

‘*Siyada asliya falastiniya*’ in the Digital Narratives of “PreOccupation Podcast” and “Sbeih.jpg”

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Introduction

Palestinians have a history of myriad forms of resistance (*muqawama*) encompassing cultural and armed resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990; Dana 2016; Othman 2007) as well as the mere act of existence and reproduction in their own ancestral land (Rexer 2023). Throughout their long history of anti-colonial praxis, Palestinians have endured a settler colonial project which relies—among other practices—on land annexation and indigenous people annihilation (Sayegh 2012; Wolfe 2006, 393). This Zionist project is backed up by its innate “addiction to violence” and “expansionist stance” (Sayegh 2012, 214). Consequently, facing this rampant Zionist settler-colonial strategies, intensified, televised and posted on different social media platforms since *Tufan al-Aqsa* [Al-Aqsa Flood] October 7th, 2023, Palestinian indigenous anti-colonial digital praxis has surged aiming to achieve a future ‘decolonized’ Palestine ‘from the river to the sea.’

On the path of Palestine’s liberation is the cultural emancipation achieved inter alia, through epistemic decolonization, creating alternative indigenous spaces (Kessi et al. 2020) and sustaining means of an ‘autochthonous’ Palestinian knowledge production. A typical Palestinian indigenous narrative calls for the liberation of Palestine in its entirety, setting it in opposition to Zionist and Western narratives on one hand, and the post-Oslo Accords of Arab and Palestinian peace narratives on the other; particularly so that the latter maintain further Zionist colonial collective repression and the historical and geographical eviction of the Palestinians out of their own land (Hilal 2015, 351). Two diaspora Palestinian figures, among the post-2010 Palestinian generation of impatient radical heterodox activists and scholars (Khalidi 2016), took to the cyber space to emphasize their Palestinian indigenous voices and contribute to producing Palestinian indigenous knowledge: the Palestinian-Canadian Bassam Abun-Nadi¹ and half-Palestinian, half-Filipino Subhi². Their English digital narratives through the former’s “PreOccupation Podcast” and the latter’s Instagram account “Sbeih.jpg” are a continuation of the Palestinian anti-colonial struggle across colonial borders, against a history

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of different settler-colonial annihilative strategies, post-Oslo narratives and Arab normalization.

Theoretical Frameworks

Indigenous Studies, decolonial frameworks and Palestine Studies are centralized in this paper to analyze the two aforementioned digital narratives. Palestine Studies intersect with Indigenous Studies, in the sense that Zionist narratives have always sought to dis-indigenize the Palestinians (Pappé et al. 2024, 174, 177). Indigeneity is an important concept in the context of this paper due to being “a moral entitlement ... [and] a legal and political category” (Salaita 2016, 19) at the core of which are “demands for native sovereignty and self-determination” (Tatour 2019, 1576). Such Palestinian rights, among others, have been under a process of rigorous eradication by the Zionist-Western knowledge production which has “productive and repressive practices that work together to render [the Zionists’] history and present ‘normal’” (Hawari et al. 2019, 155). Decolonizing epistemology on Palestine—being an integral part of Palestine’s anti-colonial praxis—started back in the 1960s, however, it has witnessed considerable success only since 1979 (Pappé et al. 2024, 173; Sa’di 2023, 29). This has been accompanied, since then, by Palestinian knowledge production which plays “a huge and important role in the decolonization effort and even more so in the building of a liberated and post-colonial Palestine” (Pappé et al. 2024, 189). Palestinians, like other indigenous people, “have a different epistemological tradition which frames the way [they] see the world, the way [they] organize themselves in it, the questions [they] ask and the solutions which [they] seek” (Smith 1999, 187–88). Jamal Nabulsi (2023) theorizes ‘*siyada asliya falastiniya*’ [Palestinian Indigenous Sovereignty] primarily as a Palestinian indigenous experience of being and knowing with persistent land claim. He perceives it as “the embodied political claim to the land of Palestine” with the ultimate aim of decolonizing it (24, 26). This Palestinian indigenous sovereign narrative is defined by its ontological grounding in Palestine: “the belonging of the Palestinian body to the land of Palestine” (32). This type of narrative resonates with the political commitment of the late Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani (1936–1972). A journalist and spokesperson of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Kanafani was the “commando who never fired a gun” (“Remembering Ghassan Kanafani” 2022) as he conceptualized culture as an arena of struggle. Being the first to describe Palestinian literature as ‘resistance’ literature, he differentiates between its two types: the one written in colonized Palestine and the other in exile (*manfa*) (Harlow 1987, 2–3). In relation to this study, although the digital narratives of Bassam and Subhi are not literary productions, they can, nevertheless, fall into the category of Palestinian cultural productions in exile.

