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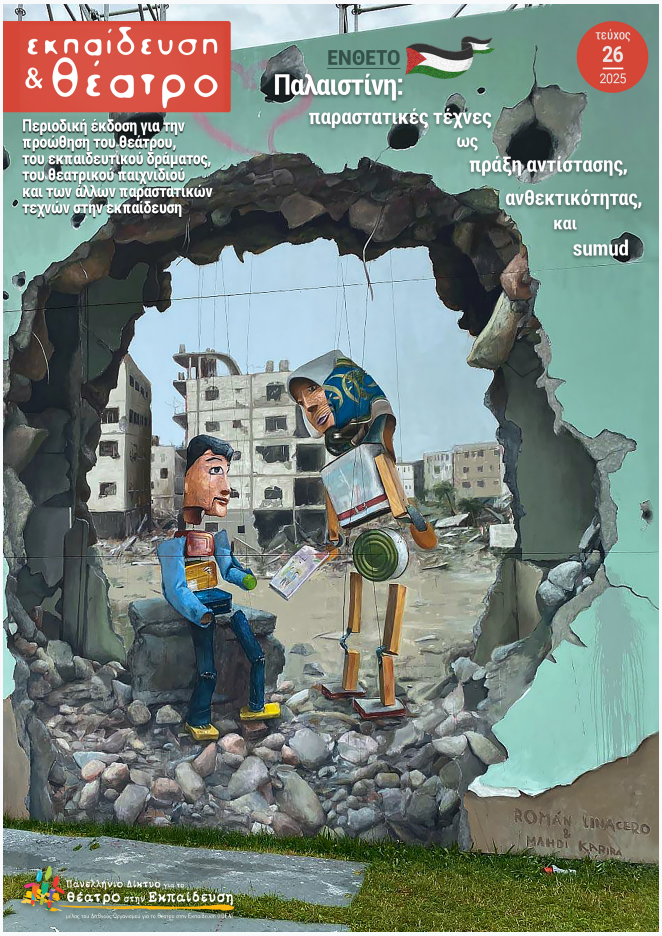

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Echoes of resistance
The role of storytelling and performing arts in preserving Palestinian identity

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Abstract

This article examines the central role of the native voice in transmitting historical memory, emphasising how it sustains collective identity and shapes our vision of the future. In the Palestinian context, storytelling serves as both a cultural archive and an act of resistance, countering fragmentation by maintaining narrative continuity. The analysis engages with embodied art forms such as dabkeh, theatre, literature and mural painting on the separation wall as vital modes of cultural expression and political testimony. The legacy of Ghassan Kanafani is highlighted, recognising his assertion that storytelling is a form of cultural survival and a revolutionary act. Contributions by Khitam Edelbi and Shams Almanal Timraz further ground the discussion. The first is a narrative recounted by Muhibah Edelbi and the second is a performance by Sabha Timraz. Both recount intergenerational memories of displacement from Al-Birwa and Isdud during the Nakba of 1948. These stories serve as a form of mnemonic resistance against erasure. Finally, the article examines the role of graffiti during the First and Second Intifadas, as well as how Palestinian narratives have gained a wider reach through theatre and digital media. These continue to amplify marginalised voices across global platforms.

Keywords: *Storytelling, performing arts, Palestinian identity, Gaza, Ghassan Kanafani, memory, resistance, Indigenous peoples, graffiti, intergenerational trauma, digital media*

Introduction

Across Indigenous communities worldwide, storytelling and the performing arts have served as sacred vessels for memory, resistance and identity. As Sium and Ritskes (2013) assert, "Stories become mediums for Indigenous peoples to both analogize colonial violence and resist it in real ways. A kind of embodied reciprocity exists between a people and their stories" (p. 5).

These creative expressions are far more than mere modes of entertainment; they are vital tools of survival, resilience and resistance in the face of colonial violence and cultural erasure. Through artistic forms such as the rhythmic cadence of oral poetry to the visual symbolism embedded in traditional crafts and theatrical performances, Indigenous peoples have preserved their histories and asserted their presence.

This article explores the global significance of storytelling and performance, with a focus on the Palestinian experience from the British Mandate and the Nakba of 1948, through to the present-day realities of occupation, exile and genocide. Using an autoethnographic approach, the authors demonstrate the importance of passing on the Palestinian story through the generations in order to preserve a heritage that has been under threat of erasure by the Israeli occupation since 1948.

