Listening Through Performance: Identity, Embodiment, and Arts-Based Research

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It is night-time. I am walking home from Qalandia checkpoint near Ramallah and attempting to hail a taxi. I am not nervous walking back at night. Having been here a couple of months, a feeling of safety is pervasive. Usually, the lights from convenience stores pour out of doorways and the sound of children's voices fill the streets as they return to their homes after a full day of play. But I have never walked through this particular area after dark. Shops appear to be closing for the night and maybe it is later than I imagined. All of a sudden, out of the corner of my eye, I see a teenager, pointedly looking at me from across the street. He raises his arm and hurls a small rock. He is far enough away that I see it coming. I raise my hand to block it. I feel a slight sting. He continues to stare at me as I continue walking. I stare back, not in anger, but inquisitively. I want to ask him "*lesh*?" Not as in, why, how could you do this? But as in, why *me*? I want to understand the target of his act. How does he see me? What do I represent to him? Is it America? Does he read me as Jewish or Israeli? Is it because I am a woman walking at night alone?

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As I silently go through the litany of questions in my head, I realize the oddity of the fact that I am not upset but almost relieved. At last, someone is fighting back against his severely repressive existence in the West Bank. I am surprised of course, because as the target of his anger, and the one who feels its force, I realize I am empathizing with and trying to understand someone who physically tried to hurt me. At this moment, I become conscious of the disparity between my outward representation as either American or Jewish or female or all of these, and my swiftly shifting identity as a Jewish-American scholar/activist who seeks to bring attention to the injustices suffered by Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

In conjunction with Gayatri Spivak's well-known essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), which addresses the failure of postcolonial scholars to represent postcolonial subjects through discourse without reproducing colonial power structures, I pose a correlative question: "Can the oppressor listen?"[1] As a scholar from the global North studying an oppressed group of the global South, my identity is intimately bound up with imperial, colonial, and neoliberal modalities. Much of my work focuses on social justice issues and attempts to communicate and make visible the webs of power that work to marginalize and subjugate those of the global South. Oftentimes my research is based on listening to those who experience the violence of these systems of power. Yet, because my identity is, in many ways, constructed by these systems, the act of listening can pose significant challenges. What if listening requires the reconstruction of hegemonic systems of knowledge and the breaking apart of codified discourse in order to allow openings with which to investigate and ask questions of its logic? What if listening requires us to re-examine, and in some cases, to reconstruct the memories and meanings of our own personal histories and systems of belief? How can we do this? How is this possible?

This chapter proposes that arts-based projects not only allow us, as scholars who are part of systems of oppression, to peel back the layers of epistemology, but oftentimes require us to do so when working to understand the ways subalterns are oppressed through the systems which shape our identities and presumed interests. Typically, arts-based research is embodied and participatory; the researcher must take part in some aspect of the artistic project being studied and engage research participants face to face. This may involve directing a theater project

or creating some type of artwork alongside interlocutors.[2] Because the research is creative and generative, the researcher oftentimes becomes part of the research and may play a significant role. The risk, of course, is replicating systems of power and privilege at the expense of those with whom we work. Therefore, it becomes critical to investigate and bring awareness to our own interests and investments in arts-based projects. Self-reflexivity becomes an important and ongoing part of the research as it unfolds.

In this chapter, I look at three different arts-based projects and the way my Jewish-American identity shifted in relation to my study of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. I argue that the conception of one's identity in relation to a project in and among marginalized groups must be a careful, critical, and reflexive process that is more akin to an ongoing "directionality" than a "positionality" stated at the beginning of a research project (see Kim qtd. in Farrell, 1995).[3] Directionality allows for a more fluid way of situating one's knowledge in relation to an arts-based project with oppressed people. The conceptual motility of the term allows for a transformative space to think about the researcher as a subject in progress, moving toward and away from subject positions, as never fully formed and realized, but constantly in dialogue and emergence. Further, this term speaks to the importance of space and movement in our ability to have a conversation. We can speak about others from a safe position, but can we truly listen from one? What does moving into new and oftentimes uncomfortable spaces do to alter what we hear, if we allow it to?