With the advent of the internet in the beginning of 2000s, Palestinian activists shifted the battlefield to the digital realm to reclaim their narrative, on the one hand, and to expose the settler-colonial strategies, on the other (Shehadeh 2023, 1–2). Vincent Miller explains that the spread of digital communications “has set the framework for an understanding of digital communications as a politically progressive, politically engaging and even revolutionary set of technologies” (2017, 252). Significantly, during the uprising of October 2015, “social media platforms turned into an active space used by Palestinians extensively to convey their narrative and document human rights violations through sound, image, and live broadcasting to the entire world” (Nashif 2023). However, amidst the Zionist Israeli “security theology” (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015, 1), censoring and clamping down on Palestinian digital content creators has been ongoing ultimately resulting in such Palestinians facing charges like supporting terrorist groups or inciting violence and which often lead to violent arrests and prison sentences (Nashif 2023)³. Consequently, scholars like Aouragh (2011) and Dwonch (2021) were driven to study “Palestinian internet presence and activism as a continuation of Palestinian political actions against Zionist dispossession since the 1880s” (Shehadeh 2023, 3). New media forms, like podcasts and social media platforms, such as Instagram, offered Palestinian digital activists a space to efficiently decenter dominant Zionist falsehoods and enabled them to transcend colonial and physical borders while reaching out to those in the diaspora (Shehada 2023, 7–9).

To begin with, a podcast is a digital program “of episodic, downloadable or streamable, primarily spoken audio content, distributed via the internet, playable anywhere, at any time, produced by anyone who so wishes” (Rime et al. 2022, 1270). Podcasts are considered one of the “practices of cultural media activism” (Fabbri and Romeo 2023, 40) which have been popular since 2014 (Spinelli and Dann 2021, 1). On the other hand, Instagram, which was launched back in 2010, is a social media platform primarily driven by digital images (Rogers 2021, 1–2). Instagram was designed “from the ground up for mobile usage, [giving it] a cutting edge with younger people” (Newman et al. 2020, 29). With its extensive reach and consumption, Instagram, among other social media applications, offers chances for advocacy, mobilization, spreading awareness and pedagogy, while building a community for supporters of a certain political or social cause (Karki 2023; Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, 120). Thus, using such social media applications can significantly promote the Palestinian cause globally through mobilizing for it as will be illustrated.

Hence, this paper aims to analyze the digital narratives of “PreOccupation Podcast” and “Sbeih.jpg” in light of the Decolonizing theory, Palestine Studies and New Media theory. It seeks to analyze Palestinian indigenous sovereign

features in Bassam and Subhi's virtual narratives which transcend colonial borders and years of expulsion as well as defies repatriation prevention. This paper also argues that their Palestinian indigenous sovereign narratives 'reclaim' rather than 'claim' their historical and political rights to their land. This paper further seeks to analyze how Bassam and Subhi's digital voices are politically committed to liberate their land from Zionist-Western colonialism and Arab normalization.

Ontological Re/Inscription of The Palestinian Indigenous Sovereign History

"PreOccupation Podcast" has 30 episodes so far,⁴ of 45 minutes average length each, with copious amounts of well-documented Palestinian historical narrative interwoven with Bassam's personal experience as a Palestinian of the diaspora. Further emphasizing his Palestinian indigenous digital narrative, Bassam often cites prominent contemporary Palestinian historians and anthropologists, like Nur Masalha (1957 -) and Adel Manna (1947 -). "PreOccupation Podcast" is hosted on different platforms including: Spotify, Apple, Recircle, Rephonic, Podbean, and Anghami. For the purpose of this paper only four episodes, hosted on Spotify, are analyzed. Bassam's '*siyada asliya falastiniya*' is expressed through ontologically grounding the Palestinians within their land, re-envisioning a decolonized Palestinian identity and digitally archiving a Palestinian indigenous sovereignty which was actually established back in the 18th century.