Drawing on personal and collective memory, the article discusses how Palestinian narratives have been preserved through painting, theatre, song, poetry, literature and folkloric dance (*dabkeh*). These forms of expression have played a crucial role in resisting extinction. To highlight how trauma and memory are transferred intergenerationally and how art becomes both a witness and a form of healing, the authors incorporate personal family testimonies, particularly from their sisters who lived through the Nakba and still carry its psychological scars.

Storytelling as survival in Indigenous contexts

In the absence of, or in the face of distortion to, written historical records by colonial regimes, Indigenous communities have preserved the truth through oral traditions. As Calder (2013) argues, narratives foster empathy, critical imagination and humility, shaping both identity and collective memory. For colonised peoples, storytelling becomes a means of reclaiming agency over their history and future. These stories are active tools of resistance, woven with ancestral wisdom and contemporary urgency, not passive recollections.

Similarly, Ceaușu (2018) highlights the therapeutic power of creative expression, asserting that art therapy is a means of reclaiming emotional and social well-being, rather than just a form of psychological intervention. In this light, performance and storytelling are not luxuries, but essential acts of survival and self-determination. These cultural tools help communities' counter alienation, affirm identity and foster a sense of belonging, particularly in situations of trauma and displacement.

The Palestinian narrative tradition

In Palestine, storytelling has played a particularly important role in maintaining cultural continuity and resisting political fragmentation. Before and during the British Mandate, and increasingly after the Nakba of 1948, Palestinian families and communities relied on oral histories, folktales, embroidery, poetry and dance to sustain their identity in the face of loss. The Nakba resulted in the forced displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians and the destruction of more than 500 villages. It was not only a physical catastrophe, but also an assault on memory and history.

In response, Palestinians turned to cultural production as a form of resistance. Stories of village life, harvest songs, embroidered thobes bearing the names of destroyed towns and theatrical reenactments of historical events have all served to preserve the memory of Palestine as it was before 1948. These forms continue to evolve, adapting to new contexts while maintaining their core function of asserting presence, humanity and rights in the face of ongoing erasure.

Art as the language of the silenced

In therapeutic contexts, storytelling can reveal profound psychological truths. People recount experiences not just as chronological events, but as narratives imbued with transformation, struggle and meaning. When language becomes insufficient or inaccessible, people often turn to symbolic and embodied forms of expression such as art, music, movement and crafts. As Ceaușu (2018) observes, these non-verbal forms enable the articulation of the unspeakable. For communities subjected to silencing or repression, the arts offer an alternative mode of communication, one that transcends linguistic barriers and evades censorship.

Palestinians have long embraced this visual and embodied language. Whether it is the meticulous embroidery that stitches memory into fabric, the defiant rhythm of the dabkeh dance, or the evocative murals painted on separation walls, art provides a sanctuary for expression. These creative acts do more than narrate suffering; they proclaim survival, assert dignity and embody hope.

In her study, Karim (2022) documents how contextualising the historical and contemporary practices of Palestinian artists can transform art-making into a tool of decolonisation. This process challenges dominant representations, galvanises solidarity and disrupts systems that deny Palestinians their autonomy and a voice.

Similarly, Ankori (2006) asserts that, despite the catastrophic rupture of 1948 and its devastating impact on Palestinian society, artistic traditions from before the Nakba endure as vital cultural reservoirs. These traditions not only anchor contemporary Palestinian art, but also serve as a foundation for its continuity and resilience.

The intergenerational power of story

Family narratives also play a crucial role in shaping collective identity. Kiser et al. (2010) argue that storytelling within families creates shared frameworks that help individuals and communities make sense of trauma and imagine a collective future. In Palestinian society, intergenerational storytelling has preserved the names of villages, the stories of exile, the experiences of resistance and the dreams of return.

Lullabies whispering of lost olive groves, proverbs carrying the wisdom of elders and oral tales passed from grandparents to grandchildren function

as portable homelands. In the diaspora, whether in refugee camps or urban metropolises, these stories become anchors of identity and acts of remembrance.