In framing the discussion of identity in relation to conceptualizing a methodology for arts-based research in areas of conflict or among oppressed groups, I look to performance studies theorist, Dwight Conquergood's work. I draw upon his term "dialogical performance" as a central concept guiding the construction and development of identity through the research project. Conquergood writes:

> Dialogical performance is a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them. The sensuous immediacy and empathic leap demanded by performance is an occasion for orchestrating two voices, for bringing together two sensibilities. At the same time, the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that each voice has its own integrity. (1985, p. 10)

In order to have an intimate conversation, one must share space with someone else. We must move our bodies close enough to our interlocutors to actually hear what they are saying. In doing so, our bodies become implicated as part of the dialogical performance, and we are made aware that listening is an embodied act. Arts-based research supports the creation of knowledge as a multiplicity of presence. We think, act, and create together in order to understand each other and the worlds and spaces to which we are intimately connected, as well as how we may reach out across those spaces to create new ones, or re-think the old ones.

Traditional research methodologies do not always support this point of view. Too often, research participants become objects of study where they are expected as "informants" to offer their experiences or perspective as "raw data" from their subject position. The researcher then takes that information and offers insights and reflections about it, from his or her vantage point. The messiness of the subject positions or the movement between them, the various registers of experience and reflection, are typically omitted from the written representation of the research, or do not occur at all. Further, scholars are discouraged from presenting the research process as unstable or their subject positions as not fully developed or defined. Ultimately, both researchers and subjects are represented as stable and static identities that encounter and leave one another intact.

In contrast, arts-based research is a research of the flesh where our source material originates from the closeness and collaboration of the bodies and voices of one another. Within this configuration, our own subject position may be opened up, challenged, or contested. Feminist theorist Athena Athanasiou suggests:

> … being present to one another takes place at the limits of one's own self-sufficiency and self-knowability, in the wake of the endless finitude of the human. In order to be present to one another (but also to be absent to, or missed by, another), we are called to take over, and occasionally to give away, the norms through which we are established as selves and others. (2013, pp. 17–18)

In arts-based research, something of who we are is exposed, made visible and representational for others to touch, construct, negotiate, imbibe, or ignore. The dialogical performance moves us toward dispossession—a corporeal leakage—where our identity is an unstable part of the research

process. We choose to risk that identity as part of undoing the systems of power which so neatly construct and produce who and what we are. In fact, we expect and depend upon the unsettling of identity as a felt barometer to make visible those webs of power in order to name and unravel them.

Herein, I think about identity construction and deconstruction as a dialogical performance with others—as a dynamic ongoing project from the very inception of a project throughout the research process until the final expression through written or creative representation—that serves as an intense site of knowledge. I also think about identity as an "embodied self" where the self is not separate from the body. As feminist theorist Anirban Das argues, there is a difference between the consciousness that is located inside the vessel of the body and a conscious body locating power and knowledge in and through the body (2010, p. 3). For me, identity shifted through the close proximity of my body to others engaged in a creative process. As Gloria Anzaldúa expresses, "… only through the body, through the pulling of flesh, can the human soul be transformed" (1987, p. 75). This statement is a testament to the linkages between our notions of self, body, and the power structures that work to regulate and form our bodily practices and our interactions with others. Opening our minds to new ways of thinking often requires that we place our bodies in new and uncomfortable spaces that challenge the prescribed meanings of the ones that have become all too familiar.

It is not possible to fully understand the way one's own identity is caught up in hegemonic systems and discourses. Yet, I hope to show that one way to begin to problematize the interwoven systems of dominance and their relationship to the construction of self is through arts-based projects. I hope to demonstrate through three examples presented herein, the way my own identity and its embeddedness in cultural and political projects is brought to the forefront in relation to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Though these moments occurred years apart, they do represent a kind of chronological continuum of learning how to be present, how to listen, and how to dispossess, to some degree, myself, in order to enter into and fully engage dialogical performance.

Moments of Rupture

In 2012, I conducted an ethnographic study of the somatic effects of occupation on Palestinian lives. The methodology was formulated around a drama workshop with students of Al-Harah Theater in Beit Jala, West

Bank. Before conducting this research, however, I spent a good deal of time in the region. In 1996, I spent five months living on a *kibbutz* in the Upper Galilee and one month living with a Palestinian-Israeli family in the Old City of Akko/Acca.[4] My next visit to Israel occurred ten years later to pursue a master's degree in Middle East Studies at Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva from 2006 to 2008. Then, during the summer of 2009, I conducted ethnographic research with Palestinian activists and human rights workers in Ramallah, West Bank.