Knowing a prospective free country's past is but one "part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization" (Smith 1999, 34). Hence, Bassam digitally 'redefines' Palestine's past by primarily positioning it in its rightful historical context. He regards Palestine as a country rich on its own, however possessing an entangled history and culture with its neighboring countries—which are all part of '*al-Mashreq al-Araby*' (modern day Arab countries) being previously part of the Ottoman Empire (1299–1922). In his enterprise to present a 'dignified' version of the Palestinian past, Bassam begins by refusing to limit the Palestinian historical experience to its moment of rupture, the Nakba. He perceives it as a mere chapter of a much richer and bigger Palestinian history. Accordingly, he does not mention 1948 in the description of his podcast, but rather presents it as "a deep dive into the social, economic, and political history of Palestine. Through the narration of Palestine's history, the podcast hopes to address some of the most common misconceptions about Palestine and Palestinians" (Abun-Nadi 2021a). In presenting his own perception of the Palestinian indigenous history and present, Bassam displays "a shift from a politics of recognition ... from Israeli settlers and the international community that tacitly and actively supports their colonization" (Nabulsi 2023, 34) to

Palestinians of the diaspora in particular and Arab audiences in general (Abun-Nadi 2024a).

Laying the foundation of a rich Palestinian history and identity, Bassam's first episode entitled "Who are the Palestinians?" ontologically grounds the Palestinians within their land by explaining that the name 'Palestine' has referred—since the 7th century—to the land extending "between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and various adjoining lands" (Masalha 2018, 1). By doing so, Bassam reclaims the Palestinian land along with identity "that both precedes and endures the settler state" (Nabulsi 2023, 25) irrespective of the Jewish presence and the destruction of their Second Temple (Abun-Nadi 2021d). In this episode and the following one "The Dawn of Ottoman Jerusalem," Bassam proceeds with a toponymy of Palestine, mentioning names of Palestinian 'sanjaks' (administrative zones of the Ottoman Empire) like Al-Quds (Jerusalem), Nablus, and Safad as well as cities like Akka (Acre), Yafa (Jaffa), and Haifa especially significant during the Ottoman Empire. Going back to the original names of the Palestinian districts and cities is imperative within the Palestinian anti-colonial praxis. Masalha explains that since the 19th century place names have become "a site of fierce contest between the European Zionist settler-colonizer and the colonized Palestinians. Palestinian Arab names were (and continued to be) 'unnamed' and Hebraicized by the Zionists using a colonizing strategy based on Hebrew names" (2023, 38).

Bassam problematizes Palestinian identity, like Palestinian history, by highlighting its reductionist definition only when defined by loss and disposition: "to be defined by your loss and your catastrophe is such an incomplete and shallow identity" (Abun-Nadi 2021d, at 6:44). Instead, he re-envisions a decolonized Palestinian identity. He is also aware of the reductionist limitation of the Palestinian collective research on Palestine as "almost always framed within the context of the arrival of the Zionists" (Abun-Nadi 2021d, at 33:01). What he represents throughout his podcast, thus, is a Palestinian indigenous sovereign identity extending beyond colonial borders and argues for its expansion: "our identity is a story that we tell about ourselves and collective identities are collective stories" (Abun-Nadi 2021d, at 8:51). He also introduces a non-Western identity marker, Islam, which has played a foundational role in the Palestinian identity and resistance (Abun-Nadi 2021b, at 23:33). Palestinians developed such a spiritual identity long before their national identity which has endured until now (Abun-Nadi 2021b, at 39:11), an idea that will be reiterated in Subhi's posts as will be discussed later.

Part of "PreOccupation Podcast" digitally narrates Palestinian history 'from below' and 'from within' (Masalha 2018, 221), archiving proud periods of Palestinian history while simultaneously deconstructing Zionist myths and

assumptions. In “The Founding Father of Modern Palestine,” Bassam presents an exceptional indigenous Palestinian ruler, but regrettably an uncelebrated one. Enthusiastically and admiringly, Bassam narrates the story of the non-elite Dhahir Al-Umar (1690–1775) of the Zaydani tribe, natives of Safuria, Safad Sanjak (Joudah 2013, 1). Al-Umar is the Palestinian indigenous ruler who established his own *dawlah qutriyyah*⁵ back in the 18th century. Presenting such Palestinian indigenous rulers—usually political and military figures—is pivotal to reform a depiction of a collective Palestinian history circulating around loss.