From Nakba to now

Following the expulsion of 1948, Palestinian refugees found themselves scattered across borders, often barred from returning home. Oral storytelling became a crucial means of preserving their culture. Without access to the lands of their birth, families described their villages in intimate detail, naming the trees, the festivals and the neighbours. This oral preservation served as both testimony and resistance.

Ghassan Kanafani, a renowned Palestinian writer and political activist, is renowned for his profound literary exploration of exile, resistance and identity. His narratives often delve into the psychological and political dimensions of displacement, transforming personal grief into collective resistance.

One of Kanafani's most notable assertions is: "The Palestinian cause is not a cause for Palestinians only, but a cause for every revolutionary, wherever they are". This statement underscores his belief in the universal relevance of the Palestinian struggle and its resonance with wider revolutionary movements around the world.

Although the exact origin of this quote is not definitively documented, it has been cited in various reputable sources discussing Kanafani's work and ideology. For instance, an article on modern diplomacy references this statement in the context of Kanafani's Marxist-Leninist views and his involvement with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The above quote also appears in discussions about Kanafani's internationalist outlook and his emphasis on solidarity among oppressed peoples worldwide. Kanafani's work, such as Men in the Sun (1999) and *Return to Haifa* (2000), exemplifies his commitment to portraying the Palestinian experience and advocating for solidarity among oppressed communities. His belief in the power of narrative to mobilise the oppressed and inspire global solidarity continues to influence discussions about resistance literature and political activism.

Storytelling as resistance
Al-Birwa: Thorns of memory between loss and survival by Khitam Edelbi

"I wish they had lived on as long as we did, and we would have slept on thorns." This is a phrase used by the ancients following the desecration of Palestine in 1948. It is with this phrase that my esteemed sister, Muhibah, began her story of Al-Birwa as she sat before me. It is a story that remains deeply etched in her heart.

> I was seven years old on the day our beloved queen fell before them, killing some of her people, desecrating her land, stealing the blue of her sky and polluting her waters. Our Al-Birwa was the town to which our parents moved from Acre to cultivate their land and harvest its crops. There, in Al-Birwa, we owned the most beautiful house, cultivated the most beautiful land and harvested the most beautiful crops. There, my mother gave birth to me and my seven siblings: Mahmoud, Muhibah, Nusaybah, Amirah, Subheyah, Zadah and Mohammad. There, we lived part of our childhood, which was stolen from us by the occupier. On the day they arrived bearing hatred, hunger and weapons, we were all at home: my mother, my six sisters, their guests as well as my father, who was sitting in the specially prepared Arabic diwan to receive them. They shouted demands for the villagers to vacate the houses within half an hour. My mother poured rice and milk into bowls for us and waited for them to cool down. But when they were cold and ready, no one wanted them; the children who had loved them ran away, and from that day on, they lost their taste. We ran and wandered in the wilderness. We raced, climbed, fell, stopped, fainted, cried, screamed and were silent. We were hungry and thirsty until we arrived at the unknown. We left our land, our house and our money behind, in Al-Birwa, carrying with us what remained of our love for it and our childhood. My father, fearing for us, forgot to wear his traditional Arab gown, which he had worn with pride. He and my mother took nothing from the house except us, for we were their most precious possession. Everyone who lived in Al-Birwa was evacuated. The adults rushed to carry the children, who ran in a state of panic. We walked with hundreds of people towards the village of Sha'ab, whose people and homes embraced us. We spent a few days there, and it was our first shelter after migrating. From Sha'ab, we walked until we reached Nahf, the village where my grandfather, Hamad Abu Awad – the village headman and most prominent figure – lived. My grandparents, Hamad and Zahiya, embraced us, and we thought we had reached safety. But then they arrived again, with their equipment and their brutality and their weapons. And so, we fled again. This time, we ran from Nahf to the village of Sajur. There my mother discovered that she had lost two of her children, Mahmoud and Nusaybah, during the escape. This loss was

even more agonising that losing Al-Birwa. She lay on the ground, putting her life on hold until her children returned. "I will not eat or drink until my children come back to me", she said. They returned two days later, and her life returned with them. From Sajur, we went to Nahf, and from there, to Akka (Acre) – the homeland of our father after he lost Al-Birwa, his second homeland. We started from scratch. There were nine mouths screaming in hunger and nine hearts bleeding with tragedy. We had no money, no home and our dignity was shattered after we had had money, a home and honour. Today, 64 years later, we still embrace the remains of those who were martyred for it. Sixty-four years later, we still pass by Al-Birwa but do not enter it; we still smell its soil, but do not eat its produce. We have forgotten all our dreams, remembering only the dream of returning. Sixty-four years later, we still remember the details, every detail: the details of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Galilee. I wish that, like our blood, they would last forever, and that we would sleep on thorns.

