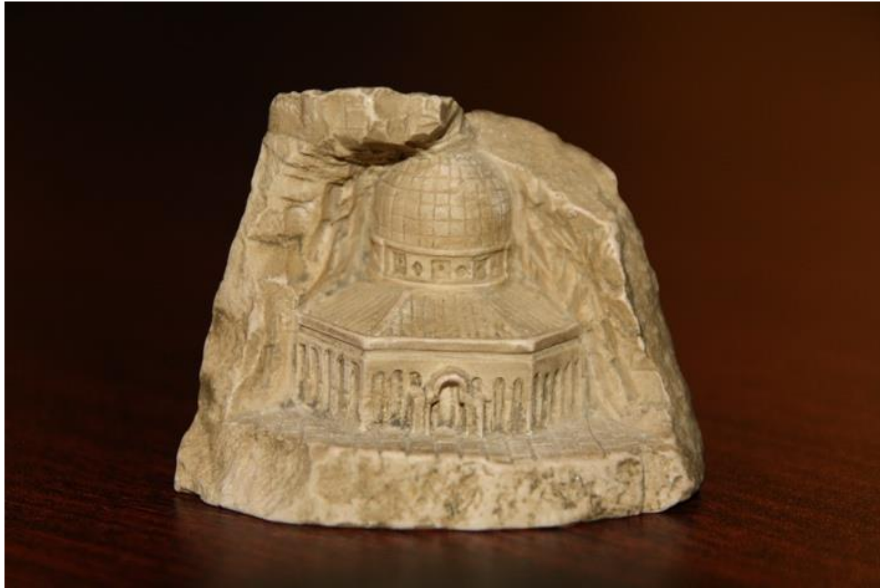

Figure 12. *Dome of the Rock*, Ala Haikal

The second of Haikal's carvings (see fig. 13) features an inscription of the Arabic phrase "يستحق الحياة" which translates into English as "worthy of life." This phrase is taken from the poem "On This Land" by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. The opening line of the poem translates into English as, "Upon this land is that which is worthy of life" (Darwish). The poem lists the things that make life in Palestine worth living. It mentions the "aroma of bread at dawn," "September's end," "the hour of sunlight in prison," and "the tyrant's fear of songs" (ibid). Another line in the poem reads "عشب على حجرٍ" which means, "grass on stone" (ibid). According to Haikal, the pattern in the top right corner of the stone was designed to look like leaves. This plant like engraving is meant to represent the grass growing upon stone that Darwish writes about (Haikal, *Interview).* Grass growing upon stone can be interpreted as a metaphor for the growth of the Palestinian people despite the harsh conditions of life under the Israeli occupation.

By carving the poem's iconic, repeated phrase into a piece of stone taken from the land, Haikal reaffirms Darwish's idea that a life under occupation in Palestine is still a life worth living.

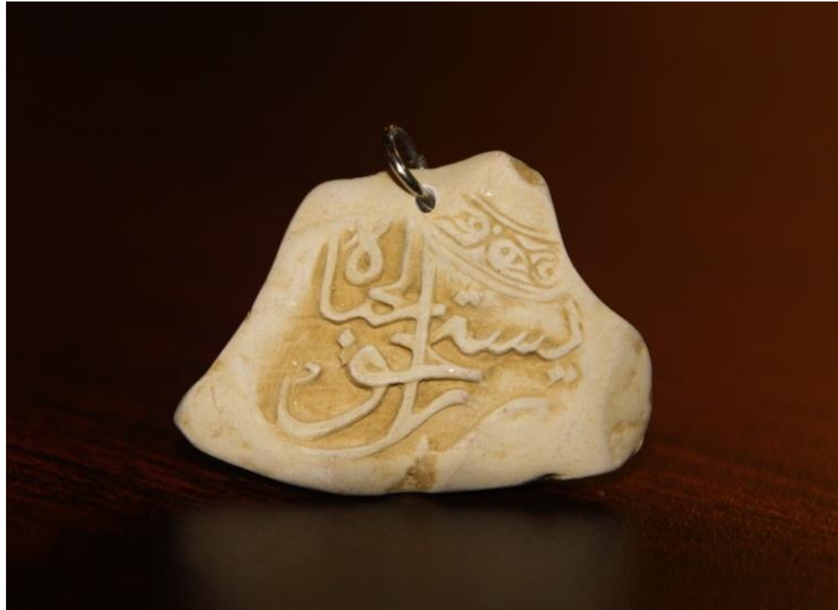

Figure 13. يستحق الحياة Ala Haikal

Ala Haikal's Videos and Projects

As Ala Haikal carves famous Palestinian architectural sites or excerpts from Palestinian poems into stone, he simultaneously converts his work into a digital form. When he works on a stone carving, Haikal films the process as a story (Haikal, *Interview).* He begins by filming how he collects the stone that he plans to carve and then films the carving process from start to finish (ibid). In the video that Haikal made to portray his process of carving of the Dome of the Rock, the opening shot is of the famous mosque itself *(Stone Carving, Dome of the Rock).* He scans the ground inside the mosque compound with his camera until he zooms in on one particular stone and picks it up (ibid). He holds up the rock, the golden dome gleaming in the background, and rotates it so that the viewer can see it from all angles (ibid). For the rest of the video, he films the process of carving the Dome of the Rock into the stone and presents the final product (ibid). By filming his work and presenting it in this way, Ala makes his carvings accessible to anyone,

whether they purchase his carvings from him, have the opportunity to view them in person, or see them online.

Furthermore, by filming the process of finding and carving the stone, the physical and digital elements of these artworks blend into one another. The videos that Haikal makes of his carvings adds a storytelling element that a carving couldn't otherwise convey. The video can depict the origins of the stone and the process of carving it, which adds elements to the final product of the physical carving. The bidirectional and intermedial physical to digital transformation in Haikal's work enriches the story that he aims to tell and creates an avenue to viewers of his work to further engage with it.

Ala Haikal also creates art in collaboration with the Palestinian Ministry of Culture. In his current project, he carves Palestinian symbols or sites that coincide with a significant Palestinian story, historical event, or cultural icon into stone (Haikal, *Interview).* He also carves a QR code to go along with each piece and, when the QR code is scanned, it takes the viewer to a video that explains its respective story, person, place, or building (ibid). In Haikal's words, "it's like a memory in a stone" (ibid). This project, with a physical and virtual component, exemplifies the concept of "transmedia storytelling," as described by Li and Prasad. Audience members must first engage with the physical, carved QR code before they can view the virtual material tied to it. Both elements, however, are two parts of one comprehensive whole.

Tel Rumeida

Despite working as individual artists in very different mediums, Sharabati and Haikal oftentimes work together in collaboration with Izz Al-Jabari. Al-Jabari is another Palestinian artist who embroiders *tatreez,* traditional Palestinian cross-stitching, and makes jewelry and other beaded crafts. Sharabati, Haikal, and Al-Jabari work together out of the art studio, Pal Motion, which I visited in the summer of 2022. As three of the most prominent artists working out of Al-

Khalil, their collaboration is essential to the growth of creativity and respect for the arts in the city. In my interview with Sharabati, he said, “Me and Izz and Ala, we have something between us and we understand each other” (Sharabati).

Currently, the trio of Khalili artists are working on a creative project that raises questions about why Tel Rumeida is so often overlooked by Al-Khalil’s Palestinian residents as an important piece of the city’s history (ibid). Tel Rumeida is an archeological site underneath the old city of Al-Khalil and was turned into an archaeological park when the Jewish Committee to the Association for the Renewal of the Jewish Settlement in Al-Khalil learned that it was the only way for them to maintain their possession of the land (Tel Rumeida Settlement). According to Sharabati, Palestinians in the city don’t think about Tel Rumeida because the Israelis have halted excavations there.

The collaborative project between Sharabati, Haikal, and Al-Jabari considers why people don’t ask about the ancient history associated with Tel Rumeida and why the Israel occupation will not allow Palestinians to explore that history by excavating the site (Sharabati). The three artists hope to create an exhibition to answer these questions. Together, they collected branches from the olive trees growing atop Tel Rumeida. Now, Izz Al-Jabari is working on an art installation that would use these branches. They also collected stones and pieces of pottery that Haikal and Al-Jabari, respectively, will use as they create artwork for this exhibition on Tel Rumeida.

According to Sharabati, he and his colleagues tend to think about the old city in two ways. They first consider the significant history of the old city and how to raise community engagement with that history. They also think about how they can address the political struggles and human rights violations faced by its residents. In our interview, Sharabati told met that one

can only truly understand the situation that plagues Al-Khalil's old city after living there (Sharabati, *Interview*). As the introduction chapter explains, the old city is littered with checkpoints and illegal Israeli settlers and Palestinian residents face humiliation, degradation, and violence every day. Because of the Israeli checkpoints that make life in the old city so difficult, Sharabati and his colleagues find it very important to bring art and creativity to the children of the old city through workshops and educational efforts like their project on Tel Rumeida.