Dhahir Al-Umar is described as “the most ambitious, cunning and motivated [among his tribe]. He became a tax farmer for the Zaydani tribe when he was just 11 years old” (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 8:32). But Bassam is far from idealizing him, avoiding conjuring up an image of a strong indigenous Palestinian past as he elaborates that Al-Umar’s rise to power was through bribery and power monopoly. Attempting to establish Palestinian sovereignty⁶, Al-Umar, with his tribe, began with “a series of bribes, lobbying and negotiations end[ing] up [with] becoming the rulers of the Safad Sanjak” (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 12:15). Al-Umar followed this up by conquering An-Nasera (Nazareth), Tabarya (Tiberias), Akka (Acre), Haifa, and Yaffa using violence and arms whether through the help of his tribe or by adding “1000 Maghribi mercenary warriors to his fighting force” (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 21:54). Hence, Al-Umar’s practical indigenous sovereignty “was not derived from any modern notion of the nation-state, but from the ability of al-‘Umar’s regime to impose legitimate power on much of Palestine” (Masalha 2018, 221).

Al-Umar was a distinctive Palestinian indigenous ruler in the sense that he was able to establish *siyada asliya falastiniya* with features of the modern Western state-like incentives including capitalism and its consequential taxes, social evolution, and political relationships unknown to the world at that time. He began by supporting his military conquests with dominating capitalism. For example, after controlling An-Nasera, he made a deal with its people to give him monopoly over their cotton export with the promise of a financial boost (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 17:28). Being true to his word, An-Nasera flourished under his reign as it even became “the site for numerous churches and monasteries for various Christian denominations” (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 19:36).

He also established a cosmopolitan city aiming to form alliances beyond “the old tribal alliances that people were accustomed to using at that time ... [He brought Jews of Izmir], settl[ed] them in Palestine, and us[ed] tax incentives in order to motivate them to engage in trade and commerce” (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 20:59). Masalha (2018) maintains that Al-Umar can “easily qualify as the founding father of early Palestinian modernities and social renewal”

(221). Bassam elaborates on this further explaining that the modern social renewal of Al-Umar's "economic policies, which resulted in the mass movement of people between ... [Palestinian] towns and ... regions, created in the process, new families, new dynamics, and allowed for the emergence of ... [Medeni class, the urban class] in the 19th century" (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 28:16). Extending his political domination, Al-Umar established "diplomatic relationships with ... European kingdoms directly, without the Ottoman Empire as a middleman" (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 23:16). Acting upon the power he gained for himself, Al-Umar defied what was recognized amongst the most powerful empires at that time which ultimately forced this Ottoman Empire to recognize him as the *Sheikh of Filasteen* (Abun-Nadi 2021c, at 25:45).

Clearly, Palestine was booming during the rule of Al-Umar, which deconstructs one of the Zionist foundational myths: "a land without a people for a people without a land" suggesting that "Palestinians were not a people capable of holding sovereignty over the lands" (Nabulsi 2023, 35). Palestine was an attraction point to many outside the Sheikhdome of Al-Umar which glaringly defies the colonial hypothesis that Palestine was a desert before the arrival of the White European Jewish who made the "desert bloom" (George 1979, 89). Such a falsification does not only deny the presence of life in Palestine, but also reflects the White Europeans' "ostensible superiority in culture and knowledge and the productivity characteristic of European capitalism" (Amara and Hawari 2019). Dhahir Al-Umar's power, ambition, and political aspirations achieved what his activist successors have called for since the advent of colonialism and across colonial borders. Discussing this Palestinian historical epoch underscores the legitimate political and historical reclaim of the Palestinians to their land and history.

Owning A Palestinian Emancipatory Digital Narration

"Sbeih.jpg," which has 2,046 posts and 1.6 million followers,⁷ emphasizes Subhi's identity: first, he discursively describes himself as 'servant of Allah' reflecting his Muslim identity, second, he expresses his Palestinian identity by means of his profile picture showing the keffiyeh covering half of his face in a symbolic representation of Palestinian resistance (Abu-Ayyash 2024, 4). Subhi's Instagram posts are a mixture of audio-visual ones, each extending to around 2 minutes. In comparison to the sophisticated English that Bassam uses, Subhi uses his vernacular English, thus, reaching wider masses. Mobilizing the masses—in this case Subhi's followers—is imperative as Kanafani asserts "everything ultimately depends on the masses" (qtd. in Abu-Manneh 2016, 84). Subhi's digital narrative is distinguished by his revolutionary emancipatory thoughts and his rejection of Western-Zionist and Arab narratives. He aims, as part of his anti-colonial praxis, to produce a Palestine-centered narrative, produce knowledge about Palestine, decolonize

the epistemology about Palestine, and mobilize masses. For the purpose of this study, the analysis is limited to a selection of post-*Tufan al-Aqsa* entries⁸ as they best manifest his Palestinian indigenous sovereign narrative. Subhi's indigenous narrative revolves around three concepts which he keeps reiterating throughout his posts: resistance, decolonization, and liberation of all Palestine.