Reflection

When recounting Al-Birwa, Muhibah offers more than a personal recollection; she weaves a tapestry of memory, loss and resistance, embodying the Palestinian struggle to preserve identity in the face of displacement. Her narrative, rich in sensory detail, serves as a vessel for the past, a past that continues to haunt and shape the present. Through her words, the land of Al-Birwa is not lost, but is made eternally present.

The imagery is poignant: the milk and rice cooling in waiting bowls, a hurried flight through the wilderness and the silence of hunger and thirst. Though rooted in personal experience, these details resonate with collective grief. Through them, we recognise the deep scars left by trauma: not only the physical violence of forced displacement, but also the psychological wounds that alter a community's relationship with home forever. For Muhibah, Al-Birwa is more than just a lost village; it is a part of her identity, an indelible mark and a piece of her unforgettable and unreachable childhood.

The story of her family's forced displacement from Al- Birwa to Shaa'b, Nahf and Sajur, and finally to Akka (Acre), echoes the recurring rhythm of Palestinian displacement. Each new home is built on the shifting sands of memory and longing. Yet, even in the face of this ceaseless movement, storytelling offers a sense of stability. It is through the act of remembering and retelling that Muhibah and others like her hold on to the essence of what was lost. The homeland becomes a realm of the heart, not just a place on a map, and this cannot be taken away through physical exile.

The emotional power of Muhibah's story lies not only in its sadness, but also in its resilience. Sixty-four years later, the soil of Al-Birwa is still imagined, smelled and mourned, despite the violence of history. This narrative is a profound statement of survival, a refusal to let go or allow erasure. In narrating the details of life before and after the Nakba, Muhibah does more than document history: she preserves it, protects it and ensures that it is passed down as a living memory and a beacon for future generations.

Ultimately, Al-Birwa becomes a symbol of the broader Palestinian experience, in which trauma, memory and identity are interwoven through storytelling. Through these stories, Palestinians continue to assert their place in history, resisting the forces that have sought to erase them and those that seek to obscure the truth of their existence. Thus, preserving Palestinian identity is a defiant and continuous affirmation of life, love and home.

A survival in a circle of exiled fabric of trauma by Shams Almanal Timraz

The Nakba of 1948, during which the mass expulsion and displacement of Palestinians occurred, took place 24 years before I was born as a refugee. The Nakba shaped every fibre of my family's existence. My parents and older siblings were among the hundreds of thousands who were forced to flee. When they were expelled from our hometown of Isdud, they set off on foot walking towards Gaza, disoriented and terrified, carrying only what they could bear.

My eldest sister, Sabha, was just a little girl. Barefoot, exhausted and bewildered, she kept asking our mother the same desperate question: "When will we get home?" Her childish voice, echoing through the chaos of exile, served as a piercing reminder that the trauma of war does not spare no one, not even the very young. It takes hold early and leaves a deep mark.

Our mother, walking with several children and bearing the unbearable weight of sudden homelessness, could offer no answers, only her presence. In an instinctive act of emotional survival and maternal creativity, she removed her dayer – a voluminous black overskirt traditionally worn by women in Isdud. She gathered it into a circle on the bare earth, helped Sabha through the central opening and seated the younger children around the edges. "Here is home, my darling", she said softly, anchoring the children not in geography, but in love and togetherness. That improvised circle of fabric and grief became their only sanctuary in a world torn apart.

Now, decades later, Sabha lives with dementia. She no longer recognises faces or remembers daily events. However, the trauma of displacement has paradoxically anchored one memory that remains intact: that moment in the circle. We still find her sitting quietly in the centre of our mother's old black dayer, reliving the only home she has left, a tactile memory etched deeper than time or cognition.