Collective memory, experience, and identity is incredibly important to the work of these three artists in the old city of Al-Khalil. Instead of working to merely represent collective memory, they're trying to alter it by reincorporating Tel Rumeida into the narrative of residents of Al-Khalil. They also do this work while acknowledging the experiences of people who live in the old city and suffer the harsh conditions of living side by side with illegal Israeli settlers.

The Importance of Al-Khalil: Rani Sharabati's Studio

Land, space, and place are relevant to Rani Sharabati's artistic process and philosophy, as well as to his creative work. His art studio, tucked away near his family home in Al-Khalil, serves as evidence that he does not only consider land and space as a subject of his work. Land must be stewarded and utilized. Spaces, especially those dedicated to art, must be created and cared for. As a student of fine art at Al-Quds University, Sharabati had a make-shift art studio in an apartment, and many people visited his studio to see his work (Sharabati). During the height of the coronavirus, he used an apartment located above his family home as an art studio and eventually, after beginning his residency with the A.M Qattan Foundation, he decided to build his own studio on a plot of family land near his home (ibid). After living in Jerusalem as a university student and traveling to Tunisia and Germany for artist residencies (ibid), Sharabati could have just as easily decided to find a permanent studio somewhere besides Al-Khalil.

So why is remaining in Al-Khalil so important when cultural hubs like Bethlehem or Ramallah are only a bus ride away from his family and friends? Outside of the four walls of Sharabati's artistic haven, the culture of Al-Khalil is not always friendly to artists. The decision to build his own studio in Al-Khalil, rather than in Bethlehem or Ramallah, reflected a commitment to stay and work in the city even though it isn't as conducive an environment to creative production as another city might be. According to Sharabati, many artists who come from Al-Khalil leave to work in Bethlehem or Ramallah where they have galleries, associations, and community support for artists. This is because the culture and people of Al-Khalil don't understand art and are sometimes opposed to it (Sharabati). For instance, when I accompanied Sharabati to Bethlehem for an art competition in Banksy's hotel in June of 2022, our taxi driver didn't understand that Rani was an artist. As he tried to explain his work, Rani used the Arabic word *basariaat*. This word, meaning "visuals," is a highly formal word to use when discussing art, so the taxi driver instead became convinced that Rani was an eye doctor.

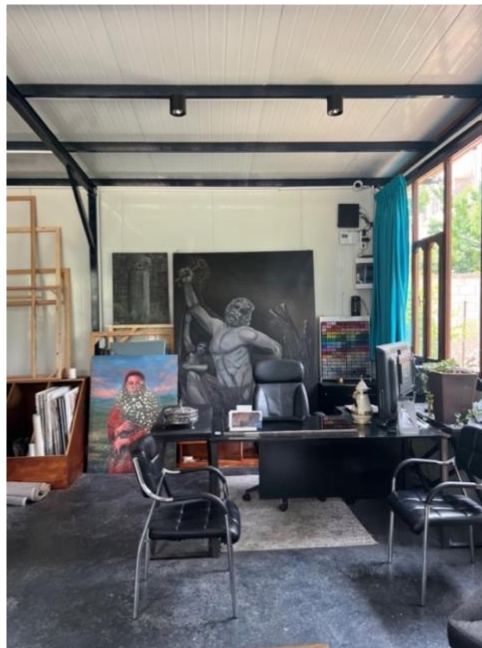

Figure 14. Rani Sharabati's Studio

Stories like this one exemplify the attitudes that many residents of Al-Khalil hold towards art and artists. However, the apprehension and uncertainty of community members does not deter Sharabati and his colleagues, but reaffirms the importance of their work in the city of Al-Khalil specifically. Sharabati is committed to changing the dominant attitude of his community towards art. In our interview, Sharabati said, “I have tried to change this idea about art, and I have started to do graffiti art…When I go into the street and do graffiti art, and go into shops to do something like street art, a lot of people [might] ask about my life, about what I do, where I [studied art]” (Sharabati). When passersby speak with Rani while he’s painting murals or installing his art in public spaces, they are shocked to learn that he is from Al-Khalil (ibid). The conversations that Sharabati has had with curious community members gave him “a lot of space to think about [Al-Khalil] more” (Sharabati). He considered that most people don’t understand what he does because people don’t learn about art in school and many schools in Al-Khalil don’t have any art teachers (ibid). Despite any discouragement that the Khalili artists might feel from the attitudes of their community, they still try to talk about their work, share the importance of art, and explain what they do to anyone who doesn’t understand (ibid).

Along with his decision to stay in Al-Khalil and build a permanent workspace, Sharabati committed himself to learning enough about construction that he could build his own studio himself (Sharabati). He spent an entire year learning about design, building materials, the best way to utilize the earth, and the process of building a functional art studio from the ground up because, in his words, “when you build something using your hands and your ideas, it’s more original” (ibid). Though he possessed the means to hire someone to build it for him, Sharabati’s commitment to designing and building his studio on his own, a process through which he

asserted ownership over his family land in the occupied West Bank, demonstrates the significance of land, space, and place in his life, as well as in his artwork.

Furthermore, according to Sharabati, his studio is the first art studio designated for any artist from Al-Khalil, greater Palestine, or anywhere else (ibid). The space is not only for his personal use, but is meant to be a collaborative space for artists, photographers, filmmakers, musicians, and other creatives (ibid). Sharabati's generosity and desire to share his space comes from an understanding of how creativity benefits from collaboration. He said, "when artists from outside Palestine and from inside Palestine come to visit this studio I can learn from [them]" (ibid). The studio is also a space for children, private courses, and art students. A portion of Sharabati's studio is sectioned off and filled with work tables and easels for visitors and students to use (see fig. 15). Sharabati is just as intentional with how he uses his space now as he was when he built it. As he remains in Al-Khalil with the hopes of spreading an appreciation for art, he uses the spaces that he has at his disposal to fan the flame of creativity in his city.

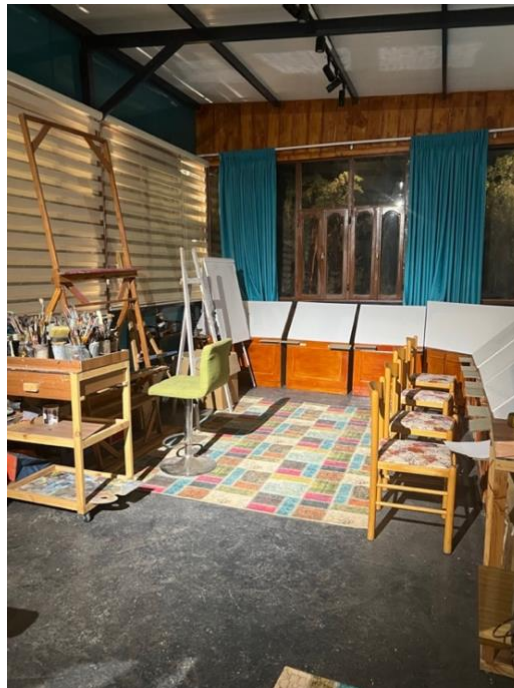

Figure 15. Rani Sharabati's Studio

Comparison with Kashmir: Showkat Kathjoo

The themes of land, space, and place intersect with experience, memory and identity and appear together across different types of Kashmiri artwork as well. Mirroring the work of Sharabati, Haikal, and Al-Jabari, Kashmiri works incorporate these themes both as a subject and a medium. Showkat Kathjoo's installation art is an excellent example of how these themes manifest in Kashmiri art. In the documentary *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies,* Kathjoo explains the piece of installation art that he created as part of the workshop, Khoj Kashmir, with 15 artists from all over the world (*Soz,* 23:45-23:54). During the workshop, Kathjoo built a bunker using materials like netting, barbed wire, and a TV that displayed photographs extracted from the travelogs of foreign travelers who wrote about Kashmir and sung their praises of the region (ibid, 24:09-24:28). "This whole work was about the landscape itself. Actually, the marking of a landscape where the bunker becomes part of it and becomes part of a memory as well. Then the erasure that happens" (ibid, 24:33-24:45). Just as Sharabati portrays the apartheid wall and Israeli guard towers as interrupting and altering Palestinian landscapes and cityscapes, Kathjoo built a literal bunker that interrupts the natural Kashmiri landscape. In the cases of both Palestine and Kashmir, interrupted space and the presence of the Israeli and Indian militaries, respectively, have been adopted into the collective identities and memories of Palestinians and Kashmiris.

With his bunker, Kathjoo also deconstructed voyeuristic depictions of Kashmir as a "beautiful place, a paradise on earth" as he showed that the bunker was a part of his generation's collective memory. "For 20 years we have been seeing this as part of our landscape as well," he said (ibid, 24:56-25:11). In this multimedia project, Kathjoo criticized both naïve and orientalist views of Kashmir by including photos selected from foreign travelogs and placing them in contrast with the militarized landscape perceived by Kashmiris. The presentation of these photos on a TV inside his constructed bunker encourages the viewer to question their authenticity. The

viewer perceives these aesthetically pleasing images, but is forced to consider them in an environment that exemplifies the militarization and corruption of the Kashmiri landscape.