Throughout these periods of study and research, my identity as an American Jew was challenged. I could classify it as a slow stripping away of cultural meanings and associations that no longer held together for me. From the time I first visited Israel as a volunteer on a *kibbutz*, I became aware of the incongruence between what I thought I knew about Israel and what I experienced. I was taught to believe in Israel as a Jewish homeland, promised to Jews by God as a place that sought to uphold a higher morality through inspired governance. I quickly understood that Israel's Zionist ideals greatly conflict with democratic ones and favoritism toward Jews was not only inherent in its formation, but a prime directive of the Zionist state. Yet, what was difficult and took a long time to unravel and perhaps let go of was the deeply ingrained notion of the State of Israel as part of my identity as a Jew and my claim to its history and destiny. Also, it was difficult to overcome fear, not of Palestinians necessarily (although there were more than a few times my biased upbringing and the animosity I initially believed Palestinians must feel toward Jews, did unnerve me), but fear of listening to them. If they were right, if Israelis were trying to expunge Palestinians from their land, then I would need to believe them and would consequently be accused of naïveté and betrayal by my family and friends. I might need to do something to denounce Israel's actions, which would also be seen as denouncing Judaism and turning against "my people" and my community.

In 1996, when I first encountered the blatant contradictions in the narrative I had come to know about Israel, I turned to ethnographic performance to work through the inconsistencies for myself as well as to express what I witnessed, to Israelis. Performance studies scholar Olorisa Omi Osun Olomo (Joni L. Jones) writes, "Performance ethnography rests on the idea that bodies harbor knowledge about culture, and that performance allows for the exchange of that knowledge across bodies" (2006, p. 339). Ethnographic performance allowed me to put multiple, and oftentimes conflicting, bodies and voices into conversation. I could

then step into various experiences and subject positions and reflect upon the "knowledge across bodies" not only for myself but also with others in a public forum.

In Joan Scott's well-known essay, "The Evidence of Experience" (1991), she astutely points out that experience is, for the most part, produced through discourse that precedes our experiences. For this reason, experience is teleological and will only lead us to understand meanings within socially produced norms (pp. 776–779). She suggests, rather than looking to experience as authoritative, we should closely consider its literary dimension; the way experience is imagined and articulated with all its contradictions and juxtapositions. According to Scott, it is the slipping back and forth between frames, the movement from one body, one experience, to the other, that helps us look for new ways of articulating the gaps in the interwoven but imperfect narratives between the social and the personal. She writes, "The meanings of the categories of identity change and with them the possibilities for thinking the self" (p. 795). It is with this perspective, I reflect upon my experiences in Israel.

Confronting the Critical Question

While volunteering on the *kibbutz*, I washed dishes, took care of children in an after-school program, and maintained the flower beds that covered the expansive and breathtaking landscape of the communal property, primarily owned by a group of over 600 Zionists with roots in Great Britain. Some weekends we were taken on tours of Israel, which typically included Zionist history lessons and affirmations of biblical connections to the land. Other weekends, we were allowed to venture beyond the *kibbutz* and travel to Israeli cities and villages. During one of these free weekends, some friends and I traveled to the northern coastal city of Akko/Acca. There, we met mostly young men our own age, who took an avid interest in showing us their city. Later, we met their families and friends and we returned each weekend to grill fish on the beach, dance at the local discotheque, and smoke *nargile* at the coffee shops in the evenings.

Our newfound friends spoke many languages, the result of growing up amidst a myriad of international tourists. Yet, they were, for the most part, impoverished. They lived day by day, fishing in the Mediterranean Sea and working on *kibbutzim* nearby. They had few opportunities outside Akko/Acca, and when they did venture beyond the walls of the city, they were treated as outsiders by Jewish Israelis. For example, one

night, someone borrowed their cousin's car and we decided to drive to a nightclub in Tel Aviv. When we approached the entrance, an Israeli guard would not allow our Palestinian-Israeli friends into the establishment. When I inquired as to the reason for this, the guard responded by saying they had not served in the army. When I asked the reason I was allowed entrance and had not served in the army, he told me "you're a girl," which did not make sense since women are expected to serve in the Israeli military as well as men. Another time, I invited some friends from Akko/Acca to see the *kibbutz*. When they arrived, they were refused entrance because they were a "security risk." What astounded me was that our friends from Akko/Acca were citizens of Israel. They paid taxes, they spoke Hebrew impeccably, and many of them worked on other *kibbutzim*. Yet, they were considered a security risk because they were Arab.