Psychological reflection

From a psychological perspective, this moment reveals how trauma can solidify memory. In his seminal work on trauma, Van der Kolk (1996) states: "Both my interviews with traumatized people, and my brain imaging studies of them, seem to confirm that traumatic memories come back as emotional and sensory states, with little capacity for verbal representation" (p. 296). Edelbi did not see her sister Muhibah lose her ability to speak, as Muhibah continues to recount the events of the Nakba in 1948 and the family's loss of home and land as if they happened only yesterday. In contrast, Sabha, the sister of Timraz, who experienced a loss of language, dramatically expressed her own Nakba by sitting at the centre of a cloth circle symbolising home – the same cloth upon which she had sat the day her real home was lost.

While dementia gradually erodes cognitive functioning, particularly short-term memory, traumatic memories often persist, because they are encoded through heightened emotional intensity and somatic imprint. For young children in particular, early trauma can become embedded in the body, influencing attachment patterns, emotional regulation and spatial identity (Schore, 2001).

Sabha's repeated question, "When will we get home?", reflects a child's primal need for safety, structure and familiarity, all of which were violently taken away from her. By drawing a circle with the dayer, our mother performed a psychologically significant act of containment, offering a spatial and symbolic representation of safety in a reality that offered none.

This behaviour aligns with trauma theories that emphasise the importance of embodied rituals and symbolic gestures in establishing emotional security. As Van der Kolk (2014) suggests, the body "keeps the score", retaining traumatic experiences somatically when cognitive processing is disrupted. For Sabha, the cloth circle that she revisited repeatedly in old age functioned as a corporeal mnemonic, grounding her sense of maternal care that she had remembered amid the terror of dispossession.

From an academic perspective, this story lies at the intersection of trauma studies, memory theory and feminist geography. The use of fabric, specifically the dayer, as a material and spatial surrogate for home, disrupts conventional notions of domesticity associated with permanent residences. Here, home is not a place, but an act of reclamation that can be performed and carried with you.

In Palestinian cultural discourse, the mother often embodies the continuity of the nation and memory. This story exemplifies how, through acts of caregiving and improvisation, women preserve cultural identity in the face of erasure. The mother's gesture transforms traditional attire into a spatial metaphor, illustrating what Edward Said (1993) termed "the contrapuntal reality" of exile, living in the absence of place yet recreating it through memory and symbol.

Furthermore, the persistence of embodied memory, as experienced through dementia, challenges linear historiography. This suggests that history is archived not only in documents and testimonies, but also in sensory experience, inherited emotion and the physical repetition of symbolic acts.

The "circle of exile" is a multi-layered concept that encompasses a psychological defence mechanism, a maternal act of protection, a feminist reimagining of space and a visceral archive of Palestinian dispossession.

Sabha's vivid, sensory memory of that moment, soaked in emotion, has endured, even though much of her everyday memory has faded. In cases of dementia, it is often the neutral, mundane memories that are lost first, while those associated with intense emotions, such as fear, love or loss, remain remarkably resilient.

Research into trauma and memory shows that the brain processes emotionally charged experiences differently. These experiences are encoded more deeply and are less vulnerable to the typical patterns of memory loss. For Sabha, the improvised "home" her mother created during their journey from Isdud to Gaza left an enduring emotional mark: a symbol of safety amidst upheaval. Even today, when she sits within a circle of cloth reminiscent of that time, her body remembers what her mind can no longer fully express. Her story highlights that memory is not just a chronological record of facts and events; it is a living, embodied archive – a dynamic repository of how we felt, how we feared and how we survived.

Psychological trauma has an immediate effect on individuals, and the stress it induces can have long-term consequences, including increased vulnerability of the brain to diseases such as dementia. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that elevated cortisol levels resulting from acute and chronic stress can have a negative impact on cognitive processes such as learning and memory. This effect may be particularly pronounced during

critical periods of neurological development, such as childhood, and later during neurodegeneration in old age.

Psychological trauma triggers a complex array of emotional, physiological and neurological responses. In the immediate aftermath of traumatic events, individuals frequently experience acute stress marked by feelings of fear, helplessness, confusion and anxiety. While these reactions are natural, they can lead to longer-term neurobiological changes if the trauma remains unresolved, which can further complicate the brain's ability to process and preserve memory.