Comparison With Kashmir: Syed Mujtaba Rizvi

Syed Mujtaba Rizvi is a Kashmiri painter, digital artist, and photographer who incorporates physical spaces in Kashmir into his work. Just like the television inside Kathjoo's bunker, one of Rizvi's digital art series, "Bureaucracies of War," uses photographs taken from someone with an outsider's perspective. The introduction to the series reads, "image sources and references are often archival, published in mainstream media, government websites, or photos by Indian tourists in Kashmir. Disregard for copyrights is intentional" (Rizvi). In each image that he includes, Rizvi inserts a crow, interrupting the falsified and voyeuristic portrayal of Kashmir that each image presents.

Figure 16 is a selection from Rizvi's "Bureaucracies of War" and is titled, *The Tourist Guide*. This image features a man in the bottom left corner playing an instrument, a bus approaching behind him, and a soldier retreating down the road with his back to the viewer. Besides the soldier is an unusually large crow, facing the viewer. The crow interrupts the image in the same way that Sharabati's inclusion of the apartheid wall and Israeli guard towers interrupted his paintings. By including them in these pirated images, taken naïvely by tourists or by government officials to purposefully mislead potential visitors, Mujtaba inserts the misery felt by the Kashmiri people into various outsiders' representations of Kashmiri land.

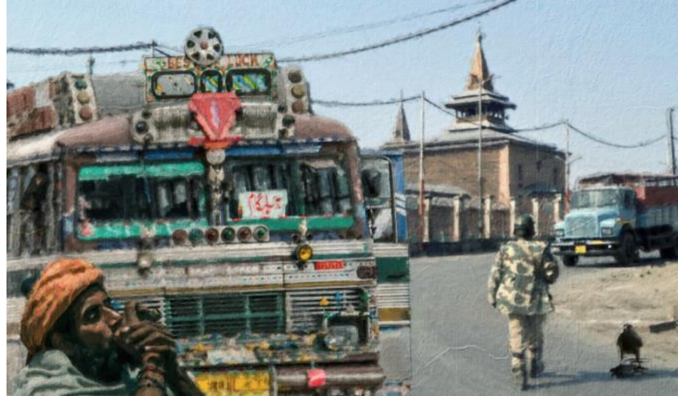

Figure 16. *The Tourist Guide,* Syed Mujtaba Rizvi

Another piece in "Bureaucracies of War" offers an aerial view of a Kashmiri city with a crow flying overhead (see fig. 17). The name of this piece, *The Town Planner,* introduces the idea that the crow could also represent the unwanted intervention by the Indian government in Kashmiri affairs and on Kashmiri land. Other titles in the series include *The Record Keeper* and *The Minister of This* (Rizvi, *Bureaucracies of War*). Each of these titles name the crows in the images and assigns them a position, a purpose. Together, the name and aerial view of this image suggests that unwanted forces are playing a determinant role in the fate of Kashmiri land and cities.

Figure 17. *The Town Planner,* Syed Mujtaba Rizvi

Syed Mujtaba Rizvi is also a photographer and one of his photography series depicts the Kashmiri city of Srinagar. This series is entitled “Reminiscent of a Tragedy” and its introduction reads, “The desolate streets of Srinagar - bustling through the day; reminiscent of a tragedy at night” (Rizvi, *Reminiscent of a Tragedy).* The photos included in this series were shot after midnight and feature the empty streets of Srinagar (ibid). All of the images are shot in black and white. The contrast between any lights and the night sky is stark and dramatic. While the subjects of each photo are stationary, the images are all slightly blurred, suggesting that any movement is taking place behind the camera. The uncertainty that surrounds the circumstances under which each image has taken, further dramatizes the series. With both the stark contrast between highlights and shadows and the blurring of each image, this series successfully presents itself as a tragedy and evokes feelings of discomfort and uncertainty (see fig. 18). Furthermore, this series suggests that there are elements of life in Srinagar that are largely unseen and emphasizes dichotomy between how outsiders and Kashmiri people view the region and its situation.

Figure 18. *Reminiscent of a Tragedy,* Syed Mujtaba Rizvi

Concluding Remarks

The artists featured in this chapter understand the significance of land, space, and place. They comment on its political significance as they represent interrupted space in their artwork. They reclaim their land and the collective identity embedded in the land as they use natural materials and physical space to create sculptures and installation art. They subvert naïve and ignorant representations of their land from outsiders. They create new spaces dedicated to the growth of art and creativity in their communities.

Though Palestine and Kashmir are separated by thousands of miles, their land holds the same significance to their people and thus, to their artists. Therefore, land, space, and place are significant within the work and experiences of artists who create resistance art in Al-Khalil and Kashmir. The land informs their art, but it also informs individual and collective identities. Mahmoud Darwish wrote about it, Ala Haikal carves into it, Rani Sharabati paints it, Syed Mujtaba Rizvi photographs it, and Showkat Kathjoo builds upon it. Despite the variety within their work and despite the fact that the artists of Al-Khalil may never meet the artists of Kashmir, they are all contributing to the same conversation about land, identity, and belonging. They all share a spirit of resistance that resonates across cultures and geographies.

Chapter 4: Art and Human Rights Violations

Introduction

The line between "art for art's sake" and resistance art is a demarcation that artists of the past have clung to for centuries. The first extreme, "art for art's sake," is exemplified in Edgar Allan Poe's essay, "The Poetic Principle." In this essay, Poe writes, "under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more, this poem written solely for the poem's sake" (Poe, 5). In Poe's eyes, art that is also a call to action, a condemnation, or an otherwise political message exists separately from art for art's sake.

On the other side of the spectrum, scholar Usama Kahf writes about hip-hop music as a form of resistance in Palestine. Kahf eloquently attributes hip-hop's "empowering potential and 'authentic' voice of the oppressed margins" to its positioning in opposition to a "reference point in the status quo" (Kahf, 362). This condition of authenticity is not dependent on genre or medium, but is derived from its positionality in relation to the status quo. However, artforms like rap and graffiti are easily fit this mold because many of the themes and language present in rap music break social norms, and graffiti is oftentimes illegal.

The types of art described by Poe and Kahf represent the two ends of an artistic spectrum. One on end, you find technically refined art that lacks any purpose or intention aside from being a perfect example of a poem, a painting, or a song. On the other, you find artwork rich with political or social critiques going against the grain and standing in stark opposition to the status quo. In the contexts of Al-Khalil and Kashmir, as well as in other cultures of resistance, this spectrum does not exist. As discussed in chapter two, Rani Sharabati believes that all art in Palestine is resistance art because all people and all aspects of life in Palestine are impacted by the Israeli occupation (Sharabati, *Interview*). Furthermore, as this chapter will illustrate, the

illegality and nonconformity ascribed to graffiti and rap music extends to all artforms in a culture of resistance.

This chapter will use rap and graffiti as a jumping off point for a comparison of politically charged resistance art in Palestine and Kashmir, which spans numerous artforms. This chapter will use an intermedial approach to explore issues of illegality in resistance art and in the experience of Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, Mir Suhail, and rapper MC Kash. This chapter will also investigate the ways in which Khalili and Kashmiri resistance art breaks down the imagined boundary that separates grungy resistance art from technically refined, fine art that exists only for art's sake. In this exploration, this chapter also asks how human experiences, memories, and identity inform politically charged art in both contexts, regardless of genre or medium.

In chapter three, I explored the ways in which Khalili and Kashmiri artists engage with the themes of land, space, and place as a subject and as a medium. Underlying these various levels of engagement are the artist's related memories, experiences, and identities which make up the common thread tying these two chapters together. In this chapter, I will shift focus from the physical lands and spaces of Al-Khalil and Kashmir to the humanitarian and human rights issues in both places. I will devote this chapter to discussing various forms of creative resistance produced in Al-Khalil and Kashmir which respond to and offer commentary on specific humanitarian and human rights issues.

I will analyze works produced by Rani Sharabati and Ala Haikal in Al-Khalil, as well as works produced in Kashmir by political cartoonist Mir Suhail and rapper MC Kash. I will include art forms like graffiti and hip-hop, which are often viewed as grungy counter-culture genres, as well as a number Rani Sharabati's technically refined oil paintings. The variety of artwork included will exemplify the spread of resistance art across artforms which are typically

divided by the demarcation line between resistance art and "art for art's sake." In this chapter, I will also turn to scholarly articles and reports by human rights groups as I discuss the issues that these artists respond to in their work. Finally, drawing upon the interviews I conducted with Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and Mir Suhail, I will put the personal experiences of these artists in conversation with to the political atmospheres in which they reside.