In Judith Butler's essay entitled "What is Critique? An Essay on Foucault's Virtue" (2002), she describes the reason one begins to ask questions that break open discourse and normative meaning. She writes:

> One asks about the limits of ways of knowing because one has already run up against a crisis within the epistemological field in which one lives … And it is from this condition, the tear in the fabric of our epistemological web, that the practice of critique emerges, with the awareness that no discourse is adequate here or that our reigning discourses have produced an impasse. (p. 215)

For me, this "tear in the fabric" began while moving between the exclusive space of the *kibbutz* and the more open, inclusive space of Akko/Acca. In order to begin to make sense of this crisis of epistemology, I turned to an embodied form of representation—one that would allow multiple experiences, narratives, and voices to be put in conversation with one another. I was hoping the refraction of experience would allow critique to emerge and shed light on new understandings.

With some of the other volunteers on the *kibbutz*, I created a devised theater piece called, "Standing on a Wire: Personal Reflections of Two Realities," recalling the name of a book by David Grossman, *Sleeping on a Wire* (1993/2003), in which a Palestinian-Israeli doctor and his children are refused entrance to a swimming pool by a Jewish-Israeli Holocaust survivor.[5] Using excerpts from Grossman's text, nursery rhymes and games, diary entries reflecting life on the *kibbutz*, and my

experiences in Akko/Acca, I interwove deeply felt personal and collective narratives and meanings. The refrain, "You tell me what to say to them[!]" (2003, p. 176), took on a double meaning through the performance. In the original Grossman text, the Palestinian-Israeli doctor makes this demand of the pool owner who refuses his children entrance to the pool. In the performance, it functioned as my own direct address to the Israeli *kibbutzniks* to demand to know what I should tell my friends from Akko/Acca who were refused entrance at the gates of the *kibbutz*. As I stood in front of the *kibbutz* community, there was no mistaking my stance as both insider and outsider, agitator and activist on the part of Palestinian Israelis. If it was not clear where I stood in relation to my identity as a Jewish American, it became clear through the parallel narratives performed through the dramatization.

These experiences changed my perspective about who I was, what I felt, what I knew, and what I believed. But it was the performance of them that registered this transformation in and through a public proclamation among others. By placing my body alongside my host Palestinian-Israeli family and our friends discursively and through enactment of their words, I was now in some way allied with them and their community. Yet, the *kibbutzniks* knew I was Jewish. Therefore, I demonstrated to them, and to myself, that Judaism was not one fixed set of beliefs. It was fluid enough to incorporate love and appreciation of others, even those who many Jews considered to be an enemy. This more fluid view of Jewish identity laid out a path, albeit a faint outline of one, of what a Jewish identity could entail. This was an identity that could be inclusive rather than exclusive—stretching across bodies and across bodies of knowledge—offering compassion and respect, instead of fear and negation.

The War in Gaza

When Israel ordered airstrikes on Gaza in late December of 2008, I was mortified. At the end of the war, 1,391 Gazans were reported killed, including countless women and children; nine Israelis were reported killed (B'tselem, 2009).[6] The controversial scholar, Norman Finkelstein, characterized the war in Gaza as a "moral turning point" (2009). For me, it was a kind of psychological unscrewing that throws reality asunder. To watch Israelis bomb Gazan civilians for weeks relatively unchallenged, called to question central belief structures regarding Judaism, Israel as a Jewish state, my identity as a Jew, and Israel's relationship to the United States and American Jews.

During this time, a colleague's condemnation of Israel's leadership on Facebook drew my attention. I noticed the efficacy of his posts in drawing conversation and criticism, rallying people around his call for protest. I wanted to follow his example. However, I lacked the courage to use Facebook as a political forum and site of activism. As a somewhat novice user, I had just begun to amass a substantial pool of friends. Many of these "friends" were Jewish Americans, with whom I had not spoken since middle school. Other contacts included a number of friends from Israel, graduate school, work, traveling, high school, ex-boyfriends, and relatives. Most of them knew I was Jewish but did not know I was critical of Israel's government. Because Jewish identity and Israel are so intertwined, protesting Israel's actions is oftentimes equated with anti-Semitism. Ultimately, if I spoke out against Israel on Facebook amidst a large Israeli and American Jewish virtual community, I risked losing friends and damaging relationships with family members. Yet, as innocent Gazans were killed, it became impossible not to take action.