One of the most concerning aspects of trauma is its ability to have long-term neurological consequences. Prolonged psychological stress has been shown to alter the brain's architecture, particularly in areas responsible for memory consolidation, emotional regulation and executive function. Over time, these neurobiological changes can increase an individual's susceptibility to various cognitive and neurodegenerative disorders, including those linked to dementia. Research indicates that chronic exposure to stress hormones, particularly cortisol can trigger inflammation, neuronal damage and volumetric reductions in essential brain regions such as the hippocampus, amygdala and prefrontal cortex. These areas play a pivotal role in sustaining cognitive resilience and emotional balance.

Both Muhibah, Edelbi's sister, and Sabha, Timraz's sister, are experiencing significant memory loss. According to Timraz, Sabha no longer recognises any of her family members. Muhibah, while still able to recognise her relatives, struggles to recall what she ate the previous day. Despite her recent memory loss, Muhibah vividly remembers her life before the Nakba of 1948, the events that unfolded during it and the subsequent years of poverty and suffering.

In contrast, although Sabha appears to have lost her memory and language skills, her body still expresses meaning. When seated in the centre of the dayer, her gestures and posture evoke the precise way she sat in 1948 after losing her home and land. In this way, her body communicates what language no longer can.

According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop in individuals who are

> exposed to actual or threatened death, either by directly experiencing the traumatic events, witnessing them in person as they occurred to others, learning that the events occurred to a close family member or close friend, or experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic events. (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 143)

Neither Edelbi nor Timraz witnessed the Nakba firsthand, as they were born after 1948. However, they have inherited the trauma through the oral histories recounted by parents, siblings and extended family, whose narratives have been shaped by the dispossession of Palestine. For the purposes of this article, they have shared the experiences of their sisters as repositories of this intergenerational memory.

Scientific research further emphasises that the timing of exposure to trauma plays a critical role in its psychological and neurological effects. Trauma experienced during sensitive developmental periods can have particularly damaging and long-lasting consequences. Childhood is characterised by rapid neurodevelopment, during which the brain actively forms and refines neural circuits. Adverse events during this period can disrupt these processes, resulting in impairments in emotional regulation, learning and memory (Teicher & Samson, 2016).

Similarly, old age is another period of vulnerability due to natural decline in the brain's plasticity and resilience. Exposure to trauma at this stage can accelerate cognitive decline and increase the risk of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia (Severs et al., 2023). The cumulative burden of lifetime stress, often referred to as "allostatic load", can further compound these vulnerabilities, especially when unaddressed (McEwen, 2007).

Understanding the intricate relationships between psychological trauma, stress and brain disease is essential in order to develop effective prevention and treatment strategies. Evidence-based therapeutic interventions and early psychosocial support may reduce the long-term effects of trauma and foster mental and cognitive resilience throughout the lifespan (Yehuda et al., 2018).

Intifadas and creative resistance

During the First Intifada (1987–1993), storytelling took on visual and performative forms. Graffiti became a means of protest, while political theatre emerged as a powerful mode of popular education. Through his satirical cartoons featuring the iconic child Handala, Naji al-Ali conveyed complex political critiques in ways that were accessible, emotional and profound.

In her seminal article, Peteet (1996) argues that graffiti emerged as one of the most prominent cultural features of the occupied West Bank during the height of the First Intifada in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These writings, some hastily scrawled and others rendered with remarkable precision,

commanded immediate attention and appeared on nearly every stone wall in the region. Typically, each piece bore the signature of a Palestinian political faction, either in its full name or in the form of an acronym.

Peteet (1996) also argues that the ubiquity of graffiti served as a persistent reminder of the surreal nature of everyday life under military occupation, as well as the collective energy of the uprising. Alongside the daily general strikes, graffiti imbued the public sphere with an aesthetic of resistance. It directly contested Israel's assertions of omnipresent surveillance directly, standing as a visible testament to the state's inability to fully monitor or dominate Palestinian space.

The Second Intifada (2000–2005) coincided with the rise of digital storytelling. Palestinians used photography, blogging and social media to share their personal stories and challenge mainstream media narratives that often dehumanised them. Platforms such as The Electronic Intifada (https://electronicintifada.net/) and citizen journalism challenged the hegemony of Zionist discourse by documenting daily realities from a Palestinian perspective.