Subhi carries the task of mobilizing his followers and educating them on Palestinian present and history. Abu-Manneh explains that “[p]lebeian participatory mobilization is the only answer to defeat” (2016, 75). In one of his pinned visual posts⁹ entitled “CALL TO ACTION,” he calls for solidarity with Palestinians and the support of the Palestinian cause. The post, as shown in Figure 1 below, bears the Palestinian flag, with an embedded shape of Palestine's map engraved in the red part of the flag, declaring: “I stand with Palestine” (Subhi 2023b). He adds the hashtag #istandwithpalestine, as part of his social media mobilization campaign. Hashtags are vital in building a narrative: they “can be employed as a tool to craft a shared story or statement regarding a specific cause or movement. In recent decades, Palestinians launched several hashtags that challenged mainstream narratives and were meant to educate Palestinians and others and debunk colonial myths” (Shehadeh 2023, 9). Such a mobilization technique is used in almost all of Subhi's posts.



Figure 1 (Subhi 2023b)

Claiming and archiving his Palestinian indigenous identity across the colonial borders, Subhi, akin to Bassam, categorically rejects the Western and Zionist continuous strategies to annihilate his people's history, reality, and political agency. On the 13th day of *Tufan al-Aqsa*, Subhi rallies for a change: it is “time for us [Palestinians] to *fight back and reclaim our narrative*” (Subhi 2023g; emphasis added), showing the importance of cultural resistance. His

strategy is based on placing the relationship between the Zionists and the Palestinians in its rightful political and historical contexts emphasizing the value of collective narrative, as Bassam did before in relation to re-envisioning a Palestinian identity: “there needs to be a *collective shift of perspective* on what Israel is” explaining that it is a settler colony with settler-colonizers living on it while the Palestinians are indigenous to the land (Subhi 2023g; emphasis added). He dismisses Western and PLO terms such as ‘conflict’ and ‘war’ (Pappé et al. 2024, 186) for more expressive terms reflecting the dismal contemporary Palestinian reality like ‘ethnic cleansing’ (Subhi 2023g). Subhi further appropriates digital tools to change the narrative through the use of Instagram carousel posts. Due to having more interaction rates than the usual Instagram posts (Southern 2020), carousel posts have been “repurposed by activists, independent artists, advocacy groups, and well-meaning individuals as a means to educate and inform the masses, one slide at a time” (Nguyen 2020). He uses the carousel posts to emphasize the narrative shift from, for example, ‘terrorist’ often referring to Palestinians by Zionist and Western media outlets, to ‘indigenous’ while calling it “The Great Narrative Shift” (Subhi 2023f). He links the post to the webpage entitled “The Palestine Academy” as part of his endeavor to emancipate the epistemology on Palestine. He produces indigenous Palestinian knowledge through his “Palestinian terminology 101” (Subhi 2023g) and backs it up with a website entitled “The Palestine Academy” in which sources and crash courses on the Zionist colonization of present day Palestine are offered for free (“The Palestine Academy” 2023). He adds three frequently used hashtags which have also been used by a myriad of social media users promoting the Palestinian cause: #istandwithpalestine, #palestine, and #gaza. Using the previously mentioned hashtags creates a digital archive of Palestinian content to be checked anytime by anyone; older Palestinian hashtags like #GazaUnderAttack, and #FreePalestine “have been used to narrate and shape a decolonial future” (Shehadeh 2023, 9).

Digitally documenting the Gazans’ land reclaim while resisting Zionist and Western colonial narratives, Subhi explains that *Tufan al-Aqsa* was the Palestinians’ return to their stolen land (Subhi 2023d). He does so through utilizing his Instagram page as a space for memorialization by means of archiving pre-1948 Palestine’s digital map. He offers in almost two minutes a comprehensive history of the Zionist colonization of Palestine. Then going back to pre-1948 history of the land while mentioning the toponymy of a pre-colonization Palestine along with the demographic reality of post-1948 Gaza, he points out that Gaza—or ‘Ghazzeh’ as he pronounces it using his Palestinian dialect—was surrounded by small districts which he names: “Ramleh, Jaffa, Khalil, and Bir el-Sabe” (Subhi 2023e; 2023a). Like Bassam,

he includes the names of pre-1948 cities but adds digital maps for further explanation which significantly offer visual digital documentation.