As I began posting opinions and news articles, many conversations emerged. I found myself in the middle of an intense dialectical exchange. Most of my Jewish friends were furious about my posts. Yet, their anger was also coupled with curiosity about the reasons for my harsh criticism of Israel. As much as I was able to respond in an informed or impactful way, I also felt an immense failure in my response. Through the Facebook forum, a central conflict emerged: knowing how and what to protest. I was very much against Israel's actions, but how far was I willing to go in denouncing Israel and what it stood for as a sovereign Jewish state?

One morning in early January, I posted a request for suggestions of a poem to read at a Muslim Students Association candlelight vigil for the victims of Gaza. The colleague, mentioned earlier, posted a poem called "Those Who Pass Between Fleeting Words," (Darwish, 1988). I am sure he did not mean it as a challenge, but after reading and re-reading the poem, I decided I could not read it at the vigil. My inability to read the poem, to speak the words in a public forum before an audience of Muslim students, signaled the inherent difficulty I faced in researching and protesting the Israeli government's actions against Palestinians, as an American Jew. Why were the words, "Carry your names, and be gone," impossible for me to speak? If I said, "So leave our country/Our land, our sea/Our wheat, our salt, our wounds," would I be rallying for Israelis to pack up and leave? For the vigil, I chose to read a different poem by Darwish with a more reconciliatory tone. But the

fact that I could not utter the words from "Those Who Pass" haunted me. What were my beliefs? If "'not to be governed *like that*'" (Foucault qtd. in Butler, 2002, p. 218), then how to govern?[7] What was I working toward? What was I representing?

Once again, performance became a mode of inquiry as well as a pathway to embodied listening as I began to adapt my Facebook pages into a performance for an audience at Northwestern University in Illinois and then again at Saint Cloud State University in Minnesota. In order to adapt the Facebook forums, I compiled a narrative map of voices, thoughts, and events that began to form the stuff of drama. Yet, I still did not have a dramatic structure. I looked back at the collection of narratives and the memories that lay between them. I realized that the way to tell the story was to show my struggle moving from arrested action to action, as influenced by the Facebook dialectic. This overarching conflict was exemplified by my inability to speak the words of the Darwish poem. What were the obstacles I faced in doing so? This became the central question of the performance.

In order to confront this question, I began reciting the poem in rehearsals. Time and again, I wrestled with the lines that told Israelis to leave. Then, after many days, as I was speaking the words of the poem yet again, I began to hear it differently. Perhaps it was not about Israelis leaving or not leaving. Perhaps that is what the poem said to a Jew. It was written by an exiled Palestinian about Palestinians. It was about existing without having every aspect of one's life including memories and meanings molested, destroyed, or even worse, erased through theft and appropriation. As I continued to speak the poem, I began to comprehend the reason I hesitated initially, in speaking out against Israeli violence. I began to see that I viewed Palestinian claims and rights as contingent upon Israeli losses, and feared that outcome. This was something I had not considered as an inherent bias in my work.

The poem continued to enact meaning through performance. The following is an excerpt from the performance when I recount for the audience my reading of Darwish's "safer" poem for the candlelight vigil. Only this time, as I recollect the event, I also change it to reflect my newfound understanding and courage.

> Standing at the top of the platform, I look out onto the audience. I think that the distance and height might erase their faces. But I can see everyone, each person sitting there. I begin with the poem, which by now has etched itself in my mind. But it is not the poem I brought with me.

> It is another poem from deep in my memory as I remember those words, "never again," and how they weren't just meant for one group of people.[8]

I had decided to represent the move from inaction to action by beginning the piece constrained and wrapped in muslin. Over the course of the performance, the muslin is shed, piece by piece until the white cloth strewn on the stage appears as variously sized bundles, representing dead bodies. At that moment, standing amidst the white cloth strewn about the floor, I felt the presence of ghosts: those who were murdered in the Gaza war. Yet, in parallel, I felt the presence of those who died in the Holocaust as I said the words: "Pile your illusions in a deserted pit" (Darwish, 1988). Images drawn from the memory of photographs of thousands of skeletons thrown into mass graves arose and awakened comparisons between what was real in front of me and the collapsed time of the event and the collective memory of Jews. I felt I was speaking for my ancestors, that I was appropriating their memory, conjuring their spirits for a purpose.