Building on this visual tradition of resistance, Edelbi and Waybright (2025) explore the layered cultural meanings of graffiti and mural art on the separation wall – a structure that partitions the West Bank from Jerusalem and other areas occupied since 1948. In their recent study, they document how Palestinian artists responded to the construction of the wall by inscribing revolutionary quotations, memorials to political martyrs and depictions of sacred sites in Jerusalem onto its concrete surface. These interventions have transformed the wall into a contested canvas that now dominates much of the West Bank's urban visual landscape.

Edelbi and Waybright (2025) also note that, over time, the wall and its Palestinian graffiti have attracted international street artists and large numbers of foreign tourists. This influx has spurred a growing graffiti tourism industry, one that has generated a set of complex and sometimes troubling consequences. Their work highlights the critical debate that these developments have provoked within Palestinian society, particularly among artists and cultural workers, regarding the ethics of visibility, the politics of public space and the responsibilities of those engaging with a living site of resistance.

Witnessing in the digital age

In recent years, particularly during Israel's ongoing assault on Gaza, storytelling has become an urgent form of witnessing. Despite bombings, censorship and infrastructure collapse, Palestinians have continued to record their stories. Journalists such as Wael Dahdouh and Hind Khoudary have reported under fire, often after losing family members themselves. Their storytelling is an act of both journalism and resistance against invisibility.

On social media, Palestinians share their final messages before death, images of destruction and moments of fleeting joy amidst war. These digital stories reach global audiences, sparking protests, shifting public discourse and exposing the complicity of Western powers. As Young (2022) notes, Palestinian art and narratives resist the machinery of erasure and build solidarity networks that transcend national borders.

Psychological and physiological functions of storytelling

Luitel and Dahal (2021) state, "Writing lives and telling stories as inquiry is likely to raise the consciousness of the researchers, participants, and readers" (p. 3). Perhaps the primary goal of the authors in narrating their personal histories was not merely to inform fellow researchers and readers about the Nakba and the suffering endured by their families, but also to express their own deep pain. Nevertheless, this articulation of pain inevitably functions as a powerful form of education, offering insight into how such trauma becomes embedded in the physical and psychological memory of others such as their sisters. These stories, rooted in events that occurred 75 years ago, are still being passed on, either orally through Muhibah (Edelbi's sister) or physically through Sabha (Timraz's sister), demonstrating the intergenerational persistence of memory.

However, the benefits of storytelling transcend political and cultural significance; they also have profound psychological and physiological dimensions. Pennebaker (2011) demonstrates how the narration of emotional experiences, whether verbally or in writing, enables individuals to process trauma and reorganise their internal narratives surrounding painful events. This process, often referred to as narrative restructuring, can promote emotional healing and cognitive transformation.

For Palestinians, this therapeutic aspect of storytelling is significant. In the face of intergenerational trauma, prolonged occupation and repeated displacement, narrating one's experience can be both a form of catharsis and an act of resistance. It enables individuals to reclaim their agency, transforming them from passive victims into active narrators and protagonists of their own lives. Therefore, storytelling is not merely an act of remembering; it is a means of survival and a reclamation of subjectivity amid structures of erasure.

The future of Palestinian storytelling

As technology advances and repression intensifies, storytelling continues to adapt. Palestinians are finding new ways to narrate their truth, from documentary films and virtual reality installations to Instagram reels and spoken word poetry. This innovation ensures that their stories remain accessible and relevant to global audiences, particularly younger generations.

At the same time, the core functions of storytelling – preserving memory, asserting identity and resisting erasure – remain unchanged. Whether performed in a refugee camp, stitched into a wedding dress or broadcast on an international stage, Palestinian stories convey the same unwavering message: We are here. We remember. We resist.

Storytelling arts in the digital, interactive world: Palestinian models

As traditional storytelling adapts to the digital era, new forms emerge that enable broader audience engagement and the preservation of cultural identity in virtual spaces. Palestinian experience, rooted in oral tradition and performative expression, has notably evolved through the use of multimedia, digital platforms and interactive technologies. This evolution ensures that Palestinian narratives survive and reach global audiences in dynamic ways.

A notable example is the rise of interactive documentaries and digital archives. The Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question (https://www.palquest.org/), conceived by the Institute for Palestine Studies as part of a joint project with the Palestinian Museum, is one such project. It offers interactive digital timelines and personal stories for users to explore, merging archival research with user-directed storytelling.