In concurrence with the previous chapters, I'll will analyze the artwork and interview data relevant to this chapter through the lens of intermediality. I will analyze the significance of the different mediums present, overlaps across mediums, intermedial collaborations between artists and intermedial productions within an individual artist's own repertoire and portfolio. I will maintain the same understanding of art, non-art, and the institution of art that I established in the first chapter. I will also continue to analyze the personal experiences of artists and the literal and figurative spaces in which they create and present their art in conjunction with their artwork. The artistic analysis of this chapter will begin with "counterculture arts" like rap and graffiti in the broader contexts of Palestine and Kashmir, discuss the illegalizing of resistance art, and then narrow in on political and human rights issues addressed in the work of Khalili and Kashmiri artists, including Mir Suhail, Rani Sharabati, and Ala Haikal.

Khalili and Kashmiri resistance art that critiques human rights abuses spans the spectrum bookended by Poe's understanding of "art for art's sake" and Kahf's understanding of resistance art. As artists in Al-Khalil and Kashmir face censorship, theft, detention and other obstacles regardless of their artistic medium, their work reflects patterns in the memories and experiences of both Khalili and Kashmiri people, derived from their shared struggles against colonization and military imposition.

Counterculture Arts: Rap and Graffiti

In scholarship on political resistance art across various geographical and chronological contexts, rap and graffiti are often grouped together as "counterculture arts." José Simões and Ricardo Campos, for instance, write about the co-emergence of "protest rap" and "illegal graffiti" as "social and cultural worlds of a more subterranean and oppositional nature" in Portugal (Simões and Campos, 19). Simões and Campos also discuss art's ability to take on an oppositional nature by existing within the sphere of illegality or by being positioned "ideologically and symbolically in a situation of transgression or contestation against a set of dominant social representations and values" (ibid). This second possible condition of resistance art closely mirrors the condition established by Usama Kahf and discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, while rap music emerged as a new music genre within the past few decades, graffiti has been a political tool for centuries; it appeared during the Roman and Umayyad empires, Franco's Spain, the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile, and World War II (Campo, 11).

Rap and graffiti provide an easy starting point for a discussion on resistance art relating to human rights abuses in Palestine and Kashmir. The idea to explore resistance art by comparing Palestine and Kashmir was derived from two instances in of relationship between Palestinian and Kashmiri rap and graffiti. In her book *Jil Oslo,* Sunaina Maira writes about the emergence of Palestinian hip-hop as an "expression of social and political identities of a new generation of Palestinian youth in the West Bank and also in Israel" (Maira, 11). Tamer Nafar, known as the father of Palestinian rap, was initially inspired to make music by American rappers like Tupac Shakur and Public Enemy. In the documentary *Slingshot Hip Hop,* Nafar names Tupac as his primary inspiration and identifies the parallel between the sentiment behind Public Enemy's album, *Fear of a Black Planet,* and the fear that Jewish-Israelis have of an Arab nation (Salloum,

3:53-4:50). The political and social issues that Black American rappers were addressing resonated with Nafar so strongly that, in the documentary, he asks how anyone could expect him and his band members to not love hip-hop.

In the documentary *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies,* Kashmiri rapper MC Kash (Roushan Illahi) echoes the exact same sentiment as Nafar. He says, “I chose hip-hop because I could relate to the slavery part. I could relate to Tupac saying ‘it’s a white man’s world’ or we’ve been subjected to slavery and oppression for too long now. That’s why I could relate to hip-hop” (*Soz,* 38:38 – 38:55). He elaborates on this connection by explaining the similar suffering of African-Americans and Kashmiris: “Both of us were sold as slaves. Both of us were made to work in fields. I mean, they were made to work in cotton fields and we were made to work in saffron fields” (ibid, 39:18 - 39:31). The link between MC Kash and Tamer Nafar is not direct, but it is poignant. Both artists relate to the experiences of Black Americans represented in Tupac’s music. Those shared experiences were the catalyst that inspired Tamer Nafar and MC Kash’s own creative resistance.

In concurrence with past scholarship that linked hip-hop music to graffiti, Sunaina Maira writes that the rise of hip-hop as a Palestinian youth subculture was accompanied by an “explosion of graffiti art” (Maira, 159). In her section on visual culture and surveillance, Maira writes about Hafez Omar, a Palestinian artist who, as a young boy, painted his graffiti at night to avoid being caught by Israeli soldiers (162). Graffiti, an artistic medium that is sometimes viewed as defacement or destruction of public property, opposes the Israeli occupation as its artists risk confrontation and arrest by IDF soldiers. Journalist Majid Maqbool writes about an intentionally anonymous group of Kashmiri graffiti artists who began spray painting political messages on the Srinagar airport road in 2008 after they saw videos of political graffiti art in

Gaza (Maqbool). Just like Omar, this group of artists did their graffiti late at night or early in the morning to avoid being apprehended (ibid).

Graffiti, commissioned and spontaneous, coats many surfaces in and around Al-Khalil. Figure 19 features a graffiti mural done by Rani Sharabati on the wall of a United Nations school in Al-Fawwar refugee camp, just south of the city. This mural utilizes the dove and the olive branch which are two universally recognized symbols for peace. The human figure on the left is wearing virtual reality goggles and the viewer is reminded that the sentiment of peace evoked by the olive branch and dove is not part of reality for West Bank Palestinians. Though Sharabati painted this mural in broad daylight and without fear of being arrested, he still opposes the status quo by calling the Palestinian reality into question and drawing a contrast between reality and utopia.

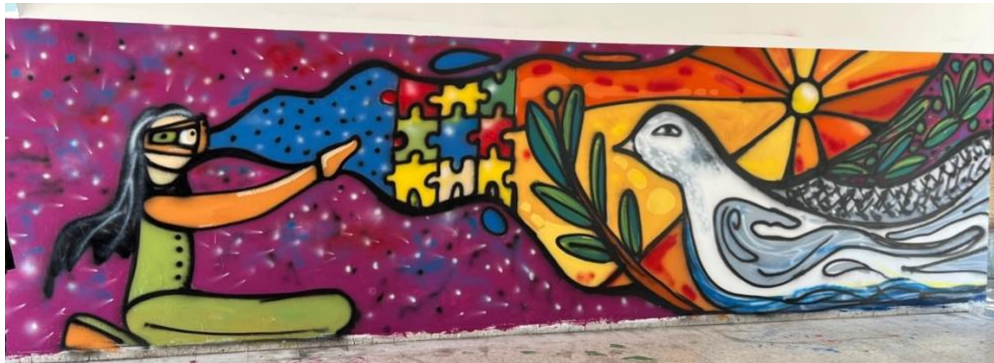

Figure 19. Mural by Rani Sharabati

A similar sentiment was adopted in a collaborative graffiti project between Sharabati, other Palestinian artists, and a French graffiti artist in Ramallah. This graffiti mural features an octopus tentacle emerging from a manhole in the ground and clutching a can of spray paint (see fig. 20). To the right of the tentacle are the words “slap” and “future.” According to Sharabati’s Instagram post about the graffiti mural, the title “Future Slap” is meant to go against the current and encourage people to leave their comfort zones to challenge political, environmental, and

social issues (Sharabati, “Future Slap”). Overall, whether rap and graffiti oppose the status quo through illegality, challenging expectations, or subverting popular beliefs, they have become a common trait of resistance movements globally, and provide a strong foundation for an exploration of political charged art in Palestine and Kashmir.

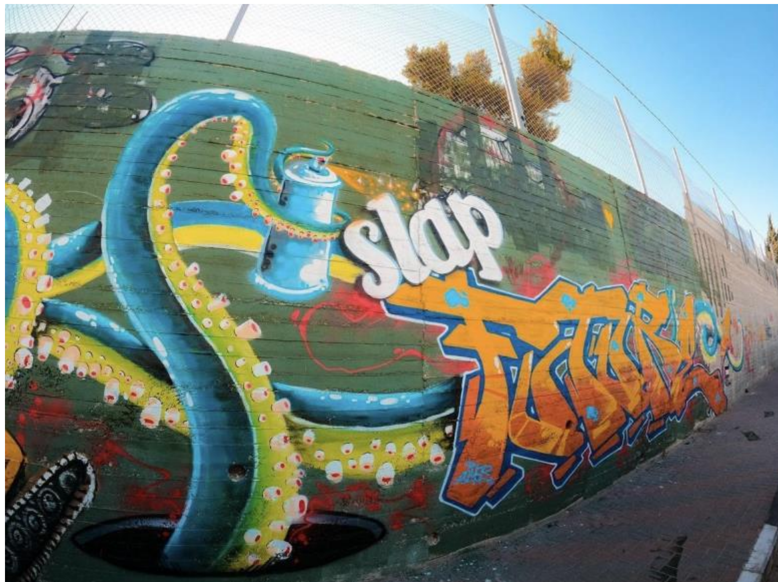

Figure 20. Future Slap Graffiti in Ramallah

Illegality of Art Off the Street:

As established by Simões and Campos, graffiti and rap adopt an oppositional, political nature either through their illegality, or through their opposition to the status quo, respectively (Simões and Campos, 19). I argue that the possibility of illegality, or interpreted illegality, extends beyond the medium of graffiti, especially in Palestine and Kashmir where artists are surveilled and can run into legal trouble making art in any medium. According to Rani Sharabati, transporting artwork serves as a difficult challenge due to checkpoints and the lack of a Palestinian airport (Sharabati). He must send his art from Palestine to Jordan using ground transport and can use air transport from a Jordanian airport. This is a difficult and expensive process (ibid). He also said that when the Israeli officers see art with political messages, they may steal it (ibid). Sharabati once gave prints of his work to a friend for redistribution, but his

friend was stopped and interrogated for three hours and the prints were all confiscated (ibid). Sharabati risks the destruction or loss of his work at the hands of the Israeli occupation when he does something as simple as sending his work to a foreign gallery or customer.