Perhaps another reason a Holocaust memory was conjured, was because I chose to play *Avinu Malkeinu*—an ancient and sacred Jewish prayer traditionally sung on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement—softly in the space. I wanted *Avinu Malkeinu* to operate as a reminder of the nature of Judaism as a doctrine of belief that strictly forbids killing innocent people. I wanted to put the acts in Gaza in conversation with a collective Jewish conscience to speak to those Jewish Americans who view Israel as essential to their Jewish belief system as a land promised by God to the Jews. *Avinu Malkeinu* evokes the spiritual and moral tenets of Judaism and it was a personal way of asking forgiveness for remaining silent so long.

When I performed the piece at Saint Cloud State University, a religious studies professor approached me after the performance. He knew the meaning of *Avinu Malkeinu* and expressed a profound sense of appreciation that I had addressed the war in Gaza from the perspective of Jewish theology, condemning Israel's actions, as a Jew. I was not only representing Palestinians' views of the wrongs that had been done, but I was understanding and condemning Israel's actions from my own ethical, moral, and religious obligations as well.

I believe this is what Conquergood intended when he wrote, as voices come together through dialogical performance, "the conspicuous artifice of performance is a vivid reminder that *each voice has its own integrity* [emphasis mine]" (1985, p. 10). I did not attempt to become the other, to subsume my identity into a Palestinian one. I was not

attempting to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar as the old adage goes. When I spoke Darwish's poem, I was representing his words, but through my embodied voice. I was representing my identity as an American Jew responsible in part for the atrocities committed against Palestinians. Ultimately, through the performance, I gained a deeper understanding of the knowledge across bodies and how that knowledge is complementary and collective. It also revealed the false logic, inherent in the construction of a contemporary Jewish identity, that the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is a zero-sum game where the existence of one, negates the existence of the other. By listening through performance, to Darwish's voice as well as the voices of my Facebook interlocutors, I was able to move from inaction to action: to protest, without fear, the atrocities committed against Palestinians.

Arts-Based Research with Palestinians in Beit Jala

In 2012, I conducted an eight-week, arts-based workshop with Palestinians in Beit Jala, West Bank. Participants primarily used movement, improvisations, and storytelling to express their experiences of occupation. In conceptualizing the research, I planned to work with both Palestinians and Israelis, using the mode of performance to allow each group to express the way they experienced occupation, while simultaneously providing a forum for exchange and reciprocity. However, the ethnographic research I conducted during the summer of 2009, as well as the research I conducted earlier in 2012, caused me to question this project design.

In proposing a joint project to Palestinian theater artists, I met a great deal of resistance and outright objection to the idea. They believed working with Israelis would contribute to "normalization," creating the illusion that Israelis and Palestinians are able to work together on equal footing. The Palestinians with whom I spoke, felt they could not engage in any project, artistic or otherwise, with Israelis on equal terms unless the political situation allowed them equal rights. Then and only then, could they engage in a project with Israelis. My initial reaction was one of disbelief and frustration. How would Palestinians ever get their point across to Israelis if they refused to meet with them or have a dialogue with them? Days later, I recalled Conquergood's instructive reading of Frederick Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855/1969):

> Douglass recommended placing oneself quietly, respectfully, humbly, in the space of others so that one could be surrounded and "impressed" by the expressive meanings of their music. It is subtle but significant that he instructed the outsider to listen "in silence." I interpret this admonition as an acknowledgement and subversion of the soundscapes of power within which the ruling classes typically are listened to while the subordinate classes listen in silence. (2002, p. 149)

Adhering to Conquergood's words, I ignored the sound of my own voice for a moment and attempted to listen to Palestinians' reasons for refusing to perform with Israelis, in silence. I had done as Conquergood instructed by placing myself in the space of others, but I had only listened to my own voice. I thought about Conquergood's mention of silence and the soundscapes of power. I noticed that when I became silent, I also became more aware of the sensorial, affective response, of what I heard through my body. I was no longer afforded the luxury of speaking and theorizing without feeling. I reflected upon the way I felt when I suggested the joint project. I remembered the immediate emotional response to rejection. I was immediately disregarded as someone who was no longer seen as an ally or supportive of Palestinian rights but as someone acting in my own self-interest.