Reminding his 1.6 million followers of the pre-1948 cartography of Palestine is part of Subhi's digital Palestinian indigenous narrative of reclaiming his—and his people's—historical right to the land as well as resisting its possible annexation. Subhi's strategy also resists the ongoing 'Hebraization' of the land which often attempts to delegitimize Palestinian indigenous historical claims to the land as aforementioned. Hence, through the use of Palestine's digital map and contextualizing *Tufan al-Aqsa* in its historical and political reality, Subhi represents it as the return of the dispossessed to their land as a step towards a future, decolonized, free Palestine. Subhi contextualizes the ongoing ethnic cleansing and genocide of Gazans (Pappé et al. 2024, 174) as yet another chapter of Zionist settler-colonial systematic practices: "Palestinian ethnic cleansing is an ongoing process" and Gaza is part of it (Subhi 2023g). Subhi is well aware that the end goal of this settler-colonial state is having an exclusively Jewish presence on the land (Dana and Jarbawi 2017, 1) and in order to do so they have to "push out all indigenous people and maintain a strict, Jewish-only state" (Subhi 2023e). Subhi, thus, deconstructs the Western-Zionist colonial narrative through clearing out misconceptions in relation to land reclaim; those who returned to their lands on October 7th, 2023 are not 'infiltrators' but resistance fighters who were trying to regain their land and resist, and not 'attack' the colonizers.

Enduring Palestinian Indigenous Resistance

Palestinian indigeneity is "a resistant identity that opposes Zionist/Israeli settler colonialism" (Nabulsi 2023, 30) for the aim of emancipating the land. This resistant identity and its consequential resistance praxis have endured colonialism in the sense that both have existed, persisted, and endured colonization since its inception (Kauanui 2016). Subhi asserts that Palestinian resistance is a "fact, non-negotiable" (Subhi 2023d). He further emphasizes an exclusive Palestinian indigenous experience while being steadfast to the resistance imperative in any given shape or form: "when, where, and how [the Palestinians] resist is not up to you ... until you live the life of a Palestinian, you have no right to speak" (Subhi 2023d). His ultimate aim is a colonization-free homeland: "we want the settlers to leave our land" (Subhi 2024). His statement is a stark digital documentation of his indigenous Palestinian demand. His political agency is expressed in his adamant rejection of the diverse forms of Zionist, Western, and Arab 'peace' talks: "[t]here's no conversation to be had ... we want to return to our home" (Subhi 2024). Here he continues Kanafani's steadfast position of resistance and the refusal of Western mediatory intervention: "I have never seen conversation between the

colonialist case and a national liberation movement” (Kanafani 1970, at 4:38). Both activists see eye to eye that the only viable way to attain freedom has always been Palestinian resistance with all its chaotic consequences.

Freedom comes with chaos, as Fanon has viewed decolonization as a “program of complete *disorder*” (1970, 25; emphasis added). Accordingly, Subhi declares: “We don’t want peace—we want *freedom* ... No sugarcoating the Palestinian cause to make it palatable for Westerners” (Subhi 2024; emphasis added). This rejection of ‘peace’ represents Subhi’s rejection of the illusionary post-Oslo narratives, primarily enticed by Zionist-Western propaganda to maintain the Zionist colonization (Dana and Jarbawi 2017, 14). Subhi’s rejection is, in fact, extended to anyone who does not support the Palestinian indigenous resistance with its intertwined political agency. He expresses his unwavering stance against the Arab states’ normalization with Israel as shown in Figure 2. In this carousel pinned post, Subhi mobilizes his followers using both Arabic and English to reject normalization and support resistance, setting them as an antithesis. He also includes the iconography of the red inverted triangle used in Qassam Military Brigade’s media releases while targeting Israeli tanks and troops. In this post, and throughout different other posts, Subhi validates and supports the Palestinian indigenous military resistance which has never been novel in the extended history of the Palestinians’ struggle to free their land.