Ala Haikal has also faced problems with the occupying Israeli military and settlers as he's tried to collect stones for his carvings. Once, he obtained a permit to accompany his father to Jerusalem for medical treatment and on this trip, he went to Al-Aqsa Mosque where he collected just a few stones, only about three or four (Haikal). While he was in Jerusalem, Israeli soldiers stopped Haikal, searched him, and found the stones (ibid). They took him to the police station and held him there for four hours until they finally kicked him out of Jerusalem to Bethlehem (ibid). In Bethlehem, he found his neighbor from Al-Khalil, gave him the stones, and returned to his father in Jerusalem with his travel permit (ibid). Haikal also referred to the issues he faces as a videographer trying to film footage in Al-Khalil. He said that if Israeli settlers see someone filming in a place where they don't want them to film, they can cause problems for them (ibid).

Kashmiri artists like MC Kash and Mir Suhail have faced similar difficulties. For instance, when MC Kash released his first hip-hop track in 2010, the Indian government immediately banned it and his studio was ransacked by police, forcing him to take his work underground (*Soz,* 10:19 - 10:22). When I mentioned MC Kash in my interview with Mir Suhail, a Kashmiri political cartoonist featured in the same documentary as MC Kash, Suhail told me that MC Kash had "disappeared;" that he had moved to Sweden and no longer made music due to the pressure that he faced from the Indian authorities (Suhail).

Mir Suhail faces issues of his own. Once, an Indian soldier threatened him with a beating until a three-star army officer intervened. Suhail told the officer that he worked as a political

cartoonist and had a curfew pass. The officer made him draw a caricature of one of his soldiers. The officer was pleased by the drawing, yet oblivious to the fact that Suhail's sketchbook was full of anti-army sketches (ibid, 1:15:17 - 1:16:30). In that instance, Suhail walked away with his life. However, one of Suhail's close friends was murdered by a military officer when he was out after curfew (Suhail). Suhail still has to navigate the trauma that these experiences and events inflicted upon him, even after leaving Kashmir and moving to New York City. In our interview, he said, "when I landed [in New York], even still I have this trauma. If I pass police [officers] I remove my earbuds. I want to listen to them; I don't want to get killed" (ibid).

Despite these challenges, Sharabati, Haikal, and Suhail continue to make art that addresses political and human rights issues in a variety of ways. According to Rani Sharabati, there is a range of ways that art can offer political commentary. He pointed to Ismail Shammout, a painter who depicts violence, weapons, and death in his work, as one endpoint on that range (Sharabati). On the other end, artists like Sliman Mansour and Khaled Hourani make political statements in their work through the use of Palestinian symbols that have adopted political meanings over time. The meanings of these symbols are more veiled than the graphic imagery that Shammout uses in his work. The work of Mir Suhail, Ala Haikal, and Rani Sharabati spans this range. In the following section, I will analyze specific pieces of their artwork and will connect these works to the specific humanitarian and human rights issues to which they respond.

Critiquing Human Rights Abuses and Pellet Guns in Kashmir

Violence and human rights abuses are basic facets of Kashmiri life. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 160 civilians were killed in Kashmir in 2018 alone (OHCHR, 13). These deaths are believed to be a result of "excessive use of force by Indian security forces against civilians (ibid, 14). Another relevant issue in Kashmir

is the arbitrary detention of protesters, political dissidents, and other civil society actors by Indian authorities (ibid, 18). The OHCHR report also details restrictions on freedom of expression that censor members of the press (ibid, 24). All of these issues, experienced by Mir Suhail and his Kashmiri collective, feed into the production of his political cartoons, which critique military violence, detentions, and censorship.

One of Suhail's cartoons (see fig. 21) features a caricature of an Indian soldier holding a bloodied meat cleaver in one hand and a chicken, held by its neck, in the other. Beside the solder is a cage full of chickens, mouths open and eyes wide. The cage is labeled "Kashmiris." This cartoon critiques the Indian military's mistreatment and detention of Kashmiris, equating their mistreatment to the caging and slaughtering of poultry. Suhail also critiques free speech restrictions imposed on Kashmiri journalists. In another cartoon (see fig. 22), Suhail depicts a pointer finger with a fountain pen head as its fingernail. The cuticle is bloodied as a pair of pliers grips the fountain pen and pulls, simultaneously depicting gruesome torture and censorship.

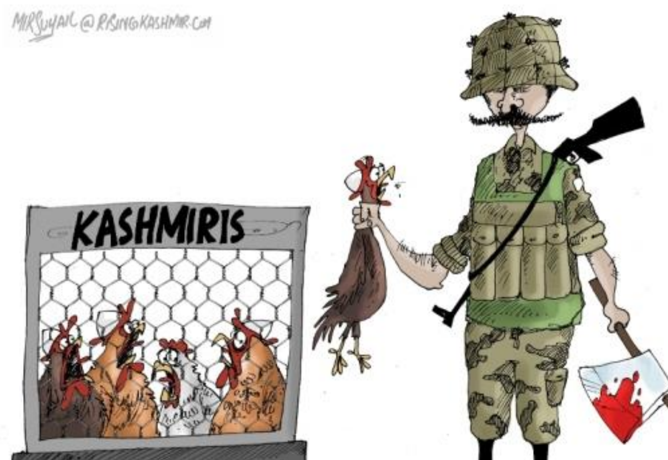

Figure 21. Comic of caged Kashmiris by Mir Suhail

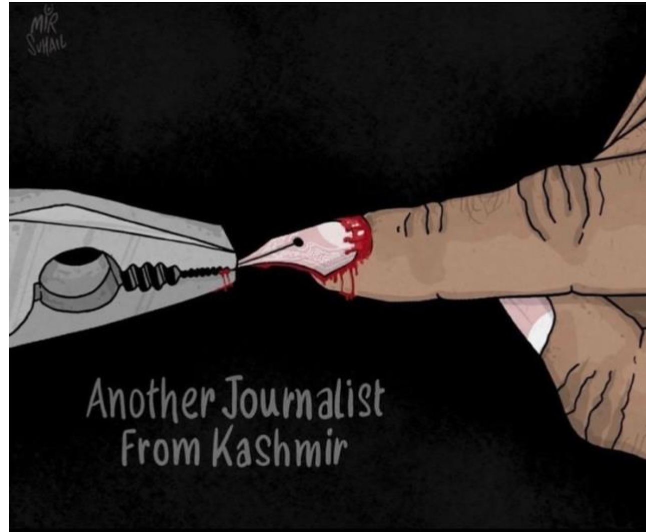

Figure 22. Comic of clipping the nails of Kashmiri Journalists by Mir Suhail

In Kashmir, the use of pellet-firing shotguns by both Kashmiri and Indian police has left 88 people with damaged eyesight between 2014 and 2017 ("Losing Sight in Kashmir"). According to Amnesty International, pellet firing shotguns have been used against Kashmiri protesters since 2010 and "have a high risk of causing serious and permanent injuries to the persons targeted as well as to others" (ibid). Though the pellets are "initially concentrated in a tight pattern as they are fired, [they] spread out to create a constellation that can reach a wide radius," increasing the risk of indiscriminate injury for bystanders and protesters alike ("India"). Human Rights Watch also condemned the use of these weapons in 2020 after dozens were injured at a Shia Muslim procession in the Kashmiri city of Srinagar (ibid).