Another important model is that of The Freedom Theatre, which is based in the Jenin refugee camp. It has expanded its live performances to include online platforms, offering virtual workshops, streamed plays and interactive Q&A sessions that maintain the immediacy of live performance in the global digital sphere. Their productions often invite audience interaction, blurring the boundaries between performer and viewer, and enabling diaspora Palestinians to participate in cultural expressions from afar (Reeves, 2022). In an interview conducted by Maryam Monalisa Gharavi, Israeli-Palestinian actor, director and filmmaker Juliano Mer Khamis, founder of The Freedom Theatre, referred to art as a means of mobilising people towards freedom clarifying that, "Art cannot free you from your chains, but art can generate and mobilise [a] discourse of freedom. Art can create debate, art can expose" (Gharavi, 2011).

Another example of adapting storytelling into new formats is Palestinian artist and playwright Amer Hlehel. His performances, such as *Taha* (2017), a monodrama based on the life of the poet Taha Muhammad Ali, have been filmed and adapted for digital streaming. This makes making deeply personal Palestinian narratives accessible to a wider, international audiences.

Social media platforms have also given rise to new forms of performative storytelling. Artists such as Rana Bishara and Suad Amiry use platforms like Instagram and Twitter, as well as podcasts, to combine personal stories with political commentary. These interactive, multimedia-rich formats help them reach younger generations.

In the realm of digital comics and graphic storytelling, initiatives such as The Palestine Project combine visual arts with narrative to create shareable online content that educates and mobilises, particularly non-Arabic speaking audiences.

Finally, the use of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) in Palestinian storytelling is beginning to emerge. Projects such as The Rift: A Palestinian Journey (created by immersive artists such as Rula Halawani and others) use VR technology to recreate demolished villages and historical sites. This allows users to experience the layered narrative of Palestinian loss and resilience in an embodies way.

These contemporary models preserve and reimagine Palestinian identity by offering interactive, participatory and democratic ways of engaging with history, memory and resistance. They demonstrate that, even as they evolve technologically, storytelling and the performing arts remain essential vessels for cultural survival and political expression.

Conclusion

In the Palestinian context, storytelling and the performing arts are not just aesthetic pursuits; they are vital acts of remembrance, resistance and resilience. These creative forms do not exist in isolation, but are intricately woven into the fabric of collective struggle and historical consciousness. As Paulo Freire (2000) reminds us, being human means being transformative, making and remaking history through creative engagement with reality. In Palestine, artists, poets, dancers and storytellers embody this principle, asserting their humanity through creative expressions that resist erasure and demand recognition.

In a world characterised by fragmentation and silence, the arts offer Palestinians a powerful means of engaging in dialogue across generations and borders, and in opposition to the machinery of occupation. This dialogue is revolutionary, not passive.

It carries the weight of history and the promise of a liberated future. Telling a Palestinian story today means resisting forgetting and participating in creating a future grounded in justice, memory and the irrepressible vitality of the human spirit.

For Palestinians, storytelling and the performing arts have always been more than cultural practices; they are lifelines. Against a backdrop of genocide, occupation and forced displacement, these creative outlets serve as tools of resistance, healing and survival. They bridge generations, counter historical revisionism and humanise a people who are all too often silenced.

As Israel's ethnic cleansing policies continue, the Palestinian story grows louder, more insistent and more creative. Each poem, dance, mural and lullaby, there is a profound assertion of existence. In a world that often seeks to silence them, telling their story is the most radical act of all.

According to Freire (2000), human beings are transformative and creative entities who are constantly interacting with reality. They do not only produce material goods and tangible objects, but also generate social institutions, ideas and concepts. Through these continuous practices, humans simultaneously create history and become historical social beings. Unlike animals, humans can embody time in three dimensions: the past, the present and the future. As a result, their history, shaped by their own creativity, evolves as an ongoing process of transformation, forming historical units. He emphasises the necessity for the oppressed to engage in the revolutionary process with an increasingly critical awareness of their role as active agents of change. Engaging in dialogue with the people is utterly essential to any genuine revolution. This is precisely what distinguishes a revolution from a military coup. The earlier the dialogue begins, the more revolutionary the movement becomes. Such dialogue is not only fundamental to revolution, but also aligns with another fundamental human need: the need for women and men as to communicate and connect with others, because they are communicative beings at their core.

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