Figure 2 (Subhi 2024)

Akin to Kanafani and Steven Salaita, Subhi aims to deterritorialize the Palestinian cause. So, while Kanafani has called for a “unified Arab-wide revolution against both imperialism and Arab authoritarianism” (Abu-Manneh 2016, 89), and Salaita has called for the theorization of (inter)nationalism between the Palestinians and the indigenous people of the US which by extension entails global decolonization, Subhi attempts to mobilize Muslims around the globe to free Palestine. By utilizing the Islamic discourse, precisely that of the Umma, Subhi engages the Islamic discourse in the decolonial praxis of his Palestinian indigenous narrative. Although the Islamic Umma narrative, has sometimes stirred controversy related to “the tension between [the Palestinian Islamic groups’] universalist Islamic message and the particularist Palestinian reality in which all of them are firmly grounded” (Rashid 2010, 149), and has at other times been rejected on the ground of being destructive and sectarian (Hamdi 2023, 6)¹⁰, the Islamic narrative has worthy decolonial potentials. Rane, Bargallie and Meston explain that the “conditions and boundaries set by the covenants in the Qur’an and sunnah [as pre-eminent sources of Islam] preclude oppressive and unjust treatment of the kind associated with colonialism” (2024, 13).

Using Islam and the Islamic narrative were used as a mobilizing factor to free countries from grips of colonizers such as the Dutch, French, and English back in the 19th and 20th centuries (Rane et al. 2024, 1). In fact, it has always been there as a strong mobilizing agent and reliable resistance strategy in the Palestinian context as well. Subhi, on his side, directly addresses the Muslims, calling them the “Umma of Mohammad” alluding to the Prophet who established a different form of unity centuries ago (Subhi 2023h). In one of his video posts, he centralizes the Palestinian flag with a call for “Muslim Brothers & Sisters from [Muslim countries to] Rise for Palestine” (Subhi 2023h). The Ummah is “one of the central concepts of Islam” with many interpretations and modes of development over time (Piscatori and Saikal 2019, 1); however, the basic conceptualization of the term in Islamic exegetical works will be used here. Contrary to the Eurocentric Westphalian model of the nation state, the Umma is “an association of Islamic societies which share the same ‘thick’ values [transcending] national state boundaries” and moving beyond language, ethnicity, [and] culture” (Shani 2008, 729). These same ‘thick values’ as “demanded by covenants in the Qur’an and sunnah emphasise a decolonising praxis centred on human welfare and wellbeing” (Rane et al. 2024, 1, 13). The Umma, like Palestinian indigenous sovereignty, precedes and proceeds colonialism (Gani 2023, 63) and can be used in the anti-colonial praxis in the sense that by definition it defies the limitations, restrictions, and exclusive nature of the Eurocentric definition of the nation state. Subhi centralizes ‘The Umma of Mohammad’ who have long been marginalized, dehumanized, and deemed ‘terrorists,’ and appeals to their

agency to free Palestine. His land remains the center of his attention while simultaneously rejecting and contesting Western appeal. Subhi's reply to one of the comments emphasizes Palestine as a 'center of gravity' to Muslims: "we have the right as Muslims to be proud of how we've stuck together for Palestine, despite all the hate and division we've gone through due to colonization and a blatant worldwide attack on our faith that continues today" (Subhi 2023h).

Going back to "PreOccupation Podcast," Bassam is well aware of the sociopolitical role Islam has played in the history of Palestinian resistance. A reflection of a mobilizing Islamic identity factor is exemplified in one of his four-part Mini Series on Palestinian resistance entitled "The Three Lives of Izzidine al Qassam" (Abun-Nadi 2024b). Al-Qassam, born in present day Syria, was an Al-Azhar graduate and prominent orator and preacher, who acted upon the Islamic indoctrination of *jihad*,¹¹ to free the Muslim people of the grips of colonialism, no matter where such a calamity is present: "[he] had spent 30 years waiting for a showdown with the colonial powers, and had things played out differently, his final moments may have been in Tripoli or in Benghazi or Damascus or Homs" (Abun-Nadi 2024b, at 41:25). Al-Qassam used to take the pulpit after Friday's prayers in Haifa's Istiqlal Mosque to mobilize the Palestinians to fight the British colonizer and the Zionist colonial project which was still in the process of becoming at that time; many responded by willing to fight back then (36:49). Though martyred during fighting the British, Al-Qassam and his group's mantra still echoes in present day Hamas' Military Brigade which also noticeably carries the late Sheikh's name: "*Innahu la jihad nassrun aw istishhad* (This is jihad, it is either victory or martyrdom)" (Abun-Nadi 2024b, at 41:55), making resistance, or dying while attaining it, an intrinsic conviction in the Palestinian indigenous thought which crosses colonial borders.