Mir Suhail addressed this specific form of violence in a digital art series that portrayed various historical and artistic characters with one eye covered by a bloodied patch. Some of the images included in the series include the Mona Lisa, Vermeer's "Girl with a Pear Earring" (see fig. 23), Vincent Van Gogh's self-portrait (see fig. 24), and a photograph of Mahatma Gandhi ("Digital Art"). Suhail also repurposed "Incredible India" advertisements, turning them into "Incredible Kashmir" advertisements that featured broken and beaten bodies riddled with

bruises, eye patches, and bandages (ibid). This series directly critiqued the use of pellet guns by the Kashmiri and Indian police by depicting the gory aftermath and subverting images that, as cultural and artistic icons, are situated in the status quo.[2]

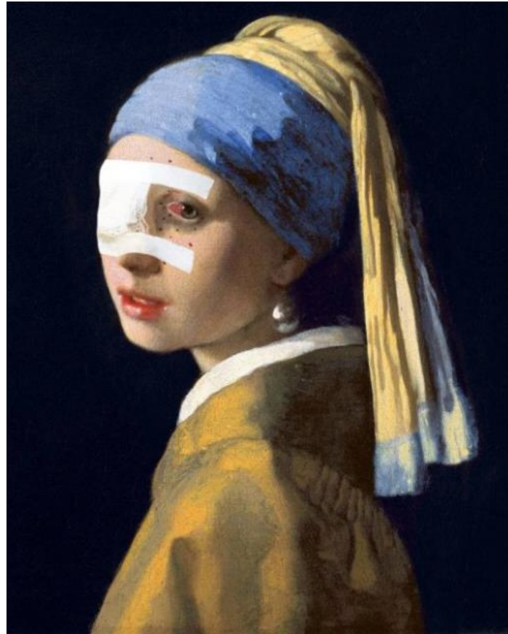

Figure 23. Girl with a Pearl digitally altered by Mir Suhail

According to Suhail, the use of iconic Western art in this series served another purpose. In using the West's beloved artistic icons like Van Gogh and the Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, Suhail reminds western audiences that "[people in the west] are human like us, inside the painting are humans just like you and me…and we have the same [flesh], same blood" (Suhail). These works of art serve as an emotional touchstone as, in Suhail's words, he "[tries] to convey to other people that we are the same, we have the same feelings" (ibid). In our interview, he said, "we care so much about Van Gogh's ear even though his body and his pain are gone. But his painting is still there conveying so much emotion and giving so much perspective about that artist" (ibid). With this piece of digital art, Suhail calls foreign audiences to extend their

[2] The eyepatch also became a notable symbol of Egyptian resistance as many protesters were shot in the eye during the Egyptian Revolution ("Egypt").

sympathy and empathy for Van Gogh to the Kashmiri people and their pain, pain that exists off the canvas and in the lives of living human beings.

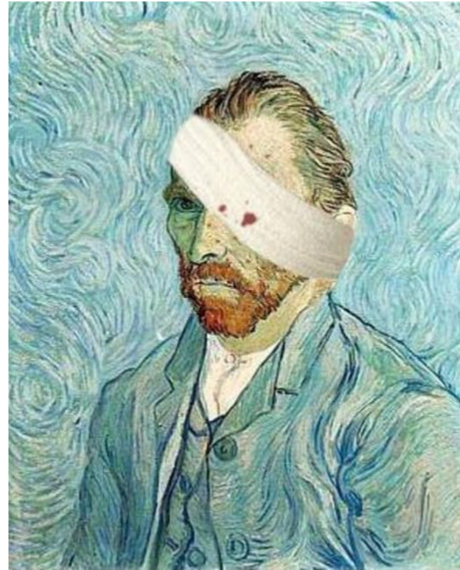

Figure 24. Van Gogh's Self Portrait digitally altered by Mir Suhail

Critiquing Settler Violence in Palestine

According to a press release by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "land [in the West Bank] is often confiscated for military purposes but is then used for settlement construction" which is in violation of international law ("Commission of Inquiry"). The occupants of these settlements often times belong to extreme nationalist political factions and wreak havoc on the Palestinian towns and villages that they surround. Ehud Eiran and Peter Krause write about the "price-tag" phenomenon in which "'hilltop youth' (*noar hagavaot*)—a loosely connected group of young Israelis that creates and populates many of the outposts in the West Bank—burn Palestinian mosques and destroy property in attacks accompanied by threatening graffiti that often references Israeli settlers, outposts, and anti-Arab slogans" (Eiran and Krause, 638). This phenomenon is characterized, in part, by its primary goal of preventing Israeli withdrawal from Israeli settlements in the West Bank (640). Though the

United Nations stopped making a distinction between price-tag and other kinds of settler violence in 2013, Israeli settlers perpetrate other types of violence and aggression as well.

For the residents and artists of Al-Khalil, violence by illegal Israeli settlers is a pressing issue. Illegal Israeli settlers live in the heart of the old city of Al-Khalil and in the nearby settlement of Kiryat Arba. One of the most potent examples of settler violence was the Ibrahimi Mosque Massacre in 1994 in which Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish-American transplant to Kiryat Arba, massacred 29 Palestinians worshipping inside the Ibrahimi Mosque (Boudreau, 75). Following this massacre, Goldstein was buried in Kiryat Arba's Meir Kahana memorial park which became a pilgrimage site for extremist Israeli and foreign Jews who viewed Goldstein as a martyr and hero (ibid, 75-76). The extremist attitudes regarding Goldstein and his actions are indicative of the challenges that Israeli settlers pose to the Palestinians of Al-Khalil. Other forms of settler antagonism include settlers who live in the upper levels of buildings in the old city throwing down rocks and trash at the Palestinians shops on the ground level. Chain link fencing or other barriers have been installed to protect shoppers and vendors from this refuse (see fig. 25).

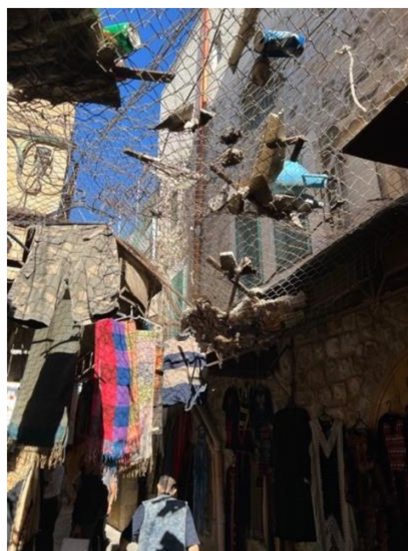

Figure 25. Waste from settlers in the old city of Al-Khalil.

While the situation surrounding settler violence and aggression in Al-Khalil is grave, one of Ala Haikal's most striking artistic responses was inspired by an experience that he had near the city of Ramallah. In July of 2022, Ala participated in the Amaken International Artists Residency, which brought together Palestinian and international artists, in the village of Kafr Ni'mah near Ramallah (Haikal, Amaken). According to Haikal, Kafr Ni'mah is often threatened by Israeli settlers who steal from and cause other problems for the village's residents (Haikal, *Interview*). Ala and his team of three other artists were in Kafr Ni'mah with the intent of making an art piece about the land, so they scouted the area with Ala's video camera looking for inspiration (ibid). While they were exploring the area, they were apprehended by four armed settlers who took Ala's camera by force (ibid). After the four artists negotiated with them, the settlers returned Ala's camera but removed the memory card and would not return it (ibid). From this encounter, the four artists found the concept for their collaborative project: memory. In Ala's words, "they stole the memory [card] of the camera, but they can never steal our memory or make us forget" (ibid).

With this sentiment in mind, Ala carved a QR code in a large stone from the site of this incident (see fig. 26). The QR code leads to a video that the group uploaded on YouTube. The video, titled "Memory," features the four artists standing in the spot where the incident took place, recounting what had happened to them ("Memory"). Haikal, the silhouetted figure situated on the far-left, approaches the spot with a scarecrow in his arms, which he sets up beside the group as a makeshift deterrent for settlers (ibid). The description of the video includes the line, "they steal the land, the water, [and the] air, but cannot steal our memories" (ibid). The stone carving and film element of this project, inspired by the experiences of the four artists involved, comments on the political situation of illegal Israeli settlers in the West Bank not by depicting

violence or conflict, but by reclaiming the collective memory of the artists and the collective memory of Palestinians.

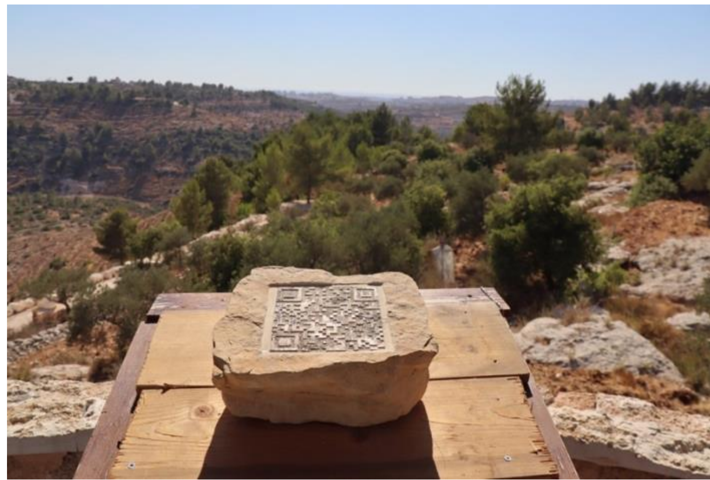

Figure 26. QR Code from Amaken International Artists Residency by Ala Haikal

Critiquing the War on Gaza

Human rights violations and violent attacks in the Gaza Strip, commonly referred to as the world's largest open-air prison, are another important issue in Palestine that Rani Sharabati responds to in his work. During Operation Cast Lead, a 22-day long assault on Gaza that took place in 2008 and 2009, 16 healthcare workers in Gaza were killed and 22 were injured (Marton, 563). Furthermore, the military strike damaged fourteen of Gaza's 27 hospitals and 38 health care clinics (ibid). Reports from groups like Human Rights Watch and the Palestinian Medical Relief Society also stated that unarmed civilians were killed during the assault and that weapons were being used in areas with concentrated civilian populations (ibid, 564).