I thought about others who propose joint projects. For the most part, scholars and peace activists of the global North use "conflict resolution" or "peacebuilding" as a discursive frame when constructing projects and research with Palestinians. These frameworks oftentimes reify the dominant political discourse of two sides, Israeli and Palestinian, as equal stakeholders in an age-old conflict. Through this frame, it logically follows that both groups need to come to the table and work things out. But, as mentioned above, the two populations and experiences of oppression are far from equal.

Taking what I learned from my Palestinian interlocutors, I decided before entering into any kind of dialogue with Israel, Palestinian voices and struggles needed to be communicated and understood on their own terms, on their own soil, among friends. The construction of the false paradigm presenting two equal sides in conflict continuously refutes the Palestinians' ability to speak. For this reason, I decided that my research would focus only on Palestinians and their experience without Israeli intervention, oversight, and domination under the pretense of peacebuilding or presenting a "balanced" view.

Conclusion

Each segment of performance research mentioned above led me through a process of inquiry bringing me closer to understanding the way my embodied identity interfered with, and even occluded my understanding of Palestinians' oppression under Israeli military occupation. The fears and obstacles became visceral through embodied representation and the work could not continue without addressing them. I learned to see these moments of rupture, the chasms between meanings, as guideposts. Through a reflexive inquiry into the way my identity as an American Jew was constructed and the political attachments invested as a part of that identity, I began to understand the ways in which Palestinians are oppressed, not only through Israelis' actions, but through my own genealogies of cultural production.

As I moved closer into Palestinian spaces and relationships where I aligned myself with Palestinians, as in the first example performing on the *kibbutz*, or when I spoke the words of Mahmoud Darwish through the integrity of my own body conjuring a collective memory of the Holocaust, and finally when I lived in the West Bank amongst Palestinians, I learned that listening is a bodily act. By allowing myself to acknowledge and feel spaces of conflict, confusion, and discomfort, and trying to register what I was told through the embodied process of a dialogical performance, I moved and was moved to gradually alter my subject position in order to more fully understand the systems of oppression, of which I am a part.

In thinking about the broader implications of this and other arts-based research, I believe the notion of proximity and creative knowledge production alongside those with whom we seek to understand, is one I would like to highlight. Not all scholars are interested in or able to adopt arts-based research methods. However, by ascribing to the notion that conversations cannot happen from a distance, because embodied listening can only occur in the performance of bodies coming together to inhabit and share space, is one way our research and its politics may be improved. In order to do this, however, our identities must be allowed the space to move to and away from subject positions. We should not only aim to see transformation in ourselves as we conduct research, but we should expect it. In the words of Gloria Anzaldúa, "I am the dialogue between my Self and *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself, I change the world" (1987, p. 70). As scholars who are invested in contesting power structures that oppress others, we must challenge ourselves to listen to who and what we are as embodiments of those structures, and then work to change them.

Notes

1. Daniel Jack Lyons and Theo Sandfort also ask this question in their online photo essay, *Subaltern Speak* (2014). http://www.danieljacklyons.com/new-blog-1/2014/9/24/subaltern-speak.
2. I use this term rather than the often used terms "informant" or "research subject" to emphasize a relationship with those one encounters in the field or who become research participants, as one based on egalitarianism, respect, and reciprocity. The other terms carry problematic histories, particularly within the discipline of anthropology, where people were studied in ways that reinforced imperial power over colonized subjects or which benefited the researcher and exploited research participants.
3. I borrowed and recontextualized the comparison between "positioning" and "directioning" from Peter Kim's usage in the field of brand strategy. I first encountered these terms while working for Kim in the late nineties.
4. These are the Hebrew and Arabic names for the city known in English as Acre.
5. Grossman uses the term "Israeli Arab" rather than "Palestinian Israeli" to describe the doctor's national identity.
6. These figures were reported at the end of the war on 18 January 2009. They do not reflect deaths resulting from war-related injuries, which occurred days or months later.
7. Judith Butler discusses this quotation from Foucault's "What is Critique?" (1997), as pointing to the origins of a critical stance, where one begins to question the delimitation of the terms which define power and the formation of the Self.
8. The last part of this sentence is a paraphrase of a remark spoken by Simona Sharoni at a solidarity workshop at DePaul University, Chicago, 2009.

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