Conclusion: 'Siyada Asliya Falastiniya' in the Cyber Space

The digital narratives of Bassam's "PreOccupation Podcast" and Subhi's "Sbeih.jpg" are politically committed to a free Palestine. Both of them reclaim their land back, emphasizing that it has belonged to them and to their ancestors proving that the embodiment of the Palestinian homeland is carried "across oceans, into the diaspora, and pass[ed] on to the generations born in exile" (Nabulsi 2023, 31). Their digital narratives set "the repatriation of Indigenous land and life" (Tuck and Yang 2012, 1) as its center which is intrinsic to any indigenous narrative setting it apart from a settler-colonial narrative. As Hilal contends that the "Palestinian historical narrative on how Palestinians tell their history, define their homeland and conceptualize their collective rights has been subjected to systematic distortion and misrepresentation" (2015, 352), one significant example of such 'distortion' and 'misrepresentation' is the

discussion of a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967. Bassam and Subhi insist on the emancipation and land reclaim of all of Palestine ‘from the River to the Sea’ voicing out their rejection of the delegitimizing post-Oslo narratives and any Western and/or Arab ‘peace’ talks. They categorically reject any suggestion of a narrative accepting the presence of the Zionist settler-colonial de facto state present and fully functioning with the blessings and arms of current global powers. They are engaged, through their narratives, in decolonizing Zionist and Western knowledge production, while contributing towards building an epistemology on Palestine centering the Palestinian indigenous experience of being and knowing and, above all, emphasizing the Palestinians’ political agency. What both of them add to the Palestinian indigenous sovereign narrative is the religious dimension of the Palestinian identity and resistance, yet without losing the land as a ‘center of gravity.’ Facing Islamophobia and the possibility of being smeared by other ideologues as being ‘terrorists,’ Bassam and Subhi emphasize the mobilizing feature of Islam in Palestinian identity and its enduring resistance. By presenting and detailing preexisting Palestinian sovereignty, Bassam subverts the dismissive “racial-colonial logics, that allows Palestinian resistance actions to be framed as criminal or terroristic” resulting in depoliticizing the Palestinian resistance (Nabulsi 2023, 35). Through the narratives of “PreOccupation Podcast” and “Sbeih.jpg” and their indigenous reclaim to the land, an emphasis on the existential and political rights of resistance as well as defying the repatriation prevention are established, documented, and archived. Hence, while the three men of Kanafani’s *Men in the Sun* (1963) did not knock on the walls of the tank, diaspora Palestinians break virtual barriers to liberate themselves and their land.

Notes

¹ I will use Abnu-Nadi’s first name ‘Bassam’ hereafter, as this is how he refers to himself in the description of his Podcast.

² ‘Subhi’ is how he refers to himself on his Instagram page, thus, I will use it accordingly throughout the article.

³ For more on the Israeli violations of Palestinian digital rights, visit “7amleh: The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media”: <https://7amleh.org/en2019/>.

⁴ Until July 31st, 2024.

⁵ ‘*Dawlah qutriyyah*’ or the country/state—the Arabic term *qutr* meaning a ‘country’—was one of the most common forms of statehood throughout Muslim history and in Muslim-majority countries, a statehood which often enjoyed practical sovereignty (Masalha 2018, 211–2).

⁶ Though sovereignty has various meanings across history, the one used here is its basic meaning: “*supreme authority within a territory*” (Philpott 2020).

⁷ Until August 3rd, 2024.

⁸ Until August 15th, 2024.

⁹ Pinned posts remain “in a prominent position, usually at the top of [a user’s] profile or feed ... [this feature is used] to highlight and prioritize specific content on [users’] profiles or feeds” (Later 2024).

¹⁰ Hamdi models ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra as models of ‘Islamic’ groups and deems such ‘jihadist’ groups as a threat and such Islamic thought as merely an extension of the colonial one (Hamdi 2023, 9).

¹¹ The Islamic conviction of *jihad* is a broad term which has many interpretations; however, its “basic Qur’anic signification is ‘struggle,’ ‘striving,’ ‘exertion’” (Afsaruddin 2016, 1).

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