Since Operation Cast Lead, the Gaza Strip has faced similar human rights violations and countless military assaults. In May of 2019, Israeli military demolished four high-rise Gaza buildings in a series of airstrikes ("Gaza"). After the eleven-day long assault, the United Nations reported 260 casualties, including 66 children (ibid). Gazan authorities also reported 2,400 housing units had become uninhabitable, with 50,000 additional housing units facing damage

(ibid). These strikes destroyed civilian lives and homes. Though the Israeli military claimed to be targeting Palestinian armed groups, Human Rights Watch found no evidence to support the notion that Palestinian militants were present in any of the four leveled high-rise buildings (ibid).

Rani Sharabati shared one of his paintings on Instagram in concurrence with these attacks. The painting features a seated elderly man, surrounded by the rubble of his demolished home (see fig. 27). Between the personal items scattered at his feet, the dark gray clouds of smoke and dust, and the colorless piles of rubble, the painting casts a dismal shadow. In the caption of the post, Sharabati quotes Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Sunday" and writes, "I sit at home, neither sad nor happy / Not me, or no one / Scattered newspapers. The vase rose does not remind me / who picked it for me / Today is our anniversary" (Sharabati, "Sunday"). As he pairs Darwish's poem with this painting and shares them both in response to attacks on Gaza, Sharabati emphasizes the regularity with which Palestinians in Gaza suffer from air strikes and must reckon with demolished homes and lives. The subject of the poem is mundane, as is sitting amidst piles of rubble in Gaza.

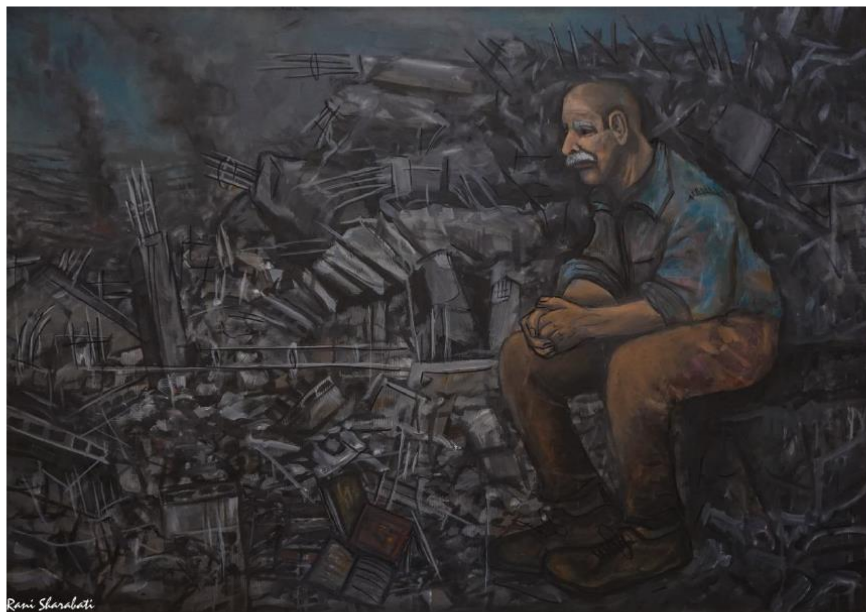

Figure 27. *Sunday,* Rani Sharabati

Mir Suhail critiques the war on Gaza in his work as well. In 2014, during Israel's "Operation Protective Edge," or the 2014 Gaza War, Mir Suhail posted a political cartoon depicting the relationship between Israel and Palestine on his Twitter (Suhail, "Cartoon on Palestine"). A number of Kashmiris protested this attack on Gaza and some Kashmiri protesters were killed while demonstrating on behalf of Palestine (Suhail, *Interview).* After these events, Suhail recalls that his cartoon was reposted by Palestinians (ibid). The cartoon depicts a man, characterized as Palestinian by the keffiyeh he wears, feeding a bloodied snake wearing a blue band with a star of David on it. This part of the cartoon, labeled "then," opposed the part labeled "now" in which the snake violently bites of the head of the Palestinian man (see fig. 28). This cartoon addresses the violence and disproportionate power dynamics in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship which are reflected by the violence that Kashmiris protesting Israel's violence faced from the Indian authorities.

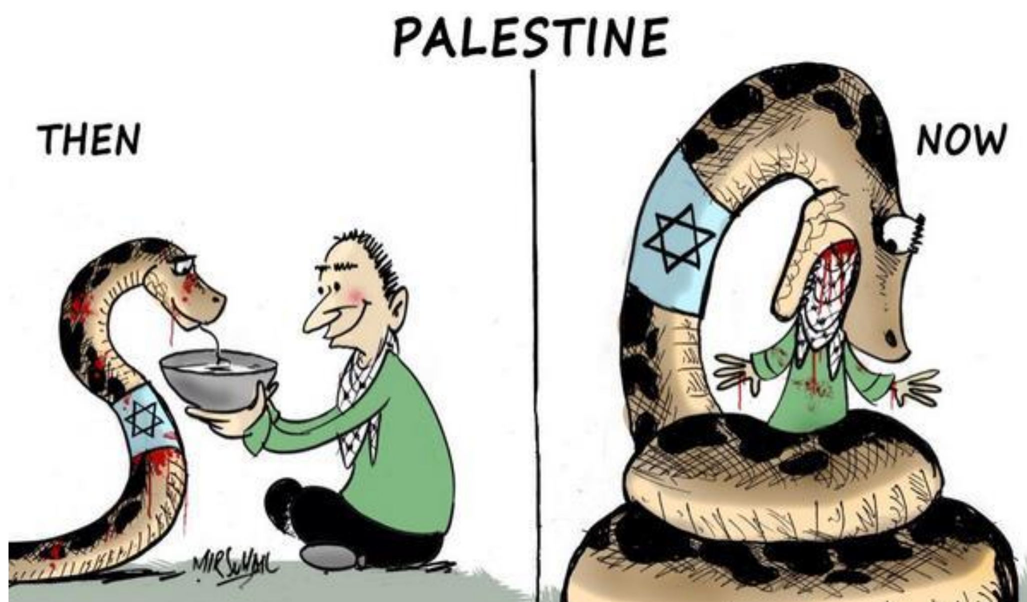

Figure 28. Cartoon on Palestine, Mir Suhail

Connecting Palestine and Kashmir

Along with addressing Israeli violence in Gaza, Mir Suhail has notably drawn comparisons between the political situations of Palestine and Kashmir in his cartoons. One of his cartoons features a rotund military officer standing over a man bleeding on the ground with a gun aimed at his head. On the left, a mirror shows their reflection. The image on the right says "Gaza" and the reflection in the mirror says "Kashmir" (*Soz*, 1:06:13). In my interview with Suhail, he said, "The way we resist, it's from Palestine because we learned from Palestinians how to resist" (Suhail). According to Suhail, stone pelting in Kashmir was inspired by stone pelting in Palestine (ibid). He also referred to similarities between tactics in India and Israel becoming increasingly visible and the presence of many young Israeli tourists in India as grounds for Palestinian and Kashmiri solidarity (ibid).

Though he doesn't claim to know everything there is to know about the Palestinian struggle, Suhail said that "internationally we (Kashmiris) collaborate with Palestine because we understand their suffering, we talk about it in our own capacity whether we draw, whether we protest, whether we discuss, whether we understand, whether we feel" (Suhail). Suhail illustrated the understanding that Kashmiris have for the Palestinian situation by turning to a cartoon from his childhood: *Tom and Jerry.* According to Suhail, *Tom and Jerry* is related to Palestine and Israel because "every time Palestinians are trying to save themselves, Israelis are like a cat" with the freedom to roam around" (ibid).

Suhail emphasized that Palestinians and Kashmiris are connected by more than the similarities in their contexts, like tactics shared between their oppressors or the shared practice of stone throwing. Palestinians and Kashmiris are bound together through shared experiences of suffering, violence, and oppression that affect them in similar ways. In my interview with Suhail, he compared the trauma of Palestinians to "walking cages" that they wear around with them

everywhere (ibid). He himself has a cage that was built by the trauma of losing friends and family members to military violence and he is still trapped in it, even in New York City (ibid). Kashmiris can relate to Palestinians over their shared suffering and, according to Suhail, art is "an international language" that provides relief from trauma (ibid).

Concluding Remarks

This chapter blurred the boundary between resistance art and "art for art's sake" by pinpointing works of art that respond to political and human rights issues and oppose the status quo regardless of their medium. By beginning with graffiti and rap, I was able to establish connections between Palestinian and Kashmiri resistance art. I also identified how these mediums oppose the status quo through their illegality and ideological opposition to the mainstream. Then, I demonstrated how the illegality of art extends beyond street art bordering on vandalism to include any form of art in the contexts of Palestine and Kashmir. In this section, I elaborated on the experiences of Mir Suhail, MC Kash, Ala Haikal, and Rani Sharabati in which their art was treated as criminal by either Israeli or Indian officials and civilians. Then, I explained the issues of military violence and detention in Kashmir, settler violence in the West Bank, and Israeli military attacks on Gaza. With each of these issues, I presented works of art that vary across mediums and succeed in critiquing human rights violations while the artists simultaneously face complications caused by human rights violations as well.

Altogether, the artist experiences and creative productions discussed in this chapter demonstrate that art's potential to carry a political message is not inherently limited or advanced by its positioning in one specific medium. Rather, the similar traumas and violations experienced by people in Palestine and Kashmir foster the growth of parallel collective identities which, in turn, foster the growth of creative resistance movements that mirror one another.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

Summary

Binary categories and divisions in the study of art, humanity, and resistance are at the core of the problems that this thesis addressed. In chapter one, I established the foundation for this thesis by providing background information about Al-Khalil, delineating my theoretical and methodological approach, and introducing the artists that this thesis focuses on. Finally, I presented my argument that, by blurring the divisions between artforms and geopolitical contexts, we are able to see the experiences and memories shared by individuals in Al-Khalil and Kashmir and refine our understanding of what resistance art is.

In Chapter 2, I established the duality of resistance art as a communal tool for collective expression and an avenue for individuals to express their thoughts, process their emotions, and cope with their trauma. I put resistance art in conversation with social media and discussed how the use of resistance art and social media as a tool of collective expression presents one uniform narrative and depersonalizes the suffering of individuals. Then, I discussed the personal outlook of Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and Mir Suhail towards their art and their own individual narratives as artists and human beings. I identified that, for these artists, art is a mode of coping with their depression and processing their trauma as well as a tool for representing their collective.

In Chapter 3, I challenged the way that scholars have previously studied Palestinian land from within the confines of rigid academic disciplines like history, political science, and environmental studies. I presented Palestinian perceptions of their own landscape, complete with the suffocating crowdedness of refugee camps and the disruption caused by the apartheid wall, guard towers and other military presence. I analyzed the stone carvings of Ala Haikal as his way of preserving Palestinian collective memory held in stones taken from the earth. I compared the

altering of the Palestinian landscape to the altering of the Kashmiri landscape, presenting art that comments on military presence and the disruption of space in the Kashmiri context. Finally, I analyzed the artistic philosophies of Rani Sharabati, Ala Haikal, and their colleagues in Al-Khalil. I discussed Sharabati's art studio as a site of artistic production and explored the investment that these artists have in the city of Al-Khalil.

In Chapter 4, I challenged the scale that scholars and artists like Edgar Allen Poe and Usama Kahf have used to push resistance art and "art for art's sake" towards two extremes. I introduced graffiti and hip-hop music as a starting point for comparing Kashmiri and Palestinian resistance art and then expanded my argument to other mediums. I discussed the fabricated illegality of art in both geopolitical contexts and compared the struggles that Kashmiri and Khalili artists face by virtue of living in a volatile political and human rights situation. Finally, I paired examples of Kashmiri and Khalili resistance art to the recent events or human rights violations that the artists have experienced and responded to through their art.

All together, these chapters have addressed the problem that arises when we treat different artforms and resistance movements as isolated from one another: we overlook how shared human experiences, memories, and identities bridge these manufactured divides. Each chapter addressed this problem by focusing on the experiences of the Khalili and Kashmiri artists that I interviewed and researched in tandem with their work.

I used Kashmir as a point of reference in this thesis to answer my questions about how the patterns in Palestinian resistance art can translate to resistance art coming out of a different context. I also demonstrated how the experiences, emotions, and narratives that Kashmiris share with Palestinians are reflected in Kashmiri and Palestinian artwork, regardless of differences in

artforms. I used interviews with Kashmiri and Palestinian artists to explore how their lives, personal philosophies, and artwork blend together in similar ways.

The theory of intermediality was central to this thesis as I analyzed Rani Sharabati's paintings and graffiti; Ala Haikal's stone carvings, videos, and animations; Mir Suhail's political cartoons and digital art; and the installation art and digital art of other Kashmiri artists. I broke down binary categories by bringing together these various artforms from different geographies and analyzing them simultaneously with interview data. In doing these things, I painted a comprehensive picture of what resistance art can be. I directed focus towards the collective experiences of human beings which underly every study of land, politics, expression, and resistance in places like Palestine and Kashmir.

Reflections on My Approach and Limitations

At the end of this research, I want to acknowledge that all of the art and artists that I included in this thesis are men. This is certainly a limitation of this study as the experiences shared by Sharabati, Haikal, and Suhail are partially determined by their gender identities. I did not intentionally exclude female artists from this research. Rather, I did not meet any female artists during my two months in Palestine and was inspired to include Kashmir in this thesis because of the work of Mir Suhail, Syed Mujtaba Rizvi, and Showkat Kathjoo. If this study were to progress in the future, I would include female artists from Al-Khalil and Kashmir as well.

Next, I want to recognize that my area of academic focus and personal investment in this research lies with Palestine, not Kashmir. I have spent the past four years studying Palestinian history, politics, culture, and art. Also, in the year and a half prior to writing this thesis, I conducted a research project on intermediality in Palestinian hip-hop music which I presented at the Middle East Studies Associations 2022 Annual Meeting. Furthermore, I built personal relationships with Sharabati and Haikal prior to beginning, or even conceptualizing, this thesis. I

spent time in their studios watching them work and even making art with them. Essentially, I lived in the Khalili art world before I ever embarked on researching it. I had very limited knowledge about Kashmir before writing this thesis which is why I incorporate it as a point of reference and not as an equal counterpart to Palestine.

Finally, I acknowledge that I conducted my interviews with Sharabati and Haikal in December of 2022 and January of 2023, respectively. Both of these interviews took place after I returned to the U.S. from Palestine and both were conducted over the phone. My interview with Mir Suhail, however, was conducted in person when I traveled to New York City in February of 2023. Because this interview was conducted in person, it ended up being twice as long as my interviews with Sharabati and Haikal. Ideally, I would have liked for all three interviews to take place at the same point in the research process and either entirely virtual or entirely in person. Unfortunately, this was not possible for this research project, but will be something that I strive for in future research projects of this nature.

Implication of Findings and Future Direction

Studying the resistance art produced in Al-Khalil is incredibly important to building a more comprehensive perspective of the city for those who study and visit it. It is worthwhile to invest in a topic that will push the boundaries of scholarly expectations and previous academic work regarding Al-Khalil. Solely characterizing the city by its dire human rights and humanitarian situation harms the reputation of Al-Khalil by cementing these issues into outsider conceptualizations of the city. Even other Palestinians that I met in cities like Ramallah had a negative view of Al-Khalil. Though I was witness to many human rights abuses during my time there, Al-Khalil deserves to be recognized for its rich community of artists as well.

Furthermore, putting Al-Khalil into conversation with Kashmir opens up an avenue for similar comparisons to be made in the future. According to Mir Suhail, art is an "international

language" (Suhail, *Interview*). I think that studying how art functions as a language across cultures and geographies, and especially in contexts of resistance, is valuable for exploring topics like oppression, trauma, and anticolonialism. In researching the relationship between Palestinian and Kashmiri resistance art, I uncovered additional connections to the Black liberation movement, the Egyptian revolution, and the Iranian protests of 2022 that went largely unexplored. I think that there is much more to be discovered in the study of resistance art and the connections between Palestine and Kashmir are just the tip of the iceberg.

The next direction for this research to go is outward, not inward. Exhausting the relationship between Kashmiri and Khalili resistance art defeats the purpose of this thesis. I hope that this research inspires a scholar or a believer in the power of art to uncover more connections that branch out from the ones I've made in this thesis. I hope that future research uncovers an international web of resistance art which I've begun to see glimpses of. Furthermore, I hope that the artists of Al-Khalil continue to get the scholarly attention that they deserve.

Final Remarks

This thesis was borne out of a life-long **love** for **art and** a more recent love for Palestine. It was also borne out of a **belief** that art is one of the many things that **make us human** and transcends the things that **make us** different from **one** another. In **our** interview, Mir Suhail told that even though my **work is** academic, I could rearrange the words **to** write a **love** letter or a poem. So, here is a little haiku poem for Mir:

Love, art, and belief

Make us human, make us one

Our work is to love